



مركز السياسات الاقتصادية والاجتماعية  
Social and Economic Policies Monitor (Al Marsad)

# UN Estimates for Reconstruction Exceed the Time it Would Take for Mountains to Erode

Iyad Riyahi - November 2024

# **UN Estimates for Reconstruction Exceed the Time it Would Take for Mountains to Erode**

**Iyad Riyahi**

**November 2024**

**5 Al-Sahel Street, Ramallah, Palestine**

**Telephone: 02 – 2955065**

**Email: [almarsad@almarsad.ps](mailto:almarsad@almarsad.ps)**

**Website: [www.almarsad.ps](http://www.almarsad.ps)**

**All rights reserved ©**

**The Social and Economic Policies Monitor – Al Marsad  
2024**

# Introduction

Some estimates suggest 350 years; others claim eighty—optimists suggest project just ten. A recent report from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) outlines a path for Gaza’s economy to find a foothold toward recovery within a decade. According to simulations within the report, the Palestinian economy might return to its pre-war level within ten years—but only if recovery plans go beyond humanitarian aid to include rebuilding destroyed capital and lifting the suffocating economic restrictions that have choked the Gaza Strip for years<sup>1</sup>. The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report paints a more daunting picture: “Once a ceasefire is reached, a return to the 2007–2022 growth trend would imply that it would take Gaza 350 years just to restore GDP to its level in 2022.” The economic toll is staggering: construction has collapsed by 96 percent, agriculture by 93 percent, industry by 92 percent, and services by 76 percent. And unemployment in Gaza soared to 81.7 percent in the first quarter of 2024, with expectations of further increases. In the fourth quarter of 2023, Gaza experienced the steepest economic recession in its modern history<sup>2</sup>. The chasm between ESCWA-UNDP’s ten-year timeline and UNCTAD’s 350-year forecast is a staggering 340 years.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, indicates a grimmer picture of Gaza’s housing crisis, noting that the majority of residents may not live to see their homes rebuilt. Rajagopal’s assessment underscores that reconstruction could stretch over eighty years if the current conditions and occupation persist. This estimate is grounded in UNDP estimates that suggest about 1,000 homes can be rebuilt each year, while the damage encompasses around 80,000 homes. In such a scenario, an eighty-year timeline for complete reconstruction would be unavoidable.

Any meaningful and immediate attempt to address

this situation—a change that could allow Gaza’s youngest children to see their homes rebuilt within their lifetimes—hinges on an immediate end to the occupation. Without this sine qua non, the youngest generation in Gaza today will grow up never seeing their homes rebuilt<sup>3</sup>. In addition to his candid reflections, Rajagopal clarified how UN experts calculate Gaza’s reconstruction needs. Yet, these calculations, based on the aftermath of the 2014 war, overlook a significant factor: the Serry Mechanism. Instituted by Robert Serry, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, this mechanism emerged after the 2014 war on Gaza, imposing exceptionally stringent security measures to accommodate Israel’s requirements. The result? A painstakingly prolonged reconstruction timeline.

Despite their varied scope and titles, UN reports fail to capture the actual timeframe required to reconstruct Gaza and revive its economy. They hinge on Israeli-imposed obstacles, extrapolating these barriers into broad, often detached quantitative estimates. These projections are often far from realistic— suggestions that fifteen years would be needed to clear rubble, eighty years to rebuild destroyed homes, and a staggering 350 years for Gaza’s economy to recover are notably inflated. Economist Naser Abdelkarim considers these numbers exaggerated. He argues that the moment war ends and conditions allow for the initiation of comprehensive reconstruction and economic revitalization, a sweeping mobilization would unfold, with individuals, business owners, governmental agencies, and local and international nongovernment organizations joining forces to rebuild.

In fragile economies, the flow of aid, the revitalization of small enterprises, and the facilitation of trade in and out of the region could drive a faster recovery. Abdelkarim points out that the UN official’s report overshoots economic logic by a striking 340 years, surpassing even the mythical years that the Seven Sleepers spent in their cave.

1- ESCWA UNDP. 2024. “Gaza War: Expected Socioeconomic Impacts on the State of Palestine.”2024. <https://bit.ly/3NIRwLX>

2- Elliott, Larry. 2024. “‘Utter Ruin’: Gaza Economy Would Take 350 Years to Return to Pre-conflict Level, UN Says.” The Guardian, October 23, 2024. <https://bit.ly/3YwyNZg>

3- United Nations. 2024. “Gaza: Report of Severe Violations of Food, Water & Housing Rights- Press Conference | United Nations.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTt7B613nuk>.

# People vs. Marine Life: An Environmental Perspective on Gaza's Debris Removal

Does Debris Removal Really Need 15 Years? The Social and Economic Policies Monitor - Al Marsad released a critical analysis of the UN calculation model for clearing the millions of tons of war debris in Gaza, which is based on the use of only a hundred trucks. This approach fundamentally underestimates Gaza's capabilities and resources. By the same logic, employing a far larger fleet—over 2,000 heavy-duty vehicles—and mobilizing tens of thousands of Gaza's workers would significantly reduce the projected timeline. One option that has been floated involves dumping the debris at sea. Yet, environmental activists have sounded alarms against this, as Gaza's war rubble is loaded with toxic, radioactive, and

explosive remnants. Any serious approach to Gaza's reconstruction warrants thorough sorting to prevent environmental devastation. Debris removal and the larger task of reconstruction require well-concerted and carefully planned efforts.

However, if the debris removal process becomes drawn out and slow, people will likely resort to dumping rubble in the sea haphazardly, disregarding organized plans. For them, the priority will be clear: people come first, not fish. The issue is blunt but unmistakable. Ensuring an organized, swift removal process is far preferable to leaving residents to resort to desperate, chaotic actions.

---

4- Asim al-Nabih. Gaza's 2023 War Rubble: Is a 15-Year Timeframe Exaggeration? Social and Economic Policies Monitor (Al Marsad), August 28, 2024. <https://www.almarsad.ps/en/content/publications/gazas-2023-war-rubble-removal-is-a-15-year-timeframe-exaggeration-2.html>.

# Steps Forward

## **I. Leveraging Corporate Social Responsibility Programs:**

In 2023, social contributions from banks in Palestine amounted to over USD 8.5 million. Directing corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives exclusively to Gaza over the next five years could support and sustain more than 42,000 families, with each receiving USD 200. The Association of Banks could coordinate this process, and if large corporations join this effort, the support could extend to cover 60,000 to 70,000 families.

---

## **II. Strengthening Local, Arab, and International Solidarity Programs:**

On an individual level, bypassing the intricacies and conditions of reconstruction funding, each Palestinian or Arab family with the means could adopt a family in Gaza, providing direct support without the need for external aid. This initiative, based solely on people, not governmental actions or policies, would likely be embraced with enthusiasm by countless families across the Arab world, as well as families in Europe, Latin America, South Africa, Malaysia, Indonesia, and beyond. The only requirement is a single coordinating body—a platform to connect donors directly with the survivors in the Gaza Strip.

## References:

- Al Nabih, Asim. August 2024. Gaza's 2023 War Rubble: Is a 15-Year Timeframe an Exaggeration? Social and Economic Policies Monitor (Al Marsad). [https://www.almarsad.ps/index.php/en/content/publications/gazas-2023-war-rubble-removal-is-a-15-year-timeframe-exaggeration-2.html?trk=public\\_post\\_main-feed-card-text](https://www.almarsad.ps/index.php/en/content/publications/gazas-2023-war-rubble-removal-is-a-15-year-timeframe-exaggeration-2.html?trk=public_post_main-feed-card-text).
- Elliott, Larry. 2024. "'Utter Ruin': Gaza Economy Would Take 350 Years to Return to Pre-conflict Level, UN Says." The Guardian, October 23, 2024. <https://bit.ly/3YwyNZg>.
- ESCWA UNDP. 2024. "Gaza War: Expected Socioeconomic Impacts on the State of Palestine."2024. <https://bit.ly/3NIRwLX>.
- United Nations. 2024. "Gaza: Report of Severe Violations of Food, Water & Housing Rights- Press Conference | United Nations." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTt7B613nuk>