

# Electricity-starved Gazans turn to sun for help

July 7 2016, by Sakher Abou El Oun

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A growing number of Gazans fed up with their erratic electricity supply are turning to solar power in an area where the sun shines for the vast majority of the year

Nahed Abu Assi's farm has been bombed in each of the three Gaza wars since 2008 and like in the rest of the Palestinian enclave, he receives only a paltry amount of electricity each day.

With his chickens dying and the cost of using generators high, Assi now hopes to do as others have done in Gaza—if he can find a loan to pay for it: install [solar panels](#).

"The electricity is cut for hours every day," the balding 52-year-old said.

"You have to connect to generators that cost a lot to fuel and that need regular repairs to keep the lamps and the livestock fans running around the clock."

A growing number of Gazans fed up with their erratic electricity supply are turning to solar power in an area where the sun shines for the vast majority of the year.

Grey and black solar panels are increasingly visible on rooftops.

Stores and adverts promoting such technology have also expanded, and authorities in the enclave running by the Islamist movement Hamas are also turning to solar power.

"Schools, hospitals and public institutions have been equipped with solar panels and other projects have been launched to at least try to partially resolve the electricity crisis," said Raid Abu al-Hajj, head of the solar energy unit in the strip's energy authority.

Some 10,000 homes could soon be equipped with [photovoltaic panels](#).



Gaza and its population of 1.9 million people has only one electricity plant and it has been damaged by wars with Israel

The option is not cheap. Assi expects to fork out between 4,500 and 5,400 euros (\$5,000 to \$6,000) for panels, but he says the investment will pay off over time.

Gaza and its population of 1.9 million people has only one [electricity plant](#) and it has been damaged by wars with Israel, the most devastating of which was fought in the summer of 2014.

It imports electricity from Israel and Egypt, but those supplies are not nearly enough.

Electricity demand is estimated at 450 megawatts, but only 250 are available: 27 percent from Israel, 22 percent provided by Gaza's own

plant and six percent by Egypt.

## Safe alternative

Israel has maintained a blockade on the Gaza Strip for around a decade, saying its aim is to keep out materials that Hamas could use for military purposes.

But Gazans—half of whom live below the poverty line—are now being allowed to import solar panels and prices have gradually come down, Hajj said.

Those taking advantage include Daoud Tarazi, who decided to equip his home and his petrol station with solar panels.

He said it was "no longer possible to work with 18 hours of electricity cuts per day" at his station, he said.



Despite an Israeli blockade, Gazans—half of whom live below the poverty line—are now being allowed to import solar panels

At home, where he receives 12 hours of electricity per day, "food spoils in the refrigerator and electronic equipment always breaks down".

With the panels, his bills have fallen since he no longer has to operate generators.

Beyond that, solar power does not pollute and he no longer has to deal with days without [electricity](#).

"There are only five or six days per year without sun in Gaza," he said.

Solar panels also provide a safer alternative to the dangers of generators and candles, said Mohammed Atallah, a businessman and member of a renewable energy organisation that has installed solar panels for street lights for roads traversing the Gaza Strip.

Health officials say explosions and fires from generators and candles have caused the deaths of 24 people in recent years, most of them children.

But despite the recent spike in interest, [solar power](#) remains only a tiny part of the energy mix in the Gaza Strip—amounting to around three megawatts, said Hajj.

"But within three years, we hope to reach 15 megawatts," he said.

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