

CHAPTER SIX:

oPt FOOD SECURITY – Why, How Many, Who, Where, Response Options .

INTRODUCTION¹⁴⁷

Food security exists when all people, at all time, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food insecurity exists when this access is jeopardized¹⁴⁸.

After years of conflict, food insecurity affects population groups according to their livelihoods and the combined effects of violence, natural disasters and economic shocks, rather than because of their refugee/non-refugee status. Most of the food insecure households in the oPt are by now chronically food insecure, but the severity of food insecurity deepens whenever the conflict situation worsens or additional shocks (natural, economic) occur.

WHY PEOPLE ARE FOOD INSECURE IN THE oPt?

As detailed in the previous chapters, the basic causes of food insecurity in the oPt are essentially linked to the conflict with Israel, with external factors (international economic context, weather-related events) playing a smaller role. In addition to the direct effects of violence, land use restrictions imposed by the Israeli Army to the bulk land area of the West Bank (identified as Area "C"), in addition to Israeli dominance over natural resources in particular water are the main elements affecting food security. Furthermore, the closure policy is the main element affecting food security through internal (mobility inside the West Bank), external (access from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to Israel and East Jerusalem), and external international (access from the West Bank to Jordan and access from the Gaza Strip to Egypt) restrictions.

These basic causes of food insecurity translate into underlying and immediate causes of food insecurity at household level, including: (i) limitations on food availability: negative effects on agricultural production, fisheries and food trade/market supplies; (ii) insufficient economic access to food: prices artificially high but lack of opportunities to secure employment and higher household incomes; and (iii) impaired food utilization: poor water, sanitation, hygiene, access to health care, and declining quality of the diet. Based on the population growth rate registered in the 2007 PCBS Population and Housing Census, the Palestinian population is projected to double in approximately 20 years. This is anticipated to magnify food insecurity prevalence and depth and possibly become a national concern.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE FOOD INSECURE IN THE oPt?

The combined results of the FAO/WFP Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey Reports (SEFSecs) in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip indicate that about 38% of households in the oPt were food insecure during the second half of 2008 and second trimester of 2009. Based on a total population of 3.8 million and taking into account the largest size of food insecure families, this represents nearly 1.6 million food insecure people.

These include 625,200 food insecure persons in the West Bank (25 %) and 973,600 in the Gaza Strip (61%). In addition, 269,300 persons in the West Bank (11%) and 218,950 persons in the Gaza Strip (16%) are vulnerable to food insecurity. While 35% of West Bank households can be considered food secure, only 17% are food secure in the Gaza Strip.

Although methodologies employed for the estimates differ, this is a similar proportion as in mid-2008 and 2003-2004, and slightly above the 2006 level of 34% food insecure households. As such, in the West Bank, the result indicates no improvement since the worsening of the situation due to the rise of food and fuel prices early 2008. In the Gaza Strip, Food security has markedly worsened since the blockade started in 2007 and further more immediately after the Israeli military offensive at the end of 2008.

In total, food insecurity level is significantly higher in Gaza Strip than in the West Bank with a difference of 36%. Gaza Strip suffers worse socio-economic conditions; including higher population density, higher unemployment rates, lower income and daily wages, lower purchasing power, and higher poverty rates (see chapter two). Scarcity of water, undermining agricultural livelihoods, restrictions on fishing and fishing areas, tight restrictions on movement and entrance of goods, continuous blockade since June 2007, various Israeli incursions, and the last Cast Lead Operation in December 2008/January 2009, are all factors increasing the number of households suffering food insecurity in Gaza Strip.

While the SEFSec define food insecurity in the oPt by combining income and/or consumption levels (US \$/capita) and trends in food and non-food expenditures (decrease/no change), the Food Consumption Score estimates the amount and variety of food consumed in the households during the 7 days preceding the survey, by counting the number of times specific food items (grouped in specific food groups) are

¹⁴⁷ Food Security chapter is mainly based on extracts from the WFP/FAO Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis Report (December 2009).
World Food Summit (1996)

¹⁴⁸FAO. The state of food Insecurity in the world 2001, Rome. 2002.

consumed¹⁴⁹. In the West Bank, 10% of households had 'poor' food consumption, 18% 'borderline' and 72% 'acceptable'. In the Gaza Strip, 14% of households had 'poor' food consumption, 23% 'borderline' and 63% 'acceptable'.

WHO ARE THE FOOD INSECURE IN THE oPt?

In the West Bank, at locality level, higher food insecurity rates affects refugee camps and rural populations (29%), and refugees (28%) more than non-refugee populations (24%). Households living in urban localities show to be more affluent compared to rural and camp dwellers, as a relatively high percentage of urban households falls within the category of food secure or marginally food secure families. The trend seems opposed to findings from data collected during the first half of 2008, when urban dwellers resulted to be more vulnerable to food insecure, due to increasing food prices particularly in urban centers.

In the Gaza Strip, the prevalence of food insecurity was also higher in rural areas (67%) and in refugee camps (62%) than in urban areas (60%) during the 2nd trimester of 2009. Rural areas are more affected than urban areas by 7%. Refugee households were less likely to be food insecure than non-refugees (58% versus 64%). However, only 2% of the total population in Gaza is rural, hence the absolute number of food insecure people is much higher in urban areas.

In both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, rural households, female-headed households, unemployed headed-households, households whose head has a low level of education attainment, households with a large number of female and child members and families with a high number of dependents are more likely to be food insecure than households without these characteristics. Food insecure households also rely more on casual work and low-paid, unskilled labour as their main source of income, compared to food secure households.

Food insecurity is also higher among certain groups such as: social hardship cases (destitute families), school children, poor farmers, herders and marginalized community, fishermen, pregnant and nursing mothers and children under 5, families affected by the Israeli "Cast Lead Operation" in December 2008 / early January 2009 which lost their assets, housing, etc.,.

WHERE ARE THE FOOD INSECURE IN THE oPt?

Food insecurity is highest in the northern parts of West Bank and lowest in the central area of the West Bank. At governorate level, Jenin is still the governorate most affected by food insecurity, with 34.5% of households suffering from food insecurity, followed by Tubas and Hebron, where 33% of households are affected respectively. The southern average is strongly affected by the high food insecurity levels recorded in the governorate of Hebron. Livelihoods in Hebron is a special case among the West Bank governorates, since it has been more impacted by the drought conditions, increasing water scarcity over the past few years undermining agricultural livelihoods, the proximity of Israeli settlements combined with settlers' violence, which have made it difficult for residents of the southern governorates to pursue their professions in a sustainable way. The same challenge is highlighted in the Jenin case and its suffering in the past years from Israeli attacks, losses in agricultural lands, and restrictions on movement.

Salfit, on the other hand, found to have the lowest food insecurity levels, where only 9% of households suffer from food insecurity. According to FAO-WFP SEFSec report, the main cause behind lower food insecurity levels is the contribution of own production towards household consumption in Salfit, which is much higher than in other governorates: 70% of Salfit households derive 50 NIS of their adult equivalent monthly consumption from the households own food production. This compares favorably to the West Bank average, where own household production contributed to the consumption of only 30% of households. In addition, Salfit receives higher levels of aid assistance than in other governorates pertaining to the West Bank. Hence, families who are able to rely on their own production for food intake and receive food aids are less vulnerable to price and supply shocks, and thus their food security levels are more stable.

Food insecurity was also slightly more prevalent among households located in the Buffer/Seam Zone (between the green line and the West Bank Barrier) compared to other locations in the West Bank (28%).

¹⁴⁹ Three groups are constructed by applying thresholds that define a 'poor' food consumption pattern, 'borderline' food consumption, and 'acceptable' food consumption. Essentially:

- a 'poor' food consumption consists of cereals (bread and rice), potatoes, sugar and oil consumed on a nearly daily basis, vegetables 4 times during the 7 days prior to the survey and very rare consumption of animal products and fruits; quantities are also likely to be low and below kilocalorie requirements for household members with additional needs (pregnant and lactating women, physically active adults);
- a 'borderline' diet is similar but includes a slightly more frequent consumption of vegetables (5 times during the 7 day period), meat and eggs (3 to 4 times) and fruits (twice); quantities are probably just sufficient to meet kilocalorie requirements;
- an 'acceptable' diet is yet more diversified with consumption of the various food groups on a nearly daily basis; the amounts consumed are expected to be sufficient.

In the Gaza Strip, at governorate level, Rafah, Gaza City and Khan Younis governorates show the highest prevalence of food insecurity (between 62% -66%), most likely because factories and outlets of the large manufacturing and construction sectors most hardly hit by the import restrictions were located in these areas. The Cast Lead Operation of December 08/January 09 also caused large damage in Rafah.

COPING STRATEGIES

The resilience of Palestinian households to the continuous degradation of their food security situation, particularly in the Gaza Strip, can be attributed to a significant extent to the efficacy of their coping mechanisms. Support from relatives within or outside the oPt (credit through traders between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, remittances) and local charities, is essential in this regard. The vast majority of households also resort to changes in their food consumption patterns (quantities, quality) in order to decrease food expenditures. In the Gaza Strip, food insecure households were unable to further reduce the amount of food purchased, and only quality could be further decreased.

However, most of the coping strategies, even if they are reversible (e.g. switching to less preferred but cheaper food, decreasing the amount of food consumed, foregoing health or education expenditures, and purchasing food on credit) can have a permanent cost on lives and livelihoods, through poorer health and nutritional status, excessive indebtedness and loss of future opportunities for higher skills and better paid jobs. Low-cost strategies such as suspension of payment of utilities and use of life savings have been exhausted for most households.

INTERVENTIONS AND RECOMMENDED RESPONSE OPTIONS

Humanitarian assistance is a crucial complement to households' own coping mechanisms. One third of West Bank households had received assistance in the 2nd semester of 2008, of which about half benefited from food parcels and more than one third got cash. Accounting for the worse food security situation in the Gaza Strip, 71% of Gazan households received assistance in the first semester of 2009 composed in its vast majority by food assistance (more than 90%), enabling most households to secure a diet with an acceptable amount and diversity of food.

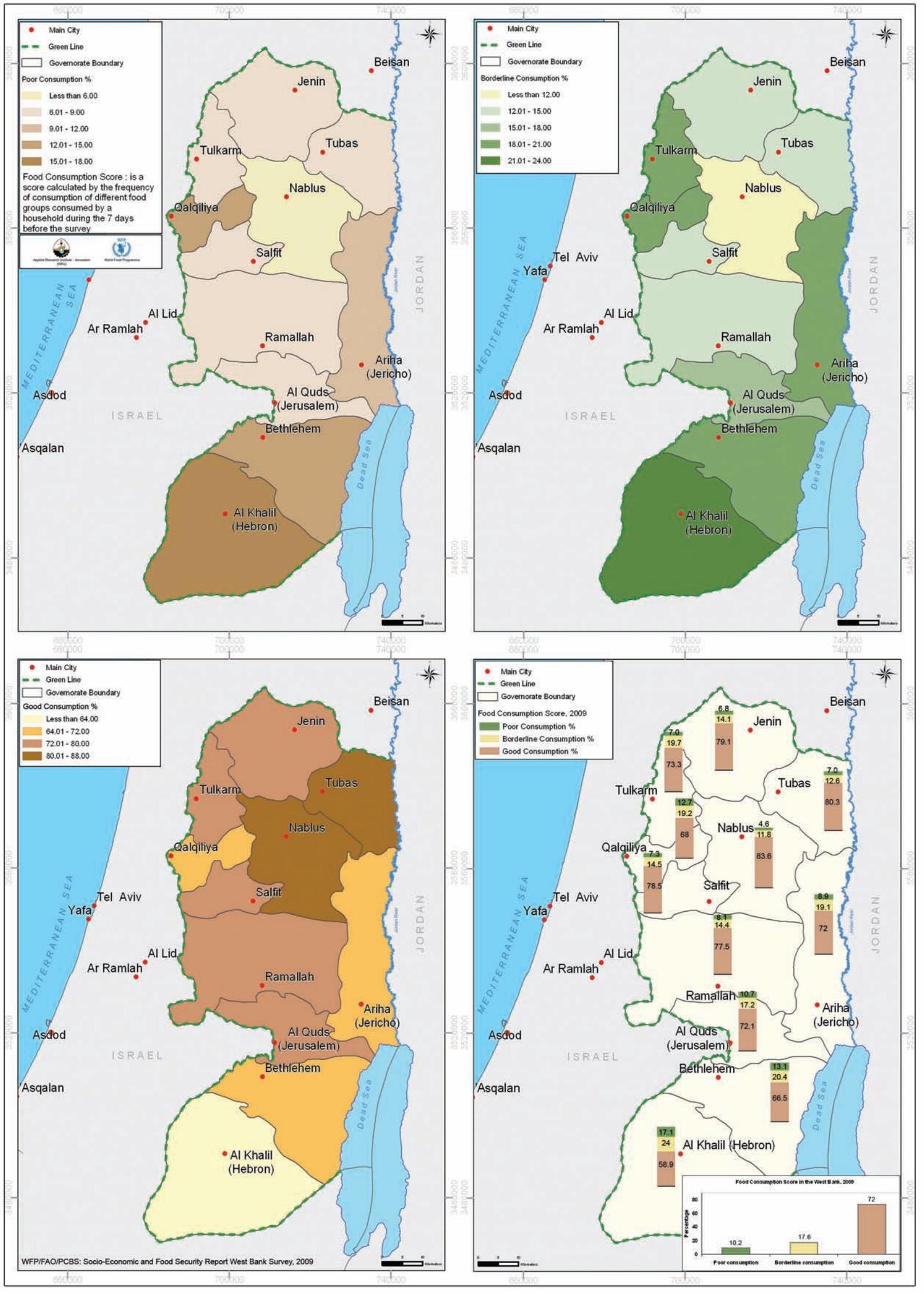
Since the beginning of the conflict with Israel, external assistance to the oPt has played a crucial role in mitigating the negative effects of the conflict on the food security situation of the population. Depending on the political situation, the focus of aid to the oPt has shifted between humanitarian and development assistance since 1967. In recent years, while the importance of social solidarity mechanisms must be acknowledged (including networks of relatives, friends and neighbours, as well as local charities and NGOs), support from UN, bilateral and non-governmental agencies with food, cash, vouchers and inputs has been instrumental to maintain a minimum level of food intake and access to other essential services, thus preventing a humanitarian disaster to unfold.

A number of interventions to increase local food availability, improve households' economic access and strengthen food utilization and nutritional status are already ongoing and would deserve being expanded. While humanitarian food and non-food assistance in the oPt is essential to prevent further degradation of food security and malnutrition levels, to reduce reliance on potentially damaging or risky coping strategies (poor food consumption, sale of assets, indebtedness, withdrawal of children from school, distress migration/displacement, over-exploitation of natural resources, illegal or exploitative work), it is insufficient to lift households out of food insecurity.

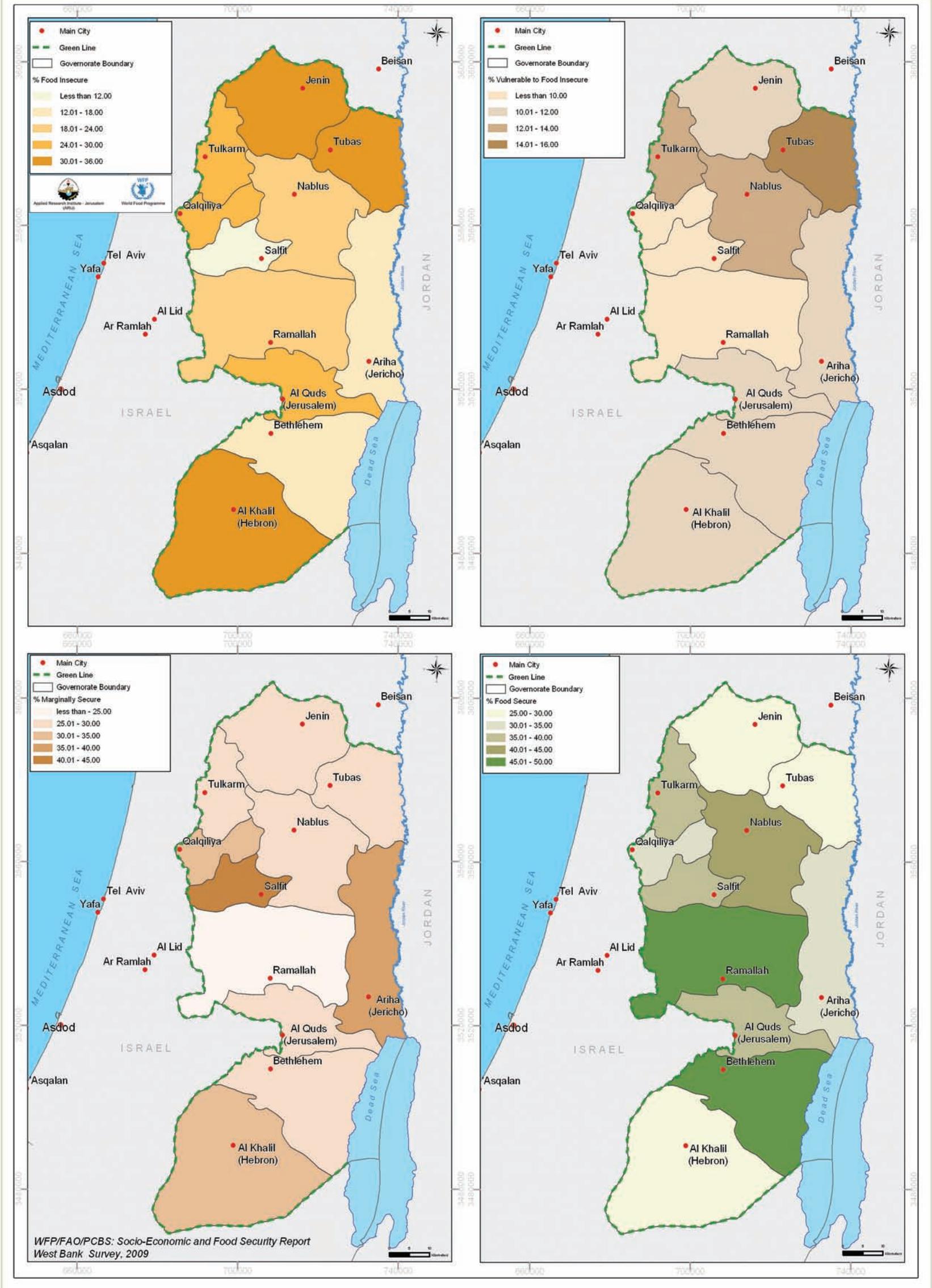
As long as access to the oPt remains restricted by Israel and prevents the delivery of material and services, as well as the mobility of persons and goods into and outside of both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian, recovery and longer-term assistance will remain low. Food and livelihood assistance should therefore be complemented by protection efforts to reduce risks to livelihoods linked to the violence and closure regime, in order to prevent - and not only respond to - lives and livelihoods threats.

However, it is clear that food security, livelihoods and protection interventions will have limited impact until the basic causes of food insecurity, loss of livelihoods and protection needs are addressed. The resolution of the peace process and end of the occupation are needed to lift constraints on economic investment, development of infrastructure and services, and growth. As long as the basic causes of food insecurity are not removed, reliable and steady financial and in-kind contributions from the donor community are required to avoid breaks of essential food and non-food assistance, and to enable the provision of levels of assistance sufficient to raise beneficiaries out of their poverty and food security gap. This also includes budgetary support to the Palestinian National Authority given the high reliance of households on public employment for their income.

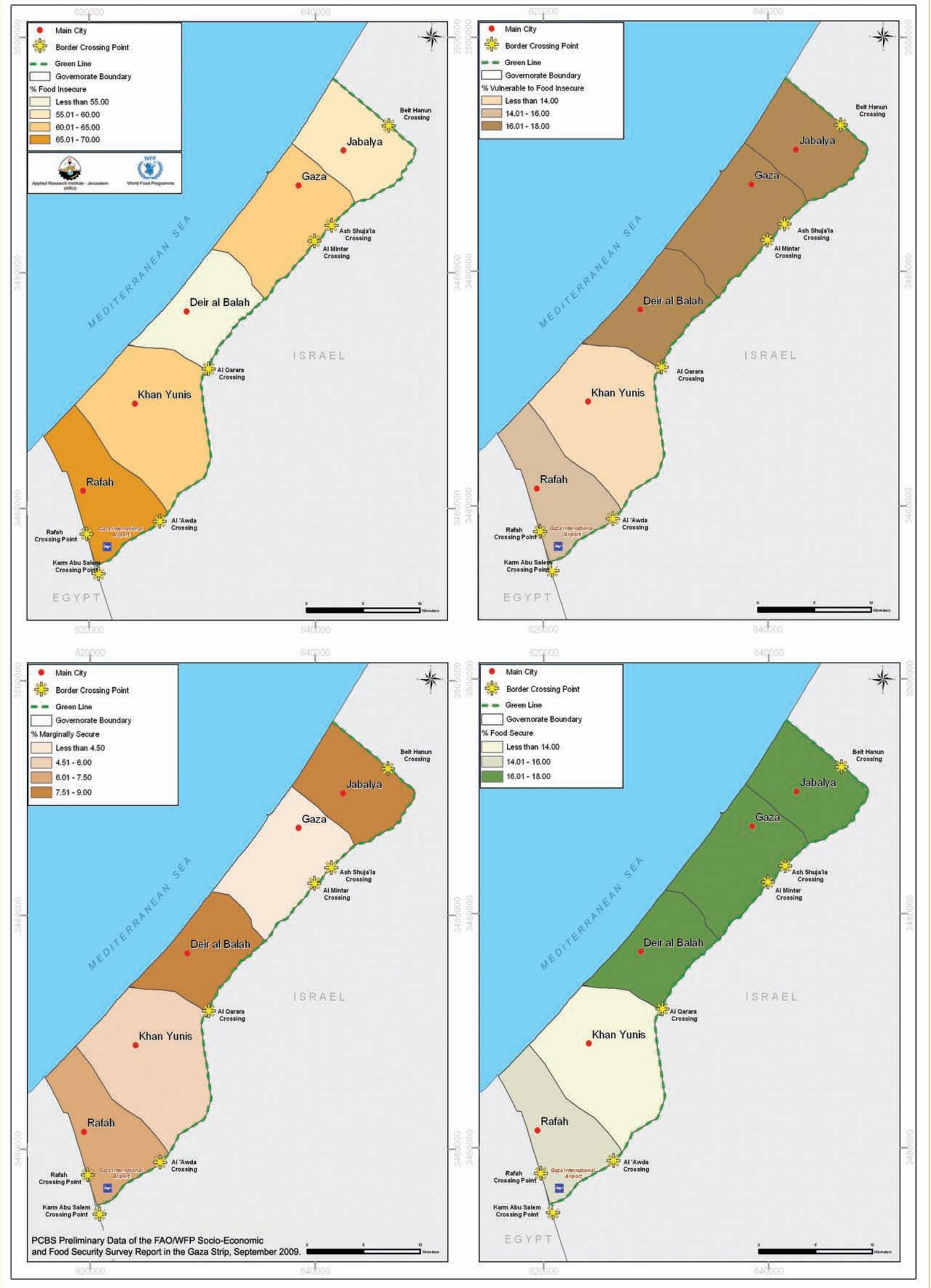
Food Consumption Score in the West Bank , 2009



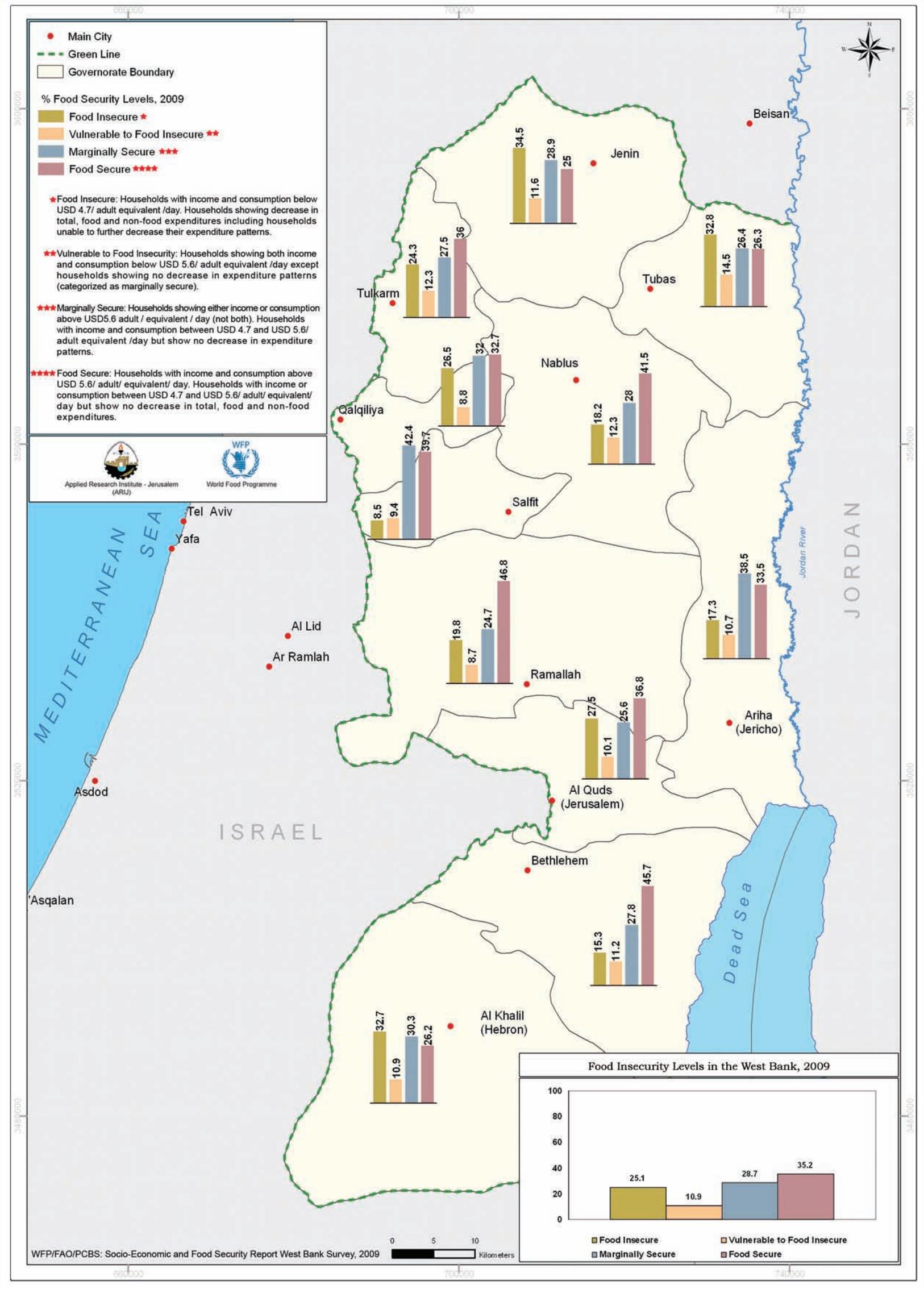
Food Security Levels in the West Bank, 2009



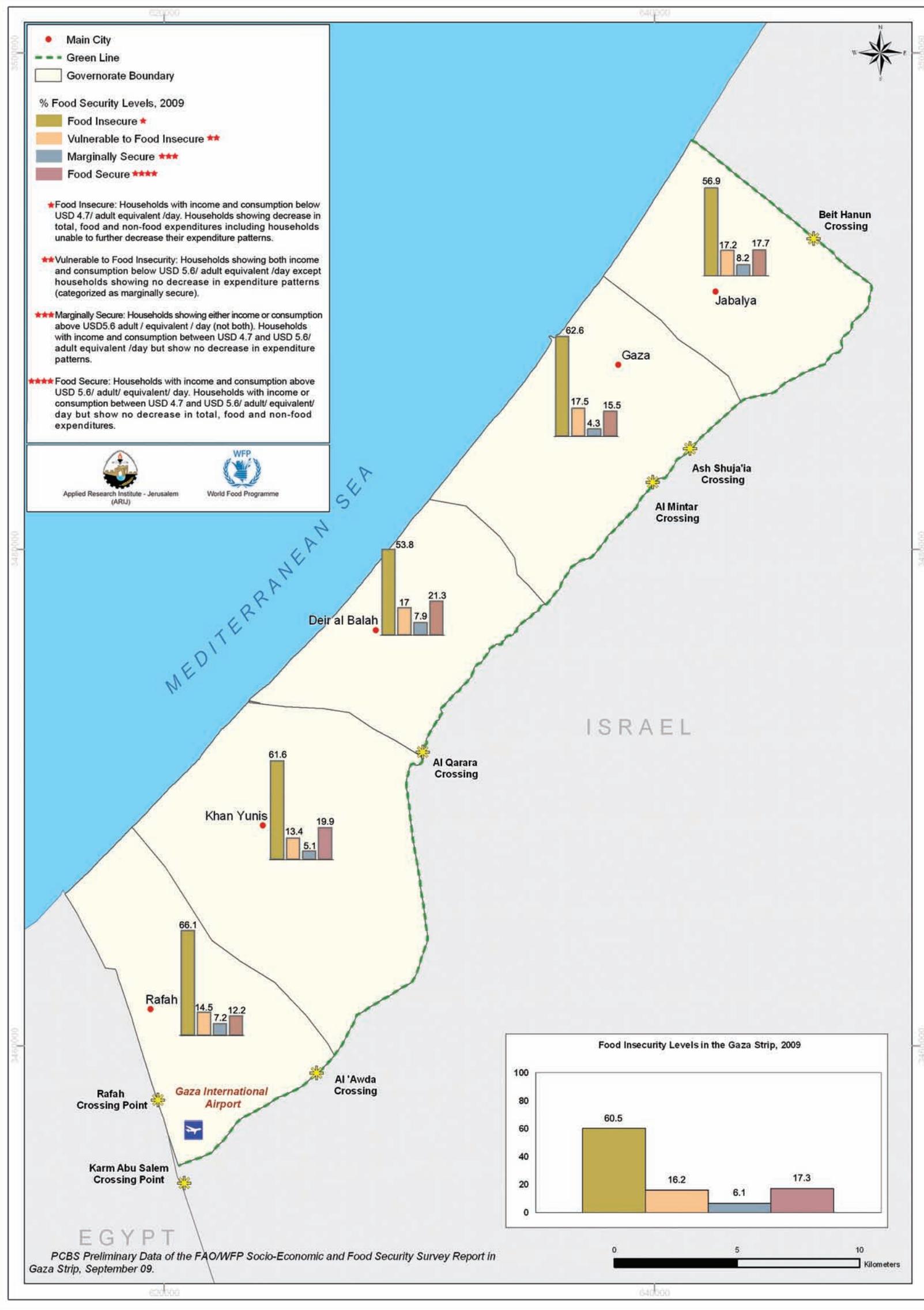
Food Security Levels in the Gaza Strip, 2009



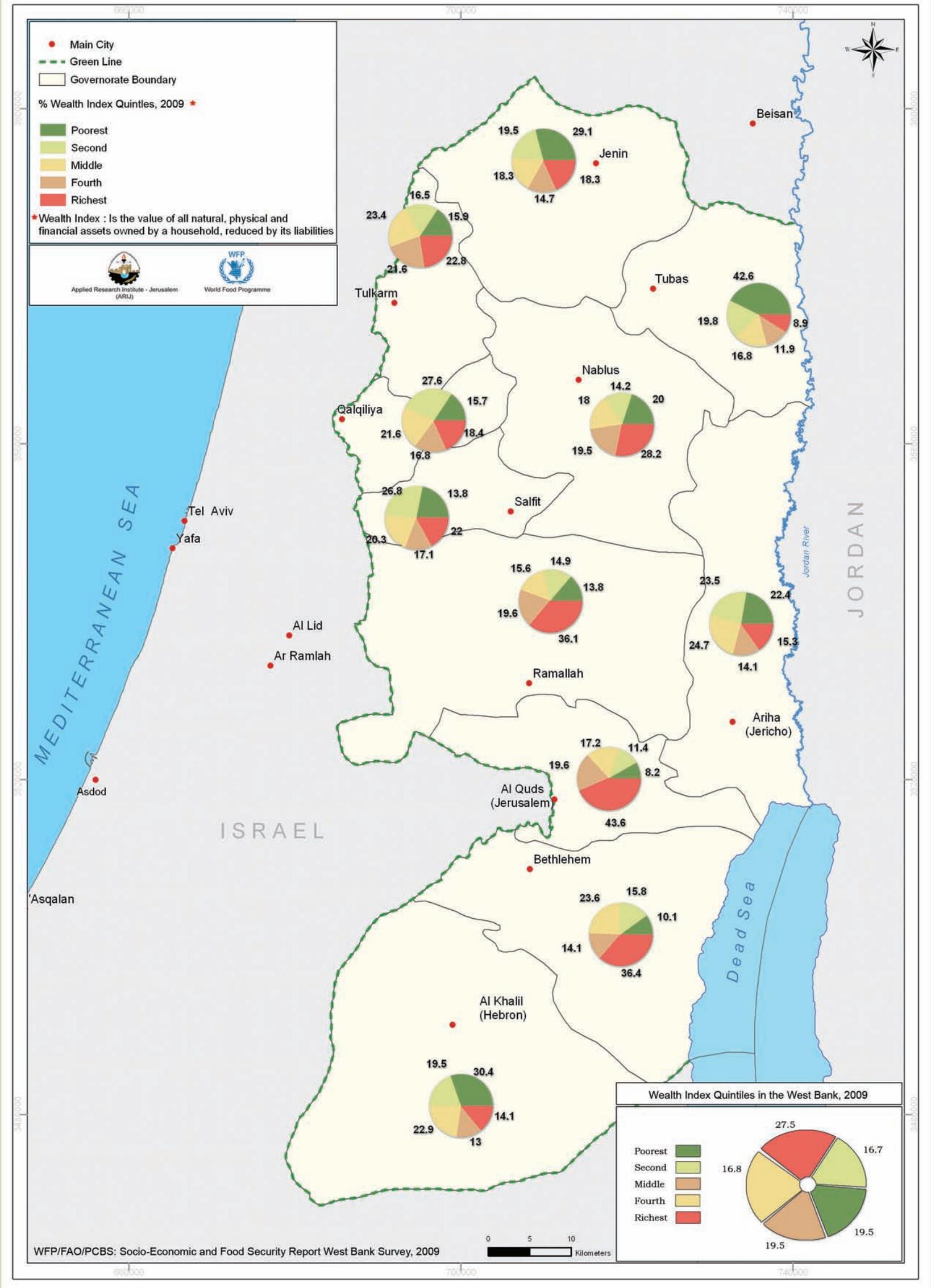
Comparison Between Food Security Levels in the West Bank, 2009

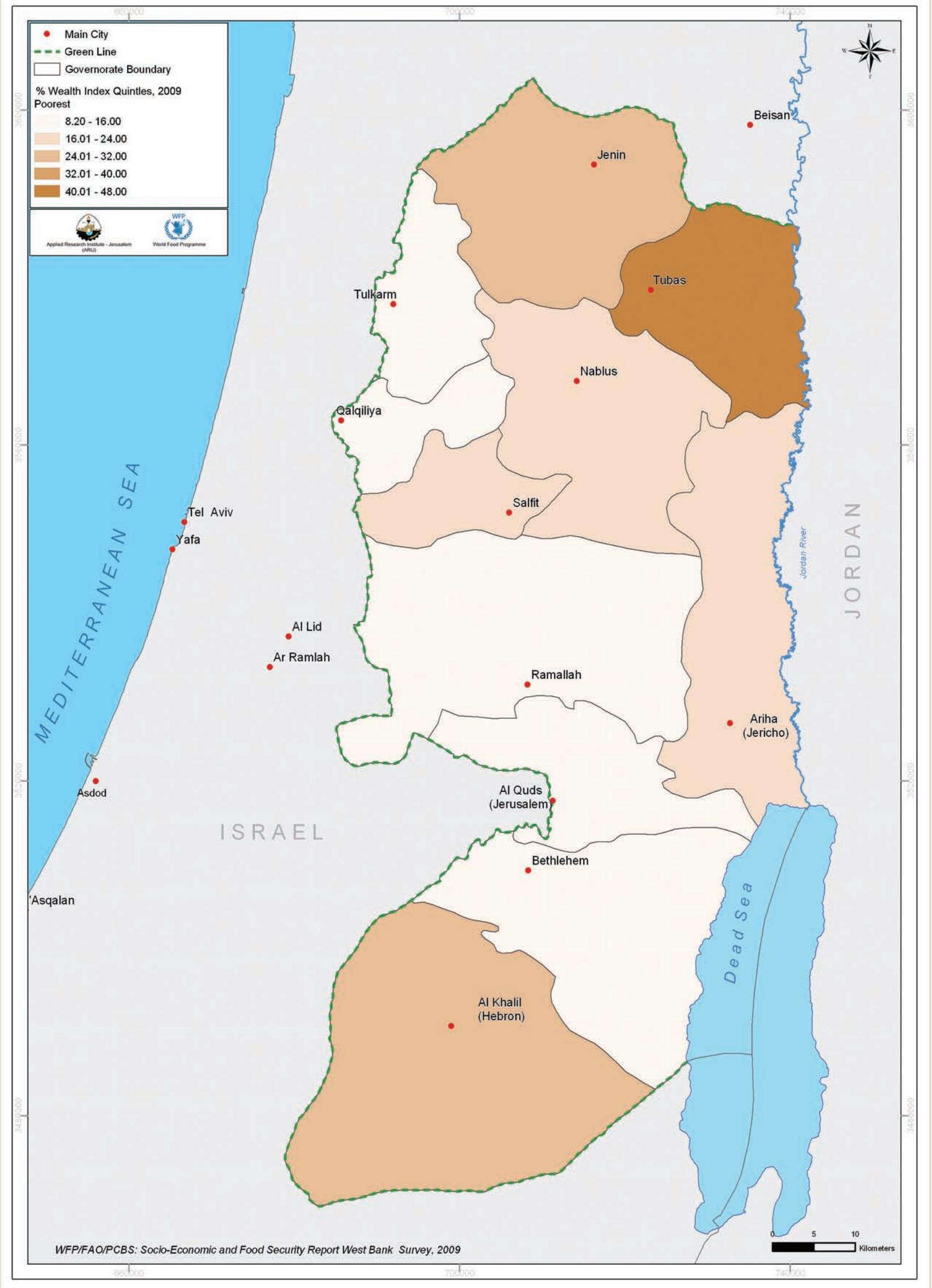


Comparison between Food Security Levels in the Gaza Strip, 2009



Wealth Index Quintiles in the West Bank, 2009

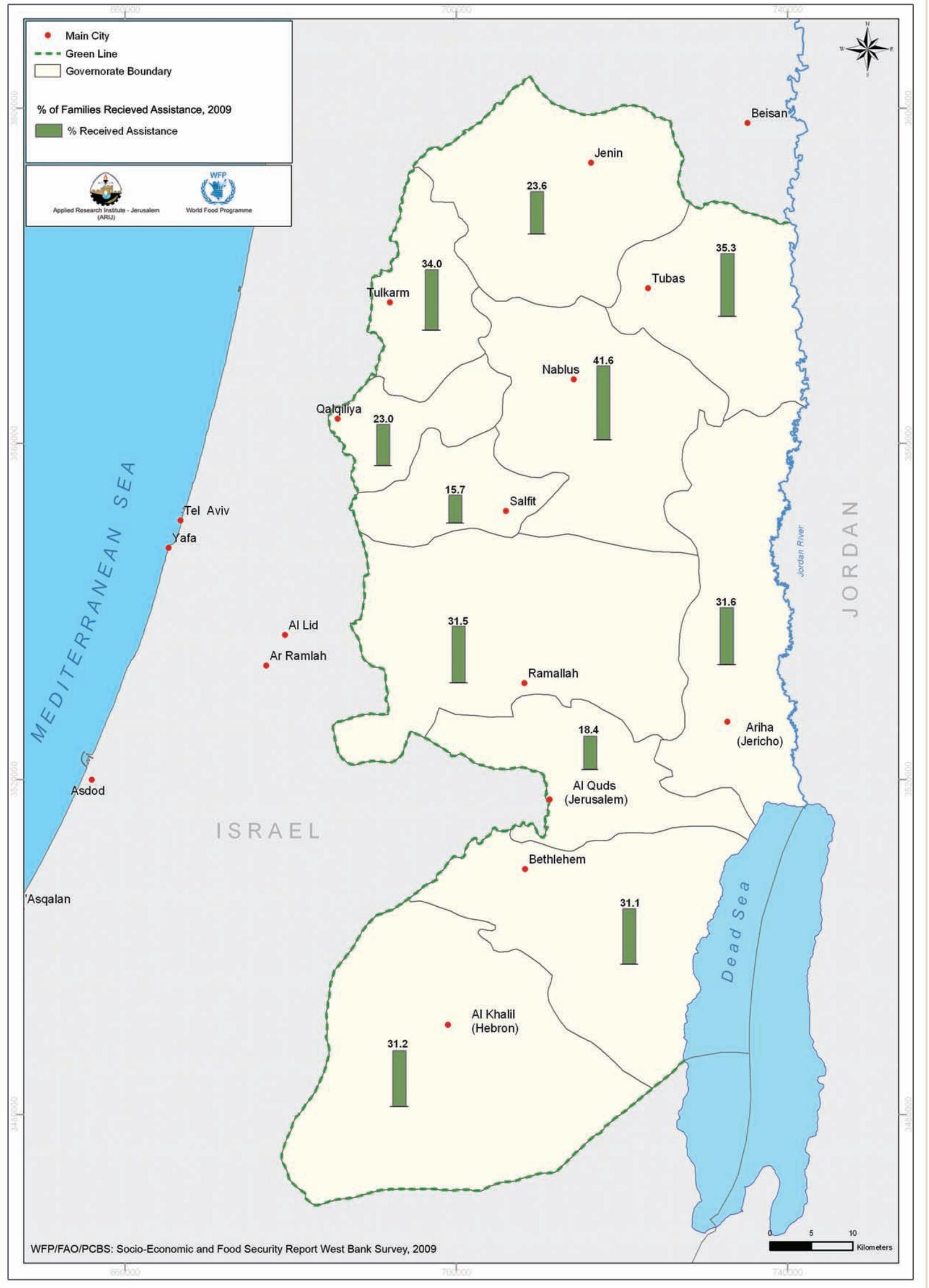




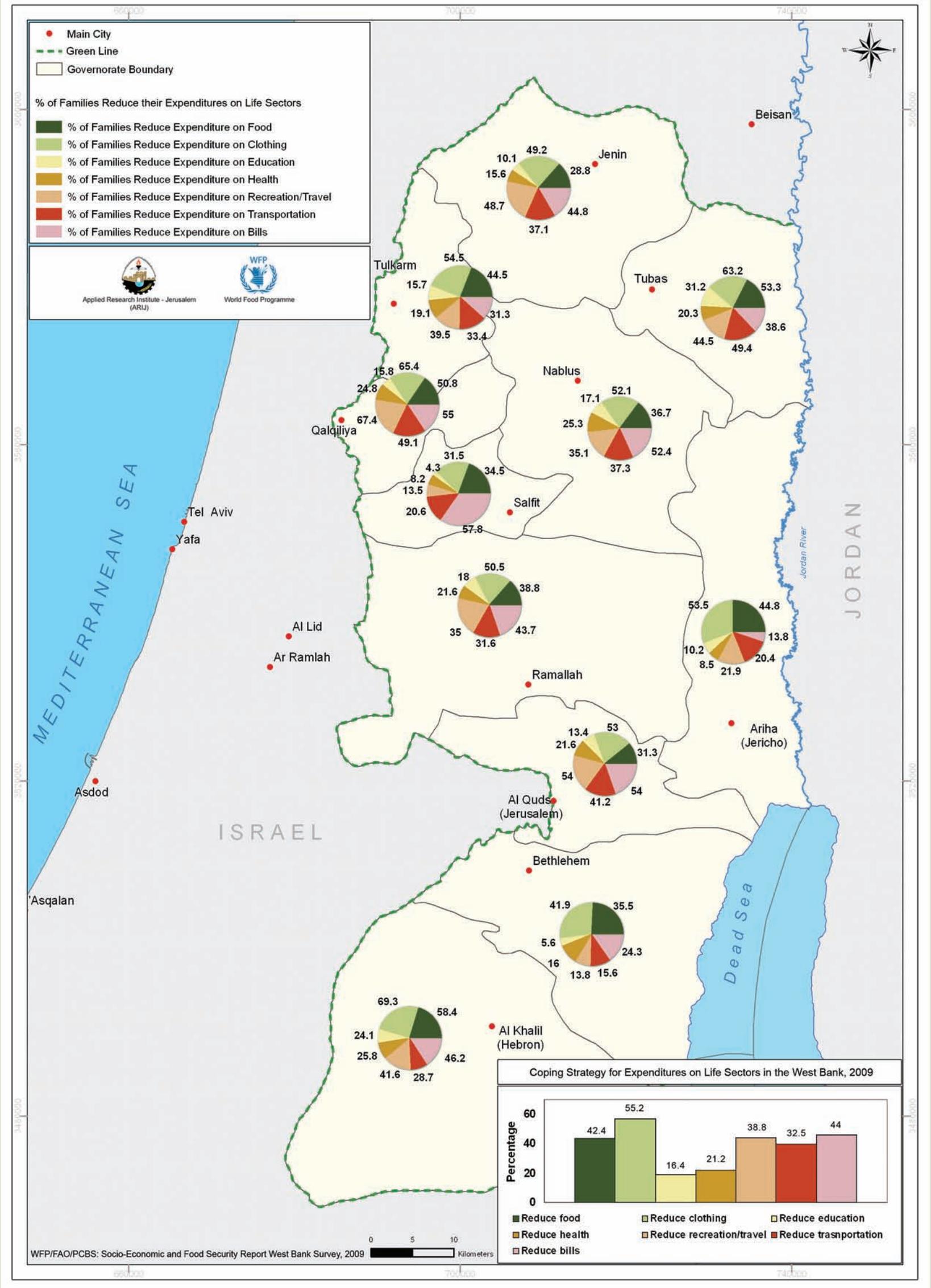
Type of Assistance Received in the West Bank, 2009

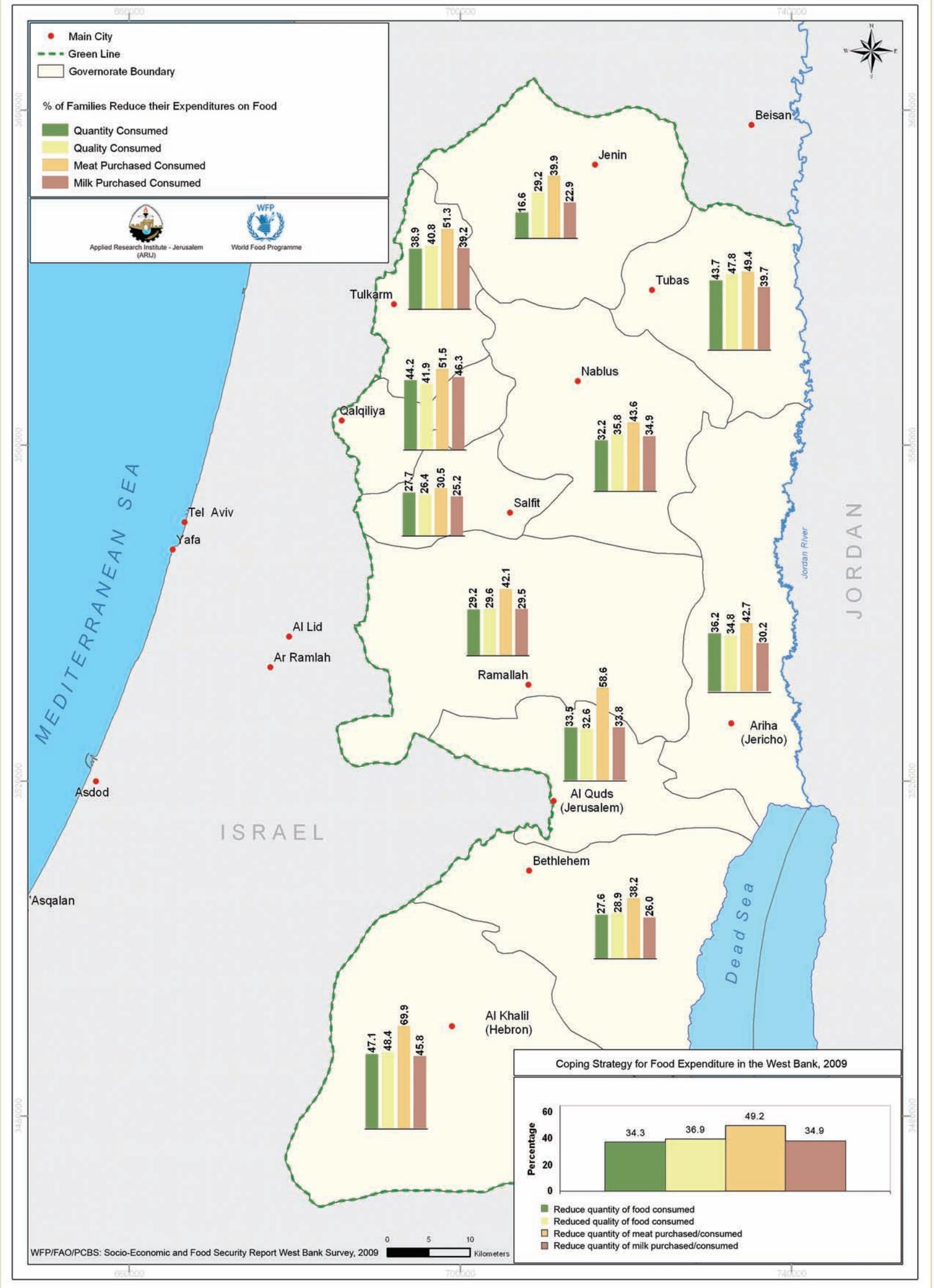


Families Recieved Assistance in the West Bank, 2009



Coping Strategy for Sustainable Livelihood in the West Bank - Expenditures of Life Sectors, 2009





Long Term Coping Strategy For Sustainable Livelihood in the West Bank, 2009

