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Gaza Crisis Response 2023



Displaced families in southern Gaza find shelter in makeshift tents. Over 1.85 million Palestinians have been displaced since the war started. Photo: Yousef Hammash, Oct 2023.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

After three months of sustained bombardment from the land, sea and air, the situation in the Gaza Strip has reached catastrophic levels. **Over 80 per cent of the population are displaced**, increasingly to Rafah governorate, which now hosts upwards of 1 million people in 65km². Streets are filled with self-built structures and tents, while numerous spontaneous camps have emerged that are overcrowded and lack key infrastructure. Makeshift shelters are constructed from salvaged materials and are unable to withstand increasingly cold, wet and windy winter weather. Insufficient shelter exacerbates vulnerabilities caused by inadequate nutrition, increases risks of exposure and hypothermia, and contributes to the spread of infectious diseases. Collective centres remain overcrowded as people seek security, even while these locations have come under direct attack despite supposed ‘deconfliction’. Ongoing evacuation orders, including to collective centres, have caused fear and confusion as families are forced to flee from one location to another, while nowhere offers any prospect of safety.

Shelter partners continue to try and provide assistance within highly constrained conditions resulting from lack of safety from ongoing attacks, including on humanitarian convoys, and lack of access due to damaged roads – while facing their own challenges to survive. **There is a huge shortage of shelter materials and NFIs**, and while some items continue to enter Gaza at a slow pace, partners also report Israel rejecting key items – including handheld solar lamps, battery-powered torches, camping gas stoves and sometimes tents – due to their claimed “dual-use” potential. This as well as complicated bureaucratic procedures are also causing delays for other permitted items.

The level of damage to shelter and infrastructure raises grave concerns over future recovery and shelter provision. As of 7 January, the Government Media Office reports **over 69,000 housing units totally destroyed** and **over 290,000 housing units damaged**. Satellite imagery analysis indicates damage to over 80 per cent of buildings in the two northern governorates, where whole neighbourhoods are now uninhabitable. The destruction of entire areas in central and southern Gaza is also being increasingly observed. Any possibility of return first requires significant explosive ordinance clearance, debris removal and infrastructure rehabilitation and raises significant questions over the scale, timeframe and feasibility of temporary shelter required.

KEY CHALLENGES

- **Funding** for the Shelter Cluster response currently meets only 15 per cent of the Flash Appeal, while needs have continued to increase since the appeal was launched
- The sheer **scale of need** in comparison to capacity to respond, due to **lack of security and access** as well as **shortage of shelter materials and NFIs**
- **Restrictions on items** allowed to enter prevents essential aid from reaching those in need and causes hesitation and complications in procurement for shelter actors
- Periodic **communications blackouts** and subsequent challenges to facilitate the response
- Identification of **feasible medium-term support options** for large numbers of people in a compact area



Destroyed building in Rafah, where the majority of IDPs have been displaced to. Photo: NRC/Mohammed Al Aklouk, Nov 2023.

SHELTER RESPONSE

Despite the challenges above, since the start of the hostilities, completed and ongoing Shelter Cluster partner response has reached **914,500 people**, the majority of whom are IDPs seeking shelter in UNRWA and non-UNRWA shelters. Shelter partners have cumulatively provided:

Basic NFIs:

- **76,530 full household kits** (bedding, kitchen and washing sets)
- **650,000 bedding items** (blankets and mattresses)
- **11,500 kitchen sets**
- **17,250 winter clothing kits** and 11,500 dignity kits

Emergency Shelter Materials:

- **36,000 sealing-off kits** to IDPs in makeshift structures, host families and families whose properties have sustained damage
- **4,200 tents** inside and outside of collective sites
- An additional **22,500 tents** have entered Gaza by member states, including Belgium, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Pakistan, Qatar, Romania, and Japan, alongside ERC/PRCS/ICRC

Due to the ongoing hostilities causing damage to properties, repeated displacement, and winter storms resulting in damage and water ingress to tents or shelters, items typically provided once are needing to be replenished or replaced, increasing the needs initially identified in the Flash Appeal on top of rising numbers of affected people.

ADVOCACY MESSAGES

- **Humanitarian needs cannot be met without an immediate and sustained ceasefire.** Shelter Cluster partners cannot meaningfully respond to existing urgent needs as hostilities continue and create further destruction.
- **Additional funding is urgently required to scale up shelter and NFI items in the pipeline** to be able to provide basic emergency shelter coverage to affected families and facilitate improved conditions as possible.
- There must be a **significant and substantial increase in the quantity of items entering Gaza**, especially through the private sector, and **removal of restrictions on household items** that pose little threat but can improve personal safety and ability to meet basic needs.
- There is a need for **additional access for humanitarian personnel** to Gaza – especially Explosive Ordnance Experts – who can facilitate humanitarian efforts which is being hampered by **lack of ability to ensure their safety** due to the ongoing hostilities even in known deconflicted sites.
- Displaced **populations must be allowed to return** to their properties as soon as safely possible and to **receive restitution or compensation** in the case of wrongful destruction in accordance with IHL.

The Shelter and NFI response in Gaza is coordinated by the Shelter Cluster Palestine, hosted by Norwegian Refugee Council. For further information contact: **Fadi Shamisti**, coord1.palestine@sheltercluster.org | www.sheltercluster.org/response/palestine