



Gaza response update

11 October 2014



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1 Key points

- Agreement reached between UNRWA, UNDP and Ministry of Public Works and Housing to undertake a shelter survey to identify level of damages and needs and inform the reconstruction process. These assessments are nearly completed.
- Payments to some affected Palestinian refugee families have commenced and are being provided to all those eligible over coming weeks.
- Immediate action to winterise damaged housing units and collective centres is required. Rain has already fallen once in the Gaza strip, demonstrating that drainage systems are damaged and pointing to likely flooding.
- Gap analysis on Household NFI and Hygiene kit distribution are available in the Shelter Cluster Situation Report, published by OCHA.

2 Background

The scale of damage and displacement resulting from Operation “Protective Edge” is unprecedented in the Gaza Strip in recent history. Current estimates indicate that 29% of the housing stock has been affected overall and nearly 6% of the housing stock has been severely damaged or destroyed.

| | Housing Unit Damage Estimates (at 09 October 2014) | |
|---------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| | Minor and Major | Severe and Destroyed |
| TOTAL (housing units) | 80,000 | 20,000 |
| % of pre-crisis housing stock | 23.2% | 5.8% |
| # Individuals | 480,000 | 120,000 |

Currently, more than 100,000 people are displaced by the recent war, with an estimated 47,000 people living with host families and 57,000 people in collective centres.

Approximately 20,000 housing units were totally destroyed or severely damaged in the war.

Furthermore, there won't be many people in Gaza, with a population of 1.8 million that have not been affected in some manner; if not with damaged houses, then by challenges in accessing household items, food, adequate water and sanitation services, etc.

Lessons learnt from the 2009 “Cast Lead” operation show that displaced households returned home as soon as the security situation permitted. Those with uninhabitable houses, whether severely damaged or destroyed, stayed with host-families, rented accommodation, or settled near their damaged/destroyed home. Understanding the coping mechanisms and aspirations of the affected households is instrumental in developing response options, which support, rather than undermine, the efforts of the affected community.

The 20,000 households (~120,000 individuals) with destroyed or severely damaged houses as a result of “Operation Protective Edge” will require interim solutions for years, in addition to support with reconstruction, given the current limitations on accessing the necessary building materials.

In total, there is chronic shortage of housing units in the Gaza Strip. 20,000 units destroyed or severely damaged during “Operation Protective Edge”; 5,000 units are outstanding reconstruction caseloads from previous military operations and 75,334 units are needed to reduce the large housing deficit from natural growth rates, based on needs in 2011. This figure is likely to have increased and the forecast for 2014 put the unmet housing needs due to natural growth rates at 122,669. The housing shortage prior to the latest hostilities, due to the blockade and ongoing conflict, has made many people resort to problematic informal arrangements.

To be able to meet the housing needs (100,334) within 3-5 years, there is a need to increase the number of truckloads with building material entering Gaza to between 735 and 441 every day of the year for 3 to 5 years respectively. This calculation does not include public infrastructure (e.g. schools, utilities, etc.).

The maximum capacity of the Kerem Shalom border crossing is said to be around 450 trucks a day - however, only about 30 truckloads with construction materials are currently passing, none of which are carrying building materials to respond to the current shelter crisis.

In addition, the UN faces lengthy waiting times to acquire Israeli approval for their reconstruction projects. According to OCHA, the average waiting time for approval was 19 months immediately prior to “Operation Protective Edge”. A recent approval took 15 months which still constitutes a major challenge.

3 Proposed response framework

3.1 Emergency assistance

For the Shelter Cluster and partners, this assistance will include:

Household and Hygiene Non-Food Item (NFI)

Support will be required for individuals in Collective Centers, host family situations and other locations of displacement. Much NFI has been distributed and is ongoing. NFI

replenishment will become the key component of NFI as the response proceeds.

Emergency shelter materials

Emergency shelter materials are needed to support individuals in Collective Centers and host family situations to provide some basic level of privacy in crowded conditions. Also, materials to support households living in damaged houses, so that they might seal off damaged rooms or create a warm, dry, ventilated room within a room using wooden framework, a tent or other solutions whilst ensuring safety within the building structure and limits.

Repair and reconstruction will require considerable time and resources. Ongoing surveys by UNRWA and UNDP with the Ministry of Public Works and Housing are resulting in payment of rental assistance and grants for minor repairs to some former owner-occupiers among the affected registered Palestinian refugee families, expanding as the program rolls out.

Others have variously received cash grants and non-food-items to assist with replacing lost items and finding new accommodation.

Pressure on housing was already severe prior to Operation Protective Edge. The ongoing surveys are likely to produce a list of damaged houses in the region of 100,000 units far exceeding previously expected 60,000 units. Of the total it is anticipated 20,000 will be totally destroyed or so severely damaged as to be uninhabitable needing costly repairs or demolition and reconstruction (up from the previous figure of 16,000). This should be compared with a known number of families in collective centres and host families of 17,000.

Transitional shelter support will be required for the estimated 20,000 households whose houses are severely damaged or destroyed and are either lodging with host families, in collective centres or following other coping mechanisms including staying in-situ in makeshift shelters.

After all minor damaged units are considered repaired, current figures indicate that up to 11,000 further transitional solutions are needed to allow the affected population to over-winter in adequate shelter conditions. The current number of known solutions number only 6,000.

Suitable transitional options include rental assistance, finishing off existing 'spare' units in exchange for rent-free accommodation, sealing off two rooms provided WASH facilities are also available and prefabricated units located either on-site in rural situations or in small temporary displacement sites of no more than 50 units as deemed suitable by the Ministry of Public Works and Housing and the Municipal authorities.

Emergency options include host families and collective centres. Work is ongoing among Shelter cluster members to determine the ongoing suitability of host family situations and to find alternative collective centres in order to provide continued emergency cover. Given the chronic pre-existing housing shortage and the need to re-open the schools currently used as collective centres, **improvements to and/or solutions to the host family and collective centre options need to quickly become available.**

The next table illustrates some of the options available to affected households, and highlights that the solutions chosen will very much depend on the damage level of the house, geographic location (for example, Beit Hanoun has no rental units available) and individual family coping mechanisms.

Those with minor damaged houses are expected to return home. However, those with destroyed houses may endeavour to stay in-situ in makeshift shelters or nearby with family and/or friends, in rental units or in lightweight structures such as imported or locally made prefabricated units, wooden structures or tents. Those with medium damaged houses may prefer to stay at home by sealing off two rooms or by creating a refuge within their home. Given the length of time reconstruction is likely to take, no single option will be able to support the entire caseload and it is likely that affected households will move between options as circumstances change.

| House status | Possible living situations for those with damaged houses (illustrative % of households - example only) | | | | |
|--------------|--|--------------------|---------------|---------|------------------------|
| | On-site | Collective Centers | Host families | Rentals | Lightweight Structures |
| Destroyed | 25% | 24% | 40% | 6% | 5% |
| Severe | 25% | 24% | 40% | 6% | 5% |
| Major | 70% | 10% | 10% | 10% | |
| Minor | 100% | | | | |

The table above is a working assumption, and agencies and authorities must work together to monitor which options affected households will choose and prioritize.

A priority for the Shelter Cluster and actors will be to devise appropriate modalities for response within the different transitional solutions. Significant agreements have been reached between Shelter Cluster partners on the mechanisms and solutions to ensure equitable and transparent assistance across the range of circumstances in which affected families find themselves. Further work is required to fine tune these responses according to the timelines dictated by the suitability of the emergency solutions including hosting and collective centres and in the light of the impending winter cold, winds and rains. Care needs to be taken to avoid undermining coping mechanisms whilst ensuring that winterisation support and a sufficient supply of transitional options are provided.

Emphasis must also be given to the need for clarity on the timing and scale of key actors' programmes and projects so that other shelter actors can gauge the need for their engagement and so that they can devise suitable responses and seek funding in a timely manner.

There is a need for consistency and recognition of others' mechanisms and provision so that the most needy are supported with the most appropriate transitional solution and to avoid exhausting certain types of solution that could occur due to its transient popularity.

Conversations on transitional shelter solutions for the estimated 20,000 households with severely damaged or destroyed houses include the following living situations:

Collective Centres

Despite the difficulties presented by living in collective centres almost 57,000 people (9,100 families) remain in 18 UNRWA and 2 MoEHE schools being used as collective centres. Given the number of transitional shelter solutions on the table, the lack of cement and aggregate and the proximity to winter it is likely that there will be a continuing need for collective centre space over the winter. It is anticipated that as alternative solutions become available and if pull-factors such as NFI distributions move away from the collective centres that affected households will prioritize other transitional solutions as they become available.

The crowded accommodation is causing some families to stay in open areas within the schools/collective centres. The need for winterisation, minor repairs and preparation for schools to reopen will bring pressure on education providers

and the IDPs to find alternative solutions to schools as collective centres/emergency shelter.

It is clear that there will be a need for continuous provision of collective centre capacity for the affected population for the foreseeable future. The scale of provision required is not clear but sufficient capacity to cover likely winter flooding will be needed.

In-situ temporary housing

Households with destroyed houses in areas with lower density housing, may choose to return to their plot of land and construct a temporary building while the reconstruction of their damaged house takes place. Agencies can support these households with materials and technical advice but also with locally built structures where appropriate and where the design, materials and layout are consistent with the aspirations of the affected households, cultural practices, and climatic considerations.

A number (approximately 5,000) of prefabricated units are likely to arrive in Gaza over the coming weeks. Prefabricated units are not an ideal transitional shelter solution and the message from the authorities in Gaza is that no more prefabricated units should be supplied. Rather than this, available funding should be used for winterisation; repairs; creating new rental units or further hosting opportunities; sealing off rooms, rendering buildings safe or creating refuges in medium damaged housing units and providing locally built solutions using materials on the open market. Winterised tents as an emergency solution are not ruled out although they are not acceptable when arranged in camps.

Existing rental units and creating new rental units

A number of displaced households are likely to choose rental units as an interim solution. However, the availability is estimated to be around 1,000 units across the Gaza Strip. In addition to available units, agencies may also consider completing unfinished and/or lightly damaged buildings failing to qualify for current initiatives in exchange for rent-free periods for affected households. Rental subsidies will increase demand on the current housing stock and may fuel price rises. A simultaneous increase in the available housing stock is also required. A small scale pilot project is underway in Beit Hanoun to test the feasibility of this option and should be closely followed. Other agencies are encouraged to examine this option as one of the more durable solutions to meeting the housing needs of the affected population.

Host families

Host families have proved an invaluable support option for a large number of households; however these situations can often be overcrowded, along with tensions arising from household income and expenditure. Whilst it is unlikely that households will be wish to stay with host families for the duration of displacement while homes are reconstructed, every effort must be made to track and support hosted and host families in order to maximise the availability of this option as long as proves necessary.

New neighbourhoods

In response to the large number of destroyed houses, and given the pre-crisis housing deficit, stated to be 75,334 in 2011, agencies and authorities should investigate the potential to create new housing developments. There is a likelihood that temporary housing solutions, such as prefabricated units in temporary displacement sites (TDS) will gradually become permanent. This coupled with an awareness of the complexities of land ownership issues indicates a clear for TDS to be appropriately designed. If temporary sites are likely to become permanent they will require attention to detail to incorporate necessary access, utility and other infrastructure service features.

3.2 Minor & Major Repairs & Winterisation

Minor repairs are a high priority in order to winterise the many minor damaged units and to minimise pressure on host family and collective centre solutions. It is important that all minor repairs are quickly carried out before winter sets in. These will need glass, aluminium frames, doors, wood, electrical items, etc. all of which are currently available on the open market although pipelines are not determined.

Some households returning to lightly damaged houses may be unable to mobilize the resources to perform minor damage repairs, Agencies should consider providing additional support to vulnerable households to enable them to undertake repairs.

The unavailability of cement and the time it will take for any improvements to the supply of restricted materials into Gaza forces all repairs and winterisation to be designed to use only the limited types of materials currently available in Gaza.

Given the amounts available for rental support and the shortage of rental units, many affected households may choose to stay at home in medium damaged buildings. Agencies should consider providing support to these families to make homes and access ways safe, to ensure associated WASH provision, the sealing off of two rooms for winter use or the creation of a refuge within the structure.

3.3 Reconstruction

Those that are able to will start the repair and reconstruction process as and when construction materials become available. However, for thousands of households, the reconstruction process will take years and they will require support with reconstruction, documentation and legal processes.

Challenges for the reconstruction process, include:

- Availability of construction materials in Gaza, including restrictions on importing 'dual use' materials from Israel;
- Access, construction and movement are restricted within and bordering the access restricted area (ARA). Affected families whose homes were destroyed in the ARA will need to be relocated.
- Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) saturation and dispersion across the Gaza Strip is currently considered high. Assessments and visible clearances by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) are ongoing,
- Rubble removal and potential for reuse.
- Housing, Land and Property (HLP) aspects, including home/land documentation for widowers, repairs for families formerly renting accommodation, etc.

4 Shelter Cluster contact details

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Meeting minutes and Information Management products will be made available on the Palestine page of www.sheltercluster.org and <http://www.shelterpalestine.org> The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has been the Shelter Cluster lead agency in Palestine since 2009. www.nrc.no