

Gaza Crisis 2023 – Shelter Situation Update



Internally displaced people seek shelter at an overcrowded public school in Rafah, Nov 2023. Photo: Mohammed Al-Aklouk/NRC

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Two months since the horrific events of 7 October, amidst relentless air, land and sea attacks and the expansion of Israel's ground operation into Khan Younis, the current situation in Gaza has deteriorated into chaos. The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator has described the current conditions as “apocalyptic” and said that “the continuing offensive had robbed aid workers of any significant means of helping”. The UN Secretary General has invoked Article 99 of the UN charter to compel the UNSC to call for a permanent ceasefire as public order begins to break down.

In these circumstances, Shelter Cluster partners in Gaza are not operational as they themselves are subjected to constant bombardments, evacuation orders and the gruelling search for the essentials necessary for survival. The seven-day pause at the end of November provided some respite from additional destruction and loss but did little to address the overwhelming needs and gaps for basic non-food items (NFIs) and shelter materials in Gaza. Only a handful of cluster partners received items through the Rafah crossing. Distributions have become increasingly fraught as desperation for needed items increases amidst a woefully insufficient supply.

Since the resumption of hostilities, civilian homes have been targeted with greater intensity. Heavy bombardments combined with evacuation orders covering 22 per cent of Khan Younis (the second largest city in Gaza and where a large proportion of people from the north were displaced to) has resulted in mass displacement into Rafah – which was already the most congested governorate. **In the current circumstances, the shelter situation in Gaza at this time is more appropriately described as a 'lack of shelter' situation.**

Over 1.9m people are currently displaced, and based on current data on destruction, more than 500,000 people will not be able to return to their former homes. Without re-establishing freedom of movement, safe and sustained access to people wherever they are, and sufficient resources, humanitarian organisations face barriers that prevent provision of meaningful shelter assistance. Restrictions on the amount and type of aid able to enter through the Rafah crossing – while Kerem Shalom remains closed – and complicated bureaucratic procedures to accomplish this continue to hinder the entry of aid and have contributed to the significant shelter gaps and increasing risk of exposure for thousands of displaced persons.

ESTIMATED NEEDS

The full extent of the impact on housing is yet to be accurately assessed. The Government Media Office reported on 3 December that **over 250,000 housing units are damaged, and 50,000 units are destroyed or rendered uninhabitable, totally more than 60 per cent of housing stock**. According to satellite imagery analysis, over 40 per cent of all buildings – residential, commercial, institutional, agricultural – across Gaza are likely to have sustained damage. To match the figures above, the average building would need to contain an average of four housing units. While satellite analysis includes buildings that do not contain any housing units, apartment blocks in the north – where most damage has occurred – often constitute many more than four units per building.



*Palestinian displaced families in southern Gaza live in makeshift shelters amidst winter storms, Nov 2023.
Photo: Yousef Hammash/NRC*

Based on satellite imagery analysis of damage to buildings, the following breakdown estimates per governorate the number of people whose housing unit has been affected, as of 1 December.

These figures are only estimates intended to give a sense of scale of the damage – it is very likely that additional people have been affected by housing damage unable to be detected via satellite imagery. According to the below, **over half a million people have no home to return to**. Many more will be unable to return immediately due to the level of damage to surrounding infrastructure, as well as the risk of Explosive Remnants of War.

| Governorate | % buildings destroyed or uninhabitable | Estimated people affected | % buildings moderately damaged | Estimated people affected |
|-------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| North | 50.9 | 230,000 | 28.4 | 128,000 |
| Gaza | 36.6 | 280,000 | 34.6 | 266,000 |
| Middle | 5.6 | 17,000 | 14.3 | 43,000 |
| Khan Yunis | 4.5 | 18,000 | 10 | 40,000 |
| Rafah | 3.3 | 9,000 | 9.2 | 25,000 |
| Total | 20.7 | 554,000 | 19.8 | 502,000 |

PLANNED SHELTER RESPONSE

The extensive damage and resulting displacement has created a full-blown crisis that will take a huge collective effort to address. While in the inter-cluster [Flash Appeal](#) (revised 6 Nov) the Shelter Cluster estimates that **1.5M people are in need of essential NFIs and shelter assistance**, with over 1.9m people displaced, the whole population of Gaza (2.3m) is affected by the crisis. Given the level of damage that has occurred, transitional shelter options to support the longer-term shelter needs and recovery will necessitate the full scope of possible assistance methods at considerable scale.

Immediate priorities:

- emergency shelter materials
- blankets and mattresses
- sealing-off kits
- winterized family tents
- warm winter clothes
- emergency repairs

Possible transitional shelter options:

- prefabricated units on determined sites
- transitional shelter cash assistance (including host family/rental support)
- finishing-off unfinished units (OFC)
- temporary change of use of non-residential buildings
- tents or makeshifts on individual plots

Cluster partners interested in developing guidance and contributing towards planning for the transitional response are invited to join the Cluster team to join the Technical Working Group.

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