

Situation Overview

1. Palestinian Refugee Caseload:

There are at least **1,059** Palestinian refugee families whose houses have suffered major damage or were totally destroyed since 2001¹. **781** of these cases resulted from the 2008-2009 Israeli operation “Cast Lead” in Gaza, while **120** cases were already registered prior to Cast Lead. Another **158** houses for refugee families were totally destroyed as a result of the November 2012 escalation of hostilities between Israel and Gaza. Out of the **10,000** minorly damaged houses resulting from the escalation, **7,400** houses were those of refugee families, **5,600** of which have been repaired (**75%**), and about **1,800** houses still needing repair. UNRWA has recently received funding for completing the entire refugee caseload of needed repairs (pre-Cast Lead, Cast Lead and November 2012) from the Saudi Fund for Development through the Islamic Development Bank. The fund will cover all the categories of destruction, including the **1,059** cases of total and major destruction and the remaining **1,800** minor repair cases².



¹ Gaza Shelter Sector - USSD

² Gaza Shelter Sector: Minutes of Meeting 09/07/2013

2. Palestinian Non-Refugee Caseload

There are about **744** non-refugee families whose houses have suffered major damage or were totally destroyed since 2001³. **500** of these cases resulted from the “Cast Lead” operation, while **220** cases were already registered prior to Cast Lead. Another **24** houses for non-refugee families were totally destroyed as a result of the November 2012 escalation. Out of the **10,000** minorly damaged houses resulting from the escalation, **2,600** houses were for non-refugee families, **600** of which have been repaired (**23%**), and about **2,000** houses still needing repair. It is worth noting that, because they are not refugees, these families do not receive any regular transitional rental fees. They sometimes incur rental costs for years, and many of them have been using other coping mechanisms, such as living with relatives or living inside their damaged house before getting it repaired. While a few reconstruction projects have been implemented, such as UNDP re-housing projects and the Self-help Approach funded by the Islamic Development Bank, and included some non-refugee cases, the remaining **2,000** minor damage and **744** total destruction and major damage cases are still pending with hope for more funding to come.



3. Re-displaced Persons: the Syrian Caseload

As violence and conflict continue to unravel in Syria, dozens of Palestinian families fled from violence into the Gaza Strip trying to seek refuge. Conducting a profiling process for these families, UNRWA received various lists of refugees from the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), the Refugees’ Popular Committee, and refugee representatives. Results of this profiling process showed that over **212** families have entered Gaza, including **188** Palestine refugee families, **4** families that are Palestinian (not refugees) or Syrian nationality, and at least **20** families with unconfirmed nationality⁴. According to protection interviews conducted by UNRWA, these families have decided to come into the Gaza Strip because they have relatives living here in Gaza or because this was the only destination available to them⁵.

³ Gaza Shelter Sector - USSD

⁴ UNRWA

⁵ Many Palestine refugees reported to UNRWA that they were denied legal entry to other destinations, such as Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt.

Regarding their current living conditions, approximately **50%** of the families reported that they live in rented accommodation, while the remaining families reportedly live with relatives. These families have consistently stated shelter and employment to be their major needs. In July, UNRWA provided a one-time shelter cash assistance of 250 USD per family to the 188 Palestine refugee families, using funding from the Agency's emergency operation in Syria. UNRWA is appealing for additional funding to provide further assistance to these Palestine refugee families from Syria.

Impact of Closures on Reconstruction Projects

After political unrest erupted in Egypt in the last week of June 2013, the Egyptian army decided to launch a security campaign in order to stabilize Sinai. While the campaign included imposing restrictions and limitations on the Rafah crossing, the biggest impact this campaign had was on the operation and performance of the tunnels under the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip during July 2013. The Egyptian Army's campaign included closure of dozens of these tunnels and close monitoring and control of movement of goods in Sinai coming into Gaza. As the Gaza Strip suffers from the blockade imposed by Israel, tunnels represent the main source for all kinds of goods and commodities in the Gaza Strip, including materials necessary for construction. Meanwhile, many international organizations have adopted the Self-help Approach for reconstruction projects, which implies that beneficiaries will be given installments and use construction materials available in the local market, as Israel imposes restrictions on official crossings.

This closure immediately had a significant impact on shelter and reconstruction projects in the Gaza Strip for a few weeks. Here are some examples of the impact of tunnel closures⁶:

- Initially after the closure and in the first week of July 2013, there were over **500** houses being repaired using the Self-help Approach through UNRWA, Mercy for Relief and Development, and the Palestinian Housing Council (PHC). Due to the closure of tunnels, not only the prices of construction materials went up (for example, the price of cement was **400ILS/ton** in June and after the closure it went up to **1,000ILS/ton**, before dropping down again later), but the majority of materials were no longer available in the market at the time. This had a severe impact on Self-help projects: all the construction was temporarily suspended and over **500** families (**3,000** individuals) had to extend their already long period of displacement without adequate shelter.
- UNRWA has recently received funding for completing the refugee caseload from the Saudi Fund for Development through the Islamic Development Bank. Over **1,000** families, in addition to the total destruction cases resulting from the November 2012 escalation, are planned to be assisted from this fund through the Self-Help Approach. However, due to the tunnel closures, UNRWA had to suspend the payment of the first installment for a few weeks.

⁶ Gaza Shelter Sector: Minutes of Meeting 09/07/2013

- Re-housing and reconstruction projects funded by the Qatari government were also affected by the closure as well. Phase 1 of the Hamad Re-housing project was shortly delayed due to the unavailability of reconstruction materials. This project consists of 3,000 residential units; each phase will cover 1,000 residential units. Another reason for the delay was that contractors were unable to submit their offers to the published tenders (due to price fluctuation and lack of some construction materials at the time). Therefore, the initiation of the Hamad Re-housing project and the construction of new hospitals in the Gaza Strip were temporarily postponed.
- In early July 2013, the Palestinian Contractors Union reported that 95% of the concrete mix factories in the Gaza Strip had to stop operations, leading to a suspension of work on around 2,000 housing units under construction⁷, before construction was resumed later.

According to OCHA, more than **10%** of the estimated **300** tunnels continued partially operating in early July despite the Egyptian measures. However, the entire situation brings into question the reliability of tunnels as a source for construction materials. The tunnel closures and their impact have made it clear that tunnels are totally unreliable, and their closure can significantly harm much-needed reconstruction projects, even if this closure was for reasons having nothing to do with Gaza. Additionally, this situation illustrates the importance of activating official crossings and the lifting of all measures and restrictions imposed by Israel on access of construction materials into Gaza through official crossings. While tunnels have resumed operation to some level, a similar situation could happen again at any time and is an untenable one for Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip.

A House for My Children

My name is Hussam Halaween. I'm a 40-year old non-refugee living in the northeast of the Gaza Strip. I have nine children; the oldest is 20 years old, and the youngest is three. I used to live in a house which I built more than 20 years ago. It was just the perfect house, and everything was available and as nice as anyone would desire.

On the seventh day of the 2008-2009 Israeli operation on Gaza, the ground invasion started. The operations were close to my neighborhood, because we could hear artillery shells falling everywhere, and the bombardment kept on escalating. Many shells fell very close to our house, which caused damage to parts of the house, so we left the house carrying white flags. After the operation was over, we came back to the area to find that the house was almost wiped out.

⁷ OCHA – Humanitarian Bulletin Monthly Report – June 2013

Most of the houses were totally destroyed by Israeli tanks and bulldozers, including my house and my father's house. Then we were given tents by local NGOs, we lived in these tents for about six months, under the rain and in the hot sun. After frustration built up, I decided to rent a small apartment for my family, although there was no kind of financial assistance to pay the rent. We lived in the rented apartment for another six months, but when I lost my job and became unemployed I could not pay rent anymore.



So I moved to live with my wife's family, where we don't have to pay rent. Although her family never complained, I have always felt indebted and undignified. In March 2012, my father received funding to rebuild his house, but my file is still waiting for funding.

When I see that my neighbors' houses are rebuilt, I don't feel jealous because I would love to see everybody who lost a house due to the conflict get another house to shelter his family. What I feel, however, is frustration, because the houses in this area were all destroyed in the same period, but you can see that most of the neighbors had their houses reconstructed by international organizations, while my house was not. The only difference between us is that they are registered refugees and I'm not, and this is frustrating. Every time I go to organizations to follow up on the case, they tell me: "there is currently no funding". Three of my children were born in displacement. Amina is 4 years old, and the twins Ali and Omar are 3 years old. They haven't yet experienced living in a house of their own. And when I think about the future, and how five or ten more years could pass without getting the house rebuilt, I feel frustrated and depressed. I hope that there would be a solution and funding for cases like mine, and that this undignifying suffering would end.

Recommendations

- Lifting restrictions on commercial import and export of goods, and totally opening official crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip to facilitate sustainable and consistent access of construction materials into Gaza. This recommendation has been recurrent since Shelter Fact Sheet 1, yet response from the international community have fallen short to achieving it.
- Press Israel to end the approvals process for construction materials for humanitarian agencies by January 2014. In the interim period:

- Streamline, simplify and reduce the approval, coordination, monitoring and reporting requirements for international humanitarian projects in the Gaza Strip. Projects should be approved within the specified two month time frame.
- Improve the capacity of land crossings in order to transport more construction materials into Gaza.
- At Kerem Shalom install a conveyor belt to simplify the movement of materials across the border and reduce costs.
- Re-open the Karni and Sufa Crossings in order to decrease transportation costs of materials.
- Remove bureaucratic and financial barriers currently preventing import of construction materials by humanitarian agencies from the West Bank.
- Streamline the process to approve changes or modifications to already approved humanitarian construction projects.
- End the requirement for GPS coordinates for all humanitarian reconstruction projects.
- Approve projects on a need basis, not on location or beneficiary profile.
- Directing more funding to the Non-refugee caseload in Gaza.
- Funding shelter projects and assistance for Syria refugees caseload.

Data source: Shelter Sector Gaza – Unified Shelter
Sector Database (USSD)
<http://www.sheltergaza.org>

Shelter Sector Lead, NRC
sheltercluster@gmail.com

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