

SHELTER ADVOCACY FACT SHEET NO. 8

Shelter Sector Gaza

February 2014

Key Facts

1. The Egyptian demolition of most of the tunnels under the Egyptian-Gaza border in July 2013, severely undermined Gaza's only coping mechanism in the face of the seven-year blockade. Regarding construction and building, the tunnels closure has caused a near complete paralysis of the Gaza construction industry - 27 concrete factories and 90% of contracting companies have completely stopped working.
2. Prices in the black market of scarce construction stock have reached unprecedented levels- 400% higher than prices in July 2013.
3. For three weeks in the Fall of 2013, Israel allowed on a daily basis the entry of construction materials comprising approximately around 25% of Gaza Strip daily needs of aggregate material, 10% of daily needs for cement and 10 truck/400 tons of steel.
4. Except for the three weeks in the Fall of 2013, in the last seven months, there has been an 84% decrease in the volume of construction materials entering. The Gaza Strip is estimated to need 3,000 to 4,000 tons of cement per day, and the amounts available in the market are close to zero
5. Currently, very limited quantities of materials enter the Gaza Strip through Kerem Shalom, mainly directed to UNRWA projects. Most of the construction and infrastructure projects implemented by international organizations are pending Israeli approvals to import construction materials.
6. With the war-damaged caseload estimated to end in 2014, it is recommended that international organizations move more towards the needs-based approach on shelter. This includes providing different types of shelter assistance in the Gaza Strip, like: Non-food item (NFI) distribution, housing needs assessments, financial and cash assistance, repair, and reconstruction as needed for cases that are not conflict-damaged.

"I can't continue building my house because of the high prices , and I will have to continue living in rented apartments until the prices of construction materials drop down ..."

- Jazi Abu Daher - his house was destroyed during cast lead offensive



Gaza-Nafaq area 3 days after the storm

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Situation Overview

Since early July 2013, the Gaza Strip has been suffering from severe shortages in fuel and construction materials following the systematic demolition of tunnels under the borders with Egypt. Due to the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, these tunnels have become the main source for fuel and other commodities in Gaza. No construction materials of any kind enter Gaza through the tunnels currently, and the only source for materials are the official crossings with Israel and Egypt. Materials coming through these crossings are designated to certain projects, with great scrutiny to ensure that they are used for their intended purpose. This has left the market in Gaza with no construction materials, where prices in the black market of the remaining scarce stock has reached unprecedented levels, up to 2,000 NIS for a ton of cement, or 400% higher than prices in July 2013. This has put all construction industries into paralysis, as the 27 concrete factories and 280 out of 300 contracting companies in the Gaza Strip have completely stopped working⁽¹⁾.

Regarding construction materials entering through official crossings, Israel allowed, by end of September 2013 and for the first time since 2007, limited quantities of construction materials to enter Gaza through Kerem Shalom crossing for the private sector on a daily basis⁽²⁾. The allowed materials comprised of 40 trucks/2800 tons of aggregate (around 25% of Gaza Strip daily needs of aggregate), 20 trucks/800 tons of cement (around 10% of Gaza daily needs of cement), and 10 truck/400 tons of steel. These quantities were still way below the daily needs in the Gaza Strip. However, this development ended three weeks later, as in mid-October, Israel discovered a tunnel between the Gaza Strip and Israel, and decided to stop all coordination for entering construction materials. Currently, very limited quantities of materials enter the Gaza Strip through Kerem Shalom, mainly directed to a few UNRWA projects. Most of the construction and infrastructure projects implemented by international organizations are at a total halt due to the lack of construction materials.

Over the last seven months, there has been a downward trend for the volume of construction materials entering the Gaza Strip through Kerem Shalom. Materials coming through Kerem Shalom dropped from 110,994 tons in July 2013 to 17,822 tons in January 2014, with a decrease of about 84% in the volume of construction materials entering. The private sector as well has suffered a remarkable decline in the amounts of construction materials available. Of the 110,994 tons that entered through Kerem Shalom in July 2013, about 22,772 tons, or 20.5%, of aggregate were allocated to the private sector. Meanwhile, of the 17,822 tons that entered during January 2014, only 291 tons of aggregate were allocated to the private sector, which is 1.6% of materials entering in January 2014 and less than 1.3% of materials the private sector received in July 2013. The Gaza Strip is estimated to need 3,000 to 4,000 tons of cement per day, and the amounts available in the market are close to zero. This situation was exacerbated in December 2013 by a very strong winter storm that hit the oPt. In the Gaza Strip, the torrential rains put severe pressure on the water infrastructure system, already strained by long overdue repairs and upgrades, as well as by the shortage of electricity and fuel used to operate backup generators. Low-lying areas across Gaza were flooded, resulting in the temporary evacuation of some 10,000 people, alongside damage to around 21,000 homes⁽³⁾.

(1) Interview with Nabeel Abu Mualiq, Head of Palestinian Contractors Union in the Gaza Strip.

(2) Gaza Shelter Sector – Minutes of Meeting 03/10/2013

(3) OCHA: Humanitarian Bulletin Monthly Report, December 2013

Total Construction Materials entered to Gaza Jul 2013 to Jan 2014

Month	Ton	Trucks
Jul-13	122122	2000
Aug-13	61446	1013
Sep-13	36192	858
Oct-13	85517	1542
Nov-13	26795	572
Dec-13	48837	944
Jan-14	37388	625

Total Construction Materials entered through K. Shalom Crossing—Jul 2013 to Jan 2014

Month	Ton	Trucks
Jul-13	110994	1736
Aug-13	48866	723
Sep-13	17556	402
Oct-13	52821	908
Nov-13	287	8
Dec-13	17372	294
Jan-14	17822	286

Total Construction Materials entered through Rafah Crossing—Jul 2013 to Jan 2014 (Qatari Projects Only)

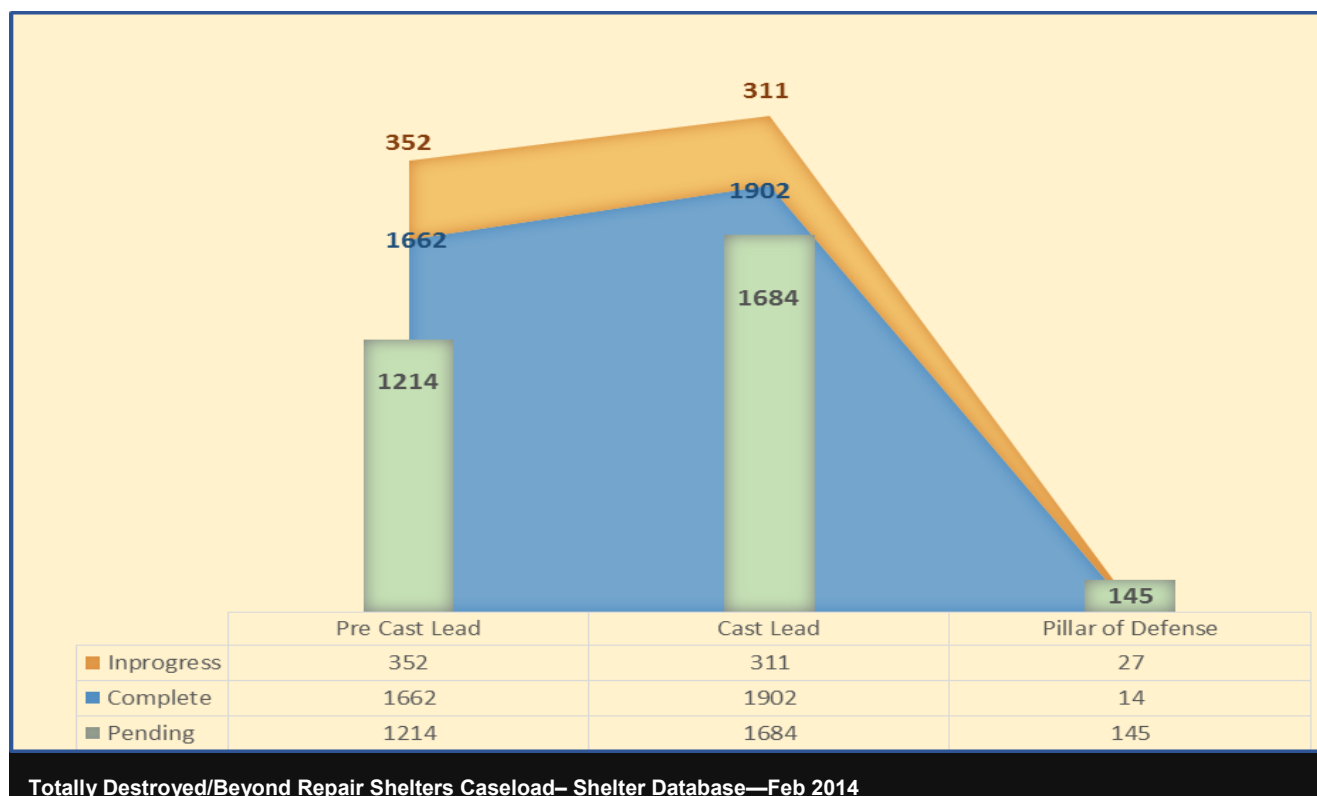
Month	Ton	Trucks
Jul-13	11128	264
Aug-13	12580	290
Sep-13	18636	456
Oct-13	32696	634
Nov-13	26508	564
Dec-13	31465	650
Jan-14	19566	339

Qatari-funded Construction Projects

In October 2012, the government of Qatar pledged about \$400 million USD for reconstruction and development projects in the Gaza Strip⁽⁴⁾. Under the supervision of Gaza's Ministry of Housing and Public Works (MHPW), these projects include construction of thousands of housing units and roads development, as well as construction of a hospital for people with special needs. The roads development projects are underway according to plans, mainly due to the fact that an agreement was signed between the Qatari and the Egyptian governments to allow materials for roads projects as a first phase to enter Gaza through the Rafah crossing at the borders between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. For housing projects, however, these projects are still in the very early stages. Housing projects include construction of thousands of housing units in the Gaza Strip divided onto four major projects. The first project includes construction of 600 housing units in different parts of the Gaza Strip from North to South. The second project is Hamad's City which will be implemented in Khan Younis and offer 500 housing units. The third project is Khalifa's City in Gaza City which will also offer 700 housing units.

The fourth, and largest, project funded by the Qatari government is the Hamad City in Khan Younis which will provide 3,000 housing units. The project is divided into three phases, and Phase One of the project, which includes construction of 1,060 units, has already been initiated. The whole area of "Phase One" was leveled and location prepared for construction to begin months ago. Calls for bids were announced and contracts were awarded, and the construction of Phase One began in December 2013. According to MHPW, there is an estimated delay of six months in the process, due mainly to the tension in Sinai and the closure of the Rafah crossing and the border area between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, which in turn hindered the access of construction materials into the Gaza Strip. However, currently materials enter through Rafah regularly, and the construction process is moving forward according to plans. While Hamad's City project will provide 3,000 housing units, MHPW received over 17,000 applications. MHPW had set criteria for selecting the 3,000 beneficiaries out of the 17,000 applicants, and the selection process was performed accordingly, with surveys and verification process underway. Housing units in "Phase One" will be 130 square meters and will cost the beneficiary an amount of 45,000 USD. Units in phases Two and Three, however, will be a bit smaller and lower in price than those in "Phase One".

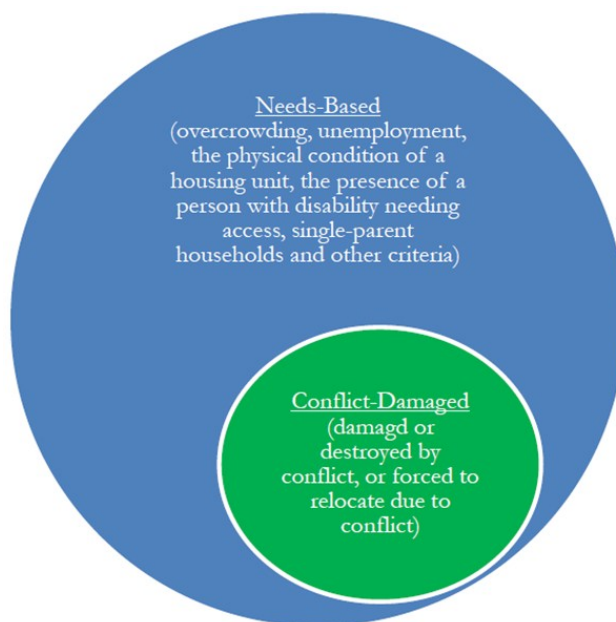
(4) Interview with MHPW.



Needs-Based and Development Work

The Gaza Strip has been subject for years to the chronic conflict between Israel and the Palestinians - 38 years of direct military occupation and Israeli settlements which ended in 2005, and the last seven years of blockade. As the current Israeli and Egyptian blockade and periodic military hostilities affects all sorts of life in Gaza, the international community and international humanitarian organizations have been responding to different needs focusing on relief and humanitarian work, responding to emergencies and mitigating periodic crises. As a result, development work has been limited.

Housing assistance in Gaza can broadly be broken down into two categories: 1) assistance to households based on the need for improved housing conditions, and 2) assistance to households whose homes were damaged due to conflict⁽⁵⁾. The first category includes conflict-damaged housing needs but also includes other criteria not related to conflict, looking instead at household indicators to determine need. Indicators may include overcrowding, unemployment, the physical condition of a housing unit, the presence of a person with disability needing access, single-parent households and other criteria. The second category includes only households whose homes were damaged or destroyed due to conflict and/or due to their location in access restricted areas.



The housing situation in the Gaza Strip has deteriorated in a spiral since 2001, due mainly to frequent incursions and military operations carried out by Israel, which left thousands of houses totally destroyed and dozens of thousands damaged. The housing crisis was exacerbated by the Israeli and Egyptian restrictions on access of construction materials into the Gaza Strip. Gaza's crippled economy was never able to recover these losses and a housing crisis seems to persist.

The Israeli military operation, "Cast Lead" left thousands of houses totally destroyed and damaged. Various International organizations responded to this humanitarian crisis, and many housing and reconstruction projects followed the events to alleviate the suffering of the displaced people and provide them with shelter. Yet again before the caseload was over, another Israeli heavy military operation occurred in November 2012, destroying hundreds and damaging thousands of additional Gazan houses.

While some organizations work on the broader "needs-based approach", in the years since the 2008-2009 Israeli heavy military operation, codenamed operation "Cast Lead", the largest amount of assistance has been given to families living in or displaced from conflict-damaged homes. The repair and reconstruction of conflict-damaged homes is considered by donors to fall under "emergency" assistance.

Looking at the work of international organizations now, more than a year after the November 2012 escalation, funding for most of the remaining shelter caseloads is secured. With the war-damaged caseload estimated to end in 2014, it is recommended that international organizations move more towards the needs-based approach. This includes providing different types of shelter assistance in the Gaza Strip, like: Non-food item (NFI) distribution, housing needs assessments, financial and cash assistance, repair, reconstruction, and resettlement as needed for cases that are not conflict-damaged. Additionally, while international organizations have limited political power to prevent Israeli military operations, they can put more effort into advocacy and use all means to pressure Israel to lift restrictions on access of construction materials; although many organizations are already exerting efforts in this direction, a real change is yet to be seen in this regard.

(5) NRC – Overview of the Housing Situation in the Gaza Strip – March 2013.

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This suffering will continue for God knows how many more months, and this is very painful.

Every time I look at the walls and the missing roof, feelings of agony rise in my heart for not being able to provide a house for my children

Jazi Abu Daher



Photo Caption

Testimony

Jazi Abu Daher, 43 years old, has six sons and two daughters; the oldest is 22 and youngest is seven. My house was 400 meters away from the borders East of Khan Younis, and we lived there for about 30 years, said Jazi. Early January 2009, during the heavy Israeli offensive codenamed "Cast Lead" on Gaza, we left the house and sought refuge in an UNRWA school. When we came back after the attacks, we found that the whole area was destroyed including our house. We started renting houses (more than 5 different houses). Some of these houses were very far from children's schools. One time I rented an apartment in Der El-Balah and the children used to come to school in Khan Younis. We received \$125 per month as rental fees from UNRWA.

Due to the fact that my land falls only 400 meters away from the borders, I had to sell it for 6 thousand Jordanian Dinars and buy a smaller and more expensive land for 20 thousand Dinars. I am still in debt for 5 thousand Dinars from the land's cost. In October 2012, UNRWA asked me to submit building permits and maps, and UNRWA engineers estimated the cost of reconstruction and that the amount would be divided onto four installments. I received the first installment in July 2013. When I started the reconstruction, prices of construction materials were as follows: cement 520 NIS per ton, steel 3,450 NIS per ton, and aggregate 125 NIS per ton. With the first installment, I was able to build the foundation and pillars only and could not cover the first floor. But now, I'm not very keen to receive the second installment, because it won't cover my costs and I will not be able to continue building the house. This is so because the prices for construction materials are very high and materials are very scarce and barely available in the market. After the closure of the tunnels with Egypt in July 2013, we started to notice an increase in prices of construction materials: cement reached 800 to 1,000 NIS and then it became unavailable in the market. The same situation occurred with aggregate and steel. I can't continue building my house because of the high prices, and I will have to continue living in rented apartments until the prices of construction materials drop down. This suffering will continue for God knows how many more months, and this is very painful. Every time I look at the walls and the missing roof, feelings of agony rise in my heart for not being able to provide a house for my children.

Recommendations

1. Israeli should cease its import restrictions on construction materials . The need for adequate shelters is high and the available building materials are not sufficient to alleviate the severe housing crisis and suffering of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip.
2. The Israeli and Egyptian blockade and access restrictions against the Gazan people must be lifted to return normalcy to the Gaza Strip and allow for economic growth and development projects to be implemented.
3. Implementing Agencies should design and implement programming to take actions to combat the problem of overcrowding
4. International donors should support projects looking at addressing overcrowding.

Contact Us

Shelter Sector Gaza – Unified Shelter Sector Database (USSD)
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