

Gaza response update

29 August 2014



Photo credit: Wafa Kafarna, NRC

1 Key points

- Discussions underway within the Shelter Cluster and OCHA for supporting transitional shelter solutions, and the way forward for the reconstruction process
- Gap analysis on Household NFI and Hygiene kit distribution are available in the Shelter Cluster Situation Report, published by OCHA
- Planning is underway for the post-ceasefire damage assessment to be led by UNRWA, UNDP, Ministry or Public Works and Housing, and others

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 15% of the housing stock has been affected, and overall 5% of the housing stock has been severely damaged or destroyed. This is in addition to the pre-crisis housing deficit of 71,000 housing units, plus the extra demand in keeping with population growth. Currently, over 400,000 people have fled their homes for safer locations. Of this about 300,000 are estimated to be in Collective Centres, and a further 100,000 are living with host families. 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 challenges in accessing household items, food, adequate water and sanitation services, etc.

	Damage type (as of 26 August 2014)			
	Minor	Major	Severe	Destroyed
TOTAL (housing units)	38,000	5,800	8,000	10,080
% of pre-crisis housing stock	11.0%	1.7%	2.3%	2.9%
# Individuals	228,000	34,800	48,000	60,500

Lessons learnt from the 2009 "Cast Lead" 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 17,000 households (~100,000 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.

The Shelter Cluster estimates that under current conditions it will take approximately 20 years to import the aggregates required to complete the housing reconstruction. This timeframe is based on the current operational capacity of Kerem Shalom crossing for aggregates (100 truckloads daily), and the estimated 97,334 housing units required in the Gaza Strip. This calculation does not include public infrastructure (e.g. schools, utilities, etc.).

Of the 97,334 housing units needed in the Gaza Strip: ~17,000 units are from homes destroyed or severely damaged during "Operation Protective Edge"; ~5,000 units are outstanding reconstruction caseloads from previous military operations; and 75,334¹ units are needed to reduce the large housing deficit from natural growth rates (calculated as of 2011). Upon the completion of ongoing assessments these figures may be revised. Though the scale of destruction in the Gaza Strip is unprecedented in recent history, the pre-hostilities housing situation was already at crisis levels due to the blockade and ongoing conflict.

Further adding to the reconstruction challenges are the lengthy waiting times to acquire Israeli approval for United Nations (UN) reconstruction projects. According to OCHA, the average waiting time for approval was 19 month¹ immediately prior to "Operation Protective Edge".

¹source:http://www.mpwh.ps/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=223%3A2013-09-24-08-29-25&catid=35&lang=en

² Source: OCHA OPT, 'Humanitarian Bulletin Monthly Report May 2014' (24 June 2014), p. 11
http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_the_humanitarian_monitor_2014_06_24_english.pdf.

3 Proposed response framework

3.1 Pre-ceasefire: emergency assistance

Currently, shelter actors are working with two different scenarios for assistance: during hostilities and post-ceasefire. While hostilities continue, actors can expect a significant caseload of IDPs residing in Collective Centres and with host-families. 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

Emergency shelter materials

Emergency shelter materials 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.

3.2 Post-ceasefire: shelter solutions

The reconstruction post-ceasefire will require considerable time and resources. In parallel, transitional shelter support will be required for an estimated 16,000 households whose houses are severely damaged or destroyed.

The table below illustrates a number 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, and individual coping mechanisms. For example, all those with lightly damaged houses may return home, however those with destroyed houses may stay in-situ, with family and/or friends, or in rental units. Given the length of time reconstruction is likely to take, no one 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	New settlements
Destroyed	40%	5%	25%	25%	5%
Severe	40%	5%	25%	25%	5%
Major	80%		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.

Furthermore, a priority for the Shelter Cluster and actors will be to devise appropriate modalities for response within the different transitional solutions. This must be a consensus-based approach across the Shelter Cluster partners in order to ensure equitable and transparent solutions, which reinforce coping mechanisms, rather than undermine. For example, for rental support, agencies need to decide together on: market capacity, eligibility for assistance, support providers, amount and duration of support, etc.

Preliminary conversations on transitional shelter solutions for the estimated 17,000 households with severely damaged or destroyed houses include the following living situations:

Collective Centres

Though a very important shelter solution during hostilities, living conditions in the collective centres are very difficult. UNRWA and MoSA have stated that they will make a number of schools available to households that are unable to return. Though this may accommodate thousands of individuals in the short-term, it is unlikely that this option will remain feasible for more than a few months, and that, where possible, affected households will prioritize other transitional solutions.

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 pre-fabricated structures, where appropriate, and where the design, materials and layout are consistent with the aspirations of the affected households, cultural practices, and climatic considerations. Though there have discussions around tents, the message from the authorities in Gaza previously was that tents were not a welcome solution.

Existing rental units and creating new rental units

A number of displaced households will likely choose rental units as an interim solution, however the availability of units is estimated to be around 1,000 units across the Gaza Strip. In addition to available units, agencies may also consider rehabilitating unfinished and/or lightly damaged buildings in exchange for rent-free periods for affected households. It is important to note that rental subsidies will merely increase demand on the current housing stock, but what is also required is an increase in the available housing stock.

Host families

Host families will be the immediate support option for a number of households; however these situations can often be overcrowded, along with tensions arising from household income and expenditure. Again, though this option will be essential in the immediate response, it is unlikely that households will be able to stay with host families for the duration of displacement while homes are reconstructed.

New neighbourhoods

In response to the large number of destroyed houses, and given the pre-crisis housing deficit of 71,000 housing units, agencies and authorities should discuss the idea of creating new settlements. Though initially they could be designed for temporary housing solutions, such as caravans, the duration of the reconstruction process will likely mean that any temporary settlement will gradually become permanent. As a result, any temporary settlement should be designed to ultimately become a permanent neighbourhood, with the associated planning and utility infrastructure.

3.3 Post-ceasefire: minor repairs

Though of a slightly lesser priority, there will be households that return to lightly damaged houses whom are unable to mobilize the resources to repair minor damage, including broken windows, doors, and damage to walls. Agencies should consider support to vulnerable households with in-kind assistance or conditional cash in order to allow the households to undertake the necessary repairs.

3.4 Post-ceasefire: reconstruction

Those that are able to will start the repair and reconstruction process as soon as the security permission permits; however for thousands of households, the reconstruction process will take years and they will require support with reconstruction, but also documentation and legal support.

Challenges for the reconstruction process, include:

- Availability of construction materials in Gaza, as well as restrictions around importing 'dual use' materials from Israel;
- Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) saturation and dispersion across the Gaza Strip is currently considered high. Sample surveys by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) are ongoing.
- Rubble removal, recycling and potential use
- Housing, Land and Property (HLP) aspects, including home/land documentation for widowers, reconstruction for renters, etc.
- Immediate registration and tracking system of the IDPs— and their self-coping mechanism.

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. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has been the Shelter Cluster lead agency in Palestine since 2009. www.nrc.no