



Life for Women and Girls in the Gaza Strip and the International Response

GBV Sub-Cluster Palestine Update and Advocacy Note – 12 December 2023

The violence being experienced by civilians in the Gaza Strip¹ extends beyond suffering that human beings can endure. Gazans have been deprived of the essentials of food, water, shelter, medicine, and safety.

For women and girls, gender-based violence (GBV), including physical and sexual violence, is a daily threat, and the combination of threats they face represent distinct and targeted attacks on their rights, identity, and dignity. This loss of dignity is primary to their experience of this crisis².

“I have lost my dignity. I have lost my privacy. I no longer think about my house or my relatives. I think about how humiliated I am.” – Palestinian woman reporting to GBV Sub-Cluster Palestine.

Nowhere in the Gaza Strip is safe. Nearly 80%³ of the Gazan population is now displaced and living in severely overcrowded shelters that offer limited “refuge.” Civilians and humanitarian and medical staff and infrastructure are under siege; health facilities are not functional due to damage or lack of generator fuel. There is an urgent need for unhindered humanitarian access to meet even the most basics.

In the absence of an immediate and respected ceasefire, the humanitarian system must remain united and vocal in its call for the **protection of civilians and respect for International Humanitarian Law**. As we make this call, we must **prepare and be ready at the earliest opportunity to complement the extraordinary work of brave local and international colleagues** who have continued to work without respite since the escalation of hostilities.

Response in Crisis

The Protection Cluster, inclusive of the Gender Based Violence (GBV), Mine Action, Housing, Land and Property (HLP), and Child Protection (CP) Areas of Responsibility, is preparing a minimum protection response package. After weeks of hostilities, the barest

minimum of commodities are available, leaving hundreds of thousands without services. The Protection Cluster is working to enable local and national partners to provide direct assistance and exercise leadership in response planning. To support this, emergency protection responders are being deployed to work with inter-cluster or multi-agency assessment and response teams where appropriate and engage with specialized services as needed, including where the context requires additional sensitivities. At the same time, it needs to be recognized that humanitarians themselves are unsafe in the Gaza Strip, and hundreds of humanitarians, aid workers, and healthcare practitioners have already lost their lives.

“I wish it was all a dream and a lie.” -
Palestinian woman reporting to GBV Sub-Cluster Palestine.

For GBV-specific response, the GBV sub-cluster⁴ is working to ensure GBV risk mitigation is included across all clusters and support GBV prevention and response actors to implement the following priorities in the Gaza Strip when possible:

- Re-establish emergency GBV service providers and referral pathways, which were previously functional but have now collapsed. This includes linking to remote case management systems in the West Bank to direct support for the most acute and complex GBV cases presenting in Gaza.

¹ The GBV Sub-Cluster Palestine has been operational in OPT to support GBV prevention and response, as part of the activated Cluster System response, for multiple years. Support through the Cluster System is provided in humanitarian contexts. This document centers on the response in the Gaza Strip given the humanitarian need in this location; response is also supported in the West Bank.

² Quotes embedded in this piece were provided by a GBV responder living in the Gaza Strip based on her conversations with women living in the same temporary shelter.

³ Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel – OCHA Flash Update #52. Available online: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/hostilities-in-the-gaza-strip-and-israel-ocha-flash-update-52/#:~:text=Over%201.8%20million%20people%20in,156%20UNRWA%20facilities%20across%20Gaza.>

⁴ The Gaza: Emergency Response GBV Sub-Cluster 5Ws Dashboard, which provides information on the individuals reached by response so far, is [available here](#).

- Provide GBV response services for survivors and those at risk of GBV via virtual/remote MHPSS, counseling, hotlines, legal support, and case management. When possible, in-person support will also include establishing safe spaces in shelters in addition to awareness raising.
- Support women-led organizations (WLOs), including those who were already providing essential GBV response services in the Gaza Strip.
- Support GBV frontline workers, including with MHPSS.
- Procure and distribute dignity kits and menstrual hygiene supplies for women and girls, including those with a disability.
- Provide cash assistance, prioritizing complex/high risk cases in formal and informal shelters, assuming liquidity and access to functional markets is possible.
- Disseminate GBV awareness raising messages.

The situation is the same for everyone and it's terrible for everyone - but the *impact* is different for women and girls" - GBV responder in Gaza.

Supporting the Response

Donor governments must support the whole of the humanitarian response in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). In the Gaza Strip, this means recognizing that the needs of Gazans are dire and interrelated and that the long-term dignity and safety of Gazans relies on a fully funded and well-coordinated humanitarian response, integrating GBV prevention and response across all clusters.

Donors are specifically called to:

- Advocate for a **permanent ceasefire** noting that dire humanitarian needs are the direct result of lack of political solutions; they should underscore the unique and disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls and ensure that women and girls are not collateral damage.
- Recognize that the long-term blockade now compounded by the war has caused a **multi-dimensional public health crisis** for all people in Gaza, with unique and disproportionate impacts on women and girls.
- Immediately **fund traditionally under-resourced Protection activities, including GBV services**, recognizing that failing to do so undermines long-standing commitments to meet the needs and ensure protection of the rights and dignity of women and girls.
 - Ensure flexible, multi-year funding that considers needs to rebuild and re-equip offices, uphold duty of care to their staff (including security, communications, and wellbeing requirements) and continue to deliver programs and services.
- Afford implementing partners, including WLOs, the necessary **contractual flexibility to respond with speed and agility** to the many diverse and complex needs in a rapidly changing context. This may include ensuring that funding applications and requirements are simplified and can be accepted in Arabic.
- Prioritize **direct funding to WLOs**, which have been at the forefront of GBV prevention and response activities in the Gaza Strip and capably responded in the past.
 - In order to ensure use of funding, donors should advocate that vibrant and capable civil society organizations, and women and youth-led organizations in particular, are not marginalized by bureaucratic impediments or rigid due diligence requirements that may effectively side-line the role of civil society.

"We are not breathing anymore. We do not breathe." – Palestinian woman reporting to GBV Sub-Cluster Palestine.

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