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CONFINED BY DESIGN

*The Human Cost
of Protracted
Displacement
in Gaza*



Nasser, displaced individual,
Gaza / August 2026



*Amal, displaced individual,
Gaza / August 2026*

Acknowledgement

This is joint report by the **Danish Refugee Council (DRC)** and the **Agricultural Development Association (PARC)**.

In the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), DRC implements humanitarian programming both directly and in partnership with local organizations. DRC and partner activities include Site Management, Protection, and Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA).

PARC is a Palestinian national development organisation, originally established to respond to the deterioration of agricultural extension services during the occupation. PARC has grown into one of the largest and longest-standing Palestinian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), working across agricultural development, rural livelihoods, food security, women's economic empowerment, and – since October 2023 – large-scale emergency humanitarian response in Gaza. PARC has operated continuously in Gaza throughout the current conflict, shifting from its traditional agricultural and rural development mandate to emergency relief, and has served as one of DRC's principal implementing partners for site management activities since March 2024, drawing on its established local presence, staff, and community relationships.

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Infographics by **Ali Mowafi**. All photos were taken by **Mohammad Kuhil** and are owned by DRC.

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Abbreviations

AO	Advisory Opinion
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
CLA	(Israeli) Coordination and Liaison Administration
COGAT	Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DFA	De-Facto Authorities
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN Agency)
FAFD	Fares Al-Arab Foundation for Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HMA	Humanitarian Mine Action
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IDP	Internally Displaced Person(s)
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
IRDNA	Interim Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OL	Orange Line
PARC	Agricultural Development Association
PHC	Palestinian Housing Council
RDNA	Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment
RNA	Rapid Needs Assessment
SM	Site Management
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
US\$	United States dollar
WAC	Women Affairs Centre
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
YL	Yellow Line

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Displaced individual collecting water, Gaza / August 2026

Executive Summary

Since 1967, Gaza has been under Israeli military occupation - a status the International Court of Justice found unlawful in its July 2024 Advisory Opinion,¹ stipulating that Israel has an obligation to end it as rapidly as possible. As the occupying power, Israel bears specific, binding obligations under international humanitarian law: to facilitate relief for the population under its control, to refrain from forcible population transfer, and to refrain from collective punishment. These obligations are the standard against which the findings below should be read.

The October 2025 ceasefire in Gaza² was supposed to end civilians' suffering. Nearly a year on, it exists largely in name only. Displacement in Gaza has not ended; it has changed shape. Where the defining feature of the war's first two years was movement — **frequent, forced, and often violent** — the defining feature of the period since the ceasefire is confinement: a demarcation line, the Yellow Line,³ that has moved in only one direction since its creation; a return permitted in name but foreclosed in practice; and a population left with nowhere further to retreat within Gaza's own shrinking boundaries. This is protracted displacement, and it represents the continuation of a deliberate policy – a pattern that independent investigators, including Human Rights Watch, have characterised as **“part of a state policy”** of forced displacement, and which the UN's own Independent International Commission of Inquiry has separately found reflects **“a consistent pattern of conduct”** by the Israeli authorities.⁵

Drawing on 20 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 195 respondents across five governorates, this report sets out what that confinement means in concrete terms. Living conditions remain severe and largely unchanged by the ceasefire: overcrowded sites, unsafe water and sanitation, and rodent infestation feature across most communities consulted. Insecurity has also not ended — civilians continue to be killed and injured near the Yellow Line, in a security environment that resembles, for many, a seemingly free-fire zone rather than an established front line. Aid delivery remains obstructed at every stage: by movement restrictions tied to the Yellow Line and the Orange Line governing humanitarian access; by an opaque and expansive “dual-use” regime⁶ that blocks even pest-control and Wash, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) materials; and by the mandatory re-registration of international NGOs, which has left dozens of organisations, including DRC, severely constrained in their operations.

Site Management is one of the few interventions shown, in this report's data, to meaningfully close that gap, but it does not reach most of the population that needs it. Most of Gaza's active displacement sites — 1,090 of 1,739⁷ have no designated Site Management actor. Where one is present, outcomes across water, sanitation, health access, and dignity are consistently and measurably better. At the same time, recovery needs have grown by a third, while donor and political attention have moved in the opposite direction, fading fast while the humanitarian emergency continues.

None of this has broken the population living through it. The persistence of community solidarity is the single most consistent finding in these data after displacement and aid obstruction — but it is not evidence that current conditions are manageable. It is evidence of what people have had to build for themselves in the sustained absence of an adequate response: neighbours standing in for family, informal networks substituting for referral pathways that do not reach most sites, and daily improvisation replacing materials still blocked at the border.

This report closes with recommendations to three groups of actors whose decisions will determine what happens next: **1) Parties to the conflict**, to uphold the ceasefire, protect civilians, enable humanitarian access, and end practices that perpetuate displacement; **2) the International community**, to use their diplomatic, legal, political, and financial tools to uphold international law, protect humanitarian space, and support Palestinian-led recovery; and **3) Donors and Humanitarian actors**, to adapt funding and programming to the realities of protracted displacement, strengthen Site Management and protection support, and invest in early recovery alongside emergency relief.

Together, these recommendations address both the immediate conditions confronting displaced Palestinians and the policies and constraints that continue to prevent displacement from being resolved.



Women in front of a damaged building, Gaza / August 2026



DRC Site Management staff in Gaza / August 2026

Introduction

Since 1967, the Gaza Strip has been under Israeli military occupation. This is not a contested characterisation: it is the position of the United Nations (UN), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and - most authoritatively - the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which found in its July 2024 Advisory Opinion (AO) that **Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), including Gaza, is unlawful, and that Israel is under an obligation to bring it to an end as rapidly as possible**.⁸ As the occupying power, Israel bears specific, binding obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL):

- To facilitate relief for the civilian population under its control;
- To refrain from the forcible transfer or deportation of protected persons;
- To refrain from measures of collective punishment against them, regardless of the individual conduct of any of its members.⁹

These obligations are the legal backdrop against which every finding in this report should be read.

This report is a joint publication of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Agricultural Development Association (PARC), building on DRC's January 2025 report, *Suffering by Design: The Human Cost of Repeated Displacement in Gaza*.¹⁰ Where that report documented the first year of the current conflict through the lens of repeated displacement (families forced to move, on average, six times in 12 months) this report examines how displacement has evolved since the October 2025 ceasefire, drawing on 20 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 195 individual respondents across five governorates of the Gaza Strip: North Gaza, Gaza City, Deir al-Balah/Middle Area, Khan Younis, and Rafah.

Displacement in Gaza has not ended. It has instead shifted from a pattern of frequent, acute movement to one of sustained, unresolved confinement; displacement has changed in kind, not simply slowed down. After more than two years of relentless killing, displacement, and widespread destruction, a ceasefire in Gaza came into effect on 10 October 2025.¹¹ Nearly a year on, this report examines what that ceasefire, and the resolution meant to secure its implementation, have actually meant for the population of Gaza still living in displacement.

Consultations with displaced individuals in the Gaza Strip revealed that the defining feature of displacement in the first two years of the war was movement (frequent, forced, often violent relocation from place to place). Since the ceasefire, the defining features of displacement centre around a continually expanding demarcation line known as the Yellow Line (YL), restrictions on return, and confinement to now just 30% of the Gaza Strip and with nowhere else to go.¹²

This is protracted displacement. The report argues that it represents a continuation of a deliberate Israeli policy identified in Gaza's first years of war. As well as reporting on the evolution of displacement patterns since the ceasefire, this report outlines the concrete implications of protracted displacement for the people living through it - their living conditions, security environment, access to aid, and protection risks, alongside the resilience and solidarity that persist despite them. Finally, it examines the humanitarian system's own response: the structural obstacles to delivering aid at the scale this crisis demands, and the role of Site Management (SM) in adapting to a crisis that has continued far longer than the emergency response system it depends on was ever designed for. The report closes with recommendations addressed to three groups of actors whose decisions will determine what happens next.



Kid in Gaza / August 2026

Methodology

This report draws on FGDs facilitated by DRC's strategic partner, the Agricultural Development Association (PARC). Between 12 and 23 July 2026, PARC conducted 20 FGDs with 195 respondents across five governorates of the Gaza Strip: North Gaza, Gaza City, Deir al-Balah/Middle Area, Khan Younis, and Rafah. Each governorate was covered by four to five FGDs, with eight to eleven respondents per group, except Rafah, where only one dedicated FGD was conducted due to access restrictions - itself a reflection of the governorate's near-total absorption behind the YL. In some cases, a single FGD included respondents from two different governorates; for example, FGD-8 includes respondents from Khan Younis and Rafah. All FGDs also included respondents residing in different sites within the same governorate: FGD-1 in Gaza City, for instance, includes respondents from the Al-Jami'at Area site, damaged buildings in the Al-Jami'at Area, the Zeitoun site, and the Shuja'iyya site. In total, 62 distinct sites are represented across the 195 respondents.

In addition to geographic coverage, site selection deliberately captured variation across three dimensions central to this report's analysis: proximity to the YL, whether a site has at least one active SM partner, and site typology (e.g., tents or damaged buildings). Of the 195 respondents:

- 50 (26%) live close to the YL;
- 24 (13%) live in sites with at least one active SM partner, against 171 (87%) in sites with no SM partner present;
- 99 (51%) live in makeshift sites, 37 (19%) in damaged buildings, 9 (5%) in sites with a mix of makeshifts and damaged buildings, and 50 (26%) unclassified.

Across the full sample:

- 66% of participants were male and 34% female;
- Ages ranged from 20 to 74 (average 41);
- 25% of participants were voluntary members of site committees;
- 75% were displaced individuals with no site management role;
- Two participants self-identified as living with a disability.

FGDs were structured around ten open-ended questions covering:

- the evolution of participants' displacement trajectory since the October 2025 ceasefire;
- changes in their situation over the preceding six months;
- living conditions and access to basic services;
- protection and safety concerns;
- social cohesion and community relationships;
- dignity, mental health and future outlook;
- attempts to return to areas of origin and the barriers encountered;
- humanitarian access and movement restrictions;
- comparative experience for those who have lived both inside formally managed sites and in damaged buildings;
- priority recommendations to donors and humanitarian actors.

Some secondary sources were used to contextualise and corroborate FGD findings rather than as a stand-alone evidence base for this report's qualitative findings. Sources have been indicated. All names in the report have been changed to protect individuals' identities, and only their original governorate has been specified.

Limitations:

- **Translation:** All FGDs data were collected in Arabic (Palestinian dialect) and translated into English using Claude, an AI assistant developed by Anthropic. All quotes used in this report were subsequently proofread against the original Arabic by a native Arabic speaker. As with any translation, some nuance may be lost from the original Arabic; figurative language and colloquial expressions were rendered for clarity and meaning rather than literal word-for-word equivalence.
- **Access constraints on sampling:** the areas facing the most acute access constraints, particularly locations closest to the YL, were also the hardest for enumerators to reach safely. Findings from these areas, while included, likely still under-represent the most extreme conditions rather than over-represent them.
- **Gender balance:** at 34% of the overall sample, women are under-represented relative to their share of the displaced population, a common constraint in mixed-gender group discussions in this context; findings on gendered experience should be read as suggestive rather than representative.
- **Uneven response coverage across questions:** because FGDs are group discussions rather than individual surveys, not every participant spoke to every question in the 10-question guide. This is a natural feature of the methodology: some participants elaborate at length on one theme while others contribute briefly or not at all on a given question, and facilitators do not require each of the 195 participants to individually answer all ten questions in turn. As a result, this report uses two different, non-interchangeable ways of expressing how common a theme is, and readers should not treat them as equivalent:
 1. **FGD-level frequency** (e.g., "raised in 18 of 20 FGDs, 90%") indicates how widely a theme appeared across discussion groups, and is generally the more representative measure of how common a concern is across the sample as a whole, since it captures a theme even when only one or two respondents in a room expressed it while others may have shared the same experience silently.
 2. **Respondent-level frequency** (e.g., "raised directly by 42 of 195 respondents") counts only individuals whose own recorded answer was coded to that theme, and will typically be substantially lower than the FGD-level figure for the same theme - this reflects how many people were individually recorded articulating a concern, not how many people in the room did or did not share it.

Neither figure should be interpreted as representing the views of Gaza's displaced population as a whole. Both reflect patterns within this specific sample of 195 participants across 20 FGDs. Differences between FGD-level and respondent-level frequencies result from the group-discussion format and should not be interpreted as evidence that a theme is more or less widespread than either measure suggests. Where the report gives a number of respondents alongside a percentage, the percentage is calculated against the full sample of 195 participants, even though not every participant responded to every question.



Means of transportation in Gaza / August 2026

1

FROM REPEATED DISPLACEMENT TO PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT

DRC's January 2025 report, *Suffering by Design: The Human Cost of Repeated Displacement in Gaza*,¹³ documented in stark terms how the first year of war reshaped where and how Palestinians in Gaza lived. Between October 2023 and October 2024, more than 90% of Gaza's population had been displaced. Individuals were forced to move an average of six times, roughly once every two months, with some displaced as many as 19 times over the course of a year.¹⁴ By then, 90% of the Gaza Strip's territory had been placed under evacuation orders at one point or another since the escalation began.¹⁵

The result was a dramatic redistribution of Gaza's population. By November 2024, North Gaza had lost 83% of its population, and Rafah had lost 84%, while Deir al-Balah had absorbed a 134% increase, and Khan Younis a 109% increase, Gaza City's population had roughly halved.¹⁶ As of mid-2026, Gaza's population stands at approximately 2.1 million,¹⁷ of whom an estimated 1.8 million (86%) in 1,739 sites across the Strip.¹⁸ Since October 2023, the war has killed at least 73,246 people and injured 173,727 more.¹⁹

Repeated displacement in Gaza was not an unfortunate or incidental consequence of active hostilities, but a deliberate strategy:²⁰ one that continuously uprooted the same population and forced it into progressively worse conditions with each move. This displacement took place against the backdrop of a prolonged humanitarian crisis. Since the Israeli blockade of Gaza was imposed in 2007, Gaza has endured repeated cycles of major violence compounded throughout by military occupation, discriminatory policies, and 17 years of blockade prior to October 2023.²¹ By the end of 2023, an estimated 80% of the population was already dependent on humanitarian aid, while the poverty rate stood at 63.7%.²²

The current war has compounded these conditions. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) estimated that Gaza's human development had been set back by 69 years within the war's first 12 months alone. That setback has continued to grow, reaching 70 years by January 2025, and 77 years by April 2026.²³

None of what follows in this report is separable from that longer arc: protracted displacement is not something new happening to a population that was stable before 2023. It is the latest stage of a much longer pattern of confinement, aid dependency, and repeated destruction that stretches back nearly two decades before October 2023, and whose roots extend to the 1948 displacement (the Nakba) that created Gaza's refugee population.

1.1 Evolution of displacement patterns since the October 2025 ceasefire

The ceasefire that came into force on 10 October 2025 triggered the largest single wave of population movement since the war began. In the first three days alone, an estimated 309,699 people moved from southern to northern Gaza.²⁴ By early 2026, OCHA and partner agencies had recorded nearly 827,000 population movements since the ceasefire began, roughly 690,000 of them from south to north, with the population of northern Gaza increasing by more than 10% as people who had sheltered around Deir al-Balah attempted to go home.²⁵



DRC Site Management team in front of rubbles; Gaza / August 2026

Returning to the north and returning home have proven to be two very different things. Conversations with individuals consulted for this report describe a ceasefire that may have allowed movement back toward areas of origin but made it impossible to actually resettle there. People attempted to return to their areas of origin both before and after the October ceasefire, and in nearly every account, the attempt failed. The reasons respondents gave for that failure cluster into five distinct, recurring obstacles:



1

Insecurity and fear

were cited most often, with respondents describing direct military action against them.

"Every time I try to reach my area, the military drones come out at us."

One Gaza City respondent

"We couldn't return because of gunfire from armed groups. I tried to go back to the outskirts of Beit Lahia but found that military jeeps come out at midnight and fire randomly at us."

A respondent originally from the north described the same dynamic further south



2

Proximity to the YL

was the second major obstacle

"I want to go to my house, but the Yellow Line prevents me, even though I live close to my house,"

one respondent

"What prevents me is the Yellow Line and the army's presence there; I wish to go back to my area."

Another described the same barrier

For some, the consequence of testing that boundary was direct and violent: Mahmoud, a 37-year-old man residing in Jabalia Site in North Gaza, tried several times to return but could not, because his house sat inside the YL area with the Israeli army present. The one time he did go, he was shot at directly, and did not attempt to return again out of fear for his life.



3

Destroyed housing

left people with nothing to return to, even when the area itself was reachable. One respondent in North Gaza, whose neighbourhood had been reduced to rubble, described going back after the ceasefire and finding not a damaged house but **"a pile of stones on top of each other"**; he spent six months clearing part of the rubble by hand, exposing himself to explosive ordnance (EO) incidents, until he had cleared a small enough space to pitch a tent beside where the house had stood. He has lived there since with his wife and children rather than attempt to rebuild. A respondent from Rafah described the area she had returned to as having been **"wiped off the face of the earth"**. Another, in his seventies and describing what was, for his family, at least the third major displacement across three generations, put it starkly: displaced in 1948, and displaced again in 2023, **"the times are far apart, but this time is worse"**.



4

Absent services and aid access

in areas of origin made even a physically intact return impractical. As one respondent explained:

"I thought about going back, but services are insufficient". Another was more categorical: **"it's no longer fit for habitation"**.



5

Unexploded ordnance

featured less frequently in the testimony but was, where raised, a decisive obstacle on its own:

"went back but there were severe obstacles like rubble and unexploded bombs" and **"stayed a long time clearing a small area"**.

One respondent in North Gaza

These testimonies are corroborated by site-level data. The Site Management Cluster's most recent baseline assessment highlights that nearly three years into the war, and well over half a year after a ceasefire intended to allow people to go home, over 80% of the population in Gaza remains displaced, most of them in makeshift tents and informal sites (82%) that have defined displacement since the earliest months of the war.²⁶ Repeated displacement has indeed turned into protracted displacement, a state rather than an event.

1.2 The Yellow Line

The imposition of the demarcation line, commonly referred to as the Yellow Line (YL), which did not exist before the ceasefire, is central to understanding why return has stalled. Under the ceasefire agreement signed on 9 October 2025, Israeli forces agreed to withdraw from active combat operations but not from Gaza itself, pulling back instead to a new internal boundary²⁷: the Yellow Line. The area east of it remained, and remains, under direct Israeli military control, while the area west of it, home to the overwhelming majority of Gaza's population, was designated the ceasefire zone. It was originally presented as an interim security arrangement: a temporary military withdrawal line pending further phases of the agreement, including the disarmament of Hamas, that would eventually allow for a fuller Israeli withdrawal. In practice, the area under Israeli control has only expanded:

- In October 2025, the area east of the line was estimated at 58%²⁸ of the Gaza Strip's total territory;
- By December 2025, independent analysis by the research group Forensic Architecture showed that Israel had seized more land by physically placing at least 27 yellow blocks (delineating its area of control) west of the YL;²⁹
- By May 2026, Israeli authorities' own disclosures put the figure at 60%, while Israel's Prime Minister instructed the Israeli army to expand its control of the Gaza Strip to 70%³⁰;
- By late July 2026, satellite images revealed that the Israeli army was building a ground barrier inside the Gaza Strip that extended hundreds of metres beyond the YL in southern Rafah;³¹

In the week following the ceasefire, Gaza's population was left to guess at the line's location, aware only that approaching or crossing it could be lethal. Physical yellow concrete markers began to be installed from 17 October 2025 onward.³² In recent months, the Israeli military has confirmed that it has built a physical barrier extending more than 23 kilometres through Palestinian communities demolished by the military. Satellite imagery also shows that Israeli forces have continued to level buildings using bulldozers and explosives since the ceasefire.³³ The barrier extends for more than half the length of the Gaza Strip.³⁴ The physical infrastructure accompanying the line's advance further undercuts any framing of it as temporary. Rather than a fixed line marking a completed withdrawal, the YL has functioned as a growing front line. Israel's own military chief of staff has publicly described the line not as a temporary ceasefire measure but as Gaza's "new border."³⁵ **This pattern of territorial expansion that forecloses return is precisely what Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention³⁶ was designed to prevent: the individual or mass forcible transfer of a protected population, "regardless of their motive."**

The humanitarian consequences of the YL are multifaceted:

- On **displacement**, the line's continued advance is now itself a driver of new displacement, independent of active hostilities. Families who resettled near the line after the ceasefire, believing areas of control had stabilised, have been repeatedly forced to move again as the line crept towards them. One North Gaza respondent, displaced 17 times over the course of the war, described his most recent move as triggered directly by gunfire from Israeli military near the line, adding that he remained "*still at risk of displacement because the Yellow Line keeps advancing.*"
- On **safety and security**, civilians are fired on when attempting to approach or cross the line: at least 224 Palestinians, including children, were killed east or in the vicinity of it between the start of the ceasefire and late February 2026 alone.³⁷ One Gaza City respondent, living close to the line, described the situation:



"Especially at dusk - no one goes out, stray bullets come from every direction, everything there stops us from going near the Yellow Line." His father was killed by a stray bullet. He described watching ***"The Israeli army's searchlights facing us"***



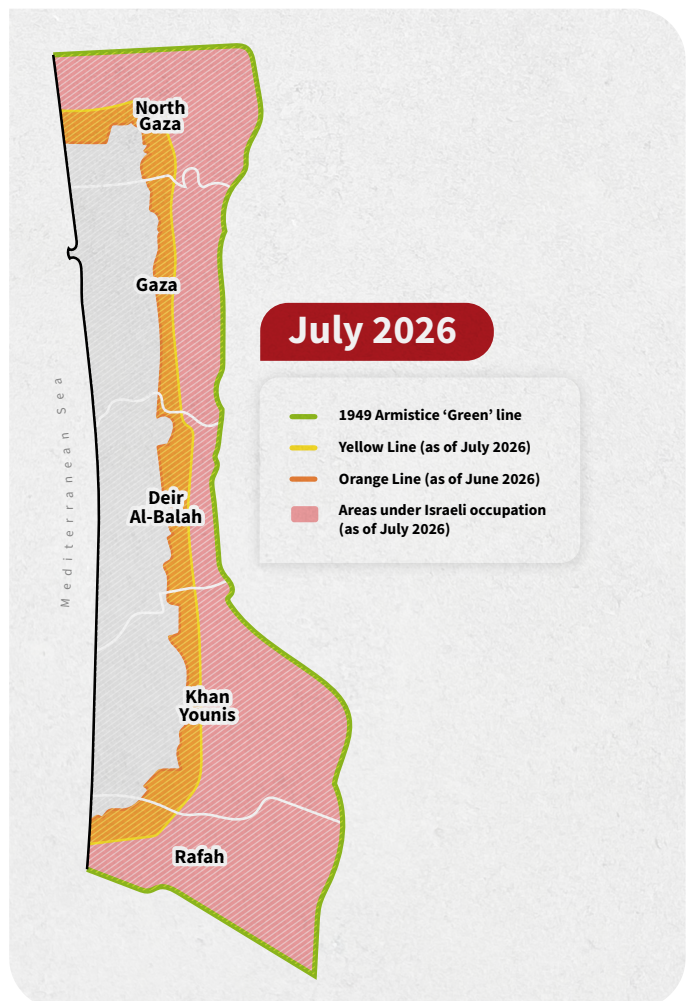
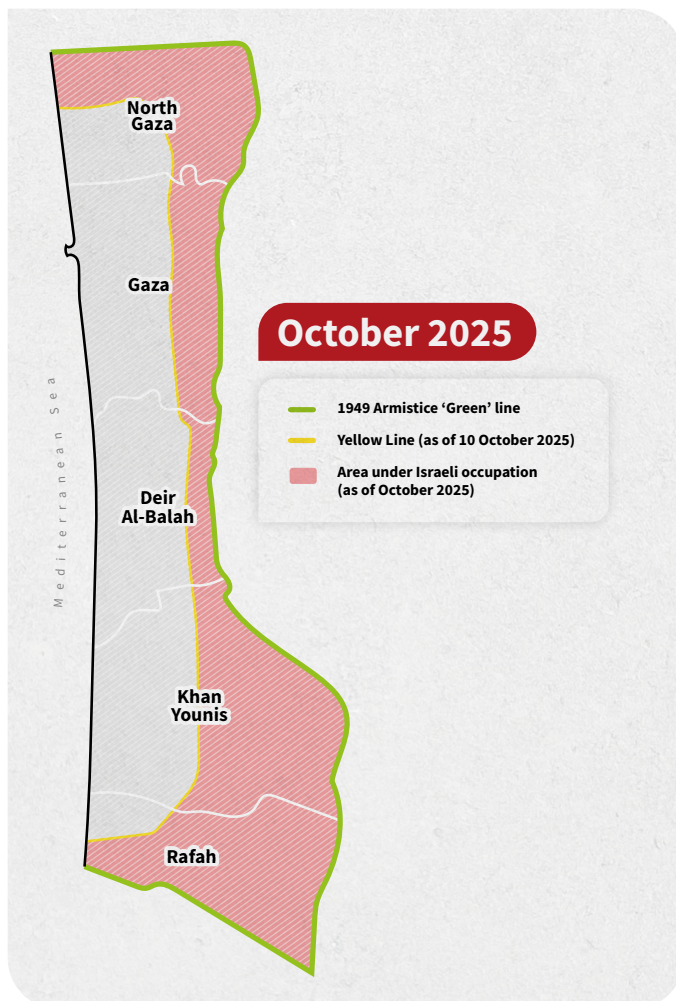
- On **access to services**, humanitarian organisations themselves describe being unable to operate within several kilometres of the line, either due to access constraints or security concerns. FGD respondents cite this as the direct reason water trucks, medical points and food distributions do not reach them. In Gaza City, one respondent living near the line put the scale of the gap starkly:

“

“There are no services near the Yellow Line... 80% of services don’t exist there, and wherever you look, assistance doesn’t come.”
 In Rafah, another said: ***“We bring water from far distances, no organisation supports us, not even with water trucks; they tell us it’s dangerous, we can’t.”***

”

For humanitarian movements, the Israeli authorities have introduced a second demarcation, the so-called Orange Line (OL), which extends further west into populated areas of Gaza than the YL itself, requiring humanitarian organisations to coordinate all movements in the area between the two lines.³⁸

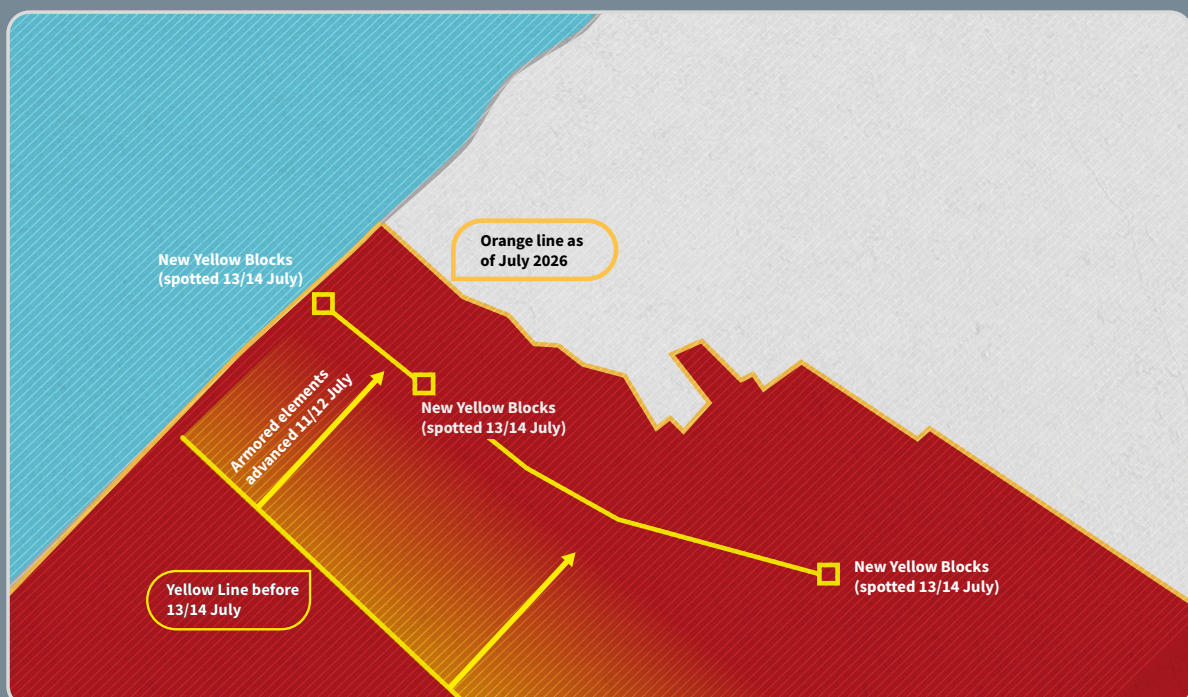


CASE STUDY: NORTHERN RAFAH, JULY 2026³⁹

The situation in northern Rafah in mid-July 2026 illustrates, in real time, how the YL's advance continues to reshape civilian life well after the ceasefire. Following weeks of advancing military positions, communities in Dahab, Al Akhwakh, Al Manara, Al Mukhtar, Ataa Al Khair, and Regional Park reported sustained hostilities, movement restrictions, and severe disruption to humanitarian access. The events of 12–14 July illustrate how quickly this advance unfolded. On 12 July, DRC received a distress call from the Al Akwakh site focal point reporting that five tanks had crossed the YL and advanced on the site, encircling it. Residents attempting to flee towards Rashid Road were met with live fire, making departure too dangerous, and the armoured elements withdrew later that day. By 14 July, at least three yellow blocks had been repositioned 500 metres or more beyond the original line, halving the distance between the YL and the coordination line used as a reference point for humanitarian access.

DRC's Site Management team assessment concluded that accompanying demolitions and ground-leveling by Israeli forces indicate these positions were intended to be permanent rather than reversed. The team also found that advances are no longer incremental, but were proceeding in 300–500 metre steps, with each advance cutting off access to additional sites. As of mid-July, across Northern Rafah, 3,008 households (approximately 13,148 people) were at direct risk of forced displacement, with a further 1,401 households (roughly 6,310 people) in neighbouring sites at risk should operations advance further.

Households already living in these sites, particularly women and children, temporarily leave during periods of heightened military activity and return once the risk appears to subside, while others remain behind to safeguard their shelters and belongings. Communities consistently said they wished to remain in their current sites rather than relocate again, citing prior displacement, attachment to land, and the financial impossibility of moving once more, even as access constraints leave persons with disabilities, older people, and caregivers at acute risk of being unable to evacuate if conditions worsen further. The area receives little to no explosive ordnance risk education support from aid agencies, with several affected communities reporting no coverage at all, again due to insecurity limiting humanitarian access. The communities' message was strikingly consistent: **their priority is not preparation for further displacement, but support to remain safely, and with dignity, where they are, through sustained access to water, food, health, and protection services, as well as functioning early-warning mechanisms, which they currently lack entirely.**



1.3 Concentration of population

Before October 2023, Gaza was among the most densely populated places on Earth. The Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA)⁴⁰ puts pre-conflict density at an average of roughly 6,300 people per km² across the Strip's 25 municipalities, reaching over 30,000 people per km² in some northern areas. Since then, Gaza's population has decreased sharply through death and displacement abroad, while the amount of territory that is even minimally habitable has continued to shrink. Here, "habitable" means some access to shelter, basic infrastructure, and safety from active violence. **Even this is a low bar: much of the remaining territory offers only substandard, undignified conditions, not adequate shelter or services by any normal standard.**

With the YL now enclosing an estimated 70% of Gaza's 365 square kilometres, roughly two million people are compressed into a shrinking western remainder of the Strip. This equates to an effective density of approximately 19,500 people per km²,⁴¹ more than double the already-extreme pre-war average. As of November 2025, the RDNA and OCHA recorded roughly one million people living in 862 displacement sites.⁴² By mid-2026, the SM Cluster's baseline assessment found that figure had grown to approximately 1.8 million people across 1,739 sites. The increase in both the number of people and the number of sites indicates that displacement-site living has become more entrenched over time, not less, well after the ceasefire.⁴³ Sites do not exist in isolation; they cluster within walking distance of one another, concentrated in the same dense, urban neighbourhoods. The YL's recent expansion has further intensified this pattern, pushing more people into areas where sites were already overcrowded.

The overwhelming majority of these sites are makeshift (82%).⁴⁴ They were not planned or designed in advance, but emerged informally, often overnight, from whatever materials and spaces were available when people were forced to flee with little notice. In the Gaza context, this typically means self-erected tents made from tarpaulins, cloth, or salvaged materials rather than standardised humanitarian shelter kits. Sites are often located on occupied open land, rubble-adjacent plots, or roadsides, rather than in areas selected and prepared in advance for habitation. They have no pre-existing infrastructure or planned layout, and typically lack built-in water and sanitation networks, designated bathroom facilities, and lighting.

Since October 2025, civilians have been held in place with nothing to return to and no clear prospect of change. The remainder of this report sets out, in concrete terms, what living inside that reality means for the people who have no choice but to do so.



Protection team visiting displaced families, Gaza / August 2026



Mohammad, displaced individual with disabilities in Gaza / August 2026

2 THE LIVED REALITY OF PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT

For 1.8 million people in Gaza, protracted displacement means living with a specific set of daily conditions. People carry water by hand over long distances. Tents are shared by more people than they were built for. Rodents enter bedding and attack residents, especially children, at night. This section highlights these dire living conditions and their toll on health. They exist against the backdrop of a collapsed health system, a lack of basic services, a security environment marked by continued indiscriminate airstrikes and shelter orders, and deliberately impeded humanitarian aid that continues to arrive in insufficient quantities.

2.1 Living conditions: water, sanitation, resource scarcity in overcrowded sites

Water and sanitation gaps were raised by 80% of the people interviewed, who describe water collection a challenge of daily life. One Gaza City respondent explained that his household has

“

Been here since 6:00 am - we keep running to fill up water, both salty and fresh... the distance is very far... every three days, or once or twice a week.

”

Without a functioning sewage network, displaced households rely instead on cesspits. This carries major risks of contamination, odours, and rodents, as described by Salma, a 25-year-old woman living in a site in Gaza City:

“

The cesspits fill up quickly, and their effects spill over onto us, and bring rats and rodents.

”

Overcrowding compounds these conditions as people share tents, and often bathrooms. One respondent reported five families share a single bathroom. This arrangement leaves women and girls in particular exposed to heightened risks of gender-based violence and other protection concerns.

These accounts are consistent with sector-wide damage figures: WASH infrastructure has sustained an estimated US\$1.7 billion in damage since October 2023, with approximately 88% of above-ground WASH assets and 76% of underground networks partially or fully damaged. All six of Gaza's wastewater treatment plants remain non-functional, and 70% of sewage pumping stations are inoperable.⁴⁵

In many of the same testimonies, electricity and lighting gaps were raised alongside water. Several respondents described avoiding movement at night for fear of falling into water pits and cesspits. This is a risk they said fell hardest on older people, girls, and women. Others cited fear of stray dogs and rodents biting children after dark. Petty crime and theft were also reported as being concentrated at night, leading people to avoid using the bathroom after dark or to light their way with a phone until the battery runs out, with nowhere to recharge it. This is corroborated by the World Bank's recent assessment, which found that over 90% of Gaza's electricity infrastructure has been destroyed.⁴⁶

On food and cooking, respondents described both scarcity and the physical risks associated with makeshift cooking arrangements. Several reported burns from cooking fires, and multiple fires inside sites during the winter season, causing injuries. This is echoed in the latest DRC Protection Monitoring report, covering the period between April and June 2026, which found that reliance on open fires and improvised cooking fuel, driven by fuel shortages, is a recurring safety hazard in displacement sites.⁴⁷

Finally, inadequate sanitation infrastructure and sewage systems, compounded by overcrowded living conditions, expose people of all ages to persistent health hazards year-round. In winter, heavy rain and wind increase exposure to cold and the risk of hypothermia; in summer, extreme heat and humidity exacerbate exposure to rodents and insects.

CASE STUDY ON RODENTS, INFESTATIONS AND SKIN DISEASES

Rodent and pest infestation was raised as a distinct issue and it is estimated that over 80% of displaced households are exposed to rodents and other pests.⁴⁸ In some cases, rodents have caused serious injury. As one respondent reported: ***"We have suffered a lot from the spread of rodents inside the camp - it got to the point that a weasel got in and bit the finger of a family member, who has diabetes. To this day he is still receiving treatment because of the injury"***.

This is not an isolated problem. Since April 2026, the number of people affected by skin diseases has been rising in displacement sites, linked to overcrowding, poor hygiene conditions, limited healthcare access, sewage running through pathways, accumulated waste, contaminated sand, and inadequate access to basic services.⁴⁹ In July 2026, 9,300 cases of chickenpox were recorded in Gaza over a one-month period, roughly half of them in Khan Younis displacement sites. In response, DRC sought to address the immediate needs of affected communities through water trucking to sites lacking sufficient safe water for personal hygiene and domestic use, solid waste management and desludging services to address wastewater accumulation, and infection prevention and control measures reaching 6,250 individuals.

While essential and life-saving for many households, this response cannot address the scale of need unless the broader impediments to humanitarian action are lifted. The rapid spread of the chickenpox reflects the risks created by increasingly overcrowded living conditions, including as the expansion of the YL pushes more people into already overcrowded sites. Restrictions on aid actors' movements in areas close to or within the YL further slow the delivery of hygiene kits, medical supplies, and vector control support.

The same restrictions are compounding a much larger waste crisis. Uncleared rubble is not just debris; it contributes to the rodent infestation and contamination described above by providing shelter and breeding grounds for pests and allowing standing water and waste to accumulate. Yet only 0.5% of the estimated 68 million tonnes of rubble generated since October 2023 had been cleared as of July 2026.⁵⁰ Humanitarian actors cannot reach landfills in areas inside the YL, and cannot bring the equipment required to clear the rubble, since it falls under the dual-use goods regime.⁵¹



Destroyed buildings, Gaza / August 2026

2.2 Security situation: continued attacks on civilians and the persistence of a hostile security environment

On top of these environmental hazards, continued insecurity severely worsens living conditions for the civilian population of Gaza. For two years, Gaza's population was repeatedly forced to flee following Israeli authorities' issuance of evacuation orders, with 90% of the Gaza Strip's territory placed under evacuation orders at one point or another before the ceasefire.⁵² The ceasefire did not end the insecurity or resulting casualties. Deaths and injuries from ongoing violence have persisted throughout the ceasefire period and, by some measures, increased:

- As of mid-January 2026, a further 449 Palestinians had been killed and 1,246 injured since the ceasefire began.⁵³
- By April 2026, the cumulative post-ceasefire figure had risen to at least 738 people killed and more than 1,600 injured, with emergency medical services responding to an estimated 200–250 security-related incidents per day during the second quarter of 2026.⁵⁴
- By July 2026, the toll had climbed further still, to 1,180 fatalities and 3,810 injuries.⁵⁵

These figures capture only direct, identified deaths, not indirect deaths resulting from disease, malnutrition, and health system collapse documented elsewhere in this report.

General protection and safety concerns were raised in almost all FGDs conducted for this report, and more than half of the households surveyed through the recent DRC Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA)⁵⁶ identified attacks against civilians as a key safety risk and protection concern, with men reported as being particularly affected. Similarly, nearly all DRC Protection Monitoring key informants indicated feeling unsafe both within their homes and in their communities, citing the sustained presence of hostilities and kinetic activity, including artillery fire, shelling, drone attacks, and stray bullets.⁵⁷ As described above, since April 2026, military activity has increasingly occurred west of the YL, closer to populated areas and humanitarian operations. Sporadic shooting has further reinforced the perception that exposure to harm remains possible across a wider geographic area than areas of active fighting alone.

This unpredictability appears to be the key driver of reported insecurity. The perception of risk is shaped less by how often violence occurs than by the uncertainty of where and when it might, which undermines communities' ability to anticipate, mitigate, or adapt to threats at all. In North Gaza, one respondent described the formation of a community-level security committee specifically intended to manage this unpredictability: ***"military drones always overhead and filming... we have a security committee - one member per family, eight people on duty every night making noise so residents feel secure"***. This is a notable instance of a community organising its own early-warning system in the absence of any formal mechanism.

This continued exposure of civilians to violence reinforces concerns about their safety and protection, underscoring the scale of humanitarian and protection needs still arising directly from Gaza's security environment.

2.3 Heightened exposure to protection risks

Deteriorating living conditions are themselves a primary driver of heightened exposure to protection risks. Findings from the latest DRC Protection Monitoring suggest that **shelter conditions are not only inadequate but are actively contributing to worsening psychological distress, reinforcing a cycle of vulnerability, fear, and insecurity with significant impact on the lives of women, children, and youth.**⁵⁸

Environmental hazards, including rodent and insect infestations, combined with the near-total absence of functioning sanitation systems, expose displaced people to daily physical risks during routine acts such as using a bathroom, sleeping, or cooking. Explosive ordnance further compounds these risks: approximately 15% of displacement sites report direct encounters with explosive ordnance, affecting an estimated 247,000 people, and more than one-third of sites have received no recent risk education on how to identify or avoid it.⁵⁹ Children are especially exposed, both through contact with debris during play and because risk-education coverage remains incomplete.⁶⁰ Together, these conditions contribute to psychological distress, dignity-related harm, domestic violence, strained family relationships, and rising tensions within households, with particularly significant impacts on women and children.

In many cases, these same conditions expose people to life-threatening health risks. For instance, respondents described a woman going into labour at night who was unable to reach a medical point because ambulances were prevented from entering areas close to the YL

“

She gave birth inside the site without sterile [environment] or medical means, the whole night spent awake in the dark, fearful of stray dogs and rodents.

”

Other respondents described deaths and serious health complications associated with the lack of access to medical treatment. A 44-year-old man living in a site in Gaza City, who described his mother's death after she ran out of medicine:

“

At the start of the war my mother ran out of her medicine and we had to put her in diapers, which caused her to develop sores - all of this led to her death. Another respondent linked foetal health complications to direct gunfire and the stress of living under it: ***My wife is pregnant and the foetus now has an oxygen deficiency because of the gunfire.***

”

These accounts are consistent with the wider collapse of health system. Fewer than half of Gaza's hospitals and only 38% of primary healthcare centres remain partially functional.⁶¹

These compounding pressures are also producing severe psychosocial and dignity-related harm. Respondents described chronic, unrelenting fear and anxiety as a baseline condition of daily life rather than a response to a specific event. In at least one account, a respondent described suicidal ideation linked directly to her inability to feed her children:

“

“I want to poison myself because I can’t feed my children” said Hiba, a 26-year-old widow raising her children alone during the war. She added: ***“the war has worn me out more than the 26 years that have passed”***.

”

This is corroborated at the population level by DRC Protection Monitoring data, which found mental health deterioration reported by 89% of women and 85% of men, with distress increasingly described as cumulative rather than episodic⁶².

Domestic violence was also frequently linked to the cumulative psychological and economic pressures experienced by households, including distress among men who are unable to provide for their families and caregivers facing prolonged stress and uncertainty. These findings suggest that the protracted crisis and repeated displacement are exacerbating existing gender inequalities and harmful coping mechanisms, increasing the vulnerability of women, girls, and children to various forms of violence and abuse. Reported forms of exploitation include demands for sexual favours in exchange for facilitating access to food or other aid, as well as poorly paid or unpaid work by adults or children in exchange for aid or food. Such exploitation disproportionately affects women-headed households and widowed and divorced women, particularly where access to aid is controlled by male relatives.

Finally, repeated and protracted displacement and ongoing insecurity disrupt family support networks and heighten protection risks for women, children, older people and persons with disabilities alike. The recent RNA⁶³ found that 11% of households identified family separation specifically as a child protection concern, with informants describing men often moving ahead to identify safer locations before women, children, and older relatives follow.⁶⁴ While reported family separation has declined since Q1 2026 (from 39% to 14%), the issue remains prevalent and was raised in 70% of the FGDs conducted for this report. Respondents described this less as a single traumatic rupture than as a slow erosion of family ties and solidarity.

Arrest and detention by Israeli forces, whether at checkpoints or during the expansion of the YL itself, further compound this fragmentation, as people fear moving within the Strip. Nearly half of RNA households identified this as a key risk, particularly among those originating from Gaza City and Khan Younis. This is corroborated by reports of individuals detained while crossing from north to south or during military operations near sites close to the YL. DRC’s own Northern Rafah Situation Analysis recorded the same pattern directly, noting recurring instances of detention alongside civilian injuries and fatalities during the military’s advance on displacement sites in July 2026.⁶⁵



Family members have been separated repeatedly throughout the war and are now living in different locations. Limited and costly transportation makes maintaining family relationships increasingly difficult. As one respondent explained:

“

“The war created a rift in relationships; my brother puts a chair at the door of his tent; we pass by his tent as if he doesn’t know me and I don’t know him, as if he’s not my brother”. For some families, these constraints also mean missing important occasions: ***“There is also a wedding for a cousin of ours that we might not go to, because I can’t afford to take my whole family and go”.***

”

Hopelessness, and the solidarity that remains

Beneath the living conditions, insecurity and protection risks documented above lies a further, cumulative harm: the slow erosion of hope. Loss of hope for the future was raised directly by 16 of 195 respondents who describe it as the accumulated weight of years without a clear future.

“

One respondent simply said that he had been ***“planning to travel and complete my education [but instead] the war came and my future was lost and destroyed”*** while another described long displacement as producing ***“humiliation for people and ongoing depression, with no clear vision for the future”***. A third put the toll in the starkest possible terms: ***“every morning I wake up feeling psychologically destroyed”***.

”

Parents also described losing hope for their children’s futures, particularly after years of disrupted education. Hani, a 45-year-old father said: *“My son has been left without education for three years - there’s no hope. He is now 15 years old and can’t even learn a craft”*. Another said: *“three years of children’s lives have gone to waste, they have become uneducated, we need education even before food and safety”*.

The depth of strain varies by location, the level of destruction and access to services, by proximity to the YL, and by whether a designated humanitarian actor is present at all. Yet even within this uneven picture, one finding cuts across nearly all of it: community solidarity emerged in 95% of the discussions conducted for this report, nearly as universal as the hardships it sits alongside. One Gaza City respondent, recalling her initial fear of an unfamiliar host community, said neighbours ***“turned out to be very good, even better than my own family”***. Another described how ***“we have become like family in the site,”*** recounting how the whole community rallied around a sick neighbour ***“despite the shortage of services”***. Solidarity of this kind is not evidence that conditions have improved; rather it is the mechanism by which a population sustains itself through a crisis.



Young man
in Gaza
/ August 2026



Nasser, displaced individual, Gaza / August 2026

3

AID RESPONSE TO PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT

Section 2 explored what protracted displacement means for those living through it. This section examines the humanitarian response to protracted displacement and the role of SM in shaping household access to assistance. It also looks at the restrictions on movement, goods, and personnel that determine whether aid reaches people at all, as well as what it would take to adapt the response to a crisis with no clear end in sight.

3.1 Site Management Response

SM emerged in Gaza as a response to the scale of displacement, affecting more than 80% of the population. Concretely, SM consists of the presence of a designated actor, in most cases a national NGO, whose role is to coordinate service delivery across a given site, establish two-way communication and participation channels between residents and responders, maintain referral pathways connecting residents to protection and assistance services, and identify and mitigate site-level risks related to safety, dignity, and access before they escalate.

Yet, SM actors and activities operate under severe constraints, and only 36% of sites are currently covered by an SM partner in Gaza.⁶⁶ The operating environment in Gaza remains highly unpredictable, shaped by fluid and continuing displacement, a layered system of restrictions on movement, goods, and personnel, and increasingly uncertain funding dynamics. SM partners are frequently unable to reach the sites they are meant to serve, cannot bring in the materials needed to resolve the problems they identify, and, in some cases, are themselves barred from registering or operating in newly restricted areas.⁶⁷ The actors best positioned to identify and escalate gaps therefore face many of the same constraints affecting the assistance they are trying to deliver. **Despite these constraints, SM remains one of the most consequential interventions available in Gaza's displacement response, functioning not merely as a coordination mechanism but as an important determinant of whether needs are identified and addressed:**

- Sites with SM partners have a structured community channel through which a gap, such as a collapsing cesspit, a missing water delivery, or an unsafe walkway, can be identified, escalated, and resolved.
- In sites without SM partners, residents are left to resolve problems informally through neighbour networks, if they are able to resolve them at all.

Data collected for this report support this distinction. Across nearly every indicator examined, including water and sanitation, health service access, and general aid delivery, sites with an SM partner present consistently reported far fewer gaps than those without. This does not necessarily mean that these sites face a fundamentally different physical environment; rather, they have a designated actor responsible for identifying gaps and seeking to address them. As one respondent observed: ***“Organized sites are much better than damaged buildings in terms of service provision.”***

Respondents in sites with SM partners also described the presence of a predictable, accountable point of reference, including registration systems, headcounts, and a known channel through which needs could be raised. Respondents in sites without an SM partner, by contrast, described dependence on personal connections, favouritism, or pure chance. As one respondent put it: ***“If you have a connection at the institution, things work out for you; the reason is usually personal favouritism”.***

A further gap emerged among displaced people living in damaged buildings, who were systematically less likely to have SM partner coverage. Some were even told that they did not qualify for humanitarian assistance:

“

“Organisations or volunteers focus on the tents and leave the displaced people in the damaged areas, saying that those in damaged buildings are not in need, although we are displaced just like anyone else, there is no difference at all.”

”

Attempts by residents of damaged buildings to be formally included in a partner’s SM portfolio were repeatedly refused on the grounds that the site did not meet a partner’s operational criteria (e.g., “government building,” “not suitable for their management”), even where residents organised themselves and requested inclusion. As one respondent explained:

“

“We tried to get an organization to manage and maintain our site, but they refused, on the grounds that our site consists of damaged buildings and tents. We approached several organisations to include us among the partner-managed sites, but they refused.”

”

This points to a wider gap in how SM is applied and reported in Gaza: coverage need not be limited to formally recognised sites, yet current reporting doesn’t consistently capture support delivered beyond them - risking both under-reporting of what’s provided and over-reporting of what counts as full coverage. DRC has raised this with the Site Management Cluster, proposing broader site typologies and operational efforts to extend coordinated support beyond Cluster-recognised locations.

In a context where displacement has become protracted rather than temporary, and where the population has nowhere further to retreat within Gaza’s shrinking boundaries, SM functions not only as a humanitarian intervention but as a foundation for longer-term recovery. It provides a structure through which critical needs, including food, shelter, healthcare, and protection, can be identified and addressed more consistently and equitably. By coordinating service delivery, facilitating communication, and enabling communities to identify and prioritise their needs, SM can reduce gaps in the response and strengthen community resilience.

The presence of a SM partner cannot eliminate the underlying scarcity or access constraints documented above. It can, however, help determine whether a population’s needs are visible to the humanitarian response and whether available assistance is distributed through known and accountable mechanisms rather than arbitrarily. Within this purposively selected sample, respondents from sites with an active SM presence more frequently described predictable communication channels, clearer referral pathways, and more structured access to service providers. **Expanding SM coverage to currently unmanaged and dispersed locations, including damaged buildings that do not fit conventional site definitions, should be treated as both a response priority and a protection and equity priority, rather than solely as a question of operational efficiency. In Gaza, reconstruction will take years, SM remains essential to safeguarding the well-being and dignity of all displaced residents.**

CASE STUDY DRC'S CATCHMENT APPROACH

DRC has been implementing SM activities in Gaza since March 2024, working through three Palestinian partners, the Agricultural Development Association (PARC), the Fares Al-Arab Foundation for Development (FAFD), and the Palestinian Housing Council (PHC), across four geographic areas: North/Gaza City, Middle Area, Khan Younis, Rafah. This partner-led model draws on the operational capacity and grassroots expertise of these established Palestinian organisations, complemented by DRC's remote technical support to maintain continuity of operations in the absence of a permanent international presence in Gaza.

Since March 2025, DRC has progressively expanded into direct site management to address gaps in hard-to-reach areas, including parts of southern Rafah and around Gaza City, that other international and local actors cannot reach due to access and capacity constraints. This direct work includes site mapping, needs assessments, establishing community committees, running help desks, and advocating to sector clusters for targeted interventions where none currently exist. DRC and its partners currently support 89 IDP sites.

The Catchment Approach

Against this backdrop, DRC found that the traditional model of managing sites individually was not operationally viable at Gaza's scale. With over 1,739 sites clustered densely within the same neighbourhoods, often within walking distance of one another, sharing the same service gaps, access constraints, and security dynamics, site-by-site management generates an unsustainable coordination burden of duplicated reporting lines, committees, and feedback channels, while leaving the majority of sites without any dedicated support at all.

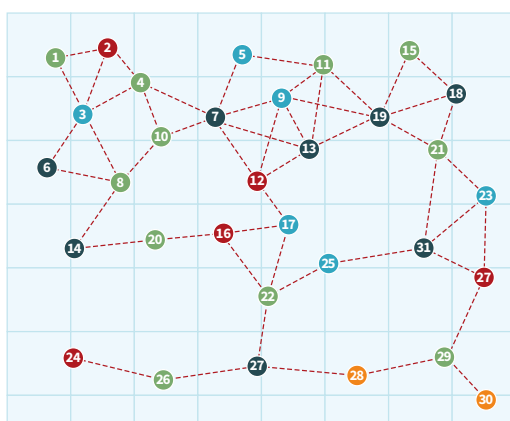
DRC's response is a two-layer Catchment Approach. The first layer is the SM Cluster's geographic assignment of partners to defined areas of responsibility, based on OCHA neighbourhood boundaries, and intended to prevent duplication. The second, developed by DRC for the Gaza context, groups three to seven sites within its assigned area into a single operational "sub-catchment", based on geographic proximity, similar site typology, and shared population dynamics. Site management activities can then be delivered across the sub-catchment level rather than separately at each site.

Piloted in Rafah, this approach has already shown several benefits: greater operational efficiency with one team covering multiple sites; improved inter-agency coordination through a single SM focal point per catchment; more equitable distribution of core services across small and hard-to-reach sites; and greater impact from available resources, as interventions such as solar lighting, shaded spaces, WASH advocacy, and protection safe-spaces can serve multiple sites simultaneously. Critically, the geographic approach also helps maintain continuity when access is disrupted. If a site becomes unreachable, the surrounding catchment structure allows continued engagement through its Site Management Committee rather than the site losing coverage entirely.

DRC's next steps are to expand the Catchment Approach to North Gaza and across all implementing partners, while advocating for cluster-wide harmonisation so that the model can scale beyond DRC.

BEFORE

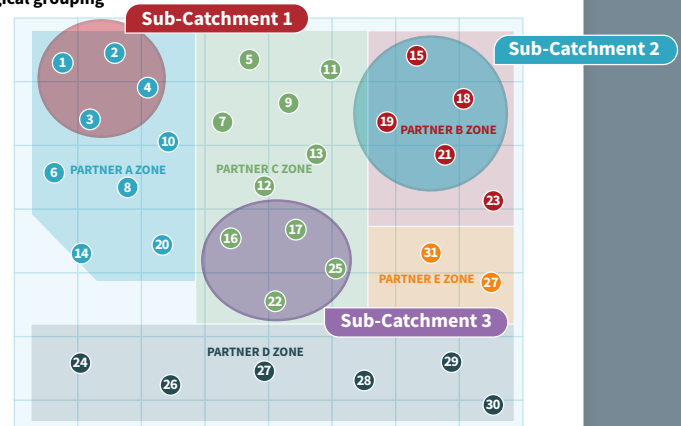
Partners cover scattered, interspersed sites with no geographic logic



Fragmented coverage creates duplication of effort, coordination gaps, and inefficient use of limited funding

AFTER

Each partner covers a defined geographic catchment zone — same sites, logical grouping



Clear geographic accountability, reduced duplication, efficient coordination — more impact per dollar of funding



Woman and her kids in their tent, Gaza / August 2026

3.2 Obstruction of humanitarian aid

Access constraints were the single most consistent finding in the FGDs: 42 respondents raised disruption to humanitarian assistance directly, and 24 specifically described movement restrictions affecting their own mobility or that of humanitarian actors. Respondents consistently framed obstruction of aid not as a peripheral operational difficulty, but as the central factor determining whether they received any meaningful support at all. **Three distinct but compounding forms of obstruction emerged: restrictions on movement, restrictions on the entry of goods, and restrictions on the entry of personnel.**

Movement restrictions

Since the ceasefire, the YL has remained a hard barrier to both return and humanitarian access across nearly every governorate. On 13 October 2025, Israeli authorities introduced a second demarcation, the Orange Line (OL), governing humanitarian access specifically. It was drawn roughly 10% farther west than the YL and was shared with humanitarian actors but never announced publicly, leaving residents without a reliable way to know where it runs. The OL compounds existing constraints: a site can sit nominally on the “Palestinian side” of the YL and still be unreachable because it falls inside the OL’s coordination zone. One North Gaza site committee member noted that services within roughly 3km of the YL are “very minimal.” Dozens of humanitarian facilities sit in the area between the two lines, and relief efforts there have been repeatedly suspended,⁶⁸ particularly since three UN workers (two UNICEF, one WHO) have been killed since mid-March 2026.⁶⁹

Humanitarian coordination and deconfliction mechanisms have not reliably prevented harm. Despite the framework established through UN Security Council Resolutions 2712 and 2720⁷⁰ a fully coordinated, clearly marked MSF convoy was attacked in November 2023.⁷¹ The toll on humanitarian workers has been severe: the oPt accounted for more than half of all aid worker deaths recorded worldwide in 2025, and 560 of the more than 1,010 humanitarian workers killed globally between 2023 and 2025.⁷² At least 596 aid workers⁷³ and over 1,700 health workers⁷⁴ have been killed in Gaza since October 2023, making it the deadliest context for aid workers ever recorded.

Beyond the lines themselves, physical destruction remains a persistent barrier to humanitarian access: approximately 74% of Gaza’s road network has been destroyed, with a further 13% partially damaged.⁷⁵ One Deir al-Balah respondent cited **“the road’s steep and rough terrain, which needs levelling” as a direct reason organisations declined to serve his area.”**

Restrictions on goods

UN Security Council Resolution 2803 required the full resumption of humanitarian assistance at scale. In practice, however, a substantial gap remains between this commitment and the volume of aid entering Gaza. Goods still enter solely through Kerem Shalom, with no direct route to northern Gaza. An average of 142 trucks per day entered in April, rising to 165 per day in May before falling to 157 in June,⁷⁶ and 142 in April,⁷⁷ still 70–75% below the 600/day envisaged under the ceasefire. Shortages of fuel, spare parts, batteries, and IT equipment directly limit food, health, WASH, and shelter delivery. These constraints are compounded by an opaque and broad “dual-use” classification⁷⁸ covering even pesticides and WASH materials.⁷⁹ SM partners routinely identify problems such as a collapsing cesspit, or a rodent infestation that they cannot resolve because the materials required are delayed or denied entry, resulting in reliance on unsustainable improvised alternatives.

These restrictions follow earlier periods of severe constraint. Between March and October 2025, Gaza endured a near-total blockade,⁸⁰ and famine was confirmed by the IPC in Gaza Governorate in August 2025.⁸¹ Israeli authorities and humanitarian organisations have presented differing assessments of subsequent aid flows. COGAT's July 2026 report states that aid *"significantly exceeded requirements,"*⁸² while OCHA's own figures indicate that truck remained below target and that less than a quarter of the 2026 Flash Appeal had been funded.⁸³

Restrictions on entry of personnel

A third layer of restrictions affects whether humanitarian organisations are able to operate in Gaza at all. In March 2025, Israel introduced mandatory INGO re-registration requirements that included the submission of full Palestinian staff lists.⁸⁴ By December 2025, applications from 37 INGOs, including DRC, were deemed incomplete after the organisations declined to provide the requested information, triggering a 1 March 2026 deadline to cease operations. Nineteen INGOs petitioned Israel's High Court in February 2026; the court dismissed the petition on 19 May. These organisations now face severe operational restrictions. Their international staff cannot access Gaza, nor the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and they cannot request approvals to import goods into the oPt.

These organisations nevertheless hold valid registration with the Palestinian Authority. The restrictions should also be considered in the context of Israel's obligations as the occupying power under international humanitarian law to facilitate humanitarian relief for civilians.⁸⁵

The re-registration requirements sit within a broader pattern of restrictions affecting humanitarian operations. **Registration is one element of a wider operational and bureaucratic environment that constrains UN agencies, national NGOs and INGOs alike, across the oPt.**



Nasser, displaced individual and his tent, Gaza / August 2026

3.3 Looking ahead

Recovery and reconstruction needs across Gaza rose from an estimated US\$53.09 billion in the February 2025 Interim RDNA⁸⁶ to US\$71.4 billion in the April 2026 RDNA,⁸⁷ an increase of approximately 34% in just over a year. This increase occurred even as the population requiring recovery assistance has, by some measures, declined as a result of deaths and displacement abroad.

At the same time, humanitarian funding has declined amid decreasing donor and political attention following the ceasefire. As of mid-2026, less than 25% of the Gaza Flash Appeal had been funded.⁸⁸ The 2026 Flash Appeal sought US\$4.06 billion to reach three million people, meaning that a funding level below 25% left more than US\$3 billion unfunded more than six months into the year. These funding shortfalls have concrete consequences for humanitarian assistance. For example, the number of families receiving shelter assistance fell by 37% from May to June 2026.⁸⁹



For the population living through this, the practical effect is evident in respondents' accounts: ***“we have asked for a wall that is at risk of collapse to be removed, but we were told there are no resources to do so”***. She continued: ***“six months ago, organisations used to come to our site with food parcels, but now, no one comes, assistance has decreased and the situation is getting worse in this regard.”***



Adapting the humanitarian response to Gaza's shift from repeated to protracted displacement does not require waiting for the conflict to end or access conditions to normalise. It requires restructuring how the response is planned, resourced, and measured against the reality documented in this report.

Displacement should not be measured solely by whether people have stopped physically moving, but against concrete criteria including safety, livelihoods, family unity, and freedom of movement. According to the data collected for this report, these criteria remain largely unmet: 90% of FGDs raised safety and protection concerns, 70% raised family separation, and 60% raised loss of livelihood as a priority need. Building response planning around these criteria, rather than relying predominantly on emergency output metrics such as meals or tents delivered, would help reveal what such metrics can obscure: **service delivery may appear stable even while the underlying conditions required for durable solutions continue to deteriorate.**

This same approach should extend to how progress in the humanitarian situation is measured and reported. Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2803, implementation has been tracked largely through aggregate figures, such as total trucks and total tonnage.⁹⁰ Such figures alone cannot demonstrate improvements in humanitarian conditions on the ground. Progress on humanitarian access should not be measured by aggregate truck counts alone, nor assessed solely on the basis of announcements or self-reported data from parties to the conflict. It should instead be assessed holistically, verified by UN and humanitarian actors, and measured against indicators including: casualties among civilians and humanitarian and medical personnel; humanitarian access and aid distribution; food availability and IPC Phase Classifications; malnutrition rates, including among children; market availability and prices; access to basic and public services; compliance with Sphere Minimum Standards⁹¹; access to primary healthcare and life-saving services; children's school attendance; and freedom of movement. No single indicator should be interpreted in isolation. The meaningful measure of progress is demonstrable improvement of the humanitarian situation and civilian living conditions.

Funding and access constraints have also coincided with the emergence of parallel funding and delivery mechanisms outside the established UN-led humanitarian coordination system. The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), a US- and Israeli-backed private entity established in 2025, was the most prominent example.⁹²

Finally, discussions on early recovery and reconstruction should be guided by five principles:

- 01** Sequenced
- 02** Context-sensitive approach
- 03** Palestinian-owned and led
- 04** Protection-centred
- 05** Grounded in a political framework

Reconstruction proposals should be assessed against these principles, including whether they safeguard the neutrality, impartiality, and independence of humanitarian actors; preserve coordinated, needs-based humanitarian operations; and ensure meaningful Palestinian participation in decisions affecting the future of their land and communities.

Recovery must be designed for a context characterised by ongoing hostilities, severe access impediments, protection risks, repeated forced displacement, damaged institutions, and the continued obligations and constraints associated with prolonged occupation.





Conclusion

This report set out to answer a specific question: **what has happened to displacement in Gaza since the ceasefire that was meant to end it?** The answer, drawn from 195 respondents across 20 FGDs and corroborated by independent assessments, is that displacement has not ended, it has changed shape. What was once the acute, visible movement of the war's first two years has become something more sustained and harder to see: a demarcation line that has moved progressively westward since its creation and the prospect of return that exists in principle but remains foreclosed for many in practice. Much of Gaza's population remains confined to an increasingly restricted area, with nowhere further to retreat within the Strip's boundaries, and is experiencing collective punishment as a result.

The October 2025 ceasefire was supposed to end civilians' suffering. Nearly a year on, civilians continue to be deliberately killed and injured, displacement has stalled rather than been resolved, and meaningful recovery remains elusive. Recovery and reconstruction needs have grown by approximately a third in just over a year, while humanitarian funding has declined. The result is a widening gap between what people in Gaza need and the assistance available to them.

At the same time, discussions about early recovery and reconstruction raise fundamental questions about how recovery will be governed, who will participate in decisions, and whether humanitarian principles will be protected. Recovery must be designed for the reality on the ground: ongoing hostilities, severe access constraints, protection risks, repeated forced displacement, damaged institutions, and the continued obligations and constraints associated with prolonged occupation. Early recovery and reconstruction should therefore be sequenced and context-sensitive, Palestinian-owned and -led, centred on protection, and grounded in the political realities in which they will take place.

The recommendations that follow are addressed to those with the capacity to change the conditions documented in this report: donors and humanitarian actors, whose funding and programming choices shape whether the gap between need and delivery closes or widens at the site level; and UN Member States, whose diplomatic, legal, and political tools can address not only conditions within Gaza's displacement sites, but also the policies and practices contributing to continued displacement.

Recommendations

To all parties to the conflict:

- Ensure full and sustained compliance with the ceasefire, including an immediate end to airstrikes, shelling, and gunfire affecting civilians and civilian objects, both inside and outside areas of active military operations.
- End attacks against civilians, humanitarian personnel, and medical workers at all times, in line with the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution under international humanitarian law.
- Ensure that any movement or evacuation of civilians complies with international humanitarian law and takes place in conditions of safety and dignity, and prevent further forced displacement, containment zones, or coercive military screenings of the civilian population.
- Guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access for the delivery of assistance, medical evacuation, and protection services, including safe passage for personnel and supplies without arbitrary delay.
- Support the establishment of an independent, UN-mandated mechanism to monitor, verify, and publicly report on ceasefire violations and alleged violations of international humanitarian law, with findings made available on a regular and transparent basis. Ensure that any monitoring function established UN, including through the Board of Peace, provides credible, independent, and timely public reporting.

To the Government of Israel, as the occupying power of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem

- Halt the further expansion of the Yellow Line, disclose its current and any future route transparently and with advance public notice, and take concrete, verifiable steps toward the withdrawal envisaged under the ceasefire agreement, consistent with the ICJ's July 2024 Advisory Opinion.
- Cease the construction of permanent military infrastructure, including berms, fortified outposts, and associated groundworks, in areas from which withdrawal is envisaged under the ceasefire agreement, and provide credible assurance that current troop positions are not intended to be permanent.
- Restore full, and unimpeded humanitarian access at the scale required to meet assessed needs, including by fully and consistently opening all crossings into Gaza, including Rafah in both directions, for people and goods.
- Enable humanitarian access to be assessed against independently verified humanitarian outcomes rather than aggregate truck or tonnage figures alone, including whether humanitarian organisations can plan distributions, move goods predictably, and scale delivery in line with assessed needs.
- Reverse the March 2025 re-registration requirements insofar as they compel the disclosure of national staff lists or otherwise place staff at risk, and resolve the registration status of the 37 INGOs, including DRC, whose international staff access and operational approvals remain restricted in Gaza and the West Bank as a result.
- Align the dual-use goods classification system with international standards and practice, and end restrictions on WASH, shelter, pest-control, medical, and rubble-removal materials, spare parts, and fuel where no proportionate security justification is provided. Publish clear criteria governing dual-use classifications and ensure the classification process is transparent, time-bound, and subject to independent review.
- Restore the medical corridor between Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remove arbitrary caps on the number of patients permitted to exit for treatment, and guarantee their right to timely treatment and subsequent return.
- Guarantee freedom of movement within, into, and out of Gaza, and enable safe, voluntary return for civilians to their areas of origin, including areas currently inside the Yellow Line, consistent with international humanitarian law, including the prohibition on forcible transfer.

To the International Community

- Move beyond statements of concern and take concrete measures to promote implementation of Resolution 2803's humanitarian provisions, including through bilateral political, economic, and diplomatic engagement; support for relevant international judicial and accountability mechanisms; and compliance with applicable obligations governing arms transfers and other forms of assistance.
- Ensure that the Board of Peace reports to the Security Council on a regular, transparent basis, at minimum quarterly, with monthly updates in the interim, and that this reporting is assessed against demonstrable humanitarian outcomes rather than aggregate commercial flow, tonnage, or truck-count figures.
- Publicly and consistently condemn attacks on civilians, humanitarian personnel, and medical workers, and support the independent monitoring mechanism referenced above.
- Give practical effect to the obligations arising from the ICJ's July 2024 Advisory Opinion, including those concerning third States and aid or assistance in maintaining the situation arising from Israel's continued presence in the oPt.
- Advocate explicitly and publicly against the de-registration of humanitarian organisations and the politicisation of NGO registration processes, recognising these as part of a broader pattern of shrinking humanitarian space rather than isolated administrative matters.
- Scale up funding through principled, multilateral, and Palestinian-led recovery mechanisms, including UN-administered channels, the Horizon Fund, and the Arab-OIC reconstruction plan, ensuring that recovery and reconstruction efforts remain Palestinian-led.

To donors and humanitarian actors

Response modalities in a protracted displacement context

- Support the scale-up of the Site Management Catchment Approach piloted in Rafah, regrouping fragmented site-level management into sub-catchment units, to extend support to displacement sites currently without a designated Site Management actor, including dispersed locations and damaged buildings that fall outside conventional site definitions.
- Plan and resource early-recovery investments, including permanent WASH infrastructure, livelihoods and cash programming, and the restoration of health infrastructure, in parallel with emergency relief rather than as a subsequent phase contingent on further political developments.

Strengthen protection outcomes

- Expand explosive ordnance risk education to displacement sites currently without coverage, and integrate age- and disability-inclusive design into site infrastructure and service delivery as standard practice, not as a retrofit.
- Scale up mental health and psychosocial support in line with the documented deterioration in psychological well-being associated with protracted displacement and substandard shelter conditions.

Support recovery efforts

- Design early recovery as more than physical reconstruction; rebuilding homes, farms, markets, and infrastructure is necessary but insufficient unless recovery funding and programming also address the scale of human harm, including death, injury, and psychological distress, alongside material loss.
- Enable a meaningful scale-up of first-phase recovery by removing restrictions that prevent the entry of essential supplies, fuel, medicines, machinery, spare parts, construction materials, WASH items, forensic materials, and equipment required for debris removal, hazardous waste disposal, unexploded ordnance clearance, and the restoration of basic services. Prioritise the restoration of essential services, particularly health and education. Without these inputs, recovery cannot begin in any meaningful sense.
- Prioritize mine action, including explosive ordnance risk education, clearance, and victim assistance, as a foundational enabler of all early recovery and reconstruction, recognising that safe returns, livelihood restoration, and infrastructure rehabilitation depend on effective management of explosive ordnance risks.

Endnotes

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- 92 The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) was a US- and Israeli-backed private entity established in February 2025 to distribute aid outside the UN-led coordination system, beginning operations in late May 2025 following the collapse of the January 2025 ceasefire. Staffed by private contractors rather than experienced humanitarian actors, it ran a small number of militarised distribution sites; no established UN agency or major INGO participated, citing incompatibility with core humanitarian principles. UN monitoring attributed over 2,000 Palestinian deaths to violence in and around its sites. GHF ceased operations on 24 November 2025, following the October 2025 ceasefire.



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