

Situation Overview

Housing shortages in Gaza continue to increase, driven by conflict, Israeli restrictions on importing reconstruction materials and rapid natural population growth. Despite increased building activities in the last quarter, and some approved UN projects, current levels of construction and reconstruction cannot accommodate all housing needs due to the lack of sufficient amounts of available building materials. Overcrowding is now a major issue in a context where long term and chronic overcrowding can lead to increased protection concerns. The housing crisis continues to permeate and create social problems for affected families, contributing to an overall inability for Palestinians in Gaza to fulfill their right to adequate housing.

Israeli restrictions on the import of raw building materials into Gaza remains the major reason for the chronic lack of housing construction and reconstruction in Gaza, compounded by Egypt's tight control of its border with Gaza for people and goods. The Shelter Sector in Gaza estimates that over 71,000 housing units are currently required to meet all shelter gaps, representing approximately 23 % of the total housing in Gaza. Ongoing armed conflict, rocket strikes and Israeli incursions into the strip has resulted in damage or the destruction of over 1,624 additional houses since the end of Cast Lead, with homes in the Access Restricted Area particularly affected.

Cast Lead Figures		
Damage Type	Status	Number
Totally Demolished	Total Case Load	3,481
	Completed	476
	In Progress	392
	Pending	2,618
Major Damage	Case Load	2,755
	Completed	1,995
	In Progress	400
	Pending	360

Pre Cast Lead Figures	
Total Case Load	2,900*
Completed	157
In Progress	1,401
Pending	1,342**
* USSD does not currently hold the total figures for all pre-cast lead cases	
** 1182 Pending COGAT Approval	

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

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Total Outstanding Estimated Needs

- **2,618** destroyed or damaged shelters beyond repair during Operation Cast Lead remain to be rebuilt;
- **1,624** shelters damaged or destroyed by Israeli military activity since 2009;
- **1,342** families suffering Israeli related housing destruction Pre Cast Lead;
- **449** housing units partially constructed by UNRWA and UNDP, but progress frozen since June 2007 due to the blockade;
- **5,600** refugee families from camps are living in derelict and unsanitary shelters in need of upgrading.
- A total of approximately **71,000** additional housing units currently needed to address unmet needs.

*Unified Shelter Sector Database (USSD)
www.sheltergaza.org –the USSD does not currently hold the total figures for all pre-cast lead cases/needs

The impacts of the continuing blockade on the Gaza housing sector

- Chronic overcrowding is leading to increased protection concerns including domestic and gender based violence;
- Israeli procedures for importing aggregate, steel bar and cement into Gaza are expensive and time consuming. Agencies can expect significantly increased operational costs and losses by formally applying for raw materials from Israel, funds which should be spent on beneficiaries. UNRWA estimates that in order to account for the construction supplies transferred to Gaza for its use under the current system, the Agency will pay US\$1.3 million in additional cost per year.
- Demand for restricted building materials is increasing, leading to a thriving black market, with no regulation or oversight on pricing or quality of materials. The majority of black market materials are sourced from the tunnels to Egypt. During 2011 alone 36 tunnel workers were killed;
- International agencies activities are restricted the most by the blockade, while local authorities, local agencies and the private sector, unencumbered by donor restrictions, are able to use tunnel materials as the last resort;
- The blockade has decimated the private construction industry in Gaza, formerly the backbone and the cornerstone of the Gaza economy and previous major employer for an estimated 75,000 – 120,000 jobs;

Accessibility & continued displacement

The Gaza Strip remains occupied by Israel and is subject to almost daily conflict, within a context of wide reaching Israeli restrictions on access and freedom of movement. Israel is currently enforcing an access restricted area of between 300 and 1000 meters from the security fence that separates Israel from Gaza. These restrictions and enforcement, sometimes through lethal force, has prevented access to housing, land and property, as well as to schools and one third of Gaza's agricultural land.

In late 2011, the Shelter Sector undertook a 2 month telephone survey to assess conditions for the 3,000 households whose shelters were totally demolished during the 2008/2009 Cast Lead military operation. An estimated **20%** of families in need of housing are in an extra vulnerable position, including over **100,000** women, men, boys and girls with particularly acute protection concerns, such as disability, single parent families and those in the Access Restricted Area.

Key findings of Shelter Sector Survey:

- Approximately **15,700** individuals remain displaced, **4,416** individuals displaced three times or more since 2009 due to their inability to reconstruct their homes and continued conflict;
- **2,618** households out of 3,481 totally demolished are still waiting reconstruction;
- **229** households are known to have one or more family members living with a disability
- **255** destroyed shelters are located in the access restricted areas and face the problem of long term displacement with no reconstruction possibility.

Availability of materials

More than 18 months after Israel announced the easing of some of their restrictions on Gaza, shelter reconstruction remains extremely limited. While the 'ease' has seen an increase in items such as glass, materials to make doors and windows, and construction 'finishing' items such as plumbing and electrical fittings coming through official Israeli crossings, vital raw building materials like steel, aggregate and cement remain on the Israeli "Dual Use List," and are therefore restricted for import into the Gaza Strip. The Israeli Ministry of Defense mechanism for the coordination of materials into Gaza is slow, bureaucratic and costly. As a result few international agencies have the capacity or funding to use the procedures. As a result the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MoPWH), and various agencies utilising materials available on the local market sourced from the tunnels are leading the way in construction and reconstruction of Gaza with little international support. For the few agencies that do succeed to enter materials into Gaza costs are massively increased. The moving of construction materials from the West Bank to Gaza also results in Palestinian suppliers being unfairly pushed out of the market, due to Israeli security rules. Palestinian companies are subject to security restrictions and checks that are not applied to Israeli companies, thus increasing their costs.

The shortage of building materials often forces families to build back lower quality multi-story homes. This raises serious concerns of disaster risk reduction in a region vulnerable to future conflict or natural disasters such as earth quake or flooding.

Cost Implications

- UNDP has spent US\$1 million establishing an access team responsible for coordinating the entry of materials to implement UNDP projects;
- UNRWA estimates that in order to account for the construction supplies transferred to Gaza for its use under the current system, the Agency will pay US\$1.3 million in additional cost per year.
- UNDP has a US\$5 million housing project to construct 120 units stalled by Israeli security procedures.
- UNRWA has funding to construct over 3,000 housing units, however, work has only begun on half of these. Government of Israel approval is needed for the remaining 1,400 units, which has been pending for nearly two years.

Affordability

As a direct result of agencies being prevented from reconstructing, transitional solutions such as rental/cash assistance have been implemented. In 2011 UNRWA alone provided US\$4.7 million in temporary shelter cash assistance to over 3,420 families but few non-refugee families have received any rental/cash assistance. Many host families for those displaced by Cast Lead are now at breaking point after providing assistance to extended family members and friends for over three years. Humanitarian assistance to host families has now ceased, due to a lack of funding.

Habitability

Overcrowding is now a major issue in a context where long term and chronic overcrowding can lead to increased protection concerns including increased domestic violence, gender based violence and the general breakdown of social and cultural norms.

Approximately **79%** of current housing needs are due to natural population growth, with an estimated **9%** due to destruction of housing by military operations.¹

A study carried out during late 2011 by the American Friends Service Committee to study the impact of overcrowding in damaged homes badly affected by Cast Lead revealed the following²

- 59% of the cases said there were no rooms for females , 17% said there were no rooms for parents , 83% had no rooms for children;
- Overcrowding affected space for study with, 65% females and 48% males of those interviewed reporting that they did not have adequate space for study;
- 78% of males and 89% of females interviewed experienced fear , depression and anxiety with the current housing conditions;
- 86.8% of females and 76.3% of males surveyed said that domestic violence had increased in their families since Cast Lead.

Equally concerning findings were reflected in the recent Palestinian National Authority Centre Bureau of Statistics, December 2011.³

1. Shelter Sector Gaza – Unified Shelter Sector Database (USSD) <http://www.sheltergaza.org>
2. Summary Findings of a Youth-led Study on the Impact of Overcrowding in Beit Lahiya and Al Zaitoon, Gaza Strip. The American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) www.afsc.org
3. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011. Press Release Main Findings of Violence survey in the Palestinian Society, 2011. Ramallah- Palestine. <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps>

Positive Progress

Approximately 633 houses destroyed before and during Cast Lead were reconstructed in the last 6 months of 2011, using tunnel materials or as a result of large Israeli approved UN projects for pre-2007 projects (Housing units since 2009). The Islamic Development Bank (IDB), in its capacity as Coordinator for the Programme of the Gulf Cooperation Council for the Reconstruction of Gaza, also significantly addressed some major housing needs, using materials available in the local market sourced from the tunnels between Gaza and Egypt, resulting in their status as the lead shelter provider in Gaza.



UNRWA Housing Project - Khan Yunis

Recommendations

1. The shelter sector recommends an immediate end to Israeli and Egyptian restrictions on reconstruction materials entering Gaza, specifically steel, cement and aggregate.
2. Israel should lift the ban on commercial imports, as it primarily affects the poorest Palestinians in Gaza as well as those trying to serve them (international agencies and donors).
3. The international community should engage with Israel and Egypt to ensure the immediate availability of these raw materials on the open market in Gaza, thus reducing the need to use tunnel materials. As an interim measure agencies and donors should be as flexible as possible to facilitate reconstruction in Gaza using all available materials.
4. COGAT should approve and facilitate all pending UN and international agency housing projects.