

ADVOCACY BRIEF:

THE COST OF WAR IN GAZA ON WOMEN AND GIRLS



The war in Gaza created a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale and magnitude. Tens of thousands of women, girls, men, and boys were killed. Those who did survive face daily threats to their lives, starvation, recurrent displacement, and deeply restricted access to essential services. The impact on their health, safety, and well-being has been devastating. Homes, schools, and even designated shelters were destroyed as a result of Israeli bombardment and land operations.

This advocacy brief draws on recent analysis conducted by UN Women to highlight the experiences of women and girls in Gaza since October 2023. Using a temporal and gender-focused lens, it highlights patterns of direct attacks, examining when, where, and how violence has unfolded and the resulting impact on women and girls. It traces how gender-specific vulnerabilities evolve and intensify over the course of war. Together, these insights highlight the urgent need for targeted, gender-responsive action to protect civilians and address the compounding risks faced by women and girls in Gaza.

The findings below highlight the scale, patterns, and consequences of the war on women and girls in Gaza.

Deaths of women and girls reached levels unseen before in previous wars on Gaza, peaking during periods of intensified violence. Women and girls continue to be killed despite a ceasefire agreement

More than 71,200 people were killed in Gaza between October 2023 and December 2025¹ though this is likely an underestimate given the collapse of health information and reporting systems. Women, children, and older persons together represent more than half of all fatalities.² UN Women estimates that more than 38,000 women and girls had been killed as of December 2025.³ This includes more than 22,000 women and 16,000 girls. Women and girls accounted for proportions of deaths far higher than those observed in previous conflicts in Gaza, when women and girls accounted for 15 per cent of fatalities in the 2008-2009 and 22 per cent in the 2014 conflicts.⁴

UN Women's analysis of trends over time shows that fatalities among women and children were highest during periods of intensified bombardment, particularly in the first six months

of the war.⁵ During this period, women and children accounted for nearly two-thirds of all recorded deaths,⁶ underscoring their acute vulnerability to direct attacks. These patterns align with the widespread use of remote explosive violence, including air and drone strikes, shelling, artillery, and missile fire, which have defined the conflict.⁷

Fatality peaks among women and children also coincided with periods of large-scale destruction of civilian infrastructure. Destruction of homes, schools, and designated shelters were heavily concentrated during the early phase of the war, with residential buildings accounting for over 95 per cent of all recorded infrastructure damages.^{8&9} Nearly 59 per cent of all women and child fatalities occurred during this initial period of peak violence.^{10&11}

By the end of 2023, extensive damage to residential areas, particularly in northern Gaza, had displaced approximately 1.9 million people, or 85 per cent of the population.¹² Many sought refuge in designated shelters, including facilities operated by UNRWA, yet these spaces also came under repeated attack.¹³ Strikes on displacement sites, makeshift camps, and civilian buildings used as shelters continued throughout the conflict, resulting in further deaths and injuries among internally displaced persons (IDPs). Women and children remained disproportionately affected, including in incidents where homes were targeted due to the perceived affiliations or professions of male family members.¹⁴

The extent of the killings and destruction shows that there was no safe place for civilians in Gaza during the war. Even locations intended to provide protection exposed women and children to heightened risks, reinforcing the urgent need for strengthened civilian protection measures and accountability.

Alarming, fatalities among women and girls have continued despite the ceasefire agreed in early October 2025. These killings have taken place against a backdrop of widespread violence against women and girls over two years of war. It is critical to note that these figures likely understate the true toll. Many bodies remain trapped under rubble,¹⁵ and the collapse of health and reporting systems has severely constrained the ability to fully document deaths.¹⁶

1 Health Cluster Dashboard, data as of 31 December 2025 | World Health Organization | Data updated as of 20 March 2026. The report is updated on a regular basis. Users may select an end date on the web page to retroactively retrieve fatality figures for any specific period.

2 Health Cluster Dashboard, data as of 31 December 2025 | World Health Organization | Data updated as of 16 January 2026

3 Invisible No More: Estimating the Death Toll, Injuries, and Long-term Disability for Women and Girls in Gaza as of 31 December 2025 | UN Women | March 2026

4 "More than a human can bear": Israel's systematic use of sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence since 7 October 2023 | UN Human Rights Commission | 13 March 2025

5 UN Women analysis based on Tech for Palestine (TFP) daily fatality data (drawing on Palestinian Ministry of Health) and ACLED conflict event data, covering October 2023–October 2025. Full technical report forthcoming (April 2026)

6 UN Women analysis based on Tech for Palestine (TFP) daily fatality data (drawing on Palestinian Ministry of Health) and ACLED conflict event data, covering October 2023–October 2025. Full technical report forthcoming (April 2026)

7 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), "ACLED defines Explosions/Remote violence events as incidents in which one side uses weapon types that, by their nature, are at range and widely destructive. These include bombs, grenades, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), artillery fire or shelling, missile attacks, air or drone strikes, and other widely destructive heavy weapons or chemical weapons." In our analysis, Air/drone strike, and shelling/artillery/missile attack, constituted 83.8% of all types of events. ACLED Codebook | ACLED

8 Source: Tech for Palestine (TFP) - Daily fatalities and buildings and infrastructure damages from 7 October 2025 to 31 October 2025.

9 Reported impact snapshot | Gaza Strip (4 February 2026) | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory

10 UN Women analysis based on Tech for Palestine (TFP) daily fatality data (drawing on Palestinian Ministry of Health) and ACLED conflict event data, covering October 2023–October 2025. Full technical report forthcoming (April 2026)

11 Source: Tech for Palestine (TFP) - Daily fatalities and buildings and infrastructure damages from 7 October 2025 to 31 October 2025.

12 Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #85 | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory | 05 January 2024

13 Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #82 | UN OCHA | 02 January 2024

14 Humanitarian Situation Update | OCHA | Based on multiple reports through October 2023–October 2025

15 10,000 people feared buried under the rubble in Gaza | UN | 02 May 2024

16 Invisible No More: Estimating the Death Toll of Women and Girls in Gaza | UN Women | May 2025

Women and girls remain largely invisible in the injury statistics, limiting understanding of the long-term gendered impact of the war

Beyond fatalities, the scale of harm extends to a largely invisible burden of injury. Recorded injuries consistently outnumbered fatalities throughout October 2023–October 2025, with pronounced spikes during periods of intensified hostilities, notably in late 2023 and again in mid-2025.¹⁷ Unlike fatality figures, injury statistics are not disaggregated by sex or age, limiting the ability to assess who is the most affected. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that approximately 42,000 people are living with life-changing injuries requiring long term rehabilitation following two years of war.¹⁸ In the absence of disaggregated data, the specific impact on women and girls cannot be directly assessed, despite their share among overall casualties. Under the most conservative scenario, UN Women estimates that there are close to 11,000 women and girls with lifelong injury.¹⁹ This critical data gap obscures the full extent of harm experienced by women and girls and constitutes a structural blind spot that limits understanding of the long-term, gendered impacts of the war.

Cycles of displacement have deepened gendered and health risks for women and girls

Alongside direct attacks, repeated displacement has further deepened risks for women and girls. Since 7 October 2023, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have issued over 150 evacuation and movement orders across the Gaza Strip, triggering successive waves of displacement and forcing many families to relocate multiple times.²⁰ Nearly one million women and girls have been displaced in Gaza,²¹ with many experiencing displacement more than four times.²²

Vulnerable groups, including pregnant women, women with disabilities, and women heads of households, were disproportionately affected, often forced to relocate with minimal assistance. The arduous and often unsafe evacuation process, frequently undertaken on foot, funneled families into already overcrowded sites, heightening protection, health, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) risks.²³

Women and girls face acute challenges, including restricted access to essential resources and services. Reports indicate that some are prevented from accessing basic necessities such as

food and water, and healthcare.²⁴ These conditions forced women to limit food and water intake and sacrifice menstrual hygiene, increasing health and reproductive health risks.²⁵

The depletion of hygiene supplies in Gaza has further deepened these challenges. By mid-2025, essential menstrual items were available at only a fraction of monthly needs, leaving many women and girls without adequate hygiene support.²⁶ This is increasing health risks – including the risk of infections and long-term reproductive health complications, and is undermining dignity and well-being, while the collapse of the health system leaves many without timely care.²⁷

Systematic collapse of reproductive health services during the conflict continues to amplify risks to women and girls

The war in Gaza has inflicted systemic reproductive violence by severely limiting women and girls' access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. At least 927 attacks have targeted health facilities and ambulances, including major maternity wards and fertility clinics through October 2023–October 2025.²⁸

By September 2025, only 37 per cent of 358 SRH service points remained functional, including 12 hospitals, four field hospitals, 45 primary clinics, and 74 medical points.²⁹ The destruction of the al-Basma IVF Centre eliminated Gaza's fertility clinic and its genetic bank, foreclosing reproductive choices for thousands of families.³⁰

By March 2025, an estimated 130 births were occurring each day in Gaza, more than one-quarter by caesarean section, placing extraordinary strain on an already degraded health system.³¹ Limited facility capacity necessitated rapid patient turnover and early discharge of mothers and newborns, often at or near the minimum post-delivery observation period, constraining the provision of safe postpartum and postnatal care in line with World Health Organization standards.³² At the same time, worsening maternal malnutrition heightened risks of low birth weight, stillbirth, and maternal mortality. Emergency obstetric and newborn care services, including Newborn Intensive Care Units (NICUs), were operating far beyond functional capacity by mid-2025, with some facilities reporting workloads at up to twice their designed capacity.³³ Women were forced into unsafe home births and denied access to family planning, and emergency care.³⁴ Mass

17 Health Cluster dashboard, data as of 30 October 2025 | World Health Organization

18 Estimating Trauma Rehabilitation Needs in Gaza | WHO | September 2025

19 This estimate is derived in the technical annex using the World Health Organization's September 2025 assessment of trauma rehabilitation due to life-changing injuries. In the absence of sex and age disaggregated data, proportions from the Ministry of Health retrospective injury survey, used by WHO as a core evidence source, were applied to model the distribution by sex and age. This was further cross-validated using rehabilitation service provider data indicating an approximate 2:1 male-to-female ratio among severe injury cases. Together, these conservative scenarios suggest that women and girls comprise roughly 28–33% of those living with life-changing war-related injuries. Additional details can be found in the technical annex.

20 Gaza Strip: Israeli Military Displacement Order | UN OCHA Tracking Dashboard | Data as of 13 September 2025.

21 Gender alert: The gendered impact of the crisis in Gaza | UN Women | January 2024

22 Press briefing by UN Women on the situation of women and girls in Gaza | UN Women – Headquarters

23 Humanitarian Situation Update #323 | Gaza Strip | UN OCHA | 18 September 2025

24 Gaza Humanitarian Response Update | 13–26 October 2024 | UN OCHA | 29 October 2024

25 Gaza: Women and girls struggle to manage their periods amid crisis | UN News | 08 June 2025

26 Gaza: Women and girls struggle to manage their periods amid crisis | UN | 08 June 2025

27 Gaza: Women and girls struggle to manage their periods amid crisis | UN | 08 June 2025

28 Health Cluster dashboard, data as of 10 October 2025 | World Health Organization

29 Health Cluster dashboard, data as of 10 October 2025 | World Health Organization

30 Report of the Commission of Inquiry: Israel's systematic use of sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence since 7 October 2023 - Question of Palestine | UN | 13 March 2025

31 Situation Report Humanitarian Crisis in Palestine | UNFPA | 06 March 2025

32 WHO recommendations on maternal and newborn care for a positive postnatal experience | World Health Organization | 30 March 2022

displacement and overcrowded shelters further exacerbate risks of infection, exposing pregnant women, women with disabilities, and adolescent girls to higher sexual and reproductive health risks.³⁵

Despite the October 2025 ceasefire, women in Gaza continue to give birth amid extensive destruction of the health system. Reports indicate that approximately 15 births occur outside hospital settings each week, often without skilled attendance or safe delivery conditions.³⁶ Despite an increase in maternity bed and incubator capacity by end 2025,³⁷ maternity services remain severely constrained, with limited access to essential medical supplies and equipment continuing to restrict service availability.³⁸

The systematic dismantling of reproductive health services constitutes a gendered form of violence that undermines women's autonomy, health, and life prospects across generations.

Starvation and food insecurity have reached catastrophic levels, disproportionately impacting women and children.

The war has driven a severe and prolonged starvation crisis.³⁹ With 93 per cent of the population facing acute food insecurity between 1 April and 10 May 2025, families were forced into extreme coping mechanisms amid widespread aid disruptions and insecurity.⁴⁰

By August 2025, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification [IPC] estimated that over 640,000 people experiencing catastrophic conditions (IPCPhase 5).⁴¹ As of 12 September 2025, at least 369 deaths from malnutrition have been verified;⁴² however, the absence of sex-disaggregated mortality data limits the understanding of the differential gendered impact. Mothers and fathers witnessed the deaths of 97 children from starvation, while at least 49,500 children were receiving treatment for malnutrition by the time a ceasefire agreement was reached in October 2025.⁴³ By July 2025, approximately 40 per cent of pregnant and breastfeeding women were malnourished.⁴⁴ During this period, an estimated 500,000 women and girls remained at risk of starvation.⁴⁵ Accessing food was extremely dangerous, with around 2,600 civilians killed and 19,182 injured at or near militarized food distribution points, compounding the crisis and limiting lifesaving aid.^{46,47}

The humanitarian crisis is expected to remain critical for at least six months following the ceasefire, with an estimated 1.6 million people still facing Crisis-level or worse food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 and above) between December 2025 and April 2026.⁴⁸ Women and children will continue to bear the brunt of these conditions. An estimated 37,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women are projected to require treatment for acute malnutrition in the year following the ceasefire,⁴⁹ alongside approximately 101,000 children aged 6–59 months, including 50,000 girls.⁵⁰ These projections underscore the enduring and disproportionate impact of the conflict on women and children, and the urgent need for sustained, targeted humanitarian response beyond the cessation of hostilities.

Rise in women-headed households in Gaza signals long-term social and protection burdens on women and girls

The war reshaped household composition and care roles in Gaza, imposing sustained social, economic, and protection burdens on women and girls. The high death rates among men, accounting for 48 per cent of total fatalities since October 2023, have resulted in a growing number of de facto women-headed households (WHHs), leaving women and girls more vulnerable. Before the escalation of conflict in 2023, only 9 per cent of households in Gaza were women-headed.⁵¹ UN Women estimates that more than 58,600 households in Gaza are now headed by women, approximately 14 per cent of all households.⁵²

Evidence from previous violence escalations shows that WHHs are more likely to be displaced (88%) than male-headed households (77%), reflecting their heightened exposure to instability.⁵³ The loss of male household members also undermines women's and children's ability to secure basic needs such as food, shelter, and protection, increasing their risks of hunger, and insecurity in a conflict environment.

Additionally, an IPC contributing evidence collected between May and July 2025, through household surveys across the Gaza Strip (excluding North Gaza), indicates widespread loss of ownership documents and tenure insecurity affecting women.⁵⁴ In Khan Younis and Rafah, 83% of women reported losing ownership papers, while in Gaza Governorate, 71% of women reported the

33 Gaza Humanitarian Response Update | 6 – 19 July 2025 | UN OCHA | 22 July 2025

34 Situation Report Humanitarian Crisis in Palestine | UNFPA | 06 March 2025

35 Humanitarian Action Overview UNFPA's global appeal 2025 | UNFPA | December 2024

36 Humanitarian Situation Update #347 | Gaza Strip | UN OCHA | 11 December 2025

37 The Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS) Palestine | World Health Organization | Data updated as of 20 January 2026

38 The Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS) Palestine | World Health Organization | Data updated as of 20 January 2026

39 GAZA STRIP: Famine confirmed in Gaza Governorate, projected to expand | IPC | 22 August 2025

40 IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Special Snapshot | IPC | 12 May 2025

41 GAZA STRIP: Famine confirmed in Gaza Governorate, projected to expand | IPC | 22 August 2025

42 Health Cluster dashboard, data as of 10 October 2025 | World Health Organization

43 Health Cluster dashboard, data as of 10 October 2025 | World Health Organization

44 Malnutrition rates reach alarming levels in Gaza | World Health Organization | 27 July 2025

45 Joint Statement from the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group on the Famine in Gaza: Women and girls are starving while the world watches [EN/AR] - Question of Palestine | UN | 05 September 2025

46 Health cluster Dashboard | World Health Organization | Data updated as of 16 January 2026

47 Humanitarian Situation Update #297 | Gaza Strip [EN/AR] | UN OCHA | 18 June 2025

48 IPC Global Initiative - Special Brief - Gaza Strip | IPC | 19 December 2025

49 IPC Global Initiative - Special Brief - Gaza Strip | IPC | 19 December 2025

50 IPC Global Initiative - Special Brief - Gaza Strip | IPC | 19 December 2025

51 Press Release | Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics | 07 March 2018

52 What it means to be a woman in Gaza today | UN Women | 12 September 2025

53 After the May 2021 Escalation: A Multi-Sectoral Gender Needs Assessment in the Gaza Strip | UN Women | 2022

loss of ownership documents.⁵⁵ The assessment also found significant gender-based barriers to housing and land rights, with 48–80 per cent of women across the four governorates reporting discrimination or obstacles when attempting to claim or retain property⁵⁶ thereby heightening their vulnerability and undermining access to social protection.

Destruction of education infrastructure threatens girls' learning, safety, and future opportunities

The conflict in Gaza has devastated educational infrastructure, with over 97 per cent of schools sustained damage and hundreds repurposed as shelters, directly affecting more than 328,000 girls and 330,698 boys.^{57&58} The Education Cluster estimates that between 7 October 2023 and 8 July 2025, 97 per cent of schools sustained some level of damage, including direct or likely damage, and 91.8 per cent (518 of 564 school buildings) require full reconstruction or major rehabilitation.⁵⁹ Thirty-five university buildings were destroyed, and 57 others were damaged. More than 320 school buildings, including UNRWA schools, were used to shelter internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of which were also directly struck.

The inability to attend school has long-term consequences, early and forced marriage for girls, and child labour. For women, the destruction of schools also removes a major employment avenue, as most teachers in Gaza are female. Given the scale of destruction, restoring education facilities will take years, with implications for the capacity and quality of the education system for generations to come.

UN Women estimates that even after schools are restored, many children are likely to remain out of school due to the psychological impacts of conflict and children's need to support family survival. Loss of education affects boys and girls differently, exacerbating gender inequalities. When girls are deprived of schooling, the consequences are particularly severe: economic dependence increases, early marriage and pregnancy risks rise, traditional gender roles and responsibilities are reinforced, and opportunities for voice, agency, and future employment are severely limited. The ongoing collapse of the education system in Gaza threatens to perpetuate cycles of vulnerability, reduce women's and girls' participation in public and economic life, and undermine long-term recovery and social development.

UN Women calls to uphold ceasefire, accountability, enforce international law, and scale up humanitarian aid

- Heed international calls to uphold the ceasefire in Gaza and ensure full compliance with its terms.
- Ensure full compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, including the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, and support conditions conducive to a just and durable peace.
- Ensure the provision of immediate unimpeded, at-scale humanitarian assistance to all Palestinians in Gaza, including inclusive and multisectoral services that address the gender-specific needs and priorities of women and girls, while laying the foundations for gender-responsive recovery and reconstruction.
- Strengthen efforts to increase the availability of data and analysis of the gendered impact of occupation and the war on women and girls in Gaza. This entails improving documentation of international humanitarian and international human rights law violations experienced by women and girls, to help support accountability processes during recovery and reconstruction.
- Drive forward the domestic implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and its subsequent resolutions, to ensure Palestinian women's role in peacebuilding, recovery and reconstruction and ensuring their access to justice, remedies, and reparations as part of efforts toward a just and lasting peace.

54 IPC Global Initiative - Special Brief - Gaza Strip| IPC| 19 December 2025

55 IPC Global Initiative - Special Brief - Gaza Strip| IPC| 19 December 2025

56 IPC Global Initiative - Special Brief - Gaza Strip| IPC| 19 December 2025

57 Verification of damages to schools based on proximity to damaged sites - Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Update # 10, July 2025 - occupied Palestinian territory | Reliefweb | 01 August 2025

58 oPt: Education Snapshot - The academic year 2024-2025, 12 September 2024 - occupied Palestinian territory | ReliefWeb

59 Verification of damages to schools based on proximity to damaged sites - Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Update # 10, July 2025 - occupied Palestinian territory | Reliefweb | 01 August 2025