

Gender-responsive approaches in emergencies

State of Palestine
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Context

Since October 7th, the escalation of hostilities across the State of Palestine is the deadliest for children the United Nations has witnessed since 2006 and has led to grave humanitarian consequences, in particular for children and adolescents, boys and girls, and their families. They are at risk of indiscriminate bombardments but also vulnerable because of the effect of years of occupation and the closure of the Gaza Strip. In this brief, UNICEF analyses the situation in the State of Palestine through a gender-lens and recommends key actions in line with our Core Commitments to Children (CCC) and Gender Action Plan (GAP).

In our response, UNICEF has adopted holistic, multi-sectoral gender-responsive approaches to mitigating barriers in relation to access to services, resources and information. These approaches – guided by the local community – recognize the diverse needs of different groups spanning from health, education, protection, water and sanitation and psychosocial support.

Key priorities and integrated considerations across sectors

Gender barriers and marginalization

The different Rapid Gender Assessments conducted in the Gaza Strip highlight multiple gender dimensions that need to be considered in the emergency response. Gender stereotypes and social norms place specific expectations on young men to assert a protective role for their families and property, as well as play a lead role as breadwinners. At the same time, as more women become widows, they must support their families as female heads of household for the first time against the strain of pre-existing gender inequalities.

RESPONSE #1: Improving access to resources, services and information for marginalized groups

UNICEF's humanitarian cash transfer has a gender-responsive approach and specifically targets female-headed households. In Gaza, UNICEF's cash transfer aspires to account for gender-based violence (GBV) risk mitigation as well as to reach families with adolescent boys and girls to mitigate negative coping mechanisms such as child labour and child marriage.

Information networks can be lifesaving as they ensure that girls, women and other vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households, know where to go and how to access humanitarian assistance (e.g. food distribution sites, phone recharging stations, means to top up mobiles, shelter support, etc.) as well as essential GBV services such as health, psychosocial support and safe spaces. UNICEF's regular girls- and women-friendly feedback and accountability mechanisms are in place throughout all stages of emergency response and recovery.

Maternal health and risk of malnutrition

Currently in the Gaza Strip, adolescent girls and women are particularly affected by the limited access to health services, including access to sexual and reproductive health services comprehensive emergency obstetric care, and newborn care.



Eight-year-old Salwa and her family had to flee from Gaza city and are now displaced in Rafah. She should be in a classroom, pursuing her dream of becoming a nurse, but her days are now consumed by the unrelenting quest for safe water to keep her loved ones alive.

KEY FACTS



1 million girls and women in the Gaza Strip



48 adolescent births per 1,000 girls and women aged 15-19 years



23% of all registered marriages included girls under 18 years of age. The North governorate of Gaza accounted for 33.2% of registered child marriages.



155,858 pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls



1 in 3 adolescent girls and women aged 15-49 years is anemic



668,000 (approximately 30% of the population) in need of protection from gender-based violence

An estimated 50,000 pregnant women and adolescent girls are facing extreme challenges accessing prenatal and maternity care, with an average of 160 births estimated per day. Food insecurity is rapidly increasing, with families reporting a decreased number of meals eaten each day from three to one. This increases the likelihood of women and children, especially pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls, experiencing under or malnutrition, leaving them at risk of contracting maternal nutrition-related illnesses such as anaemia, pre-eclampsia and haemorrhage, which increases risks of maternal mortality.

RESPONSE #2: Strengthen support to adolescent girls, and pregnant and lactating women

UNICEF, in partnership with women's led organisations and civil society organizations, is prioritizing life-saving nutritional items for pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls and newborns. These items include ready-to-use infant formula, iron-folic acid, micronutrient supplements and high-energy biscuits. UNICEF is also providing midwifery kits to operational hospitals in the Gaza Strip. These resources are being distributed through channels that also strengthen community awareness and information sharing within women's networks. UNICEF is supporting the establishment of safe spaces for girls and women, including spaces where lactating women can breastfeed.

Increased risk of gender-based violence

Overcrowding, a general lack of safety and privacy, breakdown of social structures, and increased tensions within households can exacerbate sexual and gender-based violence within the shelters, which puts adolescent girls and women at particular risk. Economic deprivation increases the risk of child marriage as a negative coping mechanism for larger households. In response to the increased risk of GBV, the UNWRA Rapid Gender Assessment recommends that girls walk in groups in public spaces such as through yards and to WASH facilities, or that they are accompanied by an adult both during the day and night.^h text

RESPONSE #3: Promote GBV risk mitigation and MHPSS

All UNICEF staff are aware of their responsibility to mitigate sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse, including ensuring accessible and safe reporting mechanisms to affected communities in collaboration with the PSEA (prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse) Network. GBV risk mitigation assessments and measures must be integrated in all emergency response plans. As part of the Adolescent Girl Humanitarian Package, UNICEF is launching Lahaa – the virtual safe spaces for women and girls which is accessible as an online platform and physical booklet. It contains information concerning mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), menstrual health and hygiene practices as well as GBV referral hotlines.

Limited access to WASH services

The urgent water scarcity, limited hygiene supplies and limited access to sanitation facilities such as toilets and bathing facilities expose girls and women to diseases, infections, and mental stress, especially during menstruation. Anecdotal evidence has shown negative coping mechanisms, including women and adolescent girls taking tablets to delay periods which can cause negative side effects. Overcrowding in shelters and informal IDP locations has forced girls and women to queue for hours to access the limited number of bathrooms and toilets available to even change clothing.

RESPONSE #4: Emergency Kits for Adolescent Girls

To ensure that the supplies being procured and included on UNICEF trucks are meeting the needs of girls and women, UNICEF is rolling out an Adolescent Girl Humanitarian Package. This kit includes critical menstrual health and hygiene supplies, information on managing menstruation during the crisis, Lahaa resources, a booklet on MHPSS and GBV Referral Mechanism, and personal safety items such as a torch and a whistle. Alongside this, UNICEF is supporting the establishment of safe spaces for women and girls, responding to different abilities, where they can access lifesaving multi-layered and multi-sectoral support, including recreational activities.

Localized Strategy: Promoting Women's and Girls' Responses

With the current restrictions on access and delivery of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip, a **localization strategy** engaging partners in civil society organizations is vital. This enables partnerships with and funding directly to local organizations that support women and girls

UNICEF's response enables:

- Establishing more women and girls' safe spaces, meeting the need of adolescent girls as well as pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls
- Effective distribution of the Adolescent Girls Humanitarian Package
- WLO's support to identify and register unaccompanied and separated children
- Engaging WLO's and youth organisations in needs assessments and programme planning

i UNICEF press release: [Child casualties in Gaza "a growing stain on our collective conscience"](#). 24 Oct 2023.

ii, iv, v, viii, ix, ["Rapid Gender Analysis: Gendered Impacts of the October 2023 Escalation in Gaza"](#). UNRWA.

iii [Gaza Crisis: Gender Based Violence Concerns and Priorities - Information & Advocacy Note](#), Relief Web, 20 Oct 2023

vi, vii, [Hostilities in the Gaza and Israel - Flash Appeal](#), OCHA.

x, xi [No privacy, no water: Gaza women use period-delaying pills amid Israel war](#). Al Jazeera, 31 Oct 2023