

“Stop the war and let me return to my home, even if it is destroyed.”

Community priorities and perceptions of aid and support in Gaza

Gaza, occupied Palestinian territories • January 2024



GROUND TRUTH
SOLUTIONS



مركز العالم العربي للبحوث والتنمية
Arab World for Research & Development

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For making these efforts worthwhile, thank you in advance to the international community, for listening.

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Who we are

[Ground Truth Solutions \(GTS\)](#) is an international, non-governmental organisation that helps people affected by crisis influence the design and implementation of humanitarian aid. GTS works to ensure the priorities of people affected by crisis are systematically considered in humanitarian action, from individual projects and organisations to complex responses and system-wide humanitarian reform.

[Arab World for Research and Development \(AWRAD\)](#) is a pioneering research, consulting and development firm. Based in Palestine, AWRAD is one of the Arab region's leading firms, providing partners with a full range of consulting and technical services for sustainable development and institution building. With a diverse and dynamic team, including expertise in research, economic and institutional development, gender studies, monitoring and evaluation including Third-Party Monitoring, AWRAD offers research, technical assistance, and data collection and analysis across a diverse range of technical areas.

To find out more about our work in Gaza please contact Meg Sattler meg@groundtruthsolutions.org or Samer Said awrad@awrad.org

Introduction

It has been 100 days since Israel launched attacks in Gaza that have seen more than 24,000 people killed since the beginning of October 2023, including more than 10,000 children. Thousands more are estimated to be missing, with many buried under the rubble.

Millions of Palestinians have long struggled to live with dignity under occupation, facing coercive practices and political divisions. On 7 October 2023, Palestinian armed groups attacked multiple locations in Israel, killing about 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals. In retaliation, constant and indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza since 7 October has displaced 1.9 million people, or nearly 85 percent of the total population of Gaza, and attacks have continued as people have fled to seek safety.¹ This comes on the heels of 15 years of near-complete closure of the Gaza Strip, multiple wars, and skyrocketing unemployment rates.²

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “no-one and nowhere is safe in Gaza,”³ with UNICEF calling it the most dangerous place on earth to be a child.⁴ Challenges for community survival and aid efforts are well-publicised. Frequent communications blackouts, border closures, severe access constraints, fuel shortages and insecurity have crippled humanitarian operations. The health system is on the brink of collapse,⁵ with more healthcare facilities out of action with each passing week.

International humanitarian law has been flagrantly and repeatedly ignored, with frequent attacks on schools, shelters, and hospitals. Hundreds of aid workers have been killed. UN special procedures experts urge that the Palestinian people are at grave risk of genocide.⁶ Local journalists are trying to share stories from their communities, but according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), “more journalists have been killed in the first 10 weeks of the Israel-Gaza war than have ever been killed in a single country over an entire year.”⁷ The organisation is particularly concerned about the direct targeting of journalists and their families.

Against this backdrop, the international community has been facing extreme conditions while attempting to deliver humanitarian assistance to the population, UN agencies and other international organisations expressing grave concern about their inability to deliver life-saving goods and services. This, in addition to the almost depleted economic and natural resources, forces Gazans to maximise self and mutual help and community-based initiatives, while the majority of the population is at risk of famine and disease.⁸

Our study

In early November, Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) and Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) set about talking to people in Gaza to find out what the humanitarian situation looked like from their perspective. Access challenges for large agencies are well known, but how have communities been supporting each other? What does aid access look like to people on the ground, and what are people’s main priorities? What do they want the international community to know?

Conditions for data collection and analysis are dangerous and volatile, meaning robust data representing the voices of civilians in Gaza has been incredibly difficult to obtain. Still, the team of professional enumerators were able to collect the data while committing to professional standards of sampling, interviewing and data management. This report contains insight generously provided by 613 adult Gazans between late December 2023 and 2 January 2024, via a survey questionnaire, with 20 in-depth interviews and three case studies conducted to complement and enrich the analysis. The findings will be shared with the humanitarian community, donor governments and the general public. The aim is to repeat this work over time to ensure aid and support priorities are in line with those of the communities most affected by the crisis.

- ¹ UN OCHA. 18 January 2024. [Occupied Palestinian Territory updates page](#).
- ² Al Mezan. June 2022. “[15 years too long: Fact sheet](#).”
- ³ UN News. 10 November 2023. “[‘Nowhere and no one is safe’ in Gaza, WHO chief tells Security Council](#).”
- ⁴ UNICEF. 19 December 2023. “[UNICEF Geneva Palais briefing note - Gaza: The world’s most dangerous place to be a child](#).”
- ⁵ UN News. 13 October 2023. “[WHO: Healthcare system in Gaza ‘almost collapsing’](#).”
- ⁶ United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL). 2 November 2023. “[Gaza is ‘running out of time’ UN experts warn, demanding a ceasefire to prevent genocide](#).”
- ⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists. 7 January 2024. “[CPJ urges probe into whether killed Gaza journalists were targeted](#).”
- ⁸ Norwegian People’s Aid. 8 December 2023. “[The delivery of humanitarian aid in Gaza has stopped](#).”; OCHA, 14 January 2024. “[Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel - reported impact | Day 92](#).”

Key findings



- People are living in constant fear. They fear the bombs, they fear for their safety, they fear further displacement, and they fear the consequences of running out of life-sustaining supplies. The fear of losing a loved one is almost universal. They call on the international community to stop the violence.
- Critical survival needs are not being met, and people are in desperate need of clean water and food. To cope, they are rationing small amounts of food among family members and drinking dirty water. While there are some calls to the international aid community to provide support to existing community structures, overwhelmingly people are calling for more direct support in accessing these most fundamental of needs.
- Coping abilities are way down. People say their ability to cope is being eroded by a lack of aid and support, lack of financial capacity and the constant violence, but also by exhaustion, sadness and a lack of privacy.
- Very few people know how to access institutional (formal) aid, as conditions for targeting, distribution and information-sharing are bordering on impossible. While 43% of those who have been able to access it say it was timely, and 31% say it helped meet their basic needs, the overwhelming majority of people say it was not enough, and that they did not feel respected or dignified when receiving it.
- People are sharing resources among themselves. Their primary source of support is family members. People have also been both giving and receiving food, water, shelter, electricity and healthcare independently of the aid system. They have been taking care of other people's children, and relying on community support for transportation and the management of daily tasks like sourcing meals, finding fuel, organising shelters and so on.
- The prospect of a permanent loss of people's homes is causing massive anxiety. People worry about long-term displacement, deportation and/or an inability to rebuild after such immense destruction.
- Trusted information is very hard to find, but most people are turning to friends and family or the radio for news and information and people are wary of much of the information they consume. Power outages are making access to traditionally trusted news channels difficult.

Who we talked to




We surveyed 613 people face-to-face, and spoke with 23 people in more depth, via 20 interviews and three case studies.

Quantitative sample:



Gender

-  49% women (303)
-  51% men (310)




Age

-  35% 18-30 years old (214)
-  45% 31-50 years old (276)
-  20% 51+ years old (123)






Displacement since 7 October

-  81% displaced (494)
-  19% non-displaced (119)







Current location

-  52% Deir al Balah (319)
-  46% Rafah (282)
-  2% Khan Yunis (12)

Origin of the displaced

-  29% Gaza city (181)
-  24% North Gaza (147)
-  20% Deir al Balah (120)
-  14% Khan Yunis (84)
-  13% Rafah (81)

Type of current residence

-  34% shelter (208)
-  22% informal newly-erected camp (135)
-  19% original residence (118)
-  18% with family (112)
-  4% other (21) ⁹
-  3% rented residence (19)

⁹ Including residing near or the premises of hospitals and churches.

Amid relentless bombardment, coping mechanisms are dwindling

"I am afraid to leave the house, and I am afraid of the future and what our fate will be, and I am afraid that I will be injured and have an amputation, and I am afraid that I will die, and I am afraid that I will lose one of my daughters ... I am so afraid that I will lose one of my daughters."

The overwhelming majority of Gazans do not feel safe in their current locations, whether they have moved to a reportedly safer area or not. Only 9% of people say they feel safe where they are right now, 24% feeling safe "sometimes" and the remainder not feeling safe at all, at any time. Displaced people feel the least safe, especially those living in tents. It is no surprise that almost 100% of people cite safety for their families as a primary priority, most telling us they want safety for their families before safety for themselves. Almost everyone is living in constant fear, and the fear of losing a loved one is all-consuming, mentioned repeatedly in interviews as people's primary worry. In qualitative discussions, people frequently mention death, injury, destruction, bombs, and feelings of being targeted. "I am afraid that I will die and no one will know about me and no one will report me," one woman said. Parents must try to alleviate the fears of their children, while dealing with their own. One mother told us, "My young son is suffering from severe fear, which is affecting his speech."

People are trying to survive and grieve at the same time. A 38-year-old man taking shelter in Rafah said: "I lost everything I owned inside my house, which was targeted. We lost 45 people. They are still under the rubble."

Figure 1:

Do you and your family feel safe where you are currently staying?



Most (97%) say they have nowhere to go or do not know where they could go, a situation echoed by the head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).¹⁰ Aid agencies have warned for weeks that there is nowhere safe left in Gaza, and closed borders and lack of paperwork render fleeing to neighbouring countries impossible for the overwhelming majority. Prior to the current hostilities, many, including humanitarian agencies, had dubbed Gaza "the world's largest open-air prison",¹¹ and a number of UN agencies had warned in 2018 that Gaza might soon be unliveable.¹²

The need for immediate safety is complicated by prevalent fears of long-term displacement and a permanent loss of people's homeland. There is widespread resistance to succumbing to a modern form of the 1948 Nakba and 1967 displacement, and many in Gaza will avoid becoming a refugee again under any circumstances. The vast majority of the Gazan population are refugees or descendants of refugees. Even if borders were open, the choice to leave would be an incredibly difficult one. "My biggest fear is forced displacement, and not being able to rebuild all the destruction," said one man who had been displaced to Rafah. Another pleaded, "Stop the war and let me return to my home, even if it is destroyed."

Figure 2:

If you need to leave your current location, do you have a place to go?



“

I am afraid to leave the house, and I am afraid of the future and what our fate will be, and I am afraid that I will be injured and have an amputation, and I am afraid that I will die, and I am afraid that I will lose one of my daughters ... I am so afraid that I will lose one of my daughters.

“

I am afraid that I will die and no one will know about me and no one will report me.

“

My young son is suffering from severe fear, which is affecting his speech.

“

I lost everything I owned inside my house, which was targeted. We lost 45 people. They are still under the rubble.

“

Stop the massacre of civilians.

“

My house was bombed and members of my family were killed.

“

My biggest fear is forced displacement, and not being able to rebuild all the destruction.

¹⁰ UN News. 14 December 2023. "Desperate, hungry, terrified': Gazans stopping aid trucks in search of food."

¹¹ Norwegian Refugee Council. April 2018. "Gaza: The world's largest open-air prison."

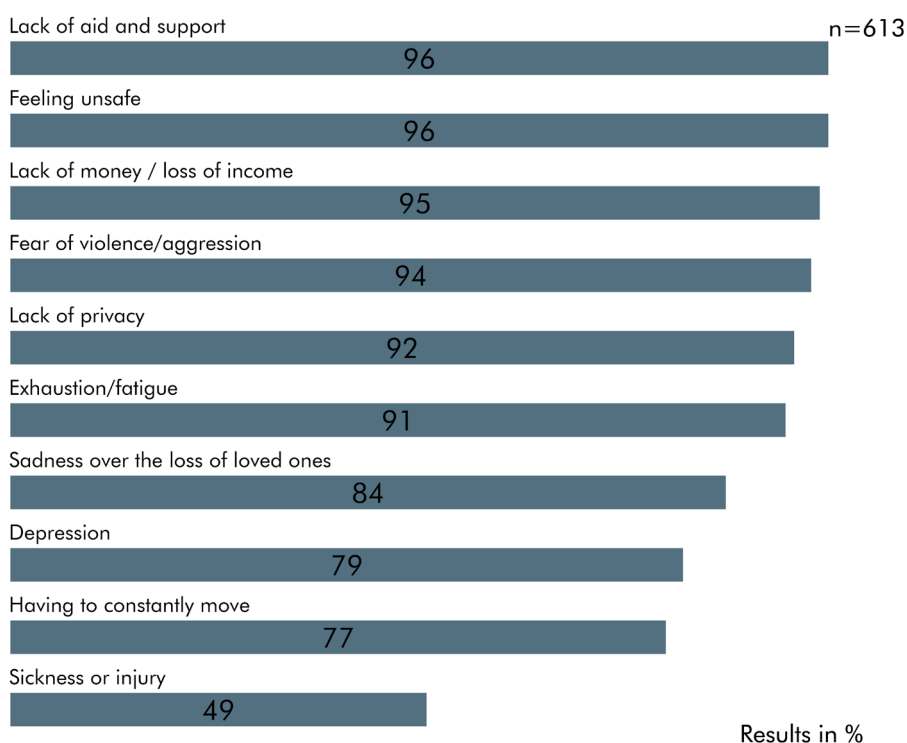
¹² UN Special Rapporteur for the Situation of Human Rights in the OPT. October 2018. "Gaza 'Unliveable', UN Tells Third Committee - Press Release".

People in the Gaza Strip have honed their coping mechanisms over decades, enduring occupation and years of tight movement restrictions, including an Israeli-imposed land, sea and air blockade after the elections that saw a takeover of Gaza by Hamas. The blockade essentially isolated more than two million Palestinians from not only the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) but the world. Restrictions imposed by the Egyptian authorities at Rafah exacerbate the situation. Rapid population growth and development challenges have resulted in further deterioration of living standards.¹³ Systematic impoverishment of the region has been described as the “de-development” of Gaza, leaving the area with few options for self-generated and sustainable development and almost totally dependent on humanitarian aid.¹⁴

But the current hostilities have led to societal collapse, and both individual and community coping mechanisms have eroded quickly. People say their ability to cope has been undermined primarily by critical food and water shortages, the relentless fear of violence, an inability to find safety, and a lack of financial capital, with most people unable to continue earning an income. These external factors have been compounded by exhaustion, lack of privacy, sadness and depression, which most people say are almost as detrimental to their ability to withstand the current situation.

Figure 3:

What has most hindered your ability to take care of yourself and others?



Another factor posing additional challenges to coping is the constant pollution, both from the bombardment and from having to cook by burning firewood in highly populated shelters and residences due to a lack of gas, which is making people sick. Eighty-nine percent of people cite escaping the pollution as one of their most immediate priorities. In qualitative discussions, people frequently mentioned the problems with firewood and the desperate need for fuel.

To get through the days, the overwhelming majority of those surveyed are relying on their faith, citing religion as their primary remaining coping mechanism. Many others say they cope by looking after children and contacting family members, further highlighting the importance of family both in crisis and in Palestinian culture. Family solidarity and community networks have been long recognised as providing crucial support in difficult circumstances.¹⁵

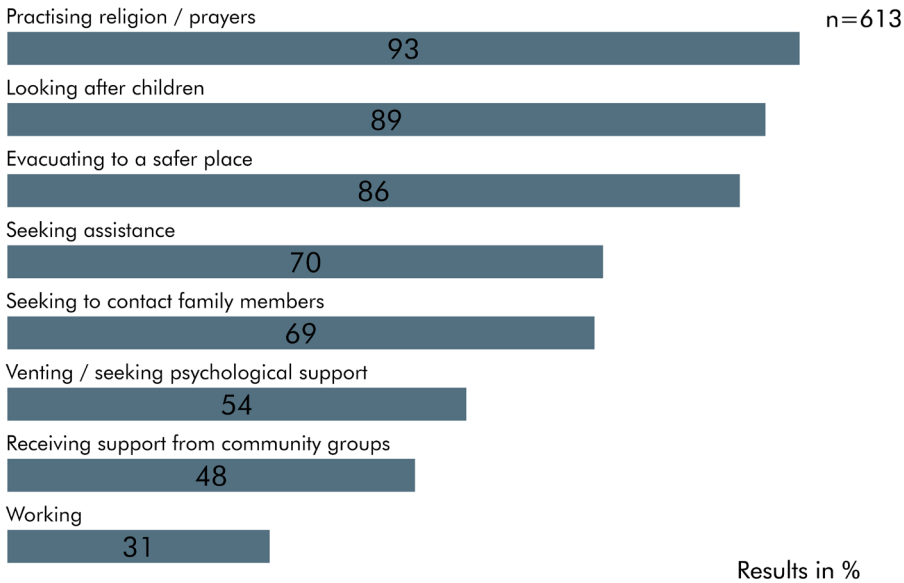
¹³ UN OCHA. 18 January 2024. [Occupied Palestinian Territory updates page](#).

¹⁴ Sara Roy. Spring 2016. “[The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development](#).”

¹⁵ Cultural Atlas. 2020. “[Palestinian Culture. Core Concepts](#).”

Figure 4:

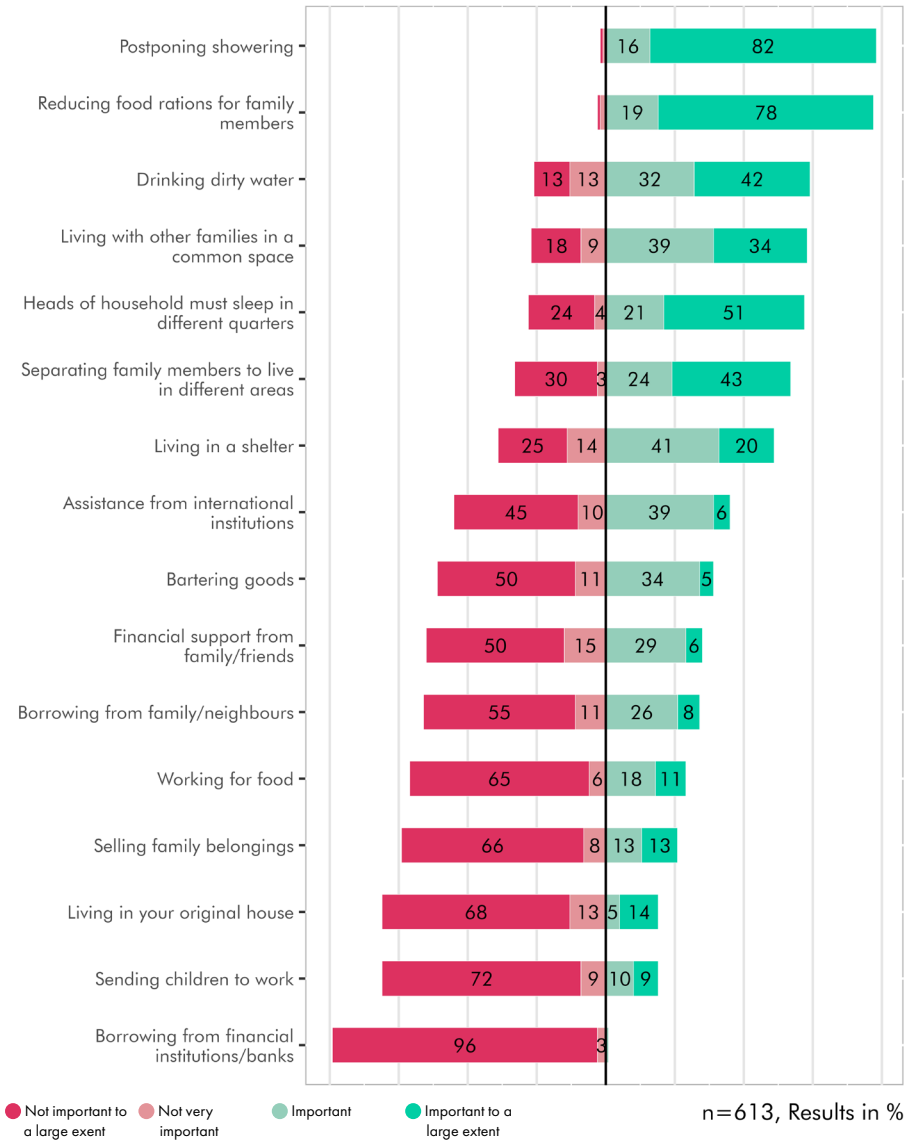
Since the escalation in hostilities on 7 October, how have you been taking care of yourself/your family?



When many speak of coping methods they refer more to survival, through evacuating and seeking assistance. Around 30% of people surveyed still say they cope through their ability to work and provide for their families, although this figure declined rapidly as this report was being written and is predicted to diminish further. To stretch meagre resources, most people are rationing whatever food they can get to share among their families or households (97%), drinking dirty water (74%), and postponing showers for long periods (98%). They also say they are staying with other people in common spaces (73%), sleeping in different locations (72%), and separating families to increase the odds of survival (67%). People are seeking ways to bolster family finances, either by borrowing money from relatives and friends (34%), selling family belongings (26%), or sending their children to work (19%). Selling belongings is more common to people with bigger family sizes.

Figure 5:

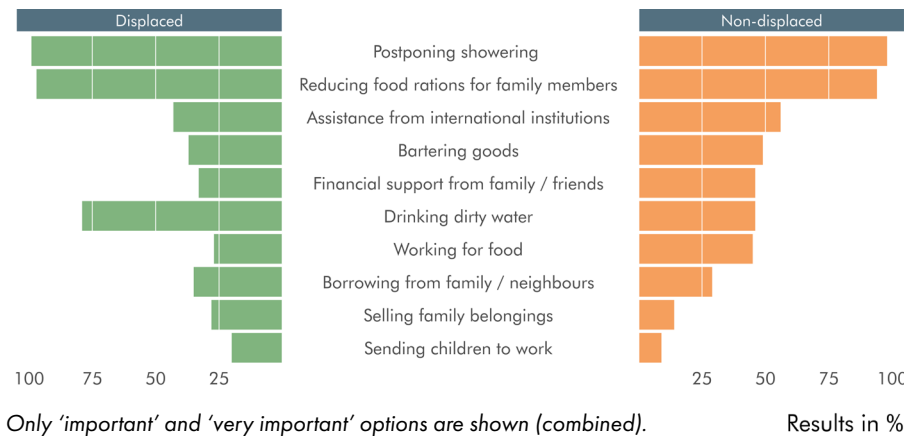
What coping mechanism has your household used?



Displaced people are more likely to cope by selling whatever remaining belongings they have, drinking dirty water and sending children to engage in small income-generating activities (e.g., selling sweets in the shelter; helping other families with carrying items), and seem slightly less able to access aid than those who have been able to remain in their homes.

Figure 6:

Breakdown by displacement status



Many people have already been displaced multiple times, and fear further displacement, particularly if it is forced. The constant attacks and the scale of the destruction make it hard for people to see displacement as temporary. People told us they feared deportation, or an inability to rebuild on the required scale.

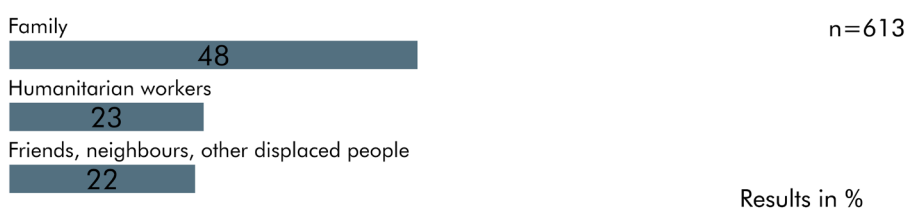
When asked what they wanted the international community to do, most simply answered: "Stop the war."

Community and family support is critical

Around half of the people who have been able to access support have received the most help from their own family networks. Everyone surveyed has accessed some sort of support from within their communities or networks of other people in Gaza affected by the crisis. People listed many examples, such as "I received shelter from a friend"; "I received financial support from a relative" and "the neighbours gave us blankets and mattresses." One woman in Rafah told us: "When we were displaced from Gaza to Shifa and then to Nuseirat, there was a friend who welcomed us to his house. After the evacuation of Nuseirat, we moved to Rafah, where a person we did not know let us stay on his land. We put tents there and stayed there until we got another place."

Figure 7:

Who has offered you the most support since the scale-up of hostilities?



Almost half of those surveyed say they have helped other families with their daily problem-solving and tasks, which can be anything from finding food and firewood to organising meals, tidying up, putting up shelters or seeking news of other community members. Around one in four has helped others with digging to rescue people from the rubble; taking care of children; providing food, water or shelter, and assisting with burials of people killed in the attacks. People described cooking food for others in displacement centres, sharing bread and water, handing out mattresses and blankets, and allowing others to charge their phones.

"I helped some of my displaced friends like me set up and build tents and took them to register for aid in schools. We also built a shared clay oven and we sometimes share in making food," said a young man in Rafah who had been displaced from Khan Yunis. Many also mentioned collecting firewood, cleaning, and providing distractions and psychological support for other people's children.

"I provided food and financial assistance, helping people with the car, providing flour, supporting the sick, and providing nappies for the children," said one woman. A man who had fled to Rafah told us, "I did not receive any aid before [7 October]. I was a university doctor and could do without aid. Here we have been cooking and distributing food to people around us as a collective, with our personal efforts and partly with donations from the surrounding community."

“

Stop the war.

“

Before I was displaced, I used to provide water at my personal expense to everyone around me.

“

I received shelter from a friend.

“

I received financial support from a relative.

“

The neighbours gave us blankets and mattresses.

“

When we were displaced from Gaza to Shifa and then to Nuseirat, there was a friend who welcomed us to his house. After the evacuation of Nuseirat, we moved to Rafah, where a person we did not know let us stay on his land. We put tents there and stayed there until we got another place.

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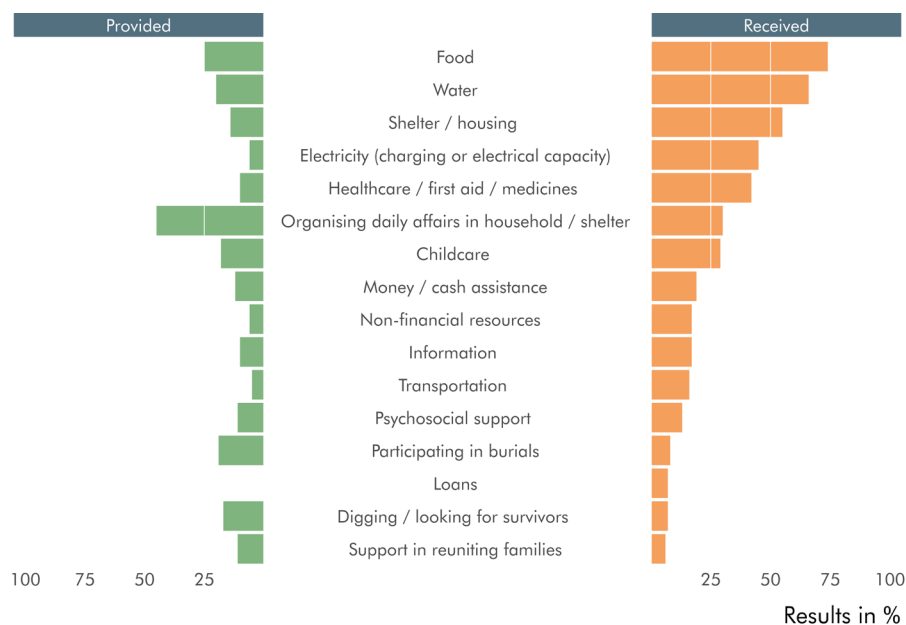
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I did not receive any aid before [7 October]. I was a university doctor and could do without aid. Here we have been cooking and distributing food to people around us as a collective, with our personal efforts and partly with donations from the surrounding community.

Around 75% of those surveyed have received food, 66% water and 54% shelter from others in the community, and many have accessed health support (like first aid or medicines). Just under half have been helped by others to access electricity, a critical commodity amid constant power outages, and almost one in every three people has been able to access childcare support. Around one in six received help with transportation or money.

Figure 8:

Have you provided and/or received assistance from people or organisations in your community during the last two months?



“

The type of support that was provided to me was from private sources, such as donors from abroad.

How people in Gaza are helping each other

To meet desperate need, young people run aid collectives in Rafah

On 15 October 2023, one young man saw need escalating in the Rafah area and knew he could do something to help. Prior to the most recent bombardment he was working in sports, and was accustomed to teamwork and coordination.

“I turned to volunteer work from the beginning of the war,” he told us, and soon had built a mutual aid movement that has to date reached around 700 people in his wider community. “For example, today we distributed money to displaced families, and mineral water, and then we made rice and milk pudding and distributed it to children.”

“We provide parcels according to people’s needs. The volunteers meet every day and divide into groups to distribute parcels. Most of them work for free, but when we can we give them 50 shekels (around 12 euros) or food parcels to take home.”

Global media has focused largely on the amount of international aid getting into Gaza, but redistribution of existing community resources has been absolutely critical to people’s survival and wellbeing as the situation has worsened.

“

Today we distributed money to displaced families, and mineral water, and then we made rice and milk pudding and distributed it to children.

“

We provide parcels according to people’s needs. The volunteers meet every day and divide into groups to distribute parcels. Most of them work for free, but when we can we give them 50 shekels (around 12 euros) or food parcels to take home.

“The aid that reaches Gaza from organisations is not enough. I noticed that social affairs warehouses are full of food supplies, but maybe they are sent to distant areas, not to the people who are staying in tents.”

The young man believes that locally led aid is necessary, “because it is implemented among people. The international initiatives are far from the people, and some of the products provided by international organisations such as canned food or toast bread are not what are really needed, and part of that aid that enters Gaza is sold because some of the people don't need it.”

Getting financial support for community initiatives has been nearly impossible. “International financial transfers are not getting into the Gaza Strip, even cryptocurrencies are blocked. Many people from abroad contact me to help but because aid to the Gaza Strip has been stopped it is difficult to obtain. Gaza’s merchants are in need, we had bread-making projects because there was flour already in Gaza, and people were in dire need of food.”

The initiative’s biggest obstacle is cost, especially for transportation, which is hard to access and comes with exorbitant prices due to the fuel shortages. “We need a [fuel] tank per week that costs 450 shekels (around EUR 110). If we want to provide a bag of flour, it now costs 180 shekels (around EUR 44) but is normally only 40 shekels (around EUR 10).”

“Here in Gaza, the ‘beneficiaries’ volunteer to serve others ... there is social solidarity between people.”

Voluntary work and local provision of assistance helps mobilise and encourage further community support, albeit limited. According to one of the young volunteers, “Our group started its work to help the needy; very quickly we discovered that our work was only a catalyst for efforts by the displaced people, who came together to help us in securing what was needed for cooking. For example, as we had no salt, women and children went to their spaces in the shelter and brought little bits. Together we secured more than a kilogram of salt. We used some of it in another shelter. The displaced are helping in the cooking, organising the queue, serving, cleaning and they even help us charge our phones while we do the work.”

“

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Here in Gaza, the ‘beneficiaries’ volunteer to serve others ... there is social solidarity between people.

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The displaced are helping in the cooking, organising the queue, serving, cleaning and they even help us charge our phones while we do the work.

“

International financial transfers are not getting into the Gaza Strip, even cryptocurrencies are blocked.

Call for more international support to meet basic needs

Water, food and safety remain people’s primary priorities, with an overwhelming majority (89%) calling for the immediate provision of more basic aid.

A man staying in a shelter in Deir al Balah, displaced from Gaza city, told us: "There are thousands of displaced people who need to be taken care of in homes and in shelter centres."

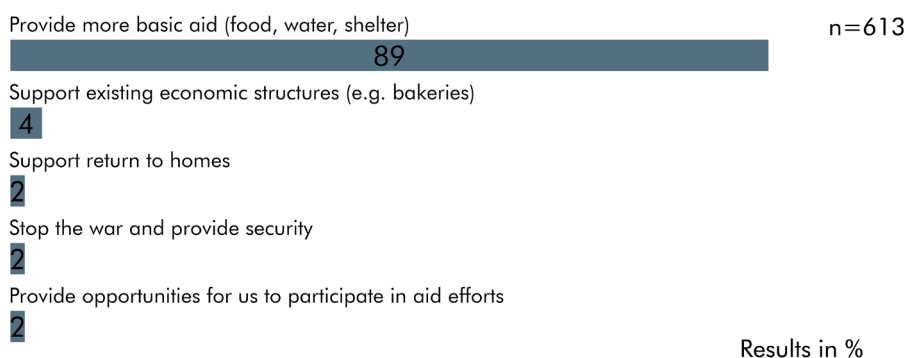
The need for water is critical, with most people speaking of drinking dirty water and going without showers for lengthy periods. These experiences bring to life the emphatic warnings from aid agencies such as UNICEF and WHO that without adequate water and sanitation, health and hygiene crises may cause a drastic uptick in diseases and deaths, the crumbling health system in Gaza already unable to keep up with casualties from the bombardment. WHO has called the situation in Gaza a "recipe for epidemics".¹⁶ One woman who had fled Gaza city and is sheltering in a tent in Rafah told us: "The areas must be cleaned of war remnants and corpses, and attention should be paid to cleanliness, reconstruction, provision of safe water, and disposal of sewage."

People desperately need food, with access getting harder by the day and people sharing whatever they have with those around them, rationing the little food they can find among household members. People have been resorting to work for payment in food, or bartering other items. The World Food Programme states that nine out of 10 people in Gaza are not eating enough.¹⁷ According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) global partnership, Gaza faces imminent famine, with the proportion of households affected by acute food insecurity the largest ever recorded globally.¹⁸ The Famine Review Committee (FRC) in Gaza warns that food and water needs are inseparable and need to be considered together. The committee emphasises that to eliminate the famine risk, it is imperative to halt the deterioration of health, nutrition, food security, and mortality through the restoration of health and water and sanitation.¹⁹ Several parents fear an inability to access baby formula as the situation gets worse. One noted that there needed to be more support for children who had allergies to wheat, given the focus on flour and bread in distributions. In qualitative discussions, people asked consistently for healthier food than canned items and bread.

Many people are having trouble accessing the medicines they need, and mentioned medicines as a specific ask to the international community. The crisis is set to have the worst ever number of attacks on healthcare facilities and staff in a conflict,²⁰ and functioning hospitals are operating with critical triage systems, overwhelmed by daily trauma cases and unable to handle non-urgent cases.

Figure 9:

How, in your opinion, could external aid organisations better support your community to cope with this crisis?



“

There are thousands of displaced people who need to be taken care of in homes and in shelter centres.

“

The areas must be cleaned of war remnants and corpses, and attention should be paid to cleanliness, reconstruction, provision of safe water, and disposal of sewage.

“

Some of my family members have cancer and chronic diseases and they are in dire need of treatment, which is not available.

“

We need medicine for children, which the UN does not have.

¹⁶ UN News. 20 November 2023. "War and health crisis in Gaza a 'recipe for epidemics' warns WHO."

¹⁷ UN News. 14 December 2023. "Desperate, hungry, terrified: Gazans stopping aid trucks in search of food."

¹⁸ OCHA. 27 December 2023. "Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #78."

¹⁹ IPC Famine Review Committee. 21 December 2023. "Gaza Strip: Famine Review of the IPC Analysis."

²⁰ The Guardian. 29 December 2023. "It's not just bullets and bombs. I have never seen health organisations as worried as they are about disease in Gaza."

Women and children need specific support

"I want support for women's needs, which are not present at all, and infant formula."

During interviews, many women noted the dire lack of supplies specifically for the dignity and health of women, such as feminine hygiene and period products. Many also called for nappies for babies, soap and the provision of bathrooms.

"I did not receive any help," a 19-year-old woman told us in Rafah, where she had fled to seek safety with her children. "My husband was killed, and there is no one to help me except those around me. We need basic things for children, milk, nappies, clothes, blankets and money." Another woman described not being able to take care of her children as her greatest fear.

UNICEF estimates that there are around 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza, with 180 giving birth every day. "My wife is pregnant and does not even have a mattress," a man in Rafah told us. "It is important to get her some vitamins and healthy food."

One woman shared: "I am afraid of everything, including the bombing and when I am alone. I have not received help from anyone and I do not know why. I need a lot of psychological support for myself and my children. I am abused by my husband a lot, but I do not know where to go or who to talk to. My torment is due to the lack of money, the lack of aid, and the lack of support. My family is small and I depend on my husband for everything. I only get the information that my husband gives me."

Almost everyone surveyed called for support to deal with the harsh winter, with many people commenting on this in addition to the survey questions. Most are living without adequate power or supplies, enduring rain, cold winds and temperatures below 10°C, and many have fled without appropriate winter clothing. Blankets were a common ask. With fuel shortages reaching crisis mode, firewood – although people would prefer not to be using it at all – has become a critical commodity that is also getting harder and harder to obtain.

"We need shelter to protect us from the extreme cold."

In response to open-ended questions, concerns for vulnerable groups arose, with people calling for specific support for people with disabilities and chronic illnesses, women and older persons. "Differentiate between assistance provided to children and older people," said a displaced man from North Gaza staying in a shelter in Deir al Balah.

“

I want support for women's needs, which are not present at all, and infant formula.

“

I did not receive any help.

“

My husband was killed, and there is no one to help me except those around me. We need basic things for children, milk, nappies, clothes, blankets and money.

“

My wife is pregnant and does not even have a mattress. It is important to get her some vitamins and healthy food.

“

I am afraid of everything, including the bombing and when I am alone. I have not received help from anyone and I do not know why. I need a lot of psychological support for myself and my children. I am abused by my husband a lot, but I do not know where to go or who to talk to. My torment is due to the lack of money, the lack of aid, and the lack of support. My family is small and I depend on my husband for everything. I only get the information that my husband gives me.

“

We need shelter to protect us from the extreme cold.

“

Differentiate between assistance provided to children and older people.

In even the harshest of conditions, priorities go well beyond mere survival

More than four of five people surveyed say it is of priority importance to them to safeguard their feelings of self-esteem, feeling worthwhile and the ability to help others, especially to care for older people. People call for psychological support, moral support and comfort.

"The psychological state of people must be taken into account."

Education is a huge priority across the board. "My biggest fear is losing a family member and not completing my education," a 33-year-old man in Al-Zuhur neighbourhood told us. "I registered for university, but the war broke out, and this will mean the loss of my future." In open-ended questions, people consistently mentioned their children, and their fears for their wellbeing and safety. According to UNICEF, there were approximately 625,000 school-age students in the Gaza Strip before the escalation of hostilities, and none of them are attending schools now.²¹

"I fear the most for the safety of my children," one parent told us, a sentiment echoed by many others.

Many people are concerned about their ability to provide for their families and save money, calling for international support to help them work and earn an income, as well as financial aid to tide them over while their earning capacity is restricted.

How people in Gaza are helping each other

With schooling interrupted, young Tuqa has become a teacher for other children

When 12-year-old Tuqa and her family fled their home and moved into a tent in an informal camp for displaced people in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza, she desperately missed going to school. Her beloved teacher had been killed in the bombardment. Her story, sadly, is not unique, and she soon found herself consoling other children about the loss of their schooling and their support networks.

"We miss the school, the teachers, the students and our friends, so much," she told us.

"Instead of sitting around playing, we decided to work together, me and another boy, to help children with their schooling," she said. "We write exams for them, and they complete them."

As well as the exams, which include writing, drawing and dictation exercises, she helps children with basic literacy and "urges them to use their time on useful things," even amid such extreme hardship. Her friend explains: "We keep studying because it's a fact that every student must work hard, in order to have a future."

“

The psychological state of people must be taken into account.

“

My biggest fear is losing a family member and not completing my education.

“

I registered for university, but the war broke out, and this will mean the loss of my future.

“

I fear the most for the safety of my children.

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We miss the school, the teachers, the students and our friends, so much.

“

We keep studying because it's a fact that every student must work hard, in order to have a future.

²¹ The Guardian. 18 December 2023. "[War's toll on education in Gaza casts shadow over children's future.](#)"

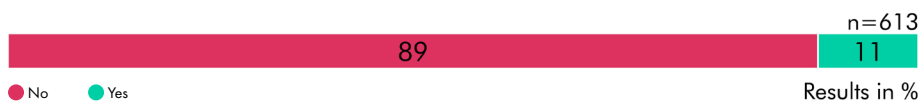
Aid is a drop in the ocean, and most people do not know how to access it

An alarming 89% of people did not know how to access formal humanitarian assistance at the time of being surveyed. This does not mean they had not received any aid – many had, with 23% of those surveyed citing humanitarian actors as their primary source of support. But many others had not received anything at all. When asked how aid had changed for them since 7 October 2023, the most common answer was “it was cut off,” with many others saying, “the situation got worse”. Before the current escalation, up to 80% of people were receiving aid in Gaza.²²

Some who had not needed aid in the past found themselves desperate for it, especially women who had lost husbands and were now taking care of children alone. People consistently called for more aid, to reach more people.

Figure 10:

Do you know how to access humanitarian assistance currently?



One man in Khan Yunis told us: “Before the war, I used to receive aid for refugees from UNRWA, who provided me with some basic needs such as flour, sugar, oil, vegetables, and milk, but currently I do not receive anything from them. So I began to borrow flour or buy it, but the price of a bag of flour reached 500 shekels or more (about EUR 123), and I am unable to afford that.”

Those who had received aid since 7 October 2023, mostly got food (some mentioned flour, and many said canned goods), healthcare, water or support with childcare (for example, through organised child-friendly activities in UNRWA shelters). Some people mentioned food coupons. Around one in four of those who had received aid had received hygiene items, and one in five had been given some support with electricity or charging. Several others mentioned receiving detergent, or temporary shelter supplies like tents.

In qualitative interviews, there were consistent calls for flour and for food other than canned food, which many – especially parents – worry is unhealthy when eaten for prolonged periods. They ask for vegetables, eggs and olive oil. Some people described sharing the aid they received. A woman in Rafah told us, “I obtained financial aid from the United Nations, and I gave some of it to other deserving people like us, and some of my family.”

“

I did not receive any help from anyone; I only borrowed from friends to live and support my livelihood.

“

Due to the circumstances of war and displacement, aid has changed for the worse, especially since there is no food or water.

“

Increase support for food, water, cooking gas, flour, and children's clothing.

“

Before the war, I used to receive aid for refugees from UNRWA, who provided me with some basic needs such as flour, sugar, oil, vegetables, and milk, but currently I do not receive anything from them. So I began to borrow flour or buy it, but the price of a bag of flour reached 500 shekels or more (about EUR 123), and I am unable to afford that.

“

My family received a food parcel from the World Food Programme, with flour and pasta. We were in dire need of flour, especially since it was expensive and missing from the market at that time.

“

I received a food basket from the Red Crescent, which was sufficient and met my needs for about 10 days.

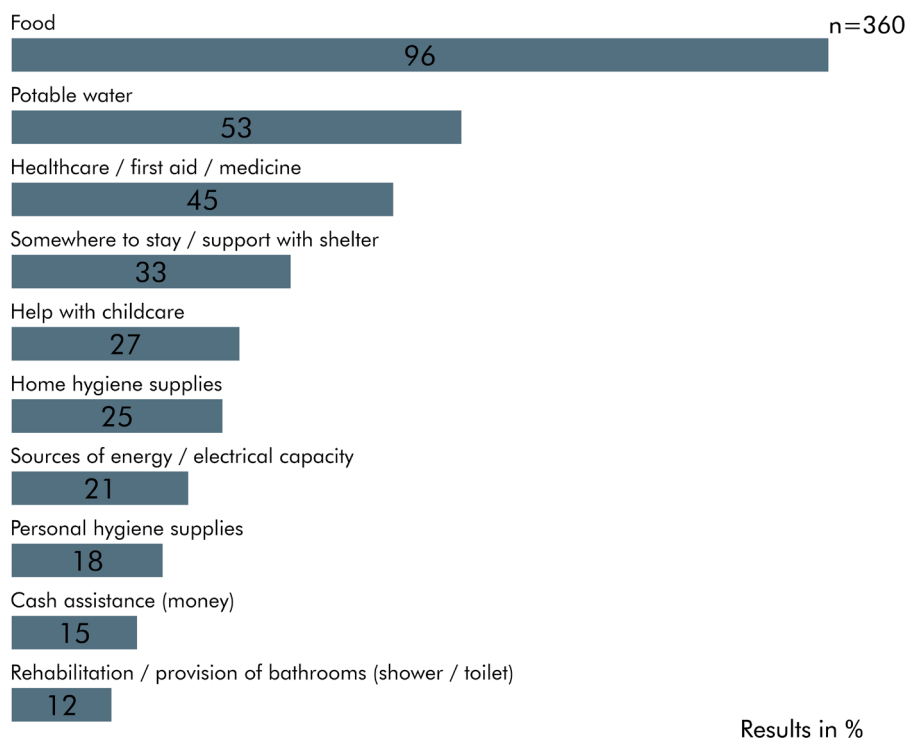
“

I obtained financial aid from the United Nations, and I gave some of it to other deserving people like us, and some of my family.

²² UNCTAD. 25 October 2023. “[Prior to current crisis, decades-long blockade hollowed Gaza's economy, leaving 80% of population dependent on international aid.](#)”

Figure 11:

What type of support have you received?



Our data shows that aid is not sufficient to stop people having to resort to drinking dirty water. But those who had received aid were slightly less likely to need to resort to selling belongings or sending children to work. Almost half of those who received aid say the aid they received was timely, and 31% of people say it helped meet their basic needs at the time, but the majority say that it was not enough.

Less than 35% say they felt respected by aid providers, with fewer still saying the process helped preserve their dignity. "There is no justice in the distribution of aid," said a man displaced from North Gaza who was staying in a shelter in Deir al Balah. People living in tents and shelters are less satisfied with aid than those in homes, which is likely due to their heightened need.

More than 80% of people believe the aid process to be unfair, not reaching those who really need it. People in qualitative interviews called consistently for more fairness, justice and equality, citing instances of favouritism and noting a need for aid to go beyond distribution centres. "Help should be proportional to the size of the family," said one displaced woman in Deir al Balah.

Some called for more international oversight and felt that the installation of independent distribution monitors might help. One man asked that agencies "choose experienced and honest people" to manage distributions, and that aid not be distributed via the government, but directly to the people.



There is no justice in the distribution of aid.



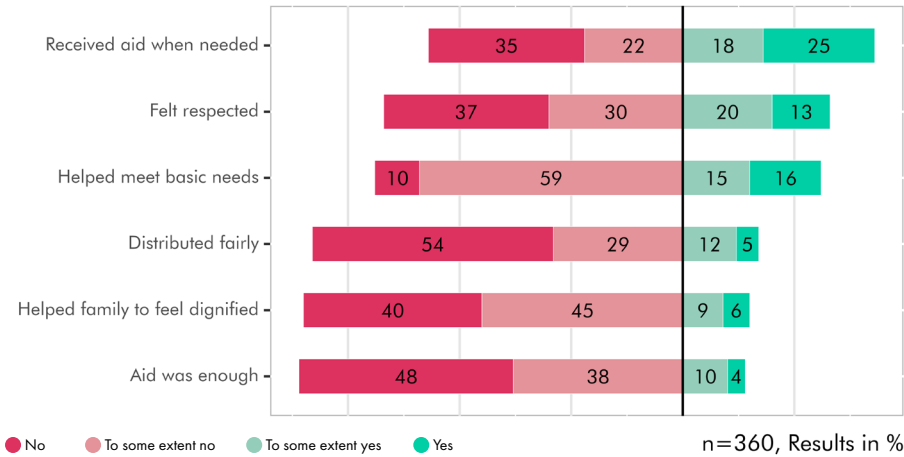
Help should be proportional to the size of the family.



There are people at home who do not receive anything. I hope that aid will reach them.

Figure 12:

How was your experience of receiving aid?



People turn to the radio, friends and family for critical news, but trust is low

Both access to and trust in information is limited. Many people echo the sentiment of one man, staying in a shelter in Gaza city, who told us: “There is no reliable information.” A man sheltering in Rafah said, “All information is unreliable, and the most unreliable is digital media.” It is clear that people are relying on information sources that they do not fully trust, contributing to the constant fear and anxiety. “I do not trust any information ... nothing,” said a displaced woman staying in Rafah.

People’s main source of information is word-of-mouth information from friends and family, closely followed by radio. They are referring to a radio channel launched specifically for the Gaza population by Al Jazeera. All local radio stations have been destroyed in the bombardment. “My information comes from the radio and neighbours but sometimes it is not reliable,” said a woman in Gaza city. Many people are accessing information from people in their immediate vicinity, often citing neighbours or people currently “next door”. “I get information from the neighbours in the tent opposite my tent,” said a woman who had been displaced from North Gaza. Others rely on people with whom they have close relationships, many citing friends as their key information sources even if they aren’t fully convinced the information is reliable. Social media remains a relatively popular source of news and information, 40% calling it a key source of news. Consistent power outages mean many people only feel informed when they have the capacity to charge their devices.

“I get my information from social networking sites, such as news groups via WhatsApp and Instagram activists and journalists,” said a man in Al-Zuhur, “but if the connection is cut off, we only find radio.”

“Unfortunately, I am not able to access reliable information unless electricity is available,” said a man staying in a house in Gaza city.

In qualitative interviews, people mentioned Facebook, as well as news channels on Telegram and WhatsApp, as their key sources of news. But they do not necessarily feel it is always trustworthy.

One woman told us: “I go to Rafah, Khan Yunis, and Deir al Balah. I search for things, inquire, verify information, and visit my friends. I verify all the information from its source myself, as I do not trust institutions or people, and I have reached the point where if I do not see something myself, I do not believe anyone.”

Very few people see humanitarian organisations as a trusted information source.



I do not trust any information ... nothing.



I get information from the neighbours in the tent opposite my tent.



My confidence in the news is non-existent.



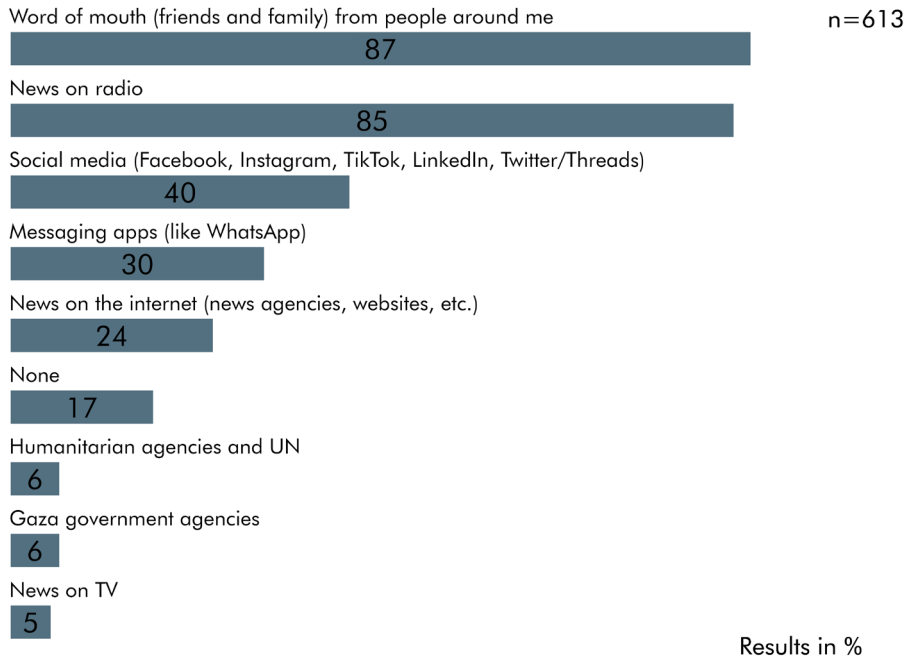
Unfortunately, I am not able to access reliable information unless electricity is available.



I go to Rafah, Khan Yunis, and Deir al Balah. I search for things, inquire, verify information, and visit my friends. I verify all the information from its source myself, as I do not trust institutions or people, and I have reached the point where if I do not see something myself, I do not believe anyone.

Figure 13:

How are you accessing information and news (about the war, the situation on the ground and available assistance)?



People in Gaza just want the violence to stop

There is a critical need for a drastic upscale in humanitarian assistance, with people repeatedly calling for food, water and shelter. But no amount of aid will stop the violence or the constant, paralysing fear. People surveyed want to make it clear that every day, they are surrounded by death and destruction, and living in constant fear for their families' safety and survival.

The people of Gaza call on the international community to – in their words – stop the war.

Methodology

Survey design

The survey questions were developed by AWRAD and Ground Truth Solutions, reviewed by AWRAD's field team and tested through a small number of cognitive interviews. The themes were based on an understanding of the situation on the ground, and previous survey work by both organisations. The survey combined Likert scale, multiple choice and binary questions, as well as some additional open-ended questions that were added to make sure people felt they had the opportunity to share information that may have been missing from the closed questions.

Sample design

The sample aims to cover the general population currently located in Rafah and Deir al Balah governorates and was designed as a quota sample. The sample used quotas for gender, age group, population size per governorate before 7 October 2023, and site type, based on 2023 population estimates by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, as well as displacement data based on UNRWA information. Data on site types was based on the shifting places of residence for most people who continue to move from one place to another (including formal shelters, informal newly erected tent communities, host families, etc.). The quotas were defined proportionally to these population parameters.

To prioritise the safety of our team, a probability sampling approach, for example using random walk or GIS-based methods, could not be strictly adhered to due to ongoing attacks and security concerns. Instead sampling locations were selected closer to interviewers' current locations, to reduce travel times and minimise associated risks.

Weighting

The sample was designed as a self-weighting sample, to reflect the different sizes of people's origin governorate (before 7 October), gender, age group as well as location types. To accommodate for minor deviations from the planned sample due to constant movement and shifts in population types, we raked to marginal totals by age group, displacement status, origin governorate and gender. The raking step ensured that the survey respondents, when weighted, represented their proper proportions in the population with respect to age group, displacement status, origin governorate and gender.

Coverage

Due to the current situation, the survey could not be conducted in Khan Yunis, Gaza City, and North Gaza. A large portion of the population of the latter two is currently displaced in Khan Yunis (which we could not access due to ongoing attacks), and the two governorates in which data could be collected, Rafah and Deir al Balah. UNRWA currently estimates the number of displaced populations are in the magnitude of 85% of the total population of Gaza. While we could not access these three territories, our sample design still includes people from all five governorates in terms of living locations before 7 October. Given the lack of current population data in each of the governorates due to ongoing displacement, no percentages on coverage rates can be provided.

Precision of estimates

Given the current situation in Gaza, we could not fully adhere to a probability sampling approach, prerequisite for calculating margins of error. However, we still provide calculations of margins of error to give an indication of the precision of estimates, had the sample been based on a probability sample. To calculate margins of error we used the package “survey” in R, specifying the exact survey design as outlined above. Note that the precision varies from question to question, sample size per question (as some of the questions are just follow up questions asked to a subset of the total sample).

For questions that were asked to all respondents (n=613) margins of error range between 0.3 and 4.1 % points (with a mean of 2.2% points) and for questions that were asked to aid recipients (n=360), margins of error range between 0.5 and 5.3% points (with a mean of 3.3% points).

Qualitative interviews and case studies

Additional qualitative interviews were undertaken to better understand people’s experiences of the themes in the survey questions. These were done on an opportunistic basis, when people felt able to sit in relative safety and wanted to elaborate on the research themes. We further identified three people who had taken leading roles in community aid, and asked them to describe their initiatives, in some cases triangulating the information with other people from the community. Quotes that appear in the sidebars came from answers to open-ended questions and qualitative interviews.

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