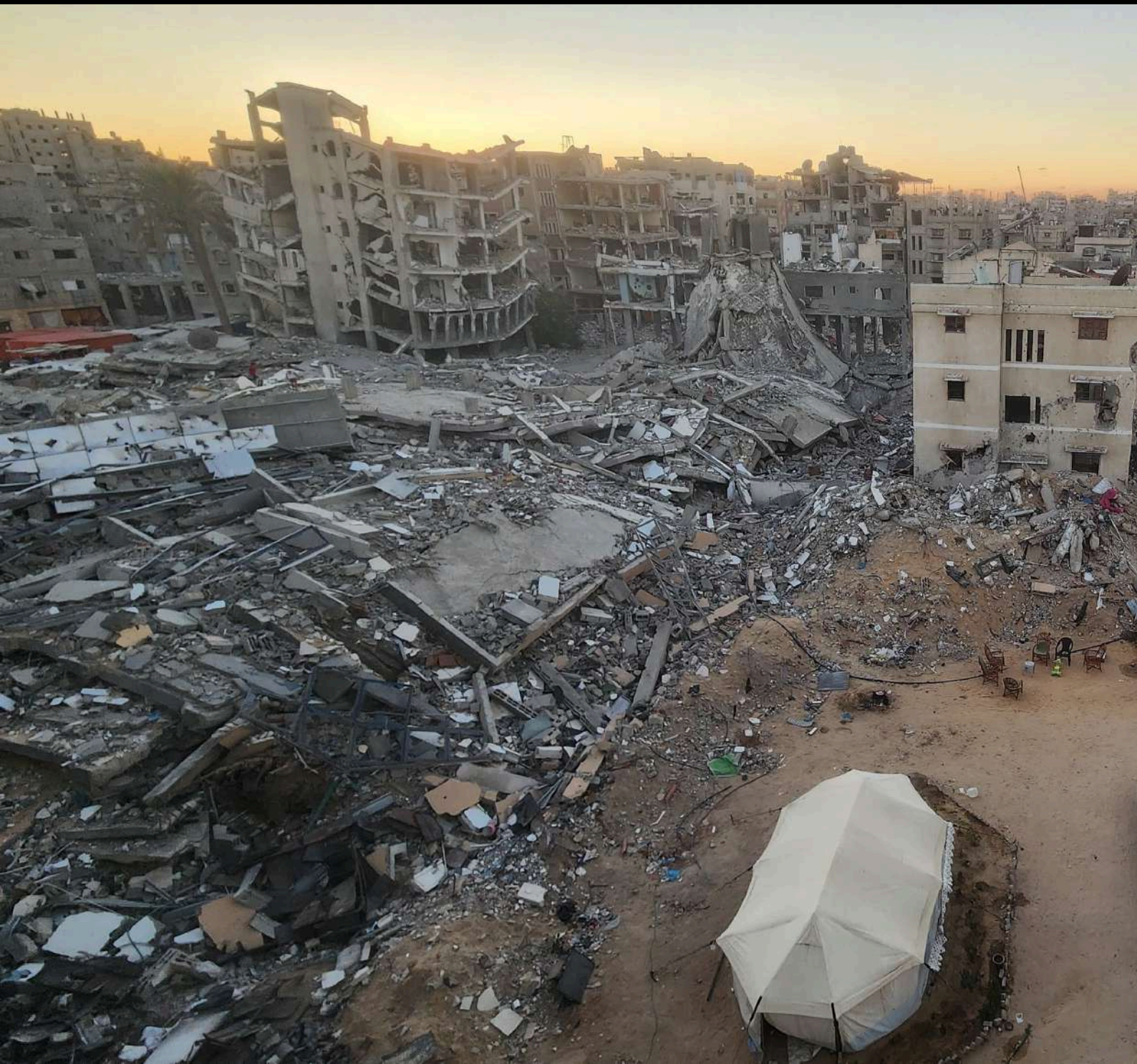


# KILLING LONG AFTER THEY FALL

THE COST OF ACTIVE WARFARE AND EXPLOSIVE  
ORDNANCE ON CIVILIANS IN GAZA



# Acknowledgements

This report was authored by Corinne Linnecar and produced by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). The research was conducted in October 2024, in collaboration with our local partners in Gaza.

In the occupied Palestinian territory DRC implements humanitarian programming in partnership with local partners. DRC and partner programming includes Camp Coordination and Camp Management, Food Security, Humanitarian Mine Action and Protection.

We would like to thank our Palestinian partners for their continued support and insights.

DRC is committed to advocating for a permanent and lasting ceasefire as well as humanitarian assistance to all those in need across the occupied Palestinian territory.

The findings and information in this report are accurate as of the publication date, 21 November 2024.

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Image credits: p17, p27 Mohammed Alkhatib, back cover Agricultural Development Association (PARC).

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# Executive Summary

This report highlights the extensive human toll of ongoing Israeli attacks on populated areas in Gaza, a territory already deeply affected by recurring violence, decades of occupation, blockade, and siege. For over a year, since attacks by Palestinian armed groups on Israel on 7 October 2023, Israel's warfare which in November 2024 was found to be consistent with the characteristics of genocide by a UN Special Committee report<sup>1</sup>, has caused severe harm to civilians, who face constant and extreme threats to their safety, health, and survival. The indiscriminate attacks as well as the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas have led to high civilian casualties, widespread forced displacement, and destruction of essential infrastructure. Additionally, the pervasive contamination by explosive ordnance poses lasting threats to communities, compounding protection risks and impeding recovery efforts.

The report analyses 103 surveys and five key informant interviews (KIIs) collected during October 2024 in Khan Younis and Deir al Balah. The analysis also reveals critical gaps in aid response capabilities, hindered by severe operational restrictions imposed by Israeli forces and the constraints of active conflict. This report underscores the importance of the Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA), which recognises states' responsibilities to safeguard civilians, maintain essential services, support victims in conflict zones and guarantee access.





# Key Findings

## Active warfare:

- 95% of people reported knowing someone killed or injured by active warfare.
- 44% of victims received no medical aid, 86% had no access to physical therapy and 97% had no access to mental health support.
- 90% of people reported damage or destruction of their homes, 70% reported damage or destruction of local schools, 75% reported damage to health facilities and 67% reported destruction of their water source.
- 99% witnessed the use of explosive weapons used within their community.

## Repeated Displacement:

- People were displaced an average of 6 times, up to 19 times, since October 2023.
- Only one out of 103 respondents felt they had adequate means to flee during an attack, 58% lacked access to transportation, and 23% cited transport costs as a barrier to fleeing internally within Gaza.

## Explosive Ordnance:

- Over half reported encountering explosive ordnance at least once, some up to 10 times.
- 70% returned to areas affected by active fighting, heightening risks of encountering EO.
- 58% reported looking under rubble, for essential items, despite knowing the risk of encountering EO.
- 23% knew someone injured or killed by EO, with only 19% of victims receiving emergency aid, only 6% had access to physical therapy, and just 1% had access to mental health services.



# Introduction

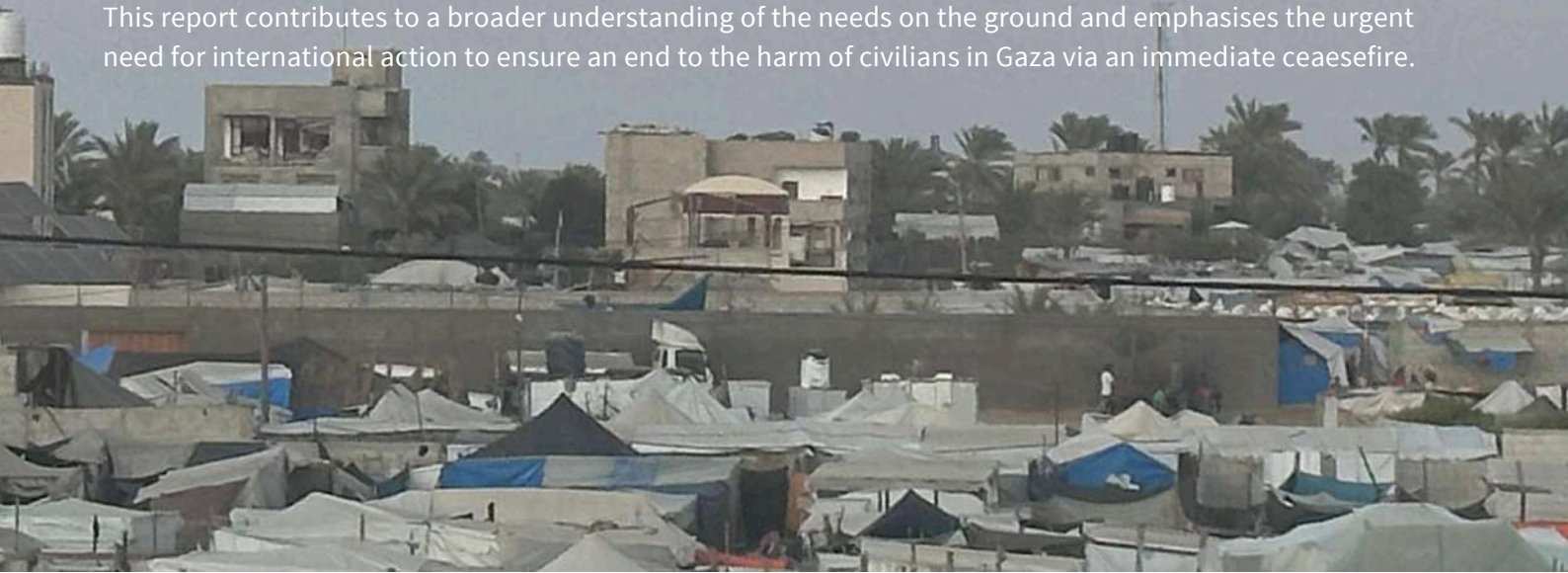
Gaza, a territory scarred by decades of recurring violence, a 57-year illegal occupation, 17 years of blockade and one year of siege, has now for more than a year endured relentless attacks by Israel. On 7 October 2023 Palestinian armed groups launched attacks on Israel that killed approximately 1,200 people. Since then, the unprecedented Israeli military offensive has killed at least 43,665 people and placed the entire population in extreme danger as they face constant threats to life, health, and well-being. The intensifying and indiscriminate attacks have caused tragic and widespread loss of life, extensive forced displacement, and daily struggles to meet basic needs.

In October, an average of just 37 humanitarian trucks per day entered Gaza, increasing to 69 per day during the first week of November. This remains far below the pre-7 October 2023 daily average of 500 trucks, which was already insufficient to meet the needs of the population. Additionally, Israeli authorities have restricted the entry of commercial trucks since 2 October 2024<sup>2</sup>.

The situation in northern Gaza has escalated even more drastically since the start of October 2024, with intense Israeli bombardments, reports from local partners of civilians being shot on the streets, families separated, children and adults detained and a month-long siege of towns and refugee camps as well as mass forced displacement. Reports indicate that famine in northern Gaza is imminent<sup>3</sup> with only a tiny amount of aid entering northern Gaza for more than a month<sup>4</sup>, resulting in 80% of the population going without basic food rations<sup>5</sup>. Israel's seeming implementation of General Gurion's plan, which entails preventing aid from reaching northern Gaza and using starvation as a weapon of war<sup>6</sup>, is happening in parallel to talks of reestablishing illegal settlements in northern Gaza. Whilst this report does not cover the situation in northern Gaza due to the extreme military action and lack of safe access to the area, DRC believes the situation in the north is likely to be even more severe than the findings reflected in this paper.

This briefing focuses on the wide-ranging impact of Israel's use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas, the resulting contamination by explosive ordnance and the critical gaps in the aid response, caused by extreme operational constraints imposed by Israel and as a result of active warfare. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas by Israel has inflicted severe and enduring harm on civilian life, killing thousands, causing lifelong physical impairments and injuries, forced displacement, and destruction of homes and vital infrastructure. These are compounded by the persistent risk of explosive ordnance contaminating homes, streets, and public spaces, leaving Gaza's communities under constant threat with long-lasting implications and protection risks for civilians.

To address these challenges, this report offers concrete recommendations for policymakers, advocating for strategies that mitigate harm to civilians and prioritise the protection and recovery of Palestinians in Gaza. This report contributes to a broader understanding of the needs on the ground and emphasises the urgent need for international action to ensure an end to the harm of civilians in Gaza via an immediate ceasefire.





# Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas has become one of the most pressing threats to civilian lives in modern warfare across the globe. As fighting increasingly takes place in cities, towns, and other populated areas including refugee camps, civilians are suffering the vast majority of violence and destruction. Weapons that are designed for open battlefields are now being used in densely populated environments, where civilians live, work, and seek safety. The consequences are devastating, over 90% of those killed or injured when explosive weapons are used in populated areas are civilians<sup>7</sup>. Many, if not all, weapons are ill-suited for use in populated areas due to their inherently indiscriminate impact in such settings, where military targets are intertwined with civilian lives and civilians pay the toll of the attacks. These weapons often cause widespread destruction and indiscriminate effects with disastrous consequences for civilian communities.

Wide area munitions typically include large-caliber artillery, mortars, air-dropped bombs, and missiles. However, in densely populated environments such as Gaza, where the targets are often civilian structures such as tents in displacement camps, a blatant violation of IHL, even the use of smaller munitions raises serious concerns. Given the wide impact these weapons have on such fragile structures, even smaller munitions can cause extensive destruction, amplifying civilian harm far beyond any intended target, raising the question over whether smaller munitions in these contexts should also be considered wide area impact.

One of the most persistent and long-term dangers of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas comes from explosive ordnance (EO). These remnants of war, which fail to detonate upon impact or may have been abandoned during warfare, pose a long-term threat to civilian populations, often causing injuries and deaths long after the fighting ceases. EO contaminates entire areas, preventing the safe return of displaced families, hindering humanitarian efforts, and obstructing access to essential services like water, electricity, healthcare, and eventually recovery and reconstruction efforts.

In addition to immediate casualties, the use of explosive weapons in towns, refugee camps, cities, and villages leads to long-term suffering, destroying homes, schools, hospitals, and vital infrastructure, whilst entire communities are uprooted and displaced, often struggling to meet the very basic means of survival. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas deeply disrupts social cohesion, as people are traumatised by witnessing death and destruction and forced into repeated displacement, creating persistent uncertainty. Overcrowded and resource-scarce displacement sites lacking privacy intensify tensions within families and among community members. Beyond the physical injuries psychological trauma and direct impacts on civilian infrastructure, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas also causes indirect or 'reverberating' effects such as deaths due to the lack of medical treatment because of the destruction or damage to hospitals. Such effects are disastrous for communities, severely disrupting their ability to recover and rebuild.



## EWIPA Political Declaration

In response to grave concerns over the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas was adopted in November 2022 by 83 states and has since been endorsed by 87<sup>8</sup>. This declaration is a critical step towards limiting the harm caused by explosive weapons in urban settings. It calls on states to develop and implement national policies that reduce the risks to civilians, urging parties to armed violence to refrain from using or restrict the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The declaration also emphasises the need for transparency and accountability, calling for greater public reporting on the use of explosive weapons and their impact on civilians. Palestine, as a UN observing member, has endorsed the declaration. Although Israel has not endorsed the EWIPA declaration, its principles still apply under international humanitarian law, which mandates the protection of civilians and prohibits indiscriminate attacks in populated areas.

A critical aspect of the declaration focuses on explosive ordnance, which continues to threaten civilian lives long after the violence has ended. The declaration highlights the duty of states to prioritise the clearance of EO<sup>9</sup>. States that endorse the declaration are called upon to invest in demining operations and to facilitate international cooperation to ensure the safe removal of these dangerous remnants of war. Without the systematic clearance of EO, the long-term recovery of affected areas remains unattainable, and civilians continue to face daily life-threatening risks and impediments to their recovery and resumption of livelihood activities.

In addition to addressing the physical threat of EO, the declaration underscores the importance of ensuring access to medical services for victims<sup>10</sup> of explosive weapon attacks. Civilians injured by these weapons often face life-changing physical impairments or injuries, psychological trauma, and long-term health needs. States must ensure the provision or facilitation of adequate support to victims of EO in a holistic manner<sup>11</sup>. Widely this is understood to include victims who have access to medical care, rehabilitation, mental health support and socio-economic inclusion to aid in their recovery. Access to adequate healthcare is vital to supporting victims in regaining their dignity, reintegrating into society, and rebuilding their lives in the wake of violence.

The Political Declaration on EWIPA goes beyond addressing the immediate harm caused by explosive weapons. It recognises the long-term humanitarian consequences and outlines clear responsibilities for states to protect civilians, provide essential services, and support victims. By committing to these obligations, states have the duty to limit the devastation caused by explosive weapons and pave the way for the recovery and resilience of communities shattered by violence.



# International Humanitarian Law

International humanitarian law (IHL) violations, particularly indiscriminate attacks, have exacerbated an already unbearable situation in Gaza. These violations disregard the principles of distinction and proportionality<sup>12</sup>, essential pillars of IHL designed to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure from harm. Indiscriminate attacks fail to distinguish between military and civilian targets, leading to widespread destruction and an elevated risk to civilians, who already endure high levels of hardship due to being trapped within an active warzone, protracted displacement, restricted access to basic necessities, and limited movement. In addition, there have been reports of the use of insidious illegal weapons, such as white phosphorus<sup>13</sup>, as well as evidence<sup>14</sup> of the use of wide-area impact munition in densely populated areas. The Fourth Geneva Convention underscores the responsibility of the occupying power, Israel in this instance, to protect civilians, mandating their well-being and security as a core obligation under international law.

The escalation of violations of IHL by Israel has deepened the crisis in Gaza, amplifying the suffering of Gaza's population and eroding the very foundations of vital international law. As Israel continues to act with impunity, the global double standards it highlights risk undermining international law and will have far-reaching ramifications, weakening the credibility of global norms meant to protect civilian lives across the world.

On 18 September 2024, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution<sup>15</sup> demanding that Israel "*brings to an end without delay its unlawful presence*" in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The resolution calls for Israel to comply with international law by withdrawing its military forces, ceasing new settlement activities, evacuating settlers, dismantling parts of the separation wall within the occupied West Bank, and allowing displaced Palestinians to return to their places of origin.



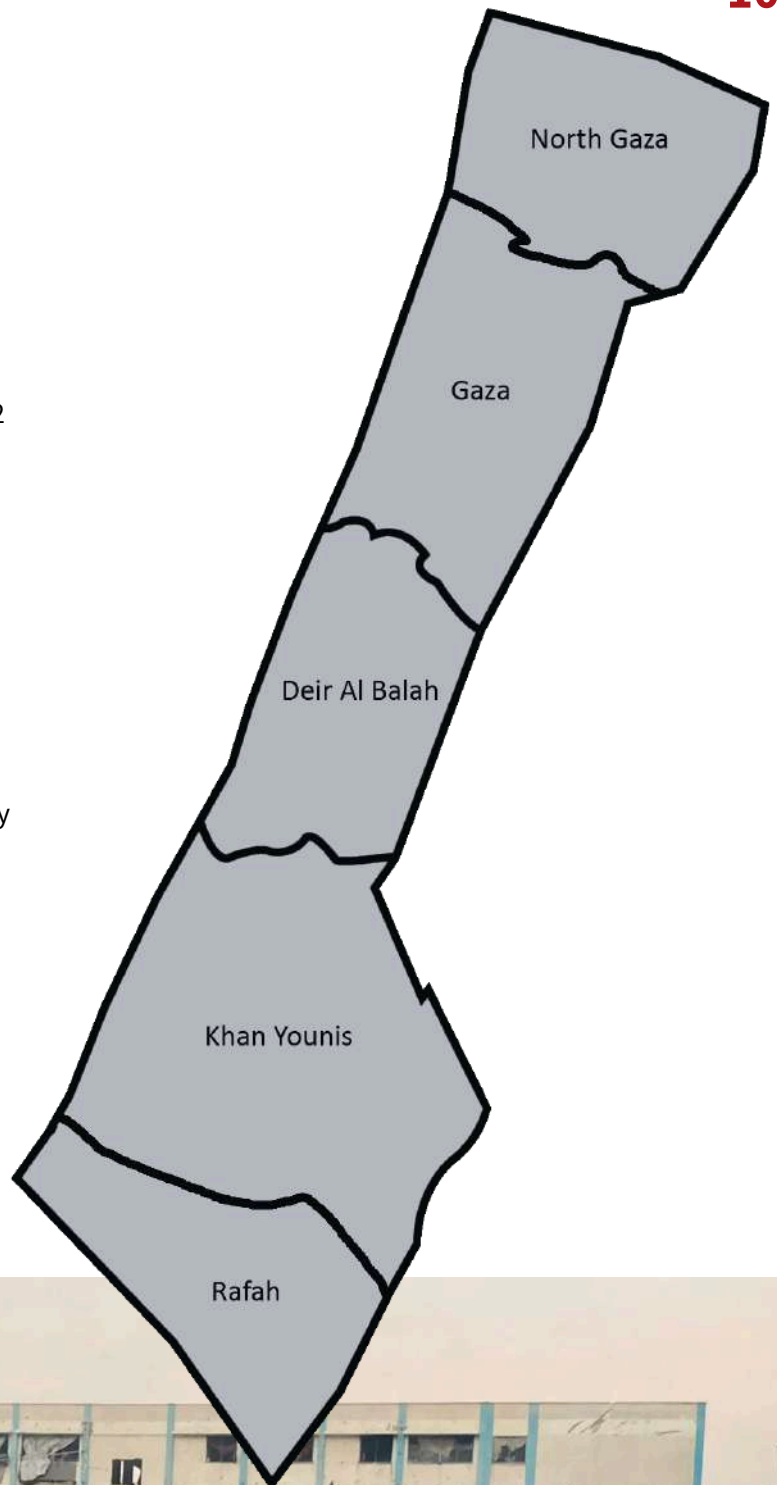


# Methodology

This paper used a mixed-methods approach, combining a quantitative survey of 103 people and in-depth interviews. Due to movement restrictions in Gaza, a random sampling method was used with adjustments to suit field conditions. The sample included 51 males and 52 females, all adults over 18, to ensure gender representation. Key statistics from focus group discussions on the impact of repeated displacement are also included in this paper.

People were located in displacement sites in Bureij, Al Zawadya, Al Nour, and Maghazi in Deir al Balah, and Al Mawasi, Aqsa Khan University grounds, and Al Amal hospital grounds in Khan Younis. Given the extreme ongoing Israeli military offensive in the north of Gaza it was not possible to collect data in these key locations that continue to witness some of the worst Israeli assaults.

Privacy was protected, and no personal identifying information was collected.





# Section One: Active Warfare

## Direct impact, killing and injuring



*During the night, I began to feel unusual movements. I started hearing the sounds of tanks and artillery fire every now and then. I kept telling myself that these sounds would stop after a moment, until it became 7:00 AM. I woke up to random shelling from artillery and planes everywhere.*



The use of explosive weapons in populated areas impacts all aspects of people's lives, exposing them to physical risk of harm and leaving them in a state of aid-dependency and uncertainty.

Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, stretching 41 kilometres in length and 10 kilometres in width, yet home to over 2 million people. Israel's extensive use of explosive weapons such as aerial bombs, artillery, rockets and missiles in cities, towns, villages and camps across Gaza has caused the majority of at least 43,665 deaths and 103,076 injuries, and buried upwards of 10,000 under the rubble of collapsed buildings and homes<sup>16</sup> whilst the use of small arms has also added to this death and injury toll.

Israel's military actions, including widespread bombing campaigns and significant civilian casualties could, according to the ICJ<sup>17</sup>, amount to genocide.

Despite the densely populated environment in Gaza and the inability of the population to leave, reports have confirmed Israel's use of wide area impact munition, including some of the largest conventional bombs in the world. The Mark 84 (or BLU-117) bomb, weighing 2,000 pounds, has an immense destructive capacity, making its use in densely populated areas like Gaza, particularly devastating. In an open area, the Mark 84 has a blast effect radius of 154 meters, where individuals have a high to certain likelihood of being killed due to the extreme heat or pressure from the explosion. However, its lethal impact extends much farther, with the fragmentation capable of killing and injuring people up to 2,627 meters away<sup>18</sup>.

No matter the size of munition, victims of active warfare endure devastating injuries, including the loss of limbs, sight, and other permanent impairments that can result in lifelong impairments and injuries. An estimated 25% of the 103,076 people injured in Gaza have suffered lifechanging injuries<sup>19</sup>. The repeated use of explosive weapons in civilian areas by Israel has inflicted profound harm on communities, leaving victims grappling with both physical and psychological trauma.

**The personal toll of Israel's assault on Gaza is staggering. According to DRC research undertaken for this report, an overwhelming 95% of people reported that they knew someone who had been killed or injured by active warfare. 64% of people reported that a family member had been injured or killed whilst an additional 31% stated that they knew someone outside their family who had been killed or injured.**

## Case study: Amira

Amira is a 26-year-old student at the college of Applied Sciences, majoring in web design and development. Her family consists of seven members, yet tragically three have been killed due the Israeli military offensive.

*“We are from Gaza City, I have been displaced 6 times to different places due to evacuation orders issued multiple times. I moved from Gaza City to Khan Younis, then to Rafah, then to Al-Zawayda, and several other places.”*

Amira and her family face extreme hardship.

*“The situation is extremely difficult, we are living in unhealthy conditions with a complete lack of security. Everything has become exhausting. Access to any kind of aid or care has become almost impossible due to the destroyed roads and ongoing bombardment.”*

In one instance, Amira and her family were struck by a bombardment that tragically resulted in the death of multiple family members.

*“I was with my family in a house in Al-Rimal neighborhood of Gaza City, and suddenly we were targeted directly by several missiles that injured me and led to the killing of several family members. I felt terrified and afraid, but thank God, I managed to get out safely.”*

The use of explosive weapons results in immediate devastation in every context. Yet, in contexts such as Gaza, where the health sector has been destroyed, the impacts are even more catastrophic. With the health infrastructure destroyed and stretched beyond capacity and active fighting and Israeli military operations inside healthcare facilities further compounding the issue, as well as roads obstructed due to physical damage, debris and rubble, lack of medical equipment and access to medical care is severely limited. This exacerbates casualties as people are unable to reach lifesaving emergency medical care and timely treatment that could prevent lifelong disabilities.

When people survive the impact of an attack, access to life-saving medical care is far from guaranteed in Gaza. People surveyed reported that **just over half of people they knew that were injured had access to emergency first aid, while 44% were left without even the most basic medical assistance.** Longer-term medical assistance, vital for recovery, is particularly hard to access with **86% of people indicating a lack of access to physical therapy.** Mental health support is almost entirely absent for victims of active warfare in Gaza, with **97% of people reporting that no such services were available to those suffering from the psychological aftermath of having been injured in an attack.**





## Case study: Ashar

Ashar, 45-year-old psychologist, business owner and mother of two has been displaced six times. She was forced to flee amidst active warfare twice.

*“During two of the displacements, I miraculously escaped death. The Israeli artillery and planes were bombing without any warning, and I was alone in the house.*

*During the night, I began to feel unusual movements. I started hearing the sounds of tanks and artillery fire every now and then. I kept telling myself that these sounds would stop after a moment, until it became 7:00 AM. I woke up to random shelling from artillery and planes everywhere.*

*Since I was alone, I didn't know what to take with me, my belongings or my son's, or my official papers. So, I had to leave as I was. I didn't know which way to take due to the random shelling everywhere. I went out and saw people fleeing and walked wherever they were heading.”*

Before leaving her home area, Ashar was forced to search through rubble for vital items for her family.

*“After they [Israeli forces] used my house and bombed it, I left without anything. Once the army withdrew, I tried to go to the ruins of the house. I was trying to retrieve anything from the house, and I actually saw something that looked like a rocket. There were strange objects, but because I don't know what they are, I didn't approach them.*

*I tried to extract anything I could [from the rubble], but of course, there was danger because who knows? Maybe the roof would collapse on me. So, it was a big risk, but I went because there are no clothes in the markets and no shoes, so I was forced to retrieve these items from under the rubble.”*

Ashar now endures harsh conditions in a displacement site in Al-Mawasi, Khan Younis.

*“I live in a tent. We have practically gone back 100*

*“It was a big risk, but I went because there are no clothes in the markets and no shoes, I was forced to retrieve these items from under the rubble.”*

*years in time. Life is difficult in every way, especially in terms of the feeling of safety, which is nonexistent. Every detail of the day is exhausting.”*

Ashar and her family struggle to meet the basic needs as the bombardment of Gaza has devastated Gaza's essential infrastructure.

*“The bombardment has affected access to humanitarian assistance, water, sanitation, medical care, and other essential needs. Life is tough in every aspect. Even in medical points and places, when we go there, we don't find medical staff available to meet our needs, and medicines are unavailable.”*

She and her family have become dependent on aid, as Ashar has been unable to work since the beginning of the military offensive. With only a trickle of aid entering Gaza, many families, including Ashar's often go without this lifeline.

*“I see people crowding at aid distribution points, and there are people who cannot reach them, and I am one of those people. Almost two months have passed, and I have not received any type of aid since I have been displaced here.”*

Palestinian children in Gaza have missed more than a year of education. As the Israeli military offensive wages on, it is not clear when education will resume.

*“My son was supposed to start the final year of secondary school before going to university, but classes have been interrupted. They said they would return to teaching, but I can't send my son to those places because none of the places are safe.”*

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas impacts all aspects of people's lives, exposing them to physical risk of harm and leaving them in a state of aid-dependency and uncertainty.

# Damage to civilian infrastructure

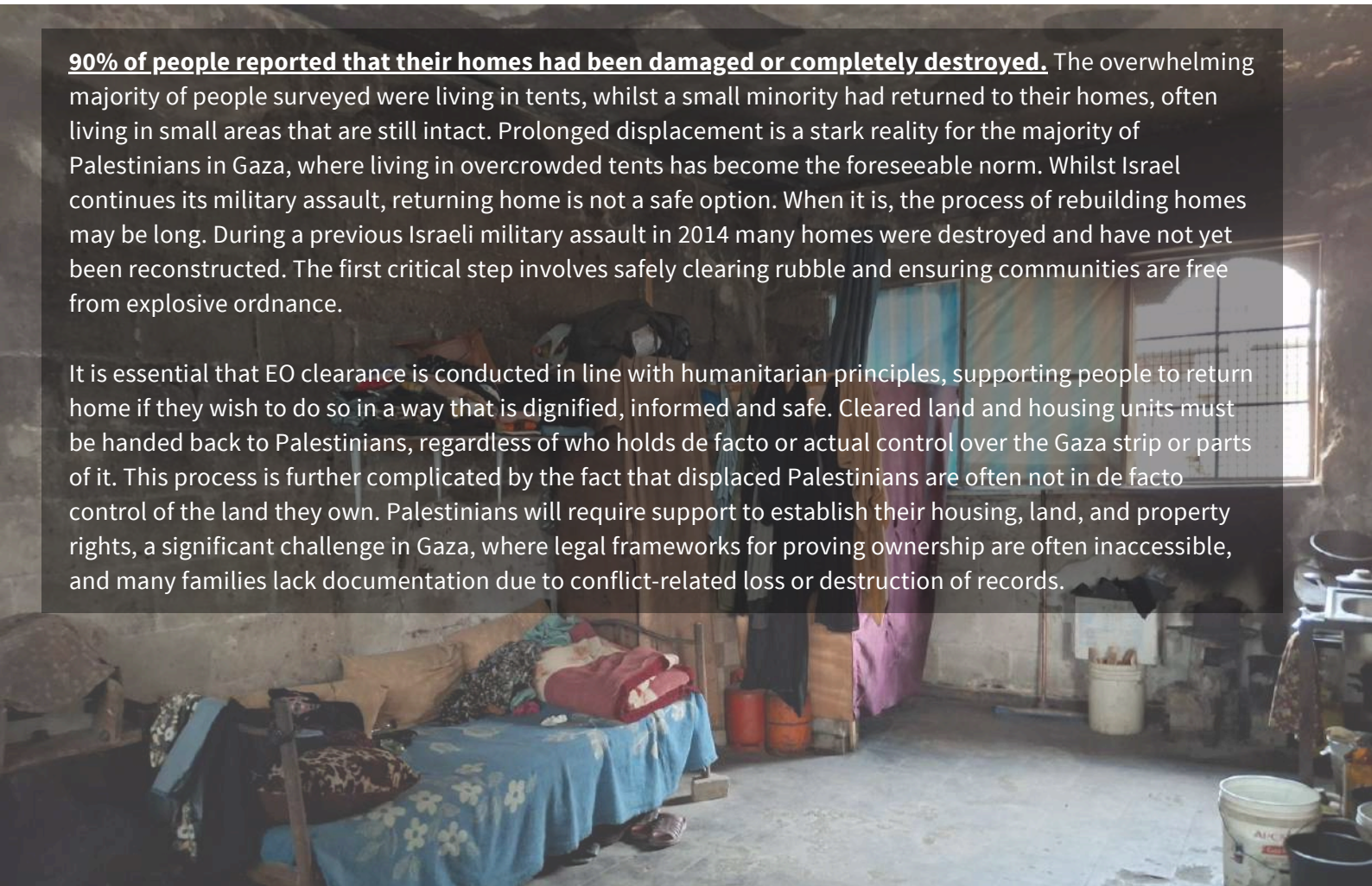
Israel's use of explosive weapons and indiscriminate bombing and shelling has caused widespread damage and destruction to civilian infrastructure across Gaza, including the destruction of homes, hospitals, water sources, and schools. DRC research enquired about the destruction of some key infrastructure, namely homes, schools, health centres and water infrastructure but does not intend to cover all types of civilian infrastructure. 66% of all structures in Gaza are estimated to be damaged or destroyed<sup>20</sup> as well as 68% of all road networks<sup>21</sup> and 66% of cropland<sup>22</sup>.

The independent UN Commission of Inquiry<sup>23</sup> on the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, detailed Israel's systematic destruction of Gaza's healthcare system, with its forces having *"deliberately killed, wounded, arrested, detained, mistreated, and tortured medical personnel and targeted medical vehicles."* These actions, according to the Commission, constitute the war crimes of willful killing and mistreatment, as well as the crime against humanity of extermination. Damaged homes force people to sleep in tents, while destroyed hospitals and health centers block access to healthcare, turning treatable diseases into life-threatening conditions and causing preventable deaths from injuries. Damaged roads further hinder people's access to essential services or their ability to flee from active fighting. In Gaza, attacks on hospitals and schools raise an additional concern, not only are they essential civilian infrastructure, with hospitals being vital during active warfare, but they also serve as shelters for thousands of displaced people.

## Homes

**90% of people reported that their homes had been damaged or completely destroyed.** The overwhelming majority of people surveyed were living in tents, whilst a small minority had returned to their homes, often living in small areas that are still intact. Prolonged displacement is a stark reality for the majority of Palestinians in Gaza, where living in overcrowded tents has become the foreseeable norm. Whilst Israel continues its military assault, returning home is not a safe option. When it is, the process of rebuilding homes may be long. During a previous Israeli military assault in 2014 many homes were destroyed and have not yet been reconstructed. The first critical step involves safely clearing rubble and ensuring communities are free from explosive ordnance.

It is essential that EO clearance is conducted in line with humanitarian principles, supporting people to return home if they wish to do so in a way that is dignified, informed and safe. Cleared land and housing units must be handed back to Palestinians, regardless of who holds de facto or actual control over the Gaza strip or parts of it. This process is further complicated by the fact that displaced Palestinians are often not in de facto control of the land they own. Palestinians will require support to establish their housing, land, and property rights, a significant challenge in Gaza, where legal frameworks for proving ownership are often inaccessible, and many families lack documentation due to conflict-related loss or destruction of records.





# Schools

**70% of people reported that at least one school in their area had been damaged or completely destroyed, with 50% reporting that more than three schools had been damaged and 30% reporting between one and three.** Israel's military offensive has deprived children in Gaza of more than a year of education as schools remain closed due to the ongoing violence. While some have attempted to access informal education in displacement camps or online, these efforts are limited to a small minority and fall far short of the structured education system that has been disrupted. Many parents have expressed that, even if schools were to reopen, they would not send their children due to the severe safety risks.

The damage and destruction of schools has long term impacts on children. The protracted military offensive threatens to deprive an entire generation of Palestinians of their right to education, as the rebuilding and reopening of schools will take significant time, further compounding the loss of learning already suffered.

# Healthcare

Israel has deliberately targeted Gaza's healthcare system<sup>24</sup>, resulting in its near decimation. 885 healthcare workers have been reportedly killed in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with a reported 1,043 Israeli attacks on healthcare since the start of the Israeli military offensive in October 2023<sup>25</sup>. In addition, 114 attacks have impacted health transport, including vital ambulances whilst there have been 216 health workers and 57 patients detained<sup>26</sup>. Prior to October 2023, Gaza had 481 health service points, including, field hospitals, primary health clinics, and mobile medical units. Currently, only five health facilities, field hospitals, are fully operational, with an additional 17 hospitals, six field hospitals, 47 primary health clinics, and 160 mobile clinics partially functional. **Over half of Gaza's healthcare infrastructure is incapacitated.**

Targeting hospitals and healthcare facilities breaches Article 18 of the Fourth Geneva Convention<sup>27</sup>, which explicitly mandates their protection during periods of armed conflict and constitutes a war crime.

Facilities that continue to operate face constant fuel shortages, essential for lifesaving medical interventions such as life support machines and incubators for babies. Medical supplies have also become increasingly scarce, as many items are classified as dual-use and denied entry, compounded by lengthy procedures required for vital aid, including medical supplies, to enter Gaza.

**75% of people reported having witnessed damage to one or more health facilities in their area** with 19% reporting damage or destruction of one healthcare facility, 31% reporting damage or destruction of two healthcare facilities, 25% reporting damage or destruction of three or more healthcare facilities in the area they were staying.

People indicated significant challenges for women and children to access healthcare and mental health services. **58% rated access as poor while 9% reported it as completely inaccessible.** Only 25% of respondents rated access at a moderate level, and just 8% felt that access was good, whilst no one reported access to be completely accessible.

The destruction of Gaza's health infrastructure will have long-lasting consequences, severely impeding access to essential medical services even after the fighting stops. Hospitals and clinics that have been destroyed or damaged will take years to rebuild, leaving many without adequate healthcare for the foreseeable future.

# Water

The destruction of water infrastructure has had devastating effects on communities across Gaza. **67% of people reported that their water source had been destroyed**, including the widespread destruction of wells, municipal water lines, and water stations. Many water sources were either bulldozed or bombed, forcing residents to rely on new, often expensive, water supplies. Bombings and ground invasions further exacerbated the situation by destroying water lines, public facilities, and local reservoirs.

Extended water cut-offs were reported, with some areas going without water for weeks or months, leaving displaced families without access to clean drinking water. In addition, some water lines are reportedly contaminated by sewage following explosions, rendering the water unusable. Many residents were left with access to only salty or unclean water, which poses significant health risks.

People also reported significant issues to access adequate water in overcrowded displacement sites with one person highlighting, *"My house was destroyed, and I was displaced. Now, at Al-Aqsa [hospital area], I struggle greatly to provide water for my family, and sometimes I don't even have drinking water."* Whilst another said, *"We wake up every day at 2 AM to go get water and stand in line to be able to drink."* In addition, many people have become dependent on irregular water deliveries from aid actors.

In July, 2024 Oxfam<sup>28</sup> found that people are surviving on just 4.74 litres of water per person per day, a 94% reduction from what was available before litres per person per day deemed essential for basic survival in emergencies, including drinking, cooking, and sanitation. Such a critical shortage exposes civilians to immense risks, violating their fundamental right to water and dignity during conflict.







# Mental Health Impact

Living through active warfare imposes an overwhelming toll on mental health, often leading to long-lasting psychological trauma. The constant threat of violence, the loss of loved ones, and the destruction of homes create an environment of perpetual fear and uncertainty. The mental exhaustion of trying to meet basic needs amidst an aid-deprived and resource weak context, compounded by the collapse of social and support systems, can be devastating, with consequences extending far beyond the immediate violence.

Active warfare has become a common feature of civilians' lives in Gaza, including those who have fled to the unilaterally declared "safe zone", which is frequently the target of attacks by Israel.

**99% of people reported having witnessed the use of explosives weapons within their community.**

80% of people witnessed explosions caused by active warfare more than three times, whilst 19% witnessed explosions less than three times.

During active warfare, civilians adopt a range of coping mechanisms in their attempt to ensure both physical safety and emotional survival amidst ongoing violence. Many focus on sheltering in the safest space available and avoiding movement (7%), or preparing emergency evacuation bags stocked with essentials like food, water, and medicine (10%).

Family and social bonds are vital with 50% of people reporting this as a primary coping mechanism, whilst an additional 26% of people reported prioritising comforting children and staying close to them during explosions. Some find solace in spiritual or religious practices, such as prayer, to maintain emotional strength, while others use breathing exercises to manage stress. 20% of people reported trying to maintain routines or distracting themselves with housework, cooking or studying.

However, chronic forced displacement, limited access to aid, and the high cost of basic goods present significant challenges, leaving many barely able to meet their needs. Amidst the instability, some people express despair at the unrelenting hardship, struggling to adapt, with 10% of people reporting there were no coping mechanisms they could employ. Despite these difficulties, social connections, routines, and small acts of normalcy help people endure the harsh conditions of the ongoing Israeli military assault.

**An overwhelming 79% of people reported experiencing fear or "terror"** with one respondent noting they felt, "Despair, feeling like we are waiting for death at any moment." **40% of people reported stress and anxiety.** Additionally, depression, while reported by a smaller portion (8%), still represents a significant mental health challenge with one person noting, "Our emotions are very difficult, and I cry every day, unable to overcome anything. As a woman, I don't know what to do, and I'm afraid for my children and family."

# Case study: Omar

Omar is a 42-year-old taxi driver, husband and father. Since the latest escalation of violence, Omar has had family members killed, has been separated from his wife, lost his livelihood, and has been displaced many times.

*“I was resident of Beit Lahiya in a border area. As soon as the war started, we were displaced to my relatives’ house in Beit Lahiya and stayed with them. The situation was very difficult, bombing, shelling, and fires, those days were tough.”*

Omar’s family were killed in one harrowing attack, with medical assistance delayed to help save them.

*“Then the house next to us, which belongs to my uncle, was bombed, and our relatives were killed that day. The house we were in began to have stones falling above our heads due to the intensity of the shelling, but thank God, we were not harmed badly, just some injuries.*

*The situation was so dire that we could not help my cousins. We called for an ambulance, and after an hour and a half, it managed to reach us, and we were able to save the others.”*

Omar was displaced again, forced to flee in terrifying conditions.

*“From that moment, we were displaced again to Rafah after 20 days of the war and went to an area called Khirbat Al-Adas. They [Israeli forces] were bombing us without any evacuation warnings, they were killing us mercilessly. That day, we were displaced from Beit Lahiya in our car, but we ended up having to carry our belongings and continued walking on foot.*

*They took some people in front of us and killed them, and we did not utter a word because anyone who spoke would die like them. We threw away half of our belongings from exhaustion. We couldn’t carry them, and we kept walking until we reached Al-Nuseirat. We got in a car and reached Rafah.”*

People in Gaza are forced to repeatedly flee in terrifying situations, with nowhere safe to go.

*“There has been frequent bombardment around the area where I live, which is Al-Aqsa University. Recently, there was insane bombing on Al-Nus Street near me, which resulted in a massive massacre where 80 people were killed.*

*Suddenly, we started seeing fire belts striking everywhere. The bombardment was crazy and intense, I didn’t know how to grab my things, so I ran to the corner of the street and lay down on the ground. I felt like I was living through the horrors of Judgment Day and thought that it was over and that I was going to die from the intensity of the bombardment.*

*After the bombardment stopped, I stood up to see people lying on the ground from a distance, and no one dared to approach because if anyone got close, a drone would open fire on them. Honestly, it was terrifying.”*

***“The tanks were on both sides creating barriers, and they were shooting anyone they wanted. We were not allowed to lower our heads or do anything because we would die. The body parts and corpses were scattered and decaying as we walked, and the scene was terrifying.”***





## Displacement

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas can cause or exacerbate displacement. People may flee to escape the threat of injury or death from airstrikes, artillery, or other explosive weapons. Additionally, displacement occurs when homes and essential infrastructure are destroyed, when vital services and livelihoods are disrupted, or when humanitarian aid is unable to reach affected areas due to the use of these weapons.

In Gaza, displacement is compounded due to the Israeli military's consistent issuance of mass displacement orders. These orders have been issued throughout Gaza, including within the "safe zone", causing civilians to continuously flee in search of safety, yet never finding it. Although not the focus of this paper, mass displacement orders account for a large number of displacements throughout Gaza<sup>29</sup>. In November 2024, Human Rights Watch found<sup>30</sup> that *"the acts of unlawful displacement in Gaza were conducted through serious human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity,"* concluding that Israel's policy and methods around forced displacement amount to a policy of ethnic cleansing, at least in the buffer zones and security corridors in Gaza. With crossings remaining closed, Gaza faces a total siege, leaving people within the territory internally displaced and unable to seek refuge beyond its borders.

Overall, **people had been displaced an average of 6 times and up to 19 times**, meaning that most people have been **displaced once every two months since the start of the October 2023 Israeli military offensive**. 100% of people surveyed were displaced, with 75% of people reporting active warfare to be the cause of displacement between one and five times.

Displacement uproots people from their homes, livelihoods and support networks. It puts people at great risk of poverty, exploitation and insecurity with the very act of displacement being exhausting both physically and mentally. Due to Israeli bombardments and forced displacement orders, people are often forced to flee at short notice, unable to pack essentials such as clothes, documents or even food and water. Increasingly, DRC hears reports that people are no longer willing to relocate when active warfare or displacement orders reach them, exhausted by the continuous quest to find safety that does not exist in Gaza, many are choosing to remain where they are no matter the consequences. This sense of lethargy toward displacement is unsurprising and reflects the significant mental and emotional toll it takes on those affected.

The act of fleeing entails access to adequate resources, that may include transport or the financial means to pay for transport, as well as adequate road infrastructure and paths to safety that are free from active fighting and the presence of military or EO contamination. **Just one out of 103 respondents believed they had the adequate means to flee during an attack**. A significant 58% of people reported they had no access to transport. Many people noted they had previously fled on foot but endured lengthy, exhausting and dangerous journeys and lacked the ability to take adequate resources with them. 22% of people cited impassable roads as a major barrier, further compounding any attempt to flee to safety.

Financial constraints also play a critical role as **87% of people reported that the Israeli military assault impacted their ability to earn an income**, with 23% stating that the high cost of paying for transportation, in light of their inability to earn income, prevented them from escaping active warfare. The cost to hire a truck before the Israeli military offensive in Gaza was around 50 Shekels (13 USD), yet reports indicate that during or after attacks or when an area has received displacement orders by the Israeli military, prices soar to 1,200 shekels (320 USD). While 13 people reported owning a vehicle, three of these named the high cost of fuel as a barrier whilst another three cited impassable roads as a significant obstacle to fleeing. Two people reported owning animals that aided their movement, yet the substantial road damage again was cited as a key barrier.

Women-headed households face distinct hardships when fleeing active warfare. With sole responsibility for young children, elderly relatives, or family members with disabilities, these women must handle the safety and transport of dependents alone, often under intense pressure. Financial constraints frequently limit their ability to afford transport or emergency supplies, while escalating costs in war zones exacerbate these barriers. Additionally, without a partner or male relative, women are more vulnerable to harassment and exploitation on escape routes, which may further deter their efforts to reach safer locations.

When people are unable to flee, they are at great risk of death or injury from active warfare. In Gaza, as areas are increasingly cut off from humanitarian aid, such as in northern Gaza, those who are unable to flee also will increasingly lack access to basic necessities such as food and water whilst being at great risk of injury and death due to the ongoing Israeli military assault.

## Case study: Sadaf

Sadaf, a 28-year-old health clinic worker from northern Gaza, has faced relentless displacement. Once earning a stable income of \$150 a month, fighting separated her from family and left her without a home or livelihood.

*“I used to work in a health clinic. But after the war, I no longer have any source of income.”*

Since October 2023, Sadaf has been displaced five times. The first came when naval shelling hit her home. She sought refuge with relatives, but they too were targeted, forcing her to flee to a school that had become a shelter for displaced people. North Gaza was cut off from vital necessities.

*“In North Gaza before moving south, there was no water, humanitarian aid, or any medical services available.”*

A particularly harrowing moment came when Israeli forces shelled a group of civilians near her home, injuring several family members. In November 2023, after an Israeli military order, she was forced to flee south. The journey was traumatic.

*“I’ve seen artillery shelling, airstrikes, and drone fire close by approximately seven times. While crossing the safe passage, I saw tanks and Israeli soldiers shooting at our feet. At our feet were corpses. I walked over the foot of one body while moving from north to south.”*

Even in Rafah, safety was never found. She was displaced again after airstrikes hit nearby shelters. In May 2024, another military order forced her from Rafah to Deir al Balah, only to be displaced again within the governorate. Sadaf now lives in a tent with relatives, separated from her mother.

*“I have no family other than my mother, and we are in different places in different tents with our relatives.”*

Indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks that involve the use of explosive weapons in populated areas forces people to flee repeatedly in search of safety, only to find none, leaving them in a constant state of uncertainty and fear.



## Section Two: Explosive Ordnance



*My children were playing next to the tent under the tree, and Ahmad was playing with an item, he didn't know what it was, with wires coming out of it. It was a detonator, but my son didn't know that, how would my son understand something like that?*



"Explosive ordnance" (EO) includes Abandoned Remnants of War (AXO) which refers to unused explosive ordnance left behind or discarded by a party to an armed conflict and no longer under their control, potentially primed or prepared for use, while Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) is explosive ordnance that has been primed, prepared, or used but remains unexploded due to malfunction, design, or other reasons<sup>31</sup>. Ordnance may not function as intended for various reasons, such as defective fuses, incorrectly calibrated time-delay igniters, soft soil that absorbs the impact needed for detonation, etc. Whether EO is abandoned or does not function, it poses a serious threat to civilian safety, often leading to injury or death long after fighting ceases.

As active fighting continues in Gaza and humanitarian mine action organisations are blocked from assessing the full extent of EO contamination, the scale of the problem remains uncertain. However, with the vast number of munitions dropped on Gaza, EO contamination is likely widespread. **Nearly 70% of respondents reported returning to areas that had seen active fighting, significantly increasing their risk of encountering EO.**

**More than half of the people surveyed reported having seen explosive ordnance at least once**, with some encountering it up to 10 times. Of those, 19% had seen EO once, 15% twice, 8% three times, 2% four times, 5% five times, and 1% had seen it 7, 8, 9, and 10 times respectively. These repeated encounters underscore the pervasiveness of the threat and the continual danger civilians face in their everyday environments.

In Gaza, the widespread prevalence of explosive ordnance is a constant and grave threat to civilians. Years of recurring Israeli military offensives and rocket attacks by Palestinian armed groups had already left Gaza saturated with a variety of explosive weapons found on or below the ground. The last year of continuous Israeli bombardment has only added to this crisis, with 42 million tonnes of debris, that will be littered with EO, which could take up to 14 years to clear<sup>32</sup>. There are increasing reports over the growing number of EO related incidents and the inadequate resources available to address the crisis. The continued existence of EO not only jeopardises civilian safety but also hinders access to essential services and obstructs recovery efforts.

The Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) police were responsible for explosive ordnance (EO) disposal in Gaza. However, since the onset of the October 2023 Israeli military offensive, the EOD police have been largely non-operational as has a functioning local authority coordination mechanism, creating a significant gap in EO response capabilities. While the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has stepped in as the leading agency on EO issues, it currently faces critical constraints that prevent it from conducting necessary EO disposal activities including access constraints and the denial of vital equipment for EO clearance due to the perception of its dual-use.

# Direct impacts, death and injury

70% of people reported returning to areas that had seen active fighting, heightening their risk of encountering explosive ordnance. Despite general awareness of EO dangers, 58% of people reported looking under rubble, exposing themselves to even greater risk.

## Case study: Omar's children

*"We came here, and honestly, I didn't expect there to be remnants left by the Israeli forces, but there were remnants of unexploded weapons, and I didn't even know what they looked like, nor did my children.*

*My children were playing next to the tent under the tree, and Ahmad was playing with an item, he didn't know what it was, with wires coming out of it. It was a detonator, but my son didn't know that, how would my son understand something like that?*

*My son brought the battery and connected the two visible wires from the strange object, and it exploded. It caused a huge explosion in the square where I live. His siblings, Layan and Rita, were next to him, and they all got injured. God was kind to them, and the injuries were not serious.*

*I was in the same area but away from them, but I heard the explosion, which was very loud. I didn't know the explosion was near my children. I went to see what was happening, then found my children were the injured ones. I went crazy, I didn't know what to do."*

Omar's children were able to access vital medical assistance to remove the shrapnel from their bodies.

*"I found the neighbours helping my children, and they called for an ambulance. It didn't take long, it arrived in less than five minutes. We went to Nasser Hospital, the hospital was not functioning well, so we went to Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al Balah. They began removing shrapnel from their bodies. Even now, the shrapnel is still in their bodies, the doctors told me it would come out, and their bodies would expel it by themselves. But regarding psychological treatment, no one has offered us such a service."*

EO is life-threatening. Victims of attacks must have access to the vital medical assistance they need as well as essential physiotherapy and psychological support.

**23% of people reported knowing someone who had been injured or killed by EO.** Incidents reported include children playing with EO, people encountering EO when returning to their homes, people mistakenly picking up EO within piles of firewood, and people unknowingly handling objects that turned out to be EO. The dense population of displacement sites also caused multiple incidents to injure numerous individuals.

Children are disproportionately affected, often unaware of the deadly risk posed by unexploded devices. In one devastating case reported by a survey respondent, a child in Rafah lost a hand and others were injured when a piece of EO exploded while they were playing. Similar incidents have occurred in Khan Younis, where children were killed after approaching EO, and another case where an adult's face was severely burned. The consequences of these explosions are often life-altering, with victims frequently suffering from amputations. Reports include individuals losing limbs, both legs or a hand, due to encounters with EO.



The ability to access critical medical care following EO-related incidents is tragically low. **Only 19% of respondents reported that victims received emergency first aid.** Access to longer-term care is even more limited, with **just 6% reporting access to physical therapy and a mere 1% to mental health services.** These numbers reflect the severe strain on Gaza's already shattered health infrastructure and the enormous challenges victims face in receiving the care they desperately need.

## Understanding and Awareness of EO

*I know a friend who returned home after the army entered the area to look for his belongings. He touched an object that looked like a food can, and it exploded in his hand, causing him to lose his hand and his right eye. He was only able to access emergency medical care, he lost his hand and eye, and there is no place to provide him with a prosthetic or psychological support.*

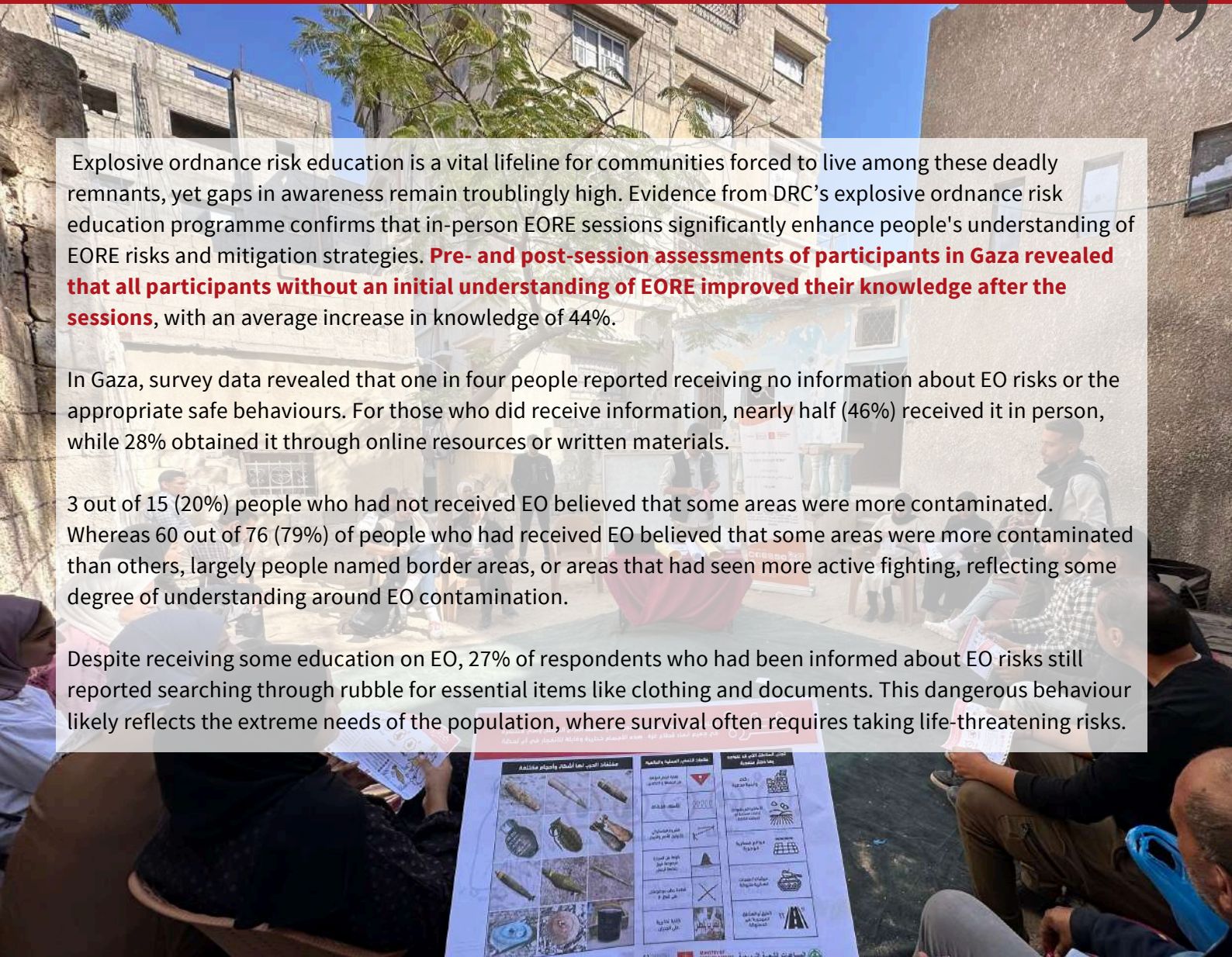
Sadaf, 28-year-old female health care worker

Explosive ordnance risk education is a vital lifeline for communities forced to live among these deadly remnants, yet gaps in awareness remain troublingly high. Evidence from DRC's explosive ordnance risk education programme confirms that in-person EORE sessions significantly enhance people's understanding of EORE risks and mitigation strategies. **Pre- and post-session assessments of participants in Gaza revealed that all participants without an initial understanding of EORE improved their knowledge after the sessions,** with an average increase in knowledge of 44%.

In Gaza, survey data revealed that one in four people reported receiving no information about EO risks or the appropriate safe behaviours. For those who did receive information, nearly half (46%) received it in person, while 28% obtained it through online resources or written materials.

3 out of 15 (20%) people who had not received EO believed that some areas were more contaminated. Whereas 60 out of 76 (79%) of people who had received EO believed that some areas were more contaminated than others, largely people named border areas, or areas that had seen more active fighting, reflecting some degree of understanding around EO contamination.

Despite receiving some education on EO, 27% of respondents who had been informed about EO risks still reported searching through rubble for essential items like clothing and documents. This dangerous behaviour likely reflects the extreme needs of the population, where survival often requires taking life-threatening risks.





# Vulnerability to EO

Survey respondents overwhelmingly believed that children were the most at risk of encountering EO, followed by teenage boys and people with disabilities. There is no safe place in Gaza, so children regularly play in dangerous areas. Alarming, one in five people reported seeing children near unexploded ordnance. Respondents identified EO in the form of bullets, shells, rockets, and bombs, often witnessing children playing near or with these deadly objects.

In most instances, people noted that they saw children playing near, on or with EO in passing and so did not intervene as other adults were present. A recurring theme is the apparent lack of awareness among both children and adults about the severe risks posed by EO. Several accounts specifically mention that children were not instructed or warned about the dangers of these remnants, emphasising the critical need for community education and awareness programs. In one account, children playing around a rocket fuse led to severe injuries, highlighting the lethal potential of these remnants.

In one account, children were seen using an unexploded shell as a goal post for football in Rafah. In another, children in Khan Younis were injured when a rocket fuse exploded while they were playing. These accounts highlight a recurring and alarming lack of awareness among both children and adults regarding the life-threatening risks posed by EO.

Globally, men and teenage boys are acknowledged to be the most at risk of encountering EO due to their involvement in activities such as clearing rubble.

*They [children] were playing with the EO, using it as a goalpost for playing football, in the Hashashin area of Rafah.*

*I saw children in Rafah near the Egyptian border carrying unexploded ordnance and playing with it, and there wasn't much awareness among the local residents about the danger of these remnants.*

*In the Muwasi area of Khan Younis, where we live, a rocket fuse exploded on children who were playing around it, causing many injuries, some of them severe.*

*By chance, on my way from Deir al Balah to Khan Younis, I saw children near Hamed City playing on top of an unexploded tank shell.*

*After the army withdrew from areas it had entered on foot, most of the residents, from all age groups, returned to these areas, coming close to EO*



# Rubble

Since October 2023, the ongoing Israeli military offensive in Gaza has created an unprecedented amount of debris, an estimated 42 million tonnes, **amounting to 14 times more than the total debris generated by all global conflicts combined since 2008**<sup>33</sup>. The rubble of homes in Gaza is more than just broken concrete, it holds the remains of loved ones, much-needed resources such as clothes, food, and other essentials, as well as critical civil documentation and items of deep sentimental value. Hence, in contexts such as Gaza, it is not uncommon for people to search through the rubble. This is compounded by the urgent need for basic necessities. As resources have become scarce, the availability of essential items such as food and clothing has drastically diminished, leading to widespread shortages, whilst at the same time, prices for these goods have surged, when the majority of people in Gaza have lost access to their livelihoods.

Despite a clear understanding of the dangers posed by explosive ordnance (EO) and its widespread presence in areas affected by active conflict, **58% of respondents reported having searched through rubble, with 45% stating they had not seen EO and 14% confirming they had encountered it.** Shockingly, **24% of people admitted to searching through rubble for essential items like clothing and documents.** It is alarming that, despite the known risks, civilians are forced to risk their lives out of sheer desperation, driven by the unavailability or unaffordability of basic necessities in local markets.

42% of people confirmed they had not looked under rubble. While this may suggest some awareness of the dangers of encountering EO, it is likely also influenced by the fact that many of those surveyed were living in displacement camps, far from their homes. It is likely that incidents of people searching through rubble will increase as people return home.





# Returning to Homes

In Gaza, many people are refugees who were displaced from their homes decades ago by Israel's illegal occupation and the Nakba, making "returning home" a return to displacement. The fear of EO contamination has left many hesitant to return to their homes. **44% of respondents expressed concern about returning due to the risk of encountering unexploded ordnance hidden within the rubble.** Many shared stories of finding rockets and other dangerous remnants in their homes upon returning.

Despite these fears, **71% of people reported that fear of EO did not prevent them from returning to their livelihoods, such as agricultural land.**

For some, presence of military personnel also interplayed with fear of EO, *"Certainly, fear prevents me from returning, any wire there could explode. The occupation is entrenched in the area, I will only return when the area is completely cleared."* In addition to the physical dangers of EO, some people expressed fear around the psychological impact of seeing their homes destroyed, *"Due to my psychological fear of seeing it [the home], I cannot return."*

The widespread presence of EO highlighted in these findings, together with the many reported incidents of death and injury caused by EO highlights the critical need for demining efforts, explosive ordnance risk education and victim assistance. Without swift and sustained intervention, civilians will continue to face unimaginable risks from EO, even long after the Israeli military offensive stops







*“We are afraid that if we return, we might be harmed or injured by the effects of destruction or find something unexploded that could accidentally explode on us.”*

*“I fear for my children that they might play with something and it explodes, and I lose them. I brought them into this world, raised them, and worked hard for them throughout the war.”*

*“We found a rocket in the house when we returned to search.”*

*“Now, there are buildings in our square that were bombed, and there is no confirmation that they are safe; honestly, we are afraid that any house might collapse at any moment, and no one has confirmed that this area is safe and free of war remnants.”*

*“I’m afraid to return to my home because there might be explosives or war remnants, and I cannot enter the house or touch the rubble without being injured or killed by these remnants.”*

*“I will definitely be afraid to enter the house until I ensure that there are no war remnants among the rubble, even if part of the house is fit for living. Because children might tamper with anything they don’t know, and I could lose them.”*



## Case study: Basma

Basma, a beautician, wife and mother of two has been displaced five times. She has returned to her damaged home in Al-Maghazi camp with her six family members where they live amongst the rubble. Basma and her family, like so many other Palestinians, are refugees in Gaza, displaced decades ago by Israel's illegal occupation. The Israeli bombardment has decimated Basma's neighbourhood, yet with nowhere safe to go, she and her family returned to their home.

*"After the evacuation of the entire Al-Maghazi area we returned to our house. The entire area around me is destroyed. There are neighbours who were bombed inside their homes, and even now their bodies have not been removed from under the rubble, and other houses around me are destroyed, I always urge my children not to get close for fear of any unexploded objects."*

Vital infrastructure has also been destroyed, further exacerbating daily struggles.

*"The sanitation water network in our area was destroyed, so we rarely get water. Sometimes contaminated water reaches us because when the water lines were cleared, they mingled with drainage and sewage water, making the water unsuitable for use. As for drinking water, it reaches us about twice a month, which is very poor considering our needs. There are two health facilities, one governmental and the other run by UNRWA, both have been destroyed. UNRWA has opened a medical point in a school near us, but it is hard to find medication there."*

They live in the remaining parts of their home that are still standing, yet due to financial hardships and high market costs, they struggle to meet even their basic needs. Desperate to find clothing for her children, Basma was compelled to search through the rubble, fully aware of the risk of encountering EO.

*"I had to look for our clothes in the rubble, since when we were displaced, we didn't take much clothing, particularly for my children."*

Living in an area that has previously seen active fighting greatly increases the chances of encountering explosive ordnance. Basma's family have found EO around their home.

*"While my children were playing in the yard, they found a strange object. Fortunately, since I had taught my children about suspicious and unexploded objects, they stayed away from it and quickly went to their father."*

Basma does not know of any organisation who could support in clearing rubble and intends to clear the rubble and rebuild their home as soon as possible.

*"When the war ends, my husband and I will save money to rebuild what was destroyed in our house."*

As people begin to try and rebuild their lives, it is essential that EO is disposed of by Humanitarian Mine Action Experts or Accredited operators to ensure homes can be safely rebuilt.



# Conclusion

The relentless use of explosive weapons in populated areas of Gaza by Israel has inflicted severe, long-lasting harm on civilian communities. The widespread contamination of explosive ordnance (EO) poses enduring threats to civilian safety, impeding recovery efforts and intensifying the daily hardships faced by those affected. Meanwhile the inhumane and significant obstacles that prevent an adequate response to victims both in terms of physical and mental recovery exacerbate harm. The EWIPA Political Declaration offers a critical framework for the protection of civilians in such settings, underscoring the need for accountability, transparency, and urgent clearance efforts. Despite 87 Member States signing onto the Declaration, the use of explosive weapons in Gaza continues with impunity.

Tolerating such disregard for civilian protection undermines the very framework of international humanitarian law and weakens global norms established to safeguard civilian lives. An urgent international response is essential not only to alleviate the immediate suffering in Gaza but to uphold global standards that protect civilians everywhere from the devastating impact of explosive weapons.

# Recommendations

**DRC remains committed to calling for a ceasefire as the only way to protect civilians in Gaza.**

**To address the impacts of explosive ordnance, the Danish Refugee Council calls on:**

## **The Government of Israel:**

- As the occupying power, Israel must ensure the provision or facilitation of victim assistance, prioritising the needs of those affected by conflict. This includes facilitating immediate and sustained access to medical care, rehabilitation services, psychological support, and socio-economic aid for civilians impacted by violence and explosive ordnance.
- Immediately review the policy of restricting vital supplies and equipment based on perceived dual-use concerns. Humanitarian Mine Action programmes urgently need equipment to operate safely and effectively, protecting civilians from the dangers posed by explosive ordnance.
- As the occupying power, the Government of Israel must be responsible for covering the costs of repairing and reconstructing all damaged civilian infrastructure, including homes, schools, hospitals, and essential water and sanitation systems and facilitate the entry of all needed resources at the scale required.

## **Donors:**

- Provide flexible funding to civil society organisations as well as international organisations to ensure they can effectively respond to the needs of communities in Gaza, ensuring vital humanitarian mine action programmes including EORE and victim assistance are prioritised.
- Ensure any funding for humanitarian mine action is in line with humanitarian principles and prioritises the clearance of key civilian areas such as homes and agricultural land and that Palestinians are an integral part of the humanitarian mine action response.
- Increase funding for EORE as it remains the only aid programme able to protect civilians from explosive ordnance until explosive ordnance disposal can take place.

To ensure an end to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, the Danish Refugee Council calls on Third States who have endorsed the political declaration to:

- Urge all parties to the conflict to adhere to IHL, especially its principles of distinction, and proportionality, and consider both the direct and indirect effects on civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, with particular attention to child-specific risks.
- Urge all parties to the conflict to stop the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.
- Urge parties to conflict to provide, facilitate, or support assistance to victims, including those injured, survivors, families of those killed or injured, and communities affected by the armed conflict.
- Urge parties to conflict to support the work of the United Nations, the ICRC, and civil society organisations in protecting and assisting civilian populations impacted by explosive weapon use.
- Ensure Palestinians from both Gaza and the West Bank are included in all stages of recovery and reconstruction plans. These must prioritise the needs and desires of affected communities.
- Prioritise humanitarian mine action as a vital first step in recovery and reconstruction plans.

To ensure the meaningful protection of civilians in Gaza, the Danish Refugee Council calls on:

The Government of Israel and Palestinian armed groups to:

- Achieve an immediate and lasting ceasefire to ensure the protection of civilian lives in Gaza.
- Adhere to international humanitarian law by immediately halting all attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, ensuring full compliance with all applicable international laws, including the Geneva conventions.
- Support independent international investigation mechanisms on reported violations of IHL.

The Government of Israel:

- Ensure the rapid and unimpeded entry of humanitarian assistance for all people in need in Gaza, allowing humanitarian actors to deliver aid safely and efficiently, guided solely by need and urgently end the siege on Gaza.
- Take immediate steps to comply with the recent United Nations General Assembly resolution that calls for an end to its unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This includes withdrawing its military forces, halting settlement expansion, dismantling sections of the separation wall, and facilitating the safe return of displaced Palestinians, in line with international law.

Third states:

- Immediately halt the transfer of weapons, parts, and ammunition to Israel and Palestinian armed groups while there is risk they are used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian or human rights law.
- Take active measures to ensure Israel's adherence to the recent United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for an immediate end to its unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This includes pressing Israel to comply with international law by withdrawing its military forces, halting settlement expansion, dismantling sections of the separation wall, and facilitating the safe return of displaced Palestinians.
- Ensure that no party to the conflict can act with impunity and prevent global double standards on adherence to international law that weaken the very foundations of IHL worldwide.



# Endnotes

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8. [EWIPA Endorsing States](#).
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10. Whilst we acknowledge people's resilience and ability to recover, DRC has chosen to use the term "victim" due to the severe harm people experience and the need for victim assistance.
11. Article 4.5, EWIPA Political Declaration: Provide, facilitate, or support assistance to victims - people injured, survivors, families of people killed or injured - as well as communities affected by armed conflict. Adopt a holistic, integrated, gender-sensitive, and non-discriminatory approach to such assistance, taking into account the rights of persons with disabilities, and supporting post-conflict recovery and durable solutions.
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