



Gender Matters Bulletin No.2

Photo: UN Women/Alaa Badarneh

# NOWHERE TO CALL HOME: The impact of displacement on the shelter needs of women and girls in the West Bank

October 2025

***“What Israeli forces and settlers are doing in the refugee camps is aimed at displacing Palestinians from our homes and our lands. They want to make us feel unsafe, forcing us to leave. Then when we’re gone and no one remains, the status of Palestinian refugees will disappear.” – Man, Nablus***

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The West Bank Shelter Cluster and Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group produced this *Gender Matters Bulletin: Nowhere to Call Home* to highlight the gender-specific impacts of the ongoing humanitarian crisis on the shelter needs of women and girls. It serves as an accompaniment to the West Bank Shelter Needs Assessment Report (July 2025). The assessment found that the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation, particularly in the northern West Bank including Jenin, Nablus, Tubas and Tulkarm, is disproportionately affecting women and women-headed households, shaping their specific needs, exposure to risks, lived experiences, and coping strategies. Women and women-headed households are more likely than men and men-headed households to experience home demolitions, share shelters with other families, and rely on hosted arrangements. These conditions often result in overcrowding and a lack of privacy, increasing their exposure to gender-based violence. They are also affected by limited access to essential services, heightened psychological distress, and insufficient awareness of, or access to, accurate, timely information and safe, confidential feedback mechanisms. Conflict and displacement are reshaping gendered household dynamics, roles, and decision-making, particularly in families newly headed by women following the arrest, detention, or death of male relatives. This bulletin highlights that while women are disproportionately affected by shelter insecurity and displacement, they also serve as key agents of resilience, leading efforts to secure safe housing, adapt to new environments, and sustain community cohesion during crisis.

## BACKGROUND

Across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate amid intensified Israeli military operations, movement restrictions, and an increase in settler-related violence. The ongoing expansion of settlements – illegal under international law<sup>i</sup> – alongside recurrent displacement and attacks, is further eroding the rights, safety, and livelihoods of Palestinian communities. From 1 January to 12 October 2025, 227 Palestinians (5 women, 177 men, 41 children and 4 older persons) were killed and 3,015 injured by Israeli forces and settlers.<sup>ii</sup> As of 10 September 2025, nearly 33,000 Palestinians remain displaced, primarily in Jenin and Tulkarm.<sup>iii</sup> Between 1 January and 16 October 2025, Israeli forces demolished 1,399 structures across the West Bank.<sup>iv</sup> Israeli authorities have indicated that most displaced families will not be permitted to return before the end of 2025.<sup>v</sup> Meanwhile, settlers continue to damage Palestinian property and restrict access to Palestinian’s agricultural land and vital resources. As of 30 October 2025, the olive harvest season has suffered its most severe impact from settler attacks since 2020, with 126 incidents recorded across 70 towns and villages, resulting in the destruction of over 4,000 olive trees and saplings.<sup>vi</sup> These actions have devastated livelihoods, crippled the economy, disrupted access to basic services such as education and healthcare, and caused widespread psychological trauma. Despite severe operational challenges, the United Nations and humanitarian partners have scaled up assistance under the 2025 Flash Appeal to provide crisis-affected people with emergency shelter, non-food items, and other lifesaving support.

## PURPOSE

The West Bank Shelter Cluster and Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group produced this *Gender Matters Bulletin: Nowhere to Call Home* to highlight the gender-specific impacts of the ongoing humanitarian crisis on the shelter needs of women and girls. It serves as an accompaniment to the West Bank Shelter Needs Assessment Report (July 2025). In humanitarian and displacement settings, people’s experiences are shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, age, disability, socio-economic background and geographic location. To be effective, emergency shelter interventions must be grounded in robust gender analysis and informed by up-to-date sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data to inform evidence-based needs assessments, programme design and technical specifications for emergency shelter interventions. Meaningful consultation with women, girls and their representative is essential to ensure responses are safe, equitable, and tailored to needs. Gender-responsive shelter interventions also advance global and national commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, reinforce broader protection outcomes, and support community resilience, providing a strong foundation for sustainable post-conflict recovery and reconstruction.

## METHODOLOGY

Between May and June 2025, the West Bank Shelter Cluster coordinated a large-scale household needs assessment in the West Bank to better understand the living conditions and shelter needs of families displaced since January 2025. The needs assessment used a clustered sampling methodology at the village level, producing a robust dataset of 2,960 household surveys, covering 12,791 people across 9 governorates including Jenin, Jericho, Jerusalem, Nablus, Qalqilya, Ramallah, Salfit, Tulkarm, and Tubas. The sample was designed with a 95 percent confidence level and a  $\pm 5$  percent margin of error, ensuring representativeness of displaced households. To complement the qualitative data, the West Bank GiHA Working Group partnered with four women-led organizations (WLOs) and women’s rights organizations (WROs) – Palestinian Working Women’s Society for Development (PWWS), Roles for Social Change (ADWAR), Rural Women’s Society for Development (RWSD), and Women’s Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) – to conduct 12 participatory focus group discussions with crisis-affected women and men in 11 governorates including Bethlehem, Hebron, Jenin, Jericho, Jerusalem, Nablus, Qalqilya, Ramallah, Salfit, Tubas and Tulkarm, as well as WLOs/WROs operating across the West Bank. This included 11 focus group discussions with 173

crisis-affected people of diverse ages and abilities, along with one focus group discussion with 27 WLO/WRO representatives. Focus group discussions with crisis-affected women and men were conducted in person, while the session with WLOs/WROs was held online. All sessions took place in Arabic during July 2025. All data collection followed ethical and safeguarding standards, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the protection of women and men participating in focus group discussions.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey reached 2,960 households (21 per cent female and 79 per cent male respondents), comprising 12,791 individuals (50 per cent female and 50 per cent male, including 5 per cent persons with disabilities), with an average household size of 4.3 persons. Findings indicate that one in four households (25 per cent) are headed by individuals from vulnerable groups, including women (15 per cent), older persons aged 60 years and above (14 per cent) and children (1 per cent). Notably, 5 per cent of all households were headed by older women, reflecting a significant intersection of sex- and age-based vulnerability. Overall, 16 per cent of surveyed households reported having at least one member with a disability, and 50 per cent of these households reported at least one member with a physical disability. Nearly half of respondents (49 per cent) reported being registered with either the Palestinian Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) or the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) for social support. This highlights pre-existing socio-economic vulnerabilities, which have been further exacerbated by displacement, as more than 60 per cent of households reported the loss of their livelihoods and income sources. As anticipated – given the assessment’s focus on displaced refugees tracked through UNRWA records – 96 per cent of respondents reported having refugee status. The remaining 4 per cent represent individuals residing on the periphery of camps who were displaced due to Israeli military operations but are not registered as refugees with UNRWA. In addition, the 12 focus group discussions engaged 173 participants (46 per cent women and 54 per cent men participants, including 17 per cent persons with disabilities), alongside 27 WLO/WRO representatives.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Key finding 1: Women-headed households are more likely than men-headed households to be affected by home demolitions, which exacerbates their economic vulnerability amid widespread income and livelihood losses.**

*“When the Israeli forces stormed my house, my four-year-old daughter fainted. They poured flour, sugar, and oil on the floor, broke our refrigerator and washing machine, and gave us until 4pm to leave. I left with my daughters and went to my parents’ house. We walked through mud and rain, and my daughter sprained her ankle. We kept going until we found people to help us.” – Woman, Tubas*

The household survey revealed that women-headed households (37 per cent) were more likely than men-headed households (32 per cent) to report home demolitions. This may reflect that women-headed households live in smaller or less structurally resilient homes, have fewer financial resources for maintenance and security, or are perceived as less able to resist attacks. In all focus group discussions, participants reported experiences or threats of forced displacement. Older women and women with disabilities were seen as disproportionately affected, due to the lack of accessible shelters, facilities, transportation, and communication channels, limiting their ability to access assistance and support. Home demolitions further compound economic vulnerability in a context of widespread income and livelihood losses. The household survey found that 74 per cent of households experienced reduced income in the month before the survey, and 49 per cent of households reported having no income at all. In focus group discussions, women noted that they were often the first to experience wage cuts and job losses, as men were typically prioritised for employment. Women described a range of coping mechanisms, including relying on relatives, friends, and community networks, producing and selling food or handicrafts, and engaging in small-scale agricultural

work. Some also reported resorting to harmful strategies, including selling assets such as gold or jewellery, and, in extreme cases, arranging child marriages for girls or sending boys into child labour.

***“During the camp invasion, my disabled sister and I were alone in the house, and the Israeli forces ordered us to leave. We had to wait for my nephew and his brothers to come. They dug small trenches in the ground to get my sister out of the house in her wheelchair.” – Woman, Tubas***

**Key finding 2: Displaced women and women-headed households are more likely than men and men-headed households to share shelters with other families and report concerns about overcrowding and lack of privacy.**

***“My family was displaced, along with all my relatives. Seventeen of us now live in just two rooms. We feel stressed and anxious all the time. Some days, I take the children to visit relatives to change the atmosphere. Most days, I leave the house, even if it is just to sit outside on the street, to give my relatives some space.” – Man, Nablus***

The household survey revealed that women (48 per cent) and women-headed households (50 per cent) were more likely than men (37 per cent) and men-headed households (36 per cent) to share shelters with other families. Women (23 per cent) and women-headed households (23 per cent) were more likely than men (16 per cent) and men-headed households (15 per cent) to live in hosted arrangements with relatives, friends or other community members. Additionally, women (47 per cent) and women-headed households (46 per cent) were more likely than men (42 per cent) and men-headed households (41 per cent) to report concerns about overcrowding and lack of privacy. In 75 per cent of focus group discussions, participants reported concerns about overcrowding and lack of privacy, with as many as 10 people living in a single room. Women highlighted specific risks linked to the lack of adequate kitchen, toilet, and bathing facilities, noting that families often must follow strict schedules to use the limited facilities while trying to maintain privacy. As a result, women and girls face heightened risks of gender-based violence, limited access to water and sanitation for daily and menstrual hygiene, and diminished personal freedom and autonomy. Additional concerns raised by participants included poor cleanliness, inadequate ventilation, and pest infestations, such as rodents, snakes, and scorpions, especially during the summer. Women with disabilities, particularly those with physical or visual impairments, reported hosted arrangements were often unsuitable and inaccessible.

***“Displacement affects everyone, but it affects women and girls the most. Living with other families, they lose the freedom to choose how to dress and are often forced to wear the hijab. It’s also embarrassing for them to use the toilet or bathe, since the facilities are overcrowded.” – Man, Nablus***

**Key finding 3: Women are more likely than men to report safety and protection concerns, facing heightened risks of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse.**

***“When the Israeli forces stormed the camp, my husband was away for work and couldn’t return. I was alone with my daughters for ten days. They surrounded us day and night. I couldn’t sleep from the fear. I was terrified they might blow up the house with us inside.” – Woman, Tubas***

Operations by Israeli forces, movement restrictions, and settler violence have heightened safety and protection risks for women and girls, both inside and outside the home. The household survey revealed that women (32 per cent) were more likely than men (26 per cent) to report safety and protection concerns. Women and girls frequently face sexual harassment and abuse by Israeli forces, including physical and psychological intimidation, especially during routine travel and at military checkpoints.<sup>vii</sup> They are also at risk of harassment and abuse by settlers, particularly in rural areas.<sup>viii</sup> In all focus group discussions, participants raised serious safety and protection concerns. Women reported specific risks, including the destruction of essential household items such as refrigerators and washing machines, theft of gold and jewellery by Israeli forces, and incidents of sexual harassment from landlords. Participants also highlighted broader threats, including forced displacement, shelter damage or demolition, theft of

personal belongings, and restrictions on movement imposed by Israeli forces and settlers. Movement restrictions significantly limit the ability of women and girls to access gender-based violence prevention and response services, along with other essential services such as education and healthcare.<sup>ix</sup> To protect their families, participants described coping strategies such as keeping children indoors, rearranging sleeping spaces to share rooms or sleep further from doors and windows, leaving lights on at night, and organizing rotating night shifts to maintain vigilance.

***“We were displaced and moved in with my sister, but living together became unbearable. The pressure was excessive, and we often took out our frustration on each other. I had to stop working, yet the burden kept growing as I repaid the loan for my destroyed house, and my brothers and I rented another house nearby to live with the rest of the family.”*** – Man, Nablus

Ongoing hostilities, widespread displacement, loss of livelihoods, overcrowded living conditions, and family separation have caused deep psychological trauma for women and girls affecting their mental health and wellbeing in distinct ways. Notably, in 75 per cent of focus group discussions, participants reported feelings of fear, stress, anxiety, frustration, humiliation and helplessness, and emphasised the loss of community networks and social connections caused by displacement. Women were more likely to be affected by increased economic hardship and caregiving responsibilities, while men were more likely to struggle with the loss of income and livelihoods and the societal pressures to fulfil traditional roles as primary breadwinners. Women also emphasized the increased unpaid care burden resulting from the destruction of essential household items such as refrigerators and washing machines, forcing them to undertake more manual work for cooking, cleaning, and other daily tasks. Participants also noted that children were more likely to exhibit distress through behavioural issues such as bedwetting, while boys may also display increased aggression. These pressures have heightened family tensions and contributed to separation, divorce, and increased incidents of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence.

***“There are no washing machines in the shelter, so we have to wash clothes by hand or go to a relative’s or friend’s house. It takes so much time and effort, and it’s exhausting, especially when there are many of us to wash for.”*** – Woman, Jenin

**Key finding 4: Conflict and displacement are reshaping household gender dynamics, decision-making, and roles and responsibilities, particularly in households newly headed by women.**

***“Men make these decisions believing they know better. Even if the decision directly affects me, I’m not asked. We’re the ones managing the household, our voices should count.”*** – Woman, Jerusalem

Traditional patriarchal structures continue to shape household decision-making on shelter-related issues. In 75 per cent of focus group discussions, participants reported that while some consultation occurs, men – husbands, fathers, and older male relatives – typically make most decisions about housing, relocation and safety, often excluding women, particularly those with disabilities. Men described acting quickly and decisively to protect their families, while women said they often avoid participating in decision-making to steer clear of sensitive discussions and conflict. In some cases, women are taking greater leadership in household decision-making to address issues that specifically affect women and girls, such as harassment and overcrowding, or to assume responsibilities in the absence of male relatives. They are also increasingly taking on roles traditionally held by men, including engaging with authorities or humanitarian organizations, as men’s capacity is sometimes limited by the mental health impacts of the crisis. Despite these changes, women noted that discriminatory laws, male guardianship rules, social norms and the risk of harassment continue to restrict their direct access to assistance and public spaces.

***“We discuss matters with our wives, but the final decision is ours, especially on issues related to land and housing.”*** – Man, Jenin

**Key finding 6: Both women and men have limited awareness of available assistance and lack access to accurate, timely information as well as safe and confidential feedback mechanisms.**

***“Sometimes we hear someone in the community got a mattress or a tent, but we don’t know how to apply for this kind of assistance.” – Man, Jenin***

Both women and men lack information about available emergency shelter assistance and are excluded from meaningful participation in shelter programme planning and implementation. Notably, in 83 per cent of focus group discussions, participants reported being unaware of available shelter assistance. Where information is shared, it is often incomplete, unclear, inaccurate or delayed. Women prefer receiving information through face-to-face engagement, WhatsApp and Facebook from trusted sources such as women’s representatives in village and municipal councils, and community and religious leaders. Men prefer receiving information through face-to-face engagement, SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook and printed notices in mosques and schools from trusted sources such as village and municipal councils, zakat committees, community and religious leaders, and local notables. Women and men highlighted the urgent need for clear, accessible information on available emergency shelter assistance, including who provides it, how to register or apply, who is prioritised, and the time and location of distributions. Women and men also noted that communications are often not accessible to persons with disabilities, particularly those with visual or hearing impairments.

***“If there was someone from our community we could trust, we’d be more comfortable sharing our concerns. Otherwise, we stay silent.” – Woman, Jerusalem***

Both women and men lack information about and access to safe, confidential feedback mechanisms. Notably, in 92 per cent of focus group discussions, participants reported being unaware of available feedback mechanisms, or reluctant to use them, citing concerns that complaints often lack visibility, are not taken seriously, may trigger negative repercussions, and rarely receive proper follow-up. Participants reported receiving little or no shelter assistance to date, aside from limited support from authorities and humanitarian organizations, and generally perceived distributions as unfair or poorly targeted, contributing to frustration and mistrust. Women prefer sharing complaints through face-to-face engagement with women’s representatives in village and municipal councils or other trusted individuals; while men prefer sharing complaints through face-to-face engagement, community meetings or WhatsApp with village and municipal councils, camp committees, and people’s committees, or suggestion boxes located in municipal council offices or mosques. Participants, particularly women, noted the absence of safe, confidential feedback mechanisms, especially for sensitive issues such as harassment and GBV incidents. For complaints related to protection concerns or other sensitive issues, participants expressed strong preference for face-to-face engagement.

***“We don’t know how to file complaints or give feedback about aid or staff behaviour. If we did, we would have reported the rude treatment displaced people often face and the expired food aid some institutions have distributed. The best way to provide feedback is through the hotline, although some prefer to do so in person.” – Man, Nablus***

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO SHELTER CLUSTER PARTNERS

- **Prioritize rental cash assistance and livelihoods support**, including emergency multi-purpose cash assistance and cash-for-work programmes, with a focus on women-headed households, older women, women with disabilities, and GBV survivors.
- **Promote housing, land and property rights and strengthen legal aid**, including promoting co-signing of formal rental agreements by women and men to enhance security of tenure.
- **Adapt shelters to address gender, inclusion, safety, and protection concerns**, such as installing locks, adequate lighting, and secure windows and doors.
- **Ensure accessibility of shelters for persons with disabilities**, including through appropriate design modifications. This includes improving lighting and visual contrast in shelters to support persons with visual impairments, as well as ensuring physical accessibility for persons with severe mobility limitations, through the installation of ramps, handrails, or accessible sanitation facilities.
- **Provide essential non-food items** such as kitchen utensils and hygiene supplies to meet basic household needs.
- **Expand weatherproofing and winterization support**, especially for individuals living in makeshift and collective shelters, including sealing-off kits, warm clothing, and bedding.
- **Enhance the engagement of women and WLOs/WROs** in needs assessments, programme design, and technical specifications for shelter interventions are gender-responsive and inclusive and reflect the diverse needs, priorities, and perspectives of women and girls.
- **Scale up accountability to affected people mechanisms**, ensuring accessible information-sharing and responsive complaints and feedback systems, tailored to the needs and preferences of women, children, and persons with disabilities.
- **Strengthen coordination and linkages between the Shelter Cluster and other humanitarian coordination mechanisms** including the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Cluster, Food Security Cluster, Education Cluster, GBV Area of Responsibility, MHPSS Technical Working Group, and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Network to provide holistic assistance to crisis-affected communities.

---

<sup>i</sup> [Summary of the Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024 | International Court of Justice](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [Palestine Country Dashboard | Palestine Health Cluster](#)

<sup>iii</sup> [2025 Northern West Bank Operational Plan \(September to December\) | OCHA](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [Humanitarian Situation Update #308 West Bank \(21 July 2025\) | OCHA](#)

<sup>v</sup> [2025 Northern West Bank Operational Plan \(September to December\) | OCHA](#)

<sup>vi</sup> [Humanitarian Situation Update #335 West Bank \(30 October 2025\) | OCHA](#)

<sup>vii</sup> [Gender-Based Violence Safety Audit Report - West Bank | West Bank GBV Sub-Cluster](#)

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid