

Joint Statement from the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group | Hungry, Cold, and Left Behind: The toll of food insecurity on Gaza's women and girls

19 December 2025

The Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group remains deeply concerned by the ongoing crisis facing women and girls in Gaza. The current ceasefire has failed to translate into improved safety and protection. Since 10 October 2025, dozens of women and girls have been killed and hundreds more injured, with many sustaining life-altering disabilities. Continued bombardments, expansion of militarized zones, and severe movement restrictions force women and girls to live in constant fear while struggling to meet their most basic needs. At the same time, humanitarian assistance remains dangerously slow and grossly insufficient, with limited food, cooking fuel, and essential supplies reaching only a fraction of those in need.

Based on the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) data released today, UN Women estimates that nearly 790,000 women and girls are currently experiencing crisis-level food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or higher). Alarming, over 1,000 women and girls are facing catastrophic conditions and the risk of famine between now and April 2026 (IPC Phase 5). During the same period, an estimated 37,000 pregnant women and 50,000 girls are at risk of acute malnutrition. The impacts of food insecurity and malnutrition are disproportionately borne by women-headed households, pregnant and breastfeeding women, girls under the age of five, older women, and women with disabilities, whose needs remain critically underserved.

“Food is a daily struggle. We rely entirely on the community kitchen, and some days there is nothing at all. I often give my portion to my children and go hungry, searching markets for discarded vegetables. Hunger is breaking me. I feel an overwhelming sense of helplessness and fear, especially on days when there is nothing to silence the hunger.” Displaced mother of five children, Gaza City

Nutritious food in Gaza remains scarce and prohibitively expensive, placing it beyond the reach of many women. Cooking gas now costs around ILS 80 (USD 25) per kilo, while essential foods such as vegetables, fruit, meat, and eggs are largely unaffordable. According to the Gaza Food Security Cluster, one in four households is surviving on just one meal per day. UN Women reports that women-headed households, which account for one in seven households, are particularly affected. Two thirds of women-headed households depend on humanitarian assistance and community support networks, with many forced to skip meals, take on debt, deplete savings, and sell personal belongings to make ends meet.

These already dire conditions are worsening with the onset of winter. Overcrowded shelters, makeshift tents, and damaged homes offer little protection from cold, rain, and wind, while families lack blankets, warm clothing, and heating materials. According to UN Women, three quarters of women-headed households urgently need shelter support, and two thirds of women urgently need clothing. In these conditions, women – who shoulder primary responsibility for cooking, cleaning, and caregiving – often lack safe spaces and equipment to store or prepare food. The combined effects of hunger, cold, and unsafe food preparation pose an immediate and severe threat to women's health, nutrition, and survival.

“The recent storm did more than destroy our tent – it took away our last sense of safety. Water poured in, soaking everything we owned, as my son and I clung to each other, helpless. We had no dry clothes, no warmth, and no real shelter from the rain. Each night, I lie awake,

terrified of losing my son, after already losing my husband and baby. The cold is relentless, and our shelter is far too weak to protect us.” Displaced widow and mother of one child, Deir El Balah

While the United Nations and humanitarian partners have scaled up food assistance since the ceasefire – through general food distributions, multi-purpose cash transfers, and community kitchens and bakeries – systemic access barriers continue to prevent women and girls from receiving humanitarian assistance. UN Women reports that many women and girls avoid markets and public transportation due to safety and protection concerns. In addition, two thirds of women face obstacles to registering for humanitarian assistance, often because of limited information, mobility restrictions, or the burden of household and caregiving responsibilities.

At the same time, the conflict has devastated local food production, further entrenching dependency on aid. According to UNOSAT and FAO, only 4 per cent of cropland remains undamaged and accessible. The Urban Women’s Agripreneur Forum estimates that around 50 per cent of women-led small and medium agricultural enterprises have been partially or fully destroyed, while access to the sea for fishing remains restricted. Although some women have established home gardens and clay ovens as coping mechanisms, far greater investment is required – including access to capital, inputs, and training – to restore livelihoods, boost household income, and rebuild local food systems.

“Mothers are facing acute food insecurity that places them in an impossible dilemma: enduring hunger themselves or securing food for their children. Widespread food shortages, severely constrained availability, and the soaring prices of remaining items in local markets have pushed many women to adopt extreme coping strategies. These include subsisting on one meal per day or less, drastically reducing portion sizes, fasting for consecutive days, relying almost exclusively on legumes and canned foods, and depending on meals provided by community kitchens.” Amal Syam, Director of Women’s Affairs Centre in Gaza

Without rapid, predictable, and large-scale assistance, the crisis will deepen and preventable deaths will rise. The Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group urgently calls on all parties to ensure safe, gender responsive, and unconditional humanitarian access; scale up lifesaving assistance; protect civilians and restore critical infrastructure; and enable the entry of commercial goods to revive local markets and food production. Humanitarian responses must be gender-responsive and inclusive, prioritizing the specific needs of women and girls, particularly the most vulnerable, and Palestinian women-led organizations must be adequately supported to continue delivering essential services and sustaining their frontline operations.

Notes to editors

The GiHA Working Group aims to collectively coordinate and advance gender equality in humanitarian action in Palestine. The GiHA Working Group is co-chaired in Gaza by UN Women and the Palestinian women-led organization, the Women’s Affairs Centre. The group includes members from humanitarian organizations such as United Nations agencies and international, national and local non-governmental organizations, including women-led organizations.

For information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

- UN Women: Manal Musleh, manal.musleh@unwomen.org
- Women’s Affairs Centre: Amal Syam, amal.syam@wac.org.ps