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## **Policy Brief**

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# **The Provision of Temporary Shelter for Displaced Persons Across the Gaza Strip in the 2023-2024 War: Needs, Challenges and Alternative Solutions**

The Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) regularly publishes applied and scientific studies, in addition to brief research papers, as part of an annual series of roundtable sessions on important economic topics of interest to the public and decision-makers. The policy briefs outline the key recommendations of selected scholastic activities, in order to disseminate this information and maximize the benefits derived from this series of sessions.

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**MAS**

**PALESTINE ECONOMIC POLICY  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE (MAS)**

Tel No. +970 (2) 2987053/4

Fax No. +970 (2) 298055

[info@mas.ps](mailto:info@mas.ps)

[ww.mas.ps](http://ww.mas.ps)

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**The Provision of Temporary Shelter for Displaced Persons Across the Gaza Strip in the 2023-2024 War:  
Needs, Challenges and Alternative Solutions**

Prepared by: Engineer Hesham Al-Abed Ad-Dirawi, Urban Planning Expert, Former Director of the General Directorate of Urban Planning and Organization at Deir al-Balah Municipality

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## 1. Background

The latest war on Gaza Strip 2023/2024 has brought the largest devastation to the Strip and created the largest displacement situations, displacing many individuals and families estimated at 1.9 million, corresponding to 90% of the total population of the Gaza Strip. The background paper prepared on the topic aims to examine the alternatives available, for emergency shelter units for displaced persons of the Gaza Strip to meet their needs pending their return to their houses.

Providing temporary and adequate shelter is one of the main problems facing displaced persons who are forced to leave their homes. The importance of the research lies in the fact that the issue of temporary shelter in the post-2023/2024 war will constitute an urgent need, particularly since hundreds of thousands of the population have lost their houses. Different international actors estimate that more than 300,000 housing units have been partially or completely damaged in the course of the war, implying that there will be a significant need for housing thousands of households in temporary shelters pending the reconstruction of their houses.

This process might take many years, requiring temporary shelter to be socially and economically fit and to provide these households with shelters that will protect them from the heat of summer and the cold of winter and meet their material and moral obligations throughout that period.

Given the recent developments in structural materials and systems, there is a diversity and a multiplicity of housing alternatives available. Such alternatives include the use of materials recycled from the locations of disasters as well as of portable structural systems that are assembled quickly. Such alternatives also include the integration of sustainable systems and the provision of physical shelters. Yet other basic needs should be met, including security for rebuilding a life pattern and fulfilling human requirements, including food and water.

The paper examines previous experiences of temporary shelter in the Gaza Strip in addition to reviewing the international experiences of some states and cities worldwide that managed to properly provide their citizens with temporary shelter. It also compares proposed solutions through examining the factors impacting the quality of temporary shelter units and assessing the alternatives introduced to come up with the solutions that are the most commensurate with the reality of the Gaza Strip.

## 2. Challenges Facing Temporary Shelter for Gaza's Displaced Persons during the 2023-2024 War

Given the unprecedented scale of destruction resulting from the 2023/2024 War, the need for an enabling environment becomes a necessity, to help consolidate efforts towards quick reconstruction which requires great concerted efforts from the international community to ensure free entry of basic resources needed to shelter the displaced and for reconstruction, including building and construction materials, and freedom of movement for citizens. This faces many challenges, most importantly:

- **Humanitarian Crisis:** which is considered one of the most significant challenges for the international community in modern times. The whole world is going through a security upheaval, disputes over

resources as well as inter-generational and inter-state conflicts. These disputes and conflicts have resulted in the displacement of urban communities, and these wars have impacted the pattern of normal life for many citizens and caused the displacement of millions. The Gaza Strip stands out as one of the most affected regions, as it has been going through unstable circumstances and its population has been suffering from deteriorating security and economic conditions. All of this has occurred at a time when many families and households have become homeless.

- **The large numbers of displaced and migrant population:** This requires adequate and immediate responses to secure their lives and provide them with temporary and appropriate shelter, as providing temporary and appropriate shelter is the main problem for the displaced who are forced by circumstances to leave their homes. The number of displaced people in the Gaza Strip is estimated at 1.9 million people, equivalent to 90% of the population of the Strip.
- **The Large-scale Infrastructure Destruction:** the war has resulted in the destruction of the majority of public facilities and infrastructure. Roads, water, sewerage, and sanitation networks were affected largely. All of this risk causing environmental and health crises and diminishes options for providing locations suitable for temporary shelter. It is also important to remove the remnants of exploded ordnance from the location.
- **The Difficulty of Finding Lands to Build Shelters on:** There are areas designated for emergency shelter in some countries, which are considered to have multiple purposes. In normal situations, these areas are used to serve the people, and in crises, they become shelters. Therefore, it will be challenging for the responsible parties to find lands to build shelters on, especially that the majority of land in populated areas is private property, and most of the land owned by the government is outside urban areas (mostly in areas of former Israeli settlements, most of which are agricultural land or nature reserves).
- **Siege Restrictions:** The siege and blockade on the movement of essential reconstruction resources, buildings, and various construction materials in the Gaza Strip have hindered the arrival of construction materials needed to provide temporary shelter units and basic resources, which clearly affects the implementation of temporary shelter and reconstruction plans.
- **Lack of Resources:** Shelters suffer from a shortage of basic materials such as water, food, and fuel, which will affect the ability of the displaced to settle unless there is good management of shelters that cares about meeting the basic needs of the population.
- **Economic Restrictions:** The prolonged presence of people in shelters will lead to a lack of economic opportunities, making it difficult for the displaced to improve their living conditions.

### 3. Recommendations

#### 3.1 The Preferable Architectural Alternative (in order of preference)

Based on the Background paper that this Policy Brief is derived from, it could be concluded, and the majority of experts agreed, that under the current circumstances, it may not be possible to implement the preferred alternatives below as long as the Occupation continues to control the Rafah crossing and prevent the entry of the required materials (manufactured or raw materials). However, it is necessary to prepare for the circumstances that allow for their implementation (even if other alternatives are resorted to under the current emergency circumstances).

1. **Locally manufactured Steel Containers:** This alternative likely meets the functional requirements in terms of durability and design flexibility. It can be adapted from the inside to maximize livability, and provide social security, and individual privacy. It can be lined from the inside to provide thermal insulation and be adapted to serve housing functions in both winter and summer. This alternative can be produced at a reasonable cost since labor is available and relatively cheap compared to abroad. Local manufacturing will create thousands of job opportunities and contribute to driving the local economy.
2. **Imported Caravans:** This alternative should be prioritized, especially at the beginning and in the period immediately following the end of the war. Therefore, importing caravans in the first few months toward the end of the war may be the preferred option until the local infrastructure is ready to manufacture caravans. This alternative may also become more significant if such caravans are imported from neighboring countries or are manufactured partially or entirely in the West Bank, or even by the Arab community and economy (1948) in Israel. The responsible authorities may request from the supplier specific specifications related to the shape, and internal layout of rooms, household facilities, or even specifications related to the external appearance to align with the conditions in the Gaza Strip and meet the desired requirements of the caravan to cater to the social and cultural needs of the population.
3. **Lego blocks or mud bricks:** These can be used for constructing temporary shelters if they are offered by local manufacturing investors for reasonable prices. If they are manufactured locally and if economically feasible (the cost of setting up a regular Lego brick factory is relatively high), it is advisable to encourage the use of these bricks in other construction sites even after the intended purpose of their use in shelters is accomplished. On the other hand, if the entry of any building materials from abroad is prohibited, there are still opportunities to manufacture bricks from what is called greencake or something similar to traditional mudbrick (sand, treated waste aggregate, straw, etc.).
4. **Tents and containers:** Living in tents provides utterly unfavorable conditions, particularly that they expose displaced people to excessive heat waves and exacerbate their suffering. Also, the option of metal containers is considered expensive and inappropriate, and therefore it is recommended that these two alternatives be completely excluded from the list of temporary shelters.

### 3.2 Planning the Geospatial Distribution of Temporary Shelter Areas

- It is advisable to choose locations that are close, to the extent possible, to the original places of residence, so that the population will feel familiar with and develop a sense of belonging to the location and in order to maintain social ties among them. Notably, the Palestinian government has designated nearly 100 sites in various governorates of the Strip that are considered available (in terms of ownership and use) for the establishment of temporary shelters.
- It is also advisable to choose locations whose ownership is not contested and it is always preferable to choose Municipality-owned locations or establish provisional shelter centers on government or the Ministry of Endowments lands, if available. As for those affected who used to own individual houses within their own plots of land, it is preferable that temporary shelter units are placed within their owned property.
- Since the land plots that could be available close to destroyed residential compounds will be relatively small in terms of area, it is preferable that the shelter centers neither be set up in

large numbers nor detached from the urban context of the area. It is also preferable that the population in such shelter centers continue to receive services from nearby places as the other residents so that they will not feel isolated.

- Consideration of the need for such locations to offer a reasonable percentage of security and neutrality. i.e. the parties of the conflict shall commit not to utilize or militarily target them
- It is preferable that such locations be flat or with a slight inclination of 2-4%, provided that the land surface inclination does not exceed 10% to help the natural drainage of water. The landscape shall provide natural drainage for water and that such a location be above flood level. Steep slopes and narrow valleys should be avoided
- Public land plots should not be used unless the approval of the competent government authorities is obtained.
- Privately owned land plots shall not be used unless an agreement is reached with the owners on an official legal arrangement as per the laws in effect.
- It is preferable that the locations of the shelter centers be designed in general in the form of small residential compounds that are separated by proper distances, whereby each center is equipped with the decentralized necessary services (toilets, sinks, rest and recreation yards) and these compounds are surrounded by a centralized service area (health services, nutritional services, education, water sources ...etc.).
- The locations shall be planned and designed to constitute a part of the rest of the city, and not as closed, isolated, and independent areas. No areas shall be allocated to markets and schools within the boundaries of such locations since consideration will be given to ensure that the shelter locations are close to these services.
- It is important to rehabilitate the destroyed water and sewerage networks as well as the power grid before commencing the establishment of temporary shelter units. It is also important to remove the remnants of exploded ordnance from the location.
- Sustainable usability: It is important to think about how to disassemble shelter units that are easily reused for other purposes after the intended purpose of their use is accomplished and reuse sites according to their functions as stated in the structural and detailed plans.

### **3.3 Needs of displaced people in displacement camps**

- It is also important to involve the population in the implementation and construction work and ensure that they are entrusted with an important role in the management and operation of the shelter location and forming teams that will help not only clean up, improve the aesthetics of, and take care of the general appearance of the shelter location, but also distribute aid rations.
- Provision of psychological and social support services for improving the quality of life.
- Providing educational tools for children: establishing teaching centers to teach children various skills that support the curriculum and holding extracurricular activities, so that the shelter center, with all its residents of different ages, is naturally integrated into the environment.
- Vocational training: Providing vocational training programs to help displaced people find jobs and improve their skills, with a special focus on empowering women, the youth, and people with special needs.
- Coordination of efforts: ensure the collaboration between the humanitarian agencies and local governments to meet the urgent needs while planning for development.