

Red Line for Gaza Ceasefire in Gaza: what now for women and girls?

Overview

Gaza's remaining 2.1 million civilians continue to face horrendous conditions, including ongoing regular violence, starvation caused by Israel's blockade, the destruction of over 90% of homes and catastrophic damage to hospitals and health care services, and being forced to live in cramped unsafe conditions after being displaced many times over. Despite the new peace plan being approved, Israeli authorities are not allowing enough trucks into Gaza and there continues to be a devastating shortage of food, medicine and humanitarian supplies. Over 60,000 Palestinians have now been killed in Gaza, including 20,000 children, and the UN Commission of Inquiry has recently found that genocide is being committed by Israel. Whilst the catastrophe has had a devastating impact on men and boys (who are being killed in large numbers), women and girls have been disproportionately affected in many ways, with the conflict representing a massive affront to gender equality and justice.

This brief – from the Red Line for Gaza campaign – offers an overview of some of the impacts women and girls are currently facing and the ways in which Palestinian women are responding to this crisis. This brief was produced in November 2025, following the approval of the Gaza peace plan in October 2025. It draws on insights from the Gender Justice campaign week held by the Red Line for Gaza campaign in early September 2025. Given the scale of destruction in Palestine, many of these findings will remain relevant for months to come, as the conflict's impact on the rights of women and girls will persist long after any formal peace agreement – underscoring the necessity of Palestinian women's full and meaningful participation in any peace and recovery processes. The destruction of health services, the prevalence of violence, and the ongoing challenges with humanitarian access are, unfortunately, long-term crises that demand ongoing urgent action from the UK Government and others.

Our message is clear: violence against women and girls should never be used as a tool of oppression in war. The violence and suffering must end, now.

Our Evidence: Violence against women and girls

Women and girls remain at extreme risk of targeted horrific violence in Gaza. Before the ceasefire came into place, approximately one Palestinian woman was killed every hour in Gaza through direct bombardment by the Israeli military. According to UN estimates, women and girls account for 67% of people killed in Gaza. Alarms have been raised over reports of sexual violence perpetrated by Israeli forces, while the broader conflict has further heightened existing risks for women and girls, including gender-based, domestic, and sexual violence. The following case study is an extract from the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, published in July 2025. This documents the violence experienced by women under Israeli forces:

"In a small house in eastern Gaza, a woman in her fifties - mother of six and grandmother of three - lived a simple life despite the harsh conditions. That was until the third day of the war. She left everything behind and took her family to the nearest hospital, searching for safety. On the evening of the fifth day, the first explosion rocked the hospital. It was an Israeli occupation strike that was later said to have been "accidental."

But in times of war, apologies are useless. Many left the place, but she decided to stay, thinking that the hospital would be a safe area. However, on October 17, the genocide repeated itself: the roof collapsed, blood flowed, and screams filled the air in one of the massacres committed by the Israeli occupation against civilians.

Days later, Israeli occupation soldiers surrounded the facility. Her husband, her nephew, and other relatives were arrested. She and her two sisters were among the "abducted." The men were forced to strip and were bound in the freezing cold. The women were subjected to invasive searches and stood on the pavement under the stares of male and female soldiers. At one point, they had to relieve themselves in the street under the watch of soldiers. Their money, jewelry - even their underwear - were stolen. They walked barefoot on gravel, beaten, cursed, and threatened. In one camp, they were covered with wet blankets in the rain until their limbs went numb. They were separated, psychologically tortured, and some were sexually harassed. One woman miscarried after being hit in the abdomen. Others were subjected to degrading verbal and physical abuse."

Research from GAGE (Gender and Adolescence Global Evidence) has also found that the conflict in Gaza has narrowed girls' life choices and exposed them to heightened risks of early marriage and abuse. With societal structures collapsing and daily life reduced to a struggle to meet survival needs, 71% of the participants in their 2024 research reported increased pressure on girls to marry as children. As one health NGO worker told researchers:

"Honestly, before the war, child marriage was decreasing. But unfortunately, during the aggression... When you link this issue to the economic and social reality... It has increased, and alarmingly so. Families, in difficult economic and social conditions, want to reduce the number of mouths to feed, so they say, 'Goodbye' [to their daughter]."

In Women for Women International's 2024 global consultation, "From Asking to Action", 68% of women consulted with in Palestine reported that child marriage is practiced in their communities. This high incidence is likely to rise even further in light of the ongoing crisis in Gaza and the West Bank and the struggle of families to survive. As displacement increases and safe housing is destroyed, some families view child marriage as a way to protect their daughters from potential sexual violence. Palestinian women's rights organisations (WROs) also reported that families often feel pressure to marry off girls at a younger age to prevent abuse - whether in refugee camps, within host communities or by members of the Israeli Defence Forces.



Our Evidence: The destruction of services for women and girls

The healthcare system, including sexual and reproductive health facilities across Gaza, has been destroyed. Most services have collapsed, and rebuilding is set to take years. This destruction of Gaza's health system is catastrophic. There have been repeated direct attacks on hospitals and ambulances. Women and girls are cut off from essential sexual and reproductive care - contraception, access to services before and after pregnancy, treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and post-rape support.

Women are also often providing the care and response required; a reminder that Palestinian women must not merely be seen as victims of the occupation and conflict but as essential agents for reconstruction, recovery, and peace. The UN estimates that 55,000 pregnant women in Gaza have nowhere to seek medical help. Approximately 130 babies are born every day, and 1 in 5 are born prematurely or suffering from complications. As of October 2025, only 15 health facilities in Gaza are currently able to provide obstetric and newborn care, all overwhelmed with patients and critically short of supplies.

Women and girls have been forced to give birth under bombardment, displacement and suffering from famine. Many women and newborns are dying due to utterly avoidable complications in pregnancy and childbirth. A recent UN report concludes that the systematic destruction of sexual and reproductive healthcare facilities amounts to an act of genocide.

Beyond healthcare, organisations providing vital legal and psychosocial support have also been devastated. Over the course of September 2025 alone, more than 400,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced from Gaza City, including staff and partners of the Center for Women's Legal Research, Counselling and Protection (CWLRCPC), many of whom lost loved ones. The CWLRCPC centre in Gaza City, once a lifeline for women seeking legal and psychosocial assistance, has been forced to close. Despite this, CWLRCPC remains determined, continuing to deliver mobile support to women wherever possible.

Our Evidence: The blocking of aid

At the same time, Israeli authorities are blocking humanitarian assistance and commercial supplies - including life-saving aid such as food, clean water, and medical supplies - from reaching Gaza. This has had catastrophic consequences for women and girls. Tahani, Member of The Family Defense Association, Nablus, shares:

"Many women have no shelter at all. They live on the streets or in tents that lack even the most basic necessities. The burdens we carry as women and girls are immense. We're responsible not only for securing food, water and clothing, but also for the care of others. We try to meet children's needs while having none of our own met. The psychological toll is devastating. Our bodies feel it. Our health suffers."

In addition, menstrual supplies have routinely been blocked by Israel from entering Gaza. This means that hundreds of thousands of women and adolescent girls have been forced to manage their periods with limited access to pads, medicine, toilets and privacy, in incredibly unsafe and unsanitary conditions. In the shelters run by UNRWA in Rafah, the UN aid agency for Palestinians, on average there is only one toilet per 486 people.

Our Evidence: The impacts of the famine and hunger crisis in Gaza

Israel's blockade on Gaza has created a human-made famine, leaving people struggling to find enough food to survive. Evidence shows that in times of conflict, women and girls often eat last and least, surviving on the least nutritious food available, acting as 'shock absorbers' for their households and deprioritising their own food consumption. Malnutrition is also particularly dangerous for children under five, and adolescent girls and young women who are pregnant and breastfeeding.

Severe malnutrition is now widespread, with doctors reporting a sharp rise in life-threatening complications among mothers and newborns. Pregnant and breastfeeding women are facing famine conditions, increasing the risk of stillbirth, low birth weight, and long-term developmental challenges for babies. These impacts threaten to entrench an intergenerational cycle of poor health and malnutrition. A mother in Gaza shares:

"As a working woman, hunger exhausts me more than work itself. I return each day empty-handed, with nothing to feed my children. Bread is beyond reach, and tears are no longer enough to calm our children. Hunger is not temporary; it lives with us."

The UN Commission of Inquiry and its finding of genocide in Gaza

The UN Commission of Inquiry concluded (in its report of 16th September) that four of the five genocidal acts defined under the 1948 Genocide Convention have been carried out in Gaza – namely killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about destruction, and imposing measures intended to prevent births. This report represents the strongest and most authoritative UN determination to date and is a devastating indictment of the international community's failure to prevent atrocities in real time.

The Commission's conclusion is a reflection of the daily reality for the people of Gaza – particularly women and girls.

The women who have survived – and who we work with in partnership with local women's rights organisations – tell us how conflict and displacement have reshaped every aspect of their lives, yet have shown remarkable resilience and leadership in the face of these overwhelming challenges.

Mothers walk for hours with hungry, barefoot children only to arrive in overcrowded camps without clean water, shelter, or health care. With hospitals destroyed and food blocked, pregnant women give birth in tents without medical support, risking their own lives and those of their newborns. Adolescent girls face hunger, exploitation, and gender-based violence in unsafe camps, while nearly half a million displaced children – many of them girls – have been denied education, safety, and stability, planting the seeds for lifelong trauma.

Urgent action is needed now from the UK Government

The horrors that women and girls continue to endure in Gaza must be stopped. Women and girls' rights and bodies must never be weaponised during war. This crosses every red line.



Women and girls rights and freedoms must be fulfilled, and we must act now. To enable this, we are calling on the UK Government to immediately:

- Condemn atrocities: Use consistent language in public and private statements to denounce attacks on civilians, making clear there can be no impunity for crimes and violations committed.
- Engage diplomatically: Leverage diplomatic networks and convene like-minded partners to engage robustly with the Government of Israel to ensure humanitarian access to Gaza, and pair this with tangible consequences for denial of aid access and use of starvation as a weapon of war.
- Protect humanitarian principles: Reject and refrain from funding aid mechanisms that violate international law or weaponise assistance and support the neutral effective principled delivery of humanitarian assistance instead.
- Impose sanctions: Apply travel bans and asset freezes against Israeli officials where there is credible evidence of responsibility for atrocities or incitement in Gaza (as well as in the West Bank).
- Support UNRWA: Provide sustained political and financial backing for UNRWA, as the backbone of the aid response.
- Fund aid interventions that tackle the gendered impacts of the conflict and rights-based programmes: this includes funding programmes that tackle Gender-Based Violence and provide women and girls with the health, SRHR and nutrition services that they need and support education and leadership initiatives focused on legal awareness, digital advocacy, and community mobilisation.
- Advance the participation of women and young people: Ensure the full, meaningful involvement of women and young people in humanitarian planning and political processes, from design through monitoring, with leadership not contingent on post-conflict stability.
- Create safe platforms: Scale opportunities for women's civic and political engagement, especially in marginalised and remote communities affected by mobility restrictions such as Israeli checkpoints.
- Promote women's political inclusion: Support women's political participation across Gaza and the West Bank, recognising political fragmentation as a barrier to unified advocacy and recognising women's role across the reconstruction process.
- Implement the UK's National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS): Fully apply the WPS National Action Plan in Palestine, ensuring Palestinian women and girls receive the same protections as women in other conflict contexts, and consider designating Palestine as a focus country of the NAP.

As part of the Red Line for Gaza Campaign from the 7th-13th September 4,801 individuals reached out to their MPs to call for the UK Government to immediately act for women and girls in Gaza.

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FOR GAZA**