

**Women and girls sheltering for their lives in Gaza face dire lack of sexual and reproductive health supplies, disease outbreak**

**30 October 2023** - Shelter conditions in Gaza for the estimated 1.4 million internally displaced people have become dire, with women and girls reporting a severe lack of menstrual hygiene products, cases of sexually transmitted diseases and urinary tract infections with little to no medical treatment available in the severely overcrowded shelters.

Contraception is in very short supply, and according to our local team sheltering and providing services in Gaza, women are sharing contraceptive pills. Women with intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUDs) are experiencing bleeding and infections due to the unhygienic conditions in the camps. There are currently no options for IUD removal in Gaza, posing long term risks to women’s reproductive health, including severe bleeding.

On 25 October, the UN said that fuel in Gaza could run out within hours, and that hospitals in the Gaza Strip are taking emergency cases only, which will prevent many women and girls from seeking sexual and reproductive health care. If Israel continues to block humanitarian aid including safe delivery kits from entering Gaza, many of the estimated 50,000 pregnant women[[1]](#footnote-1) in Gaza will have no safe place to give birth, with at least 15% likely to experience complications[[2]](#footnote-2), further compromising already stalled progress in reducing the rates of maternal morbidity and mortality.

**Wafa Abu-Hasheish, a health worker at PFPPA in Gaza said:**

“The shelter is suffering from a shortage of water, lack of medical care, and an increase in the incidence of diseases such as influenza, chest infections, skin ulcers, scabies, lice, and diarrheal diseases, and girls and women are reporting menstrual disturbance. There are also cases of sexually transmitted infections and urinary tract infections. Women using contraceptive pills are sharing their supplies with others.

The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Gaza is currently estimated at around 1.4 million (more than half the population), with a large part of that population living in overcrowded and under-supplied shelters with food, water, and fuel running out – and basic and life-sustaining services becoming more inaccessible by the hour. The mental and physical health toll on local health workers in Gaza is immense.”

Abu-Hasheish added:

“On a personal level, being the service provider and being present in the shelter has caused me several psychological problems, stress, and fear. I also suffer problems such as neckache and back muscle tension due to the inability to sleep or sit properly. I have contracted a flu and developed excessive breathing difficulties, but there is a lack of available treatment for displaced people due to the high number of patients and the scarcity of medicines. I had to go home for rest and relaxation, despite the dangers and lack of safety at home.

**Ammal Awadallah, the Executive Director of the Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association (PFPPA) said:**

"If pregnant women are lucky enough to reach a health center or hospital, they are only admitted when they are fully dilated. And they must leave the hospital within three hours after delivery, due to overcrowding in hospital facilities, lack of space and resources.

“Women are forced between choosing privacy and a clean space in their own homes, where they still stand, or shelters with dire conditions. It is choosing between the different evils. There is no safe place in Gaza.”

**For media enquiries, or to speak to our staff member in Palestine, please contact** [**media@ippf.org**](mailto:media@ippf.org)

**About PFPPA**

Established in Jerusalem in 1964, the Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association (PFPPA) is locally registered as an independent, non-profit and non-governmental association with headquarters in Jerusalem. PFPPA has service delivery points located in the West Bank Areas of Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron and Halhoul, in addition to one in the Gaza Strip, which has yet to be relocated after it was destroyed following an Israeli airstrike on 8 October. Furthermore, and in cooperation with local partners, PFPPA is also responsible for 3 safe spaces to provide Gender Based Violence (GBV) related services in the Jerusalem area.

**About the International Planned Parenthood Federation**

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is a global service provider and advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

For 70 years, IPPF, through its 150 Member Associations and collaborative partners, has delivered high-quality sexual and reproductive healthcare and helped advance sexual rights, especially for people with intersectional and diverse needs that are currently unmet. Our Member Associations and partners are independent organisations that are locally owned, which means the support and care they provide is informed by local expertise and context.

We advocate for a world where people have the information they need to make informed decisions about their sexual health and bodies. We stand up and fight for sexual and reproductive rights and against those who seek to deny people their human right to bodily autonomy and freedom. We deliver care that is rooted in rights, respect, and dignity - no matter what.

1. Source: UNFPA [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Source: MISP [↑](#footnote-ref-2)