

IN THIS ISSUE

Increase in destruction of Palestinian property in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem..... 2

Mothers at risk: limited access to medicine and family planning services compromises maternal health in Gaza..... 7



UNFPA staff preparing the distribution of essential medical supplies, Gaza City (14 July 2019).

© Photo by UNFPA, Yousef Nateel

HIGHLIGHTS

- So far in 2019, 547 Palestinians have lost their homes due to demolitions in the West Bank, exceeding the figure for all of 2018.
- More than 90 per cent of families affected by demolitions in 2019 have remained in their communities, in part due to the aid provided to them.
- Over half of essential medicines in Gaza have less than a month's supply.

OVERVIEW

Recent statements by both Israeli and Palestinian officials have called into question the 25-year old division of the West Bank into Areas A, B & C, established as part of the 1990s Oslo Accords. On the one hand, Israel's Prime Minister declared his intention, if re-elected, to "apply Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea" as a first step to the formal annexation of all Israeli settlements in Area C. On the other hand, Palestine's Prime Minister stated that the A, B & C division is no longer valid and issued a directive to expand Palestinian master planning in Area C. It still remains unclear if these announcements will be implemented and what the humanitarian impact would be.

In the meantime, as highlighted by one of this month's Bulletin articles, there has been an acceleration in Israel's destruction of Palestinian property, in both Area C and East Jerusalem, citing a lack of building permits. By end-September, some 550 Palestinians, half of them children, have lost their homes and been displaced, exceeding the number of people displaced in all of 2018; tens of thousands have also been adversely affected by the destruction of their animal shelters, water cisterns and networks, agricultural roads, commercial structures, and other properties.

The humanitarian community provides protection and assistance to households and communities affected by demolitions through an inter-agency response mechanism coordinated by UNOCHA. The aid delivered varies, depending on the findings of an initial needs assessment conducted within 48 hours of a demolition and it may include emergency shelter, cash assistance, animal shelters, water and sanitation items, food, psychosocial support, and legal aid. It is estimated that more than 90 per cent of families affected by demolitions remain in their communities, in part due to the aid provided through this mechanism.

Regarding the Gaza Strip, a report submitted this month by UN Office of the Special Coordinator to the highest-level coordination forum for oPt donors (the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee or AHLC) warns about the fragile situation of Gaza's health system, which continues to suffer from severe shortages of infrastructure, equipment, medical supplies and personnel, alongside continuous restrictions on patients referred to medical treatment outside Gaza.



SEPTEMBER FIGURES

Palestinians killed (direct conflict)	4
Palestinians injured (direct conflict)	1,202
Israelis killed (direct conflict)	0
Israelis injured (direct conflict)	4
Structures demolished in the West Bank	48
People displaced in the West Bank	42

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN 2019

351 million (US\$)
Requested

54% funded

54%
Funded



46%
Unmet
requirement

One of the areas affected by this precarious situation is maternal health, the subject of another article in this Bulletin. So far in 2019, as many maternal deaths have been reported than in all of 2018. Continued shortages of essential life-saving maternal and child health pharmaceuticals have increased the risk of disability and death among pregnant women and newborns. The percentage of essential medicines with less than a month's supply increased from 38 per cent in 2017 to 46 per cent in 2018, reaching 50 per cent in August 2019.

The shortage of drugs in Gaza has been partly driven by the chronic budgetary deficit affecting the Palestinian Authority (PA), which is responsible for the supply of drugs and disposables in Gaza. This deficit has been exacerbated over the past six months by Israel's decision to deduct from the VAT revenues it collects on behalf of the PA the allowances that the PA pays to prisoners, and the PA's refusal to receive less than the full amount. However, media reports from early October indicate that the PA has agreed to resume receiving the revenues under Israel's conditions, starting with a \$430 million immediate transfer.

As highlighted by the UN report to the AHLC, donors' support to Gaza in recent months has helped to reduce violence and lessen the impact of the ongoing humanitarian and economic crises. However, *“these efforts were not designed to be open-ended and must be followed by a focus on addressing the political challenge of intra-Palestinian reconciliation, sustained investment by the international community, a significant relaxation of Israeli movement and access restrictions and a renewed commitment by the Palestinian Government to facilitate assistance. The question as we approach 2020 is not whether Gaza is liveable, but how much longer can it exist on the life support that the UN and international partners are providing.”*

“The question as we approach 2020 is not whether Gaza is liveable, but how much longer can it exist on the life support that the UN and international partners are providing.”

UN Office of the Special
Coordinator



INCREASE IN DESTRUCTION OF PALESTINIAN PROPERTY IN THE WEST BANK, INCLUDING EAST JERUSALEM

Demolitions and the story of a West Bank family

Aziz,¹ is a 25 years old Palestinian from Khirbet ar Ras al Ahmar, a small Bedouin community in the northern Jordan Valley. Over the past six years, Aziz has experienced four demolitions by the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA). In February 2019, the ICA demolished seven structures belonging to Aziz, including the tents in which his family resides and shelters for his livestock. Rendered homeless, Aziz, his mother, brother and two sisters were forced to seek refuge in Tammum town (Tubas governorate) for a period of two weeks and leave his livestock behind, exposed to the harsh winter conditions.

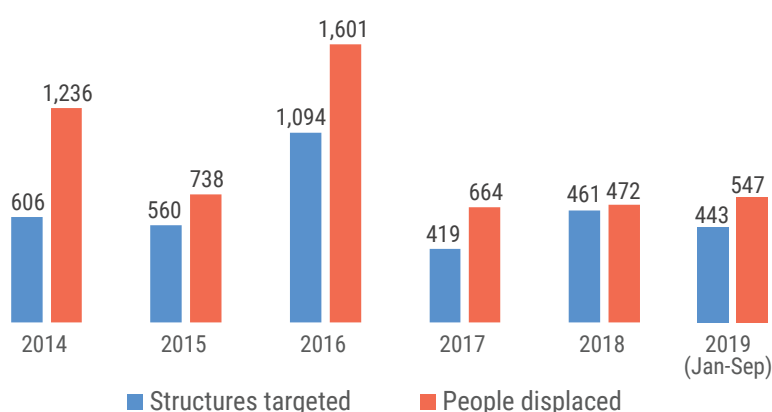
Aziz's family is one of scores affected by the spike in Israel's demolitions and seizures of Palestinian property recorded in 2019. By end September, 443 structures have been targeted in more than 80 communities across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, representing a 43 per cent rise compared to the equivalent period in 2018 (310 structures). As a result, 547 Palestinians, including 259 children, have lost their homes and been displaced, exceeding the number of people displaced in the entire 2018; nearly 50,000 additional Palestinians have been adversely affected by the destruction of their animal shelters, water cisterns and networks, agricultural roads, commercial structures, and other properties. The vast majority of incidents have taken place in Area C and East Jerusalem, on grounds that these properties lack Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible to obtain.



This article was produced with the contribution of the West Bank Protection Consortium

So far this year, nearly 50,000 Palestinians have been adversely affected by the destruction of their animal shelters, water cisterns and networks, agricultural roads, commercial structures, and other properties.

STRUCTURES TARGETED AND PEOPLE DISPLACED-TOTALS



Demolitions have a devastating impact on Palestinians' lives and ability to exercise their rights, and often result in psychological trauma, displacement, family separation, loss of livelihoods and access to basic services.² Along with a restrictive and discriminatory planning regime, movement restrictions, denial of basic services and aid obstruction, demolitions and seizures are part of a coercive environment that pressure many Palestinians to leave their homes and lands, in contravention with international law.³

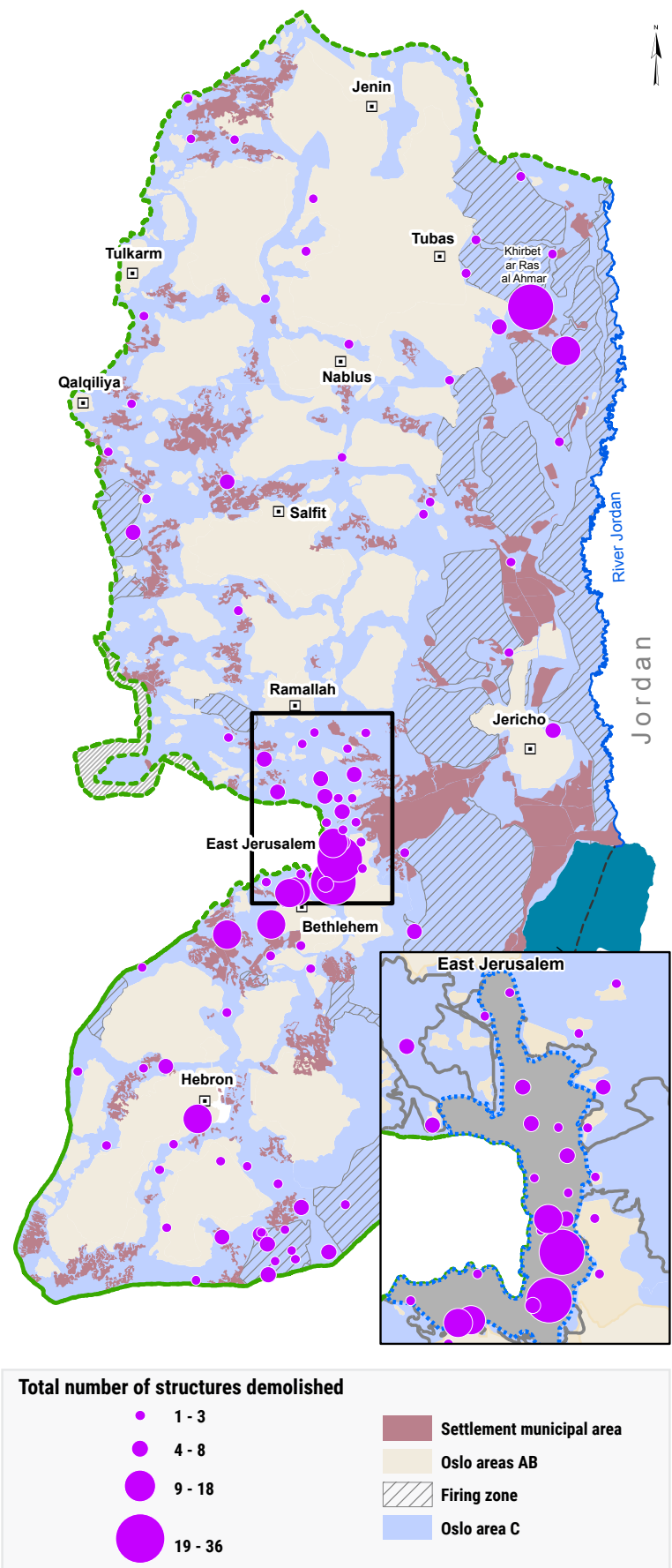
Khirbet ar Ras al Ahmar, is located in Area C, in an area that was designated as a "firing zone" for military training, where entry is prohibited by military order. According to residents, however, the community existed there long before the designation of this area in 1970. Approximately 18 per cent of the West Bank, or about a third of Area C, have been declared "firing zones", where 38 Bedouin and herding communities like Khirbet ar Ras al Ahmar are located. In this year alone, 26 structures have been demolished or seized in Khirbet ar Ras al Ahmar, leaving 30 people displaced, including 10 children.

In addition to the coercive environment experienced by Palestinians living in other parts of Area C, the approximately 6,200 people residing within these firing zones are also affected by recurrent temporary evacuations during military trainings, as well as the risks posed by unexploded ordnance.

Grounds for demolition

Israeli settlements are illegal under international law and their development has taken place amid a highly discriminatory planning framework: Palestinians are allowed to build in less

COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY DEMOLITIONS (JANUARY-AUGUST)



than 1 per cent of Area C and in only about 15 percent of East Jerusalem, which have planning schemes approved by the Israeli authorities. By comparison, approximately 8.5 per cent of Area C has approved planning schemes for settlements, and additional 11 per cent, approximately, are included within the municipal boundaries of settlements for future planning.⁴ In East Jerusalem, 38 per cent of the area annexed to Israel in 1967 has been expropriated and planned for settlements.⁵

This situation has forced Palestinians living in Area C and East Jerusalem to build without permit to meet their housing and livelihoods needs, despite the risk of having their properties demolished. According to information provided by the ICA, as of April 2017, there were over 13,000 demolition orders pending against Palestinian property in Area C alone, with many of these orders targeting multiple structures.⁶ It is estimated that at least a third of all Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem lack Israeli-issued building permits, some of which have pending demolition orders

The Israeli authorities also carry out demolitions in Areas A and B, where the planning and building powers are under the Palestinian Authority. Some of these are punitive demolitions targeting the family homes of perpetrators of attacks against Israelis, citing the need to deter similar attacks in the future. So far in 2019, six homes were destroyed on these grounds.

Demolitions are also executed citing other security concerns. On 22 July, the authorities demolished 10 buildings in a section of the Sur Baher neighborhood of East Jerusalem designated as Area A, citing their location in a buffer zone along the Barrier. Most of the structures targeted had been issued building permits by the Palestinian Authority. This demolition sets a dangerous precedent for many more Palestinian-owned structures located in the vicinity of the Barrier.⁷

Also of concern is recent Israeli legislation that significantly impedes the ability of humanitarian actors providing legal assistance to families at risk of displacement to challenge demolitions and seizures orders in Israeli courts. Military order 1797 applies to Palestinian structures in Area C deemed as new and expands the authority of the ICA to remove such structures within 96 hours from the issuance of a removal order.⁸ The order has been implemented in nine recorded incidents since it came into effect in July 2019.⁹ In addition, an order allowing the seizure of “mobile” structures without prior warning is effective since mid-2017, and an amendment to the planning and building law¹⁰ enabling to expedite demolitions in East Jerusalem, will come into effect in October 2019.

There are over 13,000 demolition orders pending against Palestinian property in Area C alone, with many of these orders targeting multiple structures.



Humanitarian response

The humanitarian community provides protection and assistance to affected households and communities through an inter-agency demolition response mechanism led by UNOCHA. When a demolition or seizure takes place, an initial needs assessment



Livelihood tents provided under the inter-agency response mechanism.

is conducted, after which an alert is sent to the relevant humanitarian partners to finalize the assessment and prepare a response. When the structure targeted is residential, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provide either a temporary tent or a small cash assistance within 24 hours to cover the immediate shelter needs of affected families.

Post demolition assistance includes shelter and/or cash assistance; livelihood solutions; water and sanitation items; food; psychosocial support; education; and legal aid.

The assistance provided by the inter-agency mechanism includes one or more of the following elements: a more permanent shelter and/or cash assistance (supplementing the initial aid by PRCS/ICRC); livelihood solutions such as animal shelters; water and sanitation items; food; psychosocial support; education; and legal aid. Depending on the nature of the needs identified in the initial assessment, a specialized assessment may be carried out by the relevant partners prior to the delivery of further assistance.

The West Bank Protection Consortium (WBPC), which is an organizational umbrella of five international NGOs acting jointly, plays a pivotal role in this inter-agency response mechanism. The humanitarian assistance helps to mitigate the impact of the coercive environment and prevent a potential forcible transfer.

Aziz received emergency relief from the WBPC under the inter-agency demolition response mechanism, including residential and livelihood tents, latrines, water tanks and livelihood equipment. This assistance has allowed the family to stay in safety and dignity in Khirbet ar Ras al Ahmar, their community of origin.

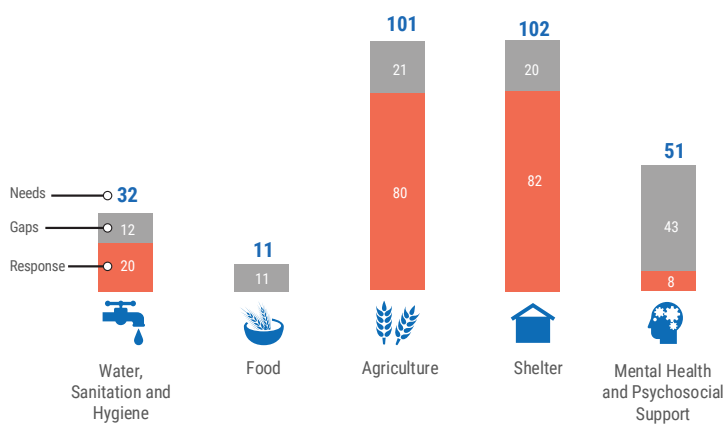


Residential tents provided in Khirbet ar Ras al Ahmar under the inter-agency demolition response mechanism.

Aziz recalls: “Our situation was awful. I don’t know how I could have recovered without this emergency assistance. It would have been very difficult for me to cope with the needs of my family. We felt that we’d lost everything again and were very worried for our livestock”. Aziz continues: “The support we received allowed us to stay in our home community, and to restore my main livelihood activity. Today, thanks to this assistance, I have not only recovered my main source of income, but also developed and enhanced it. Before the demolition, we didn’t have adequate access to water. With the new water tanks, we now have access to drinking water, which improves my family’s living conditions and the health of our livestock.”

“It is the third time that we receive assistance following a demolition; and this support is very valuable and timely. It’s been crucial for our ability to recover materially and psychologically. Without it, we might have been forced to leave but we were able to stay and resume our lives,” concludes Aziz.

THE MAIN NEEDS VS. RESPONSES RECORDED BY OCHA



95 per cent of the households assisted by the Protection Consortium in 2019 report that they are still residing in their communities three to six months after the response.

So far in 2019 (as of end September), UNOCHA has sent 297 “needs alerts” to partners in the response mechanism (one alert equals one type of response per incident). Assistance has been delivered following 190 alerts, while 107 responses are either pending or ongoing.¹¹

Often, material assistance provided through this mechanism in response to demolitions is seized or destroyed by the Israeli authorities, on grounds of lack of building permits. As of end September 2019, 97 such aid structures, worth over 300,000 euros, have been targeted¹², a three-fold increase compared to the same period in 2018 (32).¹³

Despite this, the inter-agency mechanism has proven highly effective in addressing the immediate material needs of affected families, preventing displacement and enabling recovery. For example, 95 per cent of the households assisted by the WBPC in 2019 report that they are still residing in their communities three to six months after the response. Of concern, however, is the increasing number of households in East Jerusalem and Area C who report that they may be forced to leave their community or neighborhood in the future, because the assistance was not sufficient to restore their livelihoods. Similarly, there is an increase of households suffering repeated incidents, like Aziz in Khirbet ar Ras al Ahmar.¹⁴ The response mechanisms, especially for cash assistance, are therefore being reviewed to better tailor the assistance to the specific needs of extremely vulnerable households.



This article was
contributed by the
UN Population Fund

MOTHERS AT RISK: LIMITED ACCESS TO MEDICINE AND FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES COMPROMISES MATERNAL HEALTH IN GAZA

For Sahar Al Nabaheen, the lack of access to regular, high-quality family planning information and services has all but defined her life. At 31, she lives with her husband and their six children in Al Bureij Camp, Middle Area Gaza. Three of Sahar's pregnancies were unplanned due to a lack of available contraceptives. With her and her husband unable to find work, her family of eight are living on no income.

At any given time, there are around 45,000 pregnant women in Gaza. While the mortality rates among women in childbirth in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) have sharply declined over the past 25 years, there are indications that 2018 recorded a worrying reversal in the trend.¹⁵ According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, so far in 2019 (as of end August) there were as many maternal deaths as in all of 2018.¹⁶ A review is ongoing to ascertain the contributing factors, such as possible weakened primary health care, stock outs of essential drugs and disposables, and lack of access to family planning services.

Years of blockade and other movement restrictions on people and goods, including medical resources, the deepening intra-Palestinian political divide, and a chronic energy crisis, have led to a serious deterioration in the availability and quality of health services in the Gaza Strip.

Continued stock outs of essential life-saving maternal and child health pharmaceuticals and disposables are significantly impacting services and are increasingly placing pregnant women and newborns at risk of disability and death. While this has been a longstanding issue in the Gaza Strip, the situation since 2018 has sharply deteriorated: the percentage of essential medicines with less than a month's supply increased from 38 per cent in 2017 to 46 per cent in 2018, reaching 50 per cent in August 2019. Maternal and child health pharmaceuticals are regularly the most affected by the stock outs. Moreover,

According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, so far in 2019 (as of end August) there were as many maternal deaths as in all of 2018.



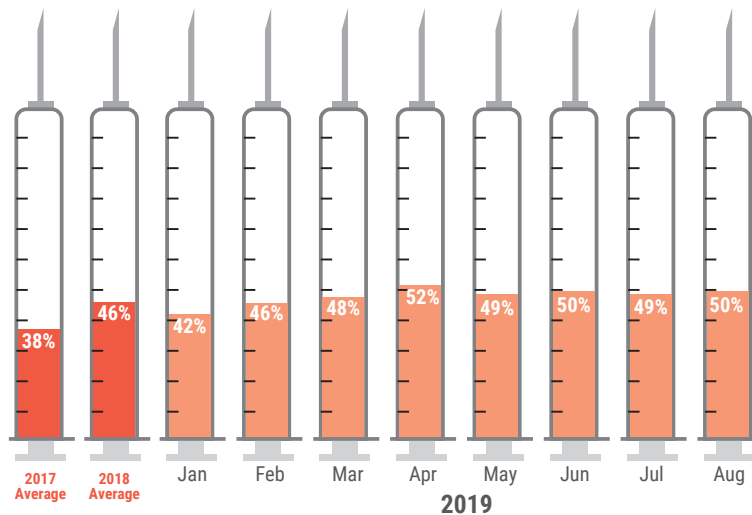
video with Sahar's testimony
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjIFEWABpo4>



Sahar and her children. Al Bureij Camp, Gaza (October 2018).

© Photo by UNFPA

PERCENTAGE OF ESSENTIAL DRUGS AT ZERO STOCK LEVEL (LESS THAN A MONTH OF STOCK)



so far in 2019, an average of 42 per cent of essential medicines were completely depleted, with no stocks left in the Gaza Ministry of Health (MoH) Central Drugs Store.

Items affected by recurrent shortages include iron and folic acid, used to prevent and treat common forms of anemia resulting from micronutrient deficiencies in pregnancy. These shortages have contributed to a rise in anemia, which in 2018 affected nearly 40 per cent of pregnant women.¹⁷ Anemia in pregnancy increases the risk of complications for the mother, such as hemorrhage and decreased ability to tolerate blood loss, possibly leading to circulatory shock and death, as well as increased risk of preterm delivery and low birth weight babies.¹⁸

Additionally, two out of the five essential family planning supplies (progesterone only pills and male condoms), have been at zero stock at MoH and UNRWA clinics in Gaza for much of 2019. Family planning is essential to save lives, as unplanned pregnancy is a major underlying cause of maternal death. Globally, it is estimated that around 44 per cent of maternal deaths could be avoided if the woman had had access to family planning.¹⁹ Most of the remaining maternal mortality cases could be avoided with access to quality medical care during and after pregnancy.

The shortage of drugs in Gaza has been partly driven by the financial crisis affecting the Palestinian Authority, which is responsible for their supply in Gaza too. Additional factors include the increased strain on the health system due to mass casualties from the Great March of Return demonstrations, as well as the unpredictability of medicines shipments to the Gaza Strip, in the context of internal Palestinian tensions.

The situation affects women like Sahar across the Gaza Strip. Sahar has a chronic blood disorder called thalassemia which, in her case, requires life-long treatment, including occasional blood transfusions. Repeated blood transfusions can cause a build-up of iron in the body, which means Sahar requires medicines to remove excess iron.

“Sometimes, I go to the hospital and I can’t find my medicines,” Sahar said. “We receive these medicines from Ramallah, but often they arrive late or they don’t arrive at all”.

“Sometimes, I go to the hospital and I can’t find my medicines,” Sahar said. “We receive these medicines from Ramallah, but often they arrive late or they don’t arrive at all”.

Sahar's story is one of many, stressing the urgent need to address existing shortages and gaps in Gaza, including for maternal and child health, hematology and family planning supplies.

The UN Population Fund (UNFPA), with support from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the government of Japan, has since July 2019 delivered life-saving maternal health drugs and disposables for government and NGO maternity wards, which support around 20,000 pregnant women in Gaza. However, even with the support provided by UNFPA and other humanitarian agencies, 70 per cent of essential maternal and child health drugs remain at zero stock in the MoH.²⁰ These drugs are critical to ensuring that no woman dies giving birth and that children can live long and healthy lives.

UNFPA is procuring the most critically needed drugs, such as antibiotics and oxytocin, which are used to stop severe bleeding after child birth (post-partum hemorrhage), one of the most common causes of maternal mortality globally.

The drugs and disposables procured with CERF funding are delivered to the MoH to be used in maternity wards across the Gaza Strip, as well as NGO hospitals; Sahaba Hospital, Al-Awda Hospital, and Al Amal Hospital.

ENDNOTES

1. Name has been changed for the purpose of privacy and protection of those involved.
2. OCHA, [Threat of demolitions in East Jerusalem](#), July 2019; OCHA, Under Threat: Demolition orders in Area C of the West Bank, September 2015; Diakonia International Humanitarian Law Resource Center, Demolishing the Future Continued Property Destruction in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, June 2019, <https://www.diakonia.se/en/IHL/News-List/property-destruction/>
3. “Displacement and relocation to alternative residential areas, as a result of demolition orders, and a coercive environment, could amount to individual and mass forcible transfer and forced evictions, contrary to the obligations of Israel under international humanitarian and human rights law”. Report of the Secretary-General, A/HRC/31/43, 20 January 2016, para. 68.
4. OCHA, [Demolition orders in Area C of the West Bank](#), September 2015.
5. Bimkom and Ir Amim, [Deliberately Planned: A Policy to Thwart Planning in the Palestinian Neighborhoods of Jerusalem](#), February 2017.
6. An online searchable dashboard presenting data on all demolition orders in Area C is available at [OCHA’s website](#). Based on an examination of over 90 per cent of the records in 2015, the actual number of structures affected was estimated to be 17 per cent higher than the number of demolition orders issued.
7. NRC press release, [Demolitions in Sur Baher set dangerous precedent for Palestinian communities](#), 22 July 2019,
8. Military Order regarding Removal of New Structures (Judea and Samaria) (Temporary Order) (No. 1797) (2018)
9. As of October, 2019, four structures were demolished and another five structures received demolition orders.
10. The planning and building law from 1965 and its amendments apply to both Israel proper and East Jerusalem given the annexation of the eastern part of the city by the occupying power in 1967.
11. In addition, there are legal interventions/counselling that are mainstreamed across the other types of responses.
12. AIDA, Quarterly Bulletin on Humanitarian Relief Obstruction, Defamation of Civil Society, QII 2019.
13. OCHA, [West Bank demolitions and displacement](#), September 2019.
14. REACH, Evaluating the effectiveness of the assistance provided in response to demolitions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, September 2018.
15. According to MoH in Gaza, there was a decline from 74 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1994 to 5.9 deaths in 2017, which subsequently increased to 16.7 in 2018; as of end August 2019 there were as many maternal deaths as in all of 2018. A UN global report estimates that in 2017 there were 27 deaths per 100,000 live births in the entire oPt (Gaza and West Bank), but it does not provide comparable figures for other years. (Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2017: estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and the United Nations Population Division).
16. Gaza Maternal Mortality Committee.
17. MoH in Gaza presentation April 2019
18. Young, M. (2018). Maternal anemia and risk of mortality: a call for action. *The Lancet Global Health*, 6(5), e479-e480. doi: 10.1016/s2214-109x(18)30185-2
19. The lancet: Maternal deaths averted by contraceptive use: an analysis of 172 countries; [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(12\)60478-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(12)60478-4/fulltext)
20. MOH in Gaza – End of August 2019