

# LEARNING BRIEF

## UNFPA CASH ASSISTANCE WITHIN THE GAZA CRISIS

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### Background

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza has had a devastating impact on women and girls, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and increasing the risk of gender-based violence (GBV). The blockade has severely limited access to essential services, including healthcare, and has resulted in widespread poverty and food insecurity. Women and girls are particularly at risk of exploitation and abuse in this context, as they often have limited mobility and access to resources. UNFPA is working to address the needs of women and girls in Gaza through the provision of reproductive health kits, menstrual health management kits, cash assistance and psychological support and hygiene awareness.

UNFPA's experience in different humanitarian contexts has shown that cash and voucher assistance (CVA) is a powerful instrument that can save lives, alleviate risks, and help women and girls escape abusive environments by giving them greater access to vital services, goods and empowering them with the freedom to choose. In the context of the Gaza crisis, where markets are affected but still functioning and access of humanitarian goods has been limited, CVA has proven to be a highly effective and efficient means of delivering assistance to vulnerable women and girls.





## UNFPA'S RESPONSE

### WHAT / WHY

Prior to October 7<sup>th</sup>, UNFPA was providing cash assistance in the framework of GBV case management to mitigate GBV risks and respond to the consequences of GBV and had identified pregnant and lactating women to benefit from a pilot cash assistance project. At the onset of hostilities, GBV case management services, including cash assistance, were suspended due to operational challenges including insecurity. Following a rapid situation analysis, conducted in coordination with the Palestine Cash Working Group, UNFPA's GBV and CVA teams shifted from tailored cash in GBV case management to multipurpose cash assistance (MPCA) to improve access to essential and urgent needs and to protect affected women and girls from potentially

negative coping mechanisms. UNFPA's CVA programming resumed by 17 October.

Cash assistance has remained one of the few viable interventions to directly support the affected population in Gaza, as humanitarian and commercial crossings into Gaza have been either closed or severely limited. This was particularly the case in the early weeks of the crisis, before humanitarian assistance began trickling into Gaza from Rafah. Markets have been working on existing stocks and are now — after over four months of blockade — largely depleted. Informal markets are now the key sources of basic goods and services along with the recent entry of a few commercial trucks.

### WHO / HOW

Priority has been given to the GBV survivors already receiving cash under GBV case management and to pregnant and lactating women who were already part of a pilot cash programme to support their health and protection status. UNFPA has continued to identify vulnerable women and girls among those (i) already benefiting from women and girls safe spaces activities and (ii) from health and social protection facilities managed by implementing partners, (iii) and accepted referrals through the UNRWA GBV programme.

On October 17, 2023, cash transfers were made to women, leveraging the existing partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP) and using their payment platform system, which relies on a local bank payment network used by all major cash stakeholders in Gaza. The system endured throughout the crisis with occasional hiccups due to telecommunication and electricity shortages.

By the end of February 2024, **2,986 women and their families** in Gaza had received cash assistance at a value of approximately \$200 each.

‘I’m pregnant and I have three kids. Finding out our house was destroyed really hurt. But getting the cash help was a huge relief. We arrived at Rafah Shelter with nothing. It was packed and tough. With the cash, we bought what we needed from the shops. I got some food, hygiene stuff, and winter clothes for my kids.’

- Esra, 23, cash assistance recipient, Gaza

## RESULTS, CHALLENGES, WAY FORWARD

In January 2024, UNFPA conducted a rapid post-distribution monitoring using the Cash Working Group’s harmonized tool. Among the 81 interviewed recipients of cash assistance, 81 percent stated that the cash helped to fully or partially access urgent/basic items and services they needed. Another 54.1 percent responded that CVA contributed significantly or moderately to help coping with the current situation, while 48.6 percent reported facing challenges when accessing markets.

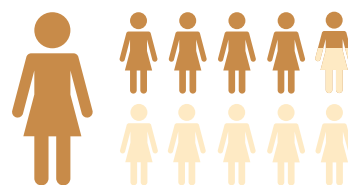
All interviewed participants reported being able to spend the cash received as well as their preference for unconditional cash in case of continued emergency support for basic needs. Moreover, the analysis shows that food remains the highest priority expense, reported by 90.5 percent of those interviewed, followed by drinking water at 66.2 percent, and clothes and medicines at 43 and 42 percent respectively.



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**54.1%** stated that the cash contributed significantly or moderately to help coping with the current situation



**48.6%** reported facing challenges when accessing markets. All reported being able to spend the cash received

### PRIORITY EXPENSES



**90.5% Food**



**66.2% Drinking Water**



**43% Clothes**



**42% Medicines**

‘Now we’re staying with a host family since our home got destroyed. There are 60 of us in the same house. It was uncomfortable until we got cash assistance that allowed us buy some essential stuff enough for everyone.’

- Ola, 35, cash assistance recipient, Deir El Balah

The primary challenges impeding CVA remain market functionality. These include:



‘I’m displaced at a public school in Khan Younis. I fled my house after a heavy airstrike and had to evacuate without extra clothes or blankets. Now, with the cash assistance, I bought medicine and other basic items. Unfortunately, the assistance wasn’t enough to cover all our needs due to the extremely high prices. We hope to receive additional assistance soon.’

- Maysa, a 56-year-old breast cancer patient, cash assistance recipient, Jabalyia

The situation in Gaza is catastrophic and UNFPA remains committed to the provision of assistance and support to vulnerable women to assist in meeting their basic, urgent needs as well as those of their children. Despite the challenges around market functionality, cash has proven to be among the few, most relevant, and most effective humanitarian interventions during the crisis to help cover essential needs.

Under the scenario of continued active conflict and partial market functionality, UNFPA will continue the support to vulnerable women and girls in Gaza under the current emergency MPCA approach. Once there is a prolonged ceasefire and essential services and goods are more widely available, UNFPA will tailor its CVA approach to support needs under specific sectoral outcomes under GBV/protection and SRH programming.



