



PALESTINE COUNTRY REPORT

THE STATE OF THE
HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM 2026



4. THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM IN GAZA

4.1 Architecture of the humanitarian system and coordination

The humanitarian response in Palestine is organised through a coordination system bringing together UN agencies, international and national NGOs and other actors (OCHA oPt, n.d.). The Humanitarian Country Team assumes a central leadership role, setting overall response priorities and direction. Operationally, groups (or clusters) coordinate by sector, where organisations share information, plan activities and align their work. Palestinian NGOs and community actors are sometimes part of these coordination structures, contributing mainly to implementation at the operational level and to local coordination at the cluster level.

Primary evidence suggests that the most effective coordination takes place at the operational level, within clusters and working groups where information exchange and day-to-day alignment occur. These are also the primary entry points for local actors – though, in 2024, no local or national actors were included in the Inter Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) (Humanitarian Action, 2025). This distribution of influence reflects underlying power asymmetries: strategic decision-making is concentrated at higher levels, limiting the ability of national actors to shape priorities and resource allocation.



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4.2 Cluster system and division of roles

Key informants consistently described clusters as the central platform for information-sharing, joint planning and alignment of sectoral responses. Within the highly constrained operating environment, these clusters enable organisations to exchange needs assessments and operational updates to coordinate interventions. Area-based coordination and sectoral working groups also reduce duplication through shared lists, site-based targeting and cluster-level checks, so agencies can stagger services and avoid overlaps.

However, the effectiveness of the cluster system is uneven in practice. Variations in participation, targeting criteria and vulnerability frameworks across actors reportedly contribute to inconsistent assistance, duplication and exclusion at the community level.



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Community representatives explained that different organisations focus on distinct services or target groups – food provision, hygiene support or psychosocial services, for example. Under siege conditions, humanitarian actors in Gaza have adapted to maximise coverage and efficiency through a functional division of roles. Organisations specialise in certain populations, sectors or modalities, relying on partners to address complementary needs.

This approach supports broader coverage and it reinforces interdependence among actors. But it demands effective coordination to ensure that needs falling across sectors are adequately addressed.

4.3 Private-sector involvement in humanitarian delivery

Private-sector actors have become increasingly involved in Gaza's humanitarian landscape. Reinforcing reports from OCHA (2025b), humanitarian actors described how Israeli border restrictions and delays have often favoured the entry of commercial goods over humanitarian consignments. This has prompted organisations to contract private companies to import supplies through commercial channels and then transfer them to humanitarian actors inside Gaza.

In practice, this has meant working with traders and importers to bring in food and non-food items, with transport companies to move goods within Gaza, and with private security firms to accompany aid convoys and reduce the risk of looting. Humanitarian organisations have also partnered with local bakeries to produce bread, with water trucking companies to distribute water and with desalination plants to supply clean water to communities.

The growing reliance on private actors represents a direct coping mechanism under conditions of restricted humanitarian access and the prioritisation of commercial flows. But this has shifted parts of the response outside formal humanitarian accountability structures. Respondents often associated the reliance on private contractors with increased risks around diversion, oversight, protection standards, inequitable access and undignified or poorly regulated distributions.



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4.4 Local actors and parallel response systems

Local actors constitute the operational backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza, particularly when access by international actors has been heavily restricted. Palestinian NGOs, community-based organisations, municipalities and volunteer

networks have drawn on their contextual knowledge and ability to operate under shifting security conditions. In many cases, they remained the last responders on the ground when international staff withdrew. International organisations frequently rely on these actors to navigate local dynamics, identify needs and maintain communication with communities.

The role of Palestinian actors within the formal humanitarian system remains uneven though. Donor funding structures privilege UN agencies and INGOs, while local organisations are positioned as implementing partners not primary decision-makers. Compliance requirements and donor risk perceptions often limit direct funding to local organisations – in 2024, only about 38.5% of humanitarian funding was channeled through local and national organisations directly, constraining how they could shape response priorities (OCHA oPt, 2024).

At the same time, local NGOs have strengthened their participation in coordination spaces through closer engagement with UN-led mechanisms. As international actors have lost their offices and faced access and mobility constraints, Palestinian organisations have established shared hubs for cluster meetings, training and coordination activities. Although this has enabled more meaningful collaboration, significant structural barriers remain to equitable participation and decision-making: donor funding architectures position local NGOs as implementing subcontractors with limited strategic influence, while restrictive compliance and vetting requirements render local organisations ineligible for direct funding.



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