



This report is produced by OCHA oPt in collaboration with humanitarian partners. It covers the period from January to 16 January 2013 (1500 hrs).

Highlights

- A winter storm, characterized by torrential rains, strong winds, low temperatures and snowfall, struck the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) between 7 and 10 January.
- Some 12,500 people were negatively impacted by the loss of, or damage to, residences and agricultural livelihoods due to flooding and strong winds.
- Some 200 homes were severely damaged or destroyed and 650 people were temporarily displaced.
- The weather conditions exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities stemming from movement, access and planning restrictions faced by Palestinian communities.
- This extreme weather event has highlighted the need for increased investment in disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response capacities of the State of Palestine.



12,500 Affected people	190 Affected communities	650 People temporarily displaced	5 people killed	1,570 Houses damaged	40 Per cent of the average annual rainfall fell in first 48 hours of the storm
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Situation Overview

A winter storm, among the strongest recorded in recent decades, struck the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) between 7 and 10 January. It was characterized by strong winds, heavy rains, low temperatures and snowfall. The first 48 hours witnessed uninterrupted rains, with quantities reaching over 260 mm in some areas of the northern West Bank; overall, these two days received more than 40 per cent of the average seasonal rainfall. Most streams and rivers reached their limits and some overflowed. Combined with the pre-existing precarious sewage and drainage infrastructure in many areas of the oPt, the heavy rains resulted in unprecedented floods. The last two days of the storm brought below-average temperatures and heavy snowfall (up to 20cm) in areas above 700 meters of altitude.

Preliminary field reports indicate that approximately 12,500 people in about 190 communities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were directly affected by the storm. Palestinian casualties included three people who drowned and one who died of burns in northern West Bank; and in the Gaza Strip at least one person was killed and three were injured in tunnel collapses caused by the heavy rainfall. Additionally, over 20 people were injured across the oPt in weather-related incidents. Approximately 650 people were temporarily displaced, though some were able to return home soon after the end of the storm.

The impact primarily relates to the loss of, or damage to, housing and agricultural infrastructure and assets (including greenhouses, animal sheds, livestock and field crops) due to flooding and strong winds. Additionally, the extreme weather also resulted in prolonged electricity cuts, interruption of access to services due to the flooding of roads, and the suspension of school classes. In the northern West Bank, those most affected included residents of urban areas in the Tulkarm and Qalqiliya governorates and farmers. In the Jordan Valley, and the central and southern areas of the West Bank, the Bedouin and herding communities were most affected, reporting significant losses to property as well as displacement of some families. In the Gaza Strip, Rafah sustained the most damage to housing, primarily due to flooding and many homes in Gaza city were damaged by the high winds. Large numbers of greenhouses were also reportedly destroyed, particularly in the northern West Bank and in the Gaza Strip and thousands of chickens died due to the low temperatures and flooding of sheds.

For many people, the storm exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities stemming from restrictive policies imposed on Palestinian communities in the oPt:

- The lack of adequate planning and inability to obtain building permits have contributed to the extremely precarious nature of housing and animal shelters in many herder communities in Area C of the West Bank, compounding the impact of the extreme weather.
- Urban areas partially surrounded by the Barrier (made of concrete walls), such as Qalqiliya and Tulkarm cities in the northern West Bank, and Kafr Aqab in East Jerusalem, were flooded due to the obstruction of the drainage systems. A similar situation occurred in Hebron's Old City as a result of dozens of IDF-roadblocks obstructing the drainage of rain water.
- Several villages, such as Kafr Qaddum in Qalqiliya, were temporarily isolated after the only access route they are allowed to use (due to access restrictions imposed by the Israeli military) was flooded.
- The longstanding blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip has, over time, resulted in a deterioration in the quality of housing and basic infrastructure (such as sewage systems), which were unable to withstand the heavy rain and winds.
- The heavy rains increased the threat to life of workers in the tunnels, which are another consequence of the Gaza blockade; during the storm, two tunnels collapsed, resulting in the death of one worker; two are still reported and three others were injured.

Emergency response interventions were largely implemented by the Palestinian Civil Defense teams (primarily search and rescue operations) and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS), coordinated by the various Governorate offices. As the scope and impact of the storm became more evident, UN agencies and international NGOs began intervening in support of ongoing efforts, covering emerging needs and gaps in areas where they were already operational. Interventions by international organisations included distribution of non-food items, such as plastic sheeting, mattresses and blankets, as well as food assistance. A comprehensive damage assessment in the agriculture sector is currently underway, led by the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and will inform the development of a PA response plan. Notwithstanding the efforts of local actors to respond rapidly to humanitarian needs, these extreme weather events have highlighted the need for increased investment in disaster risk reduction systems and capacities in communities and in local and central government. The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) stands ready to support the State of Palestine in this regard.

Humanitarian needs and response



Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI)

45%
of affected
communities in the
West Bank reached

Needs

Initial information indicate that over 1,570 homes across the oPt sustained damage due to flooding and strong winds, two-thirds of them in the West Bank and one third in the Gaza Strip. About 200 of these homes, the vast majority in the West Bank, were destroyed or severely damaged leading to the displacement of some 650 people.

- Gaza Strip: 530 homes, including 43 per cent in Gaza City and 22 per cent in Rafah area; 20 families have been temporarily displaced.
- Northern West Bank (Jenin, Nablus, Qalqiliya, Tulkarm, Salfit and Tubas): 618 homes in 91 communities; 410 people displaced.
- Central West Bank (Ramallah, Jerusalem and Jericho): 223 homes in 53 communities; 26 families were displaced.
- Southern West Bank (Bethlehem and Hebron): 202 homes in 40 communities; 104 people displaced.

Families affected by loss or damage to their homes were in need of non-food items, including mattresses, blankets, cooking gas, heaters, hygiene kits and plastic sheeting.

Response

In the Gaza Strip, a collective effort by PRCS, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), UNRWA, and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), enabled a large number of affected families to be assisted while the storm was still ongoing. Items distributed included two blankets per affected family; tarpaulin, plastic sheets and fuel heaters to 251 families; mattresses and kitchen sets to 74 families, and solar reading lights and solar lantern lights to 50 families.

Ongoing or planned responses by UNRWA, Medical Aid for Palestine (MAP) and CRS are expected to cover the remainder of those with shelter needs in the Gaza Strip. The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMMU) in Gaza has been working around the clock to drain water from flooded areas and houses, with technical support provided by Save the Children (UK).

In the West Bank, PRCS, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), UNRWA, UNICEF, World Vision and ACF distributed NFIs to affected households, including thousands of mattresses, blankets, tarpaulin, kitchen sets and heaters, as well as residential tents to some herder communities.

However, due to access problems and the large numbers of families affected, the rate of coverage has been more limited than in the Gaza Strip. In the northern governorates of the West Bank, 38 per cent of affected communities were reached so far (33 of 87). In the central and southern West Bank, 43 per cent of affected communities so far were provided with assistance.

Gaps

The biggest gaps in terms of immediate shelter and NFIs are concentrated in the northern West Bank, where the proportion of households reached is the lowest, followed by the central and southern areas. Immediate needs in the Gaza Strip have, for the most part, been covered.

In the medium and longer-term, most families whose residences were destroyed or severely damaged are likely to be in need of financial assistance to repair or reconstruct their homes. In addition, many families living in precarious housing conditions in the Gaza Strip and in Bedouin or herder communities in the West Bank will require assistance to improve their preparedness for the remainder of the winter season. Finally, the rapid and effective response by PRCS and the MoSA has depleted their existing NFI stocks; replenishment of these stocks is urgently required to ensure they are able to respond to remaining and any future needs.

Needs

Food assistance needs are primarily among herder communities and poor urban families whose own food stocks were damaged or destroyed by the weather and who also lost housing and productive assets. The MoSA, in conjunction with the various Governorate offices and the Food Security Sector are conducting full assessments of affected families.

Response

In the Gaza Strip, UNRWA and the World Food Programme (WFP) have maintained their normal distributions to a caseload of nearly 1.1 million people. Additionally, the MoSA distributed more than 2,700 food packages among the most vulnerable families affected by the storm.

In the Tulkarm and Qalqiliya Governorates, WFP is distributing food vouchers to over 900 identified families, which can be redeemed in local stores for bread, milk, yogurt, cheese, canned food, sugar, rice, vegetable oil, salt and pulses worth up to 300 NIS. Both WFP and UNRWA are also targeting Bedouin communities in Area C, including Ramoun (Ramallah) and Fera'ah (Hebron), as well as Beit Hanina Al Balad in the Jerusalem governorate.

Gaps

NTR

Agriculture

100,000
Chickens killed in the
northern West Bank

Needs

The agriculture sector has been severely impacted by the extreme weather conditions. Initial information indicates that hundreds of families depending on herding and farming for their livelihoods experienced heavy losses, including to greenhouses, open field crops, livestock, and animal sheds. While the precise scope of damage is still unknown, it is expected to be extensive.

Initial reports indicate that the loss of animal sheds resulted in increased mortality rates of livestock. This has raised particular concern regarding the resilience of already vulnerable herding communities and requires an immediate response. The poultry sub-sector was also severely hit, with more than 100,000 chickens dead in the northern West Bank alone.

The proportion of greenhouses and open field crops destroyed or damages was particularly high in the northern West Bank, as well as in the northern and southern parts of Gaza.

Response

The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) is currently conducting an assessment at the directorate level to document the damage and inform a response plan. In parallel, it has launched an appeal to the international community to support the rehabilitation of damaged structures and prevent further losses.

Gaps

Response not yet started

General Coordination

The overall response coordination has been led by the various Governorate offices, along with PRCS and the Palestinian Civil Defense. While all Governorates were able to respond, there were varying levels of leadership and effectiveness. The most common challenges were the lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities within the governors' offices and inconsistent communication and information sharing protocols. These challenges made the early consolidation and analysis of the impact and response difficult. They also underlined the imperative for strengthening the Government's capacity in disaster management and contingency planning, including to ensure closer links with such capacities in the international humanitarian community.

Cluster and sector leads have been working closely with their counterparts in key ministries and field coordination has been ongoing between the national and international partners with the support of OCHA to optimize existing capacities and avoid overlaps. The HCT also met on 11 January, in an extraordinary meeting focusing on the assessment and response to the extreme weather.

On the same day, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad chaired an extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet to discuss government efforts to address the storm's impacts. An Emergency Committee was established under the supervision of the Prime Minister to oversee the government's response. In a press statement issued following the meeting, the Cabinet acknowledged the support already received by members of the HCT and "emphasized the importance of the response of other countries and organizations to the identified needs".

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Coordination Saves Lives