PALESTINE
SHELTER CLUSTER
Coordinating Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements

Gaza Emergency Shelter Response

Technical Guidance on Tents Assistance in Gaza

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Introduction

With the contextual limitations on shelter programming and the inability to bring in diverse emergency shelter materials into Gaza across the past 22 months of the ongoing war, currently Standard Family tents (23 m²) and Geodesic tents (18 m²) are some of the most feasible emergency sheltering options for displaced persons in Gaza, especially as a large proportion of building stock is damaged or destroyed. This document outlines minimum standards and specifications for tents, along with programmatic guidance on targeting and distribution. The guidance has been drafted for the shelter response in Gaza. It may be adapted to West Bank if needs arise to carry out emergency tent distributions.

Tents are among the most frequently used shelter solutions given their characteristics including that they can be stockpiled, are light weight (for transport and distribution), have large production capacities that makes them commonly available, and that they are quick to install. On the other hand, tents are relatively expensive, are inflexible in terms of requirement of space and suitable location, may be unsuitable in high winds or heavy precipitation, and provide limited thermal comfort. While tents can be mobilized as a timely and immediate response in a crisis, they are inadequate for a protracted emergency such as Gaza. Anecdotal feedback from Gaza suggests that displaced households prefer shelter solutions which offer more space (especially head height) and solid walling than tents can offer[1].

In response to the blockade of shelter materials into Gaza (since 02 March 2025 and limited entry of tents taken place in September), Shelter Cluster Palestine advocates for access to diverse shelter solutions which include framing materials i.e. tents and emergency shelter kits (consisting of a framing kit, sealing off kit, and tool kit) and essential household items.

Geographical Targeting and Household Selection

In 2025, Shelter Cluster partners have reported distribution of 91,000 tents supporting over 510,000 individuals across the Gaza Strip.[2] This is a relatively small number compared to the staggering emergency shelter needs of displaced households across Gaza. It is highly recommended that partners carry out assessments and follow a technical and vulnerability criterion to distribute tents. The target group for tents is the displaced population in the open i.e. with no shelter, or in extremely precarious (i.e. at risk of collapse) makeshift shelters that have access to a space to set up a tent in safe conditions. These include:

- Newly displaced or returning households without shelter living in open air, tents is a priority if people are in less stable location.
- Households in sub-standard tents or makeshift shelters, with damaged framing/structure, living in overcrowded sites subject to available land. If the covering is deteriorated but framing is stable, those households may receive a tarpaulin package (i.e. two tarpaulins instead of tents).
- Households in heavily damaged buildings and have space outside to live should be prioritized to receive ESK, and tents if ESK is not feasible.

[1] There is some anecdotal feedback that households prefer the geodesic tent over the family tent. However, this needs to be verified through analysis of partners' PDM reports or through perception assessments.
[2] From January to September 2025; noting that there was a complete blockade of shelter items from March to September.

- Household in collective centres, for decongestion inside the buildings.
- Households in overcrowded hosting arrangement, tents to be provided for decongestion, based on households' preference and land availability.

To select households within these groups, prioritize women- headed households, and households that have family members with injuries, chronical illness, older persons, persons with disabilities, and women, girls, and children at risk (in coordination with Protection Cluster), as per the Shelter Cluster vulnerability criteria. Include local community representatives to identify underserved and hard-to-reach locations as far as possible. Refer to the Targeting and Prioritization guidance by Shelter Cluster for more details.

When addressing site-level shelter needs, shelter partners should aim to provide coverage for the entire site, applying the selection criteria outlined above. If the available quantity of tents is insufficient, partners should coordinate with the Shelter Cluster to discuss selection criteria and explore options to complement assistance with other partners, or with provision of other appropriate assistance such as SOKs. To ensure transparency and prevent community tensions, targeting criteria should be clearly communicated to all households.

Shelter teams should ideally be providing multi-sectoral assistance or be working side-by-side with other actors, such as the Site Management Cluster, the WASH and the Protection clusters, first-line responders or local partners teams which have been building relationships with displaced communities and community leaders. Consult and involve them to make informed choices about location and identify participant households.

Distribution Guidance

Each distribution in Gaza requires coordination with relevant stakeholders, including the Shelter Cluster and the Site Management Cluster. Given the scale of needs and limited shelter options, the distribution of high-value items like tents may create community tensions.

Where possible, agencies should plan for a range of distribution methods to address security, geographic dispersion, time constraints, operational capacity, transportation options, access, and the availability of local or community-based partners. As far as possible and subject to access, tents should be delivered as part of an integrated package with other household items, especially bedding kits, if feasible.

Once a project site is identified and prioritized, the field team should conduct a household registration before bringing tents to the distribution location. If a safe distribution point near the intended tent installation area cannot be secured, agencies should arrange additional transport or delivery support for households unable to reach the collection point independently (e.g., older persons or persons with disabilities). Agencies and community leaders should avoid holding tents for households that are absent. Households who were not present for registration or distribution may be ineligible for a tent.

Ensure both the field team and the affected population have access to the list of items included in each package along with basic assembly instructions, refer to Shelter Cluster IEC materials on installation of Family Tents. This is especially important in Gaza, where packages may be opened or reassembled at border crossings, and each household must verify they have all required components.

The packages containing various tent components are too large to be transported by bike, wheelbarrow, or donkey (unless with a cart) and require at least two healthy adults to carry over short distances. Arrange additional support, fostering community solidarity, to assist in setting up tents for those in need, such as women- and child-headed households, elderly individuals, and persons with disabilities.

Technical Quality

The recommended type are tents following humanitarian specifications (UNHCR or IFRC Family tent, ICRC/IFRC/IOM Geodesic tent or equivalent) waterproof, fire retardant and UV stabilised. The Family tent has 23 sq.m. covered area and the Geodesic tent has 18. sq.m covered area. Tents should include a partition to sub-divide the internal space for privacy.

The expected lifespan of a tent is six months to one year in Gaza[3], where military operations are ongoing, and there are repeated displacements (with packing down, movement and re-erection) and harsh weather conditions likely to damage tents after the initial installation. It may be necessary to replace sheeting, reinforce or maintain them. Provide information on proper installation and on common tent failures and ways to fix them.[21] Repair kits should be included with tent distributions if possible, including 1 large needle (suitable to work with for heavyweight fabrics like canvas), 20 m stitching thread, 3 m polyester rope or string of 6 mm and a canvas spare piece.

Thermal comfort in temporary shelters with little to no heating sources is a concern against cold weather. Tents are difficult to heat as the canvas provides limited insulation so winterization kits or layers for improved insulation particularly to the ground, including carpets, should be considered for the winter period. In addition, it should be considered that heating inside the tents poses a high risk of fire incidents. The tent specifications must include a hole and stove exhaust pipe for ventilation. In addition, shelter actors should prioritize provision of winter bedding kits and winter clothing through an established targeting criteria in coordination with shelter cluster.

The unit cost per tent procured varies, depending on the type. The prices listed below are indicative and do not include transportation or other logistical expenses, which can be significant for Gaza. These costs are challenging to estimate due to the unpredictable nature of access routes and the potential for long, costly border delays. It is recommended to clearly label packaging and contact the shelter cluster to communicate with the logistics cluster to prioritize tents movements.

Tent 23 sq.m., one tent is for one family of up to 6 members.						
#	**Item**	**Description**	**Unit**	**Qty**	**Unit Cost USD**	**Total Cost USD**
1	Family Tent 23 sq.[4]	UNHCR/IFRC standard 23 m2 double fly with ground sheet	unit	1	408	408
						$ 408

[3] A Family tent's lifespan is suggested as three years. Partners are currently examining the lifespan and collecting end-user feedback. In the meanwhile, based on observations in Gaza, Shelter Cluster is considering 6 months as the lifespan of tents in Gaza due to repeated displacement cycles, bombing, and weather conditions.
[4] UNHCR Family Tent

Tent 18 sqm one tent is for one family of 5.						
#	Item	Description	Unit	Qty	Unit Cost USD	Total Cost USD
1	Geodesic Tent 18 sqm[5]	UNHCR/IFRC standard geodesic 18.3m2, triple fly	unit	1	424	424
						$ 424

Tents Minimum Standards

The above suggested tent models follow global standards and have been agreed as standard tents as per Shelter Cluster Palestine. If partners are procuring tents other than the tents explicitly mentioned in this guidance so far, consider the minimum criteria below.

- Double layer to allow ventilation.
  - The outer tent must be waterproof and have UV protection.
  - The inner tent must be water-vapor permeable.
  - Gap between layers.
- Cross ventilation to reduce temperature and humidity and prevent respiratory diseases. Doors and windows on opposite sides of the tent
- Minimum one internal partition, with two doors
- Doors and windows must be internally closable to allow privacy and reduce GBV risks. Consider including repair kits which include digital locks for locking tents.
- Mosquito nets on windows and doors to prevent mosquito-borne diseases and entry of rodents and other insects.
- Light colors to reduce heat trapping. Avoid colors that could be confused with camouflage or military identification.
- Central clear height of 2 meters to allow people to stand, reduce the temperature and improve indoor air circulation[6].
- Impermeable groundsheet (PE fabric or equivalent) to prevent water infiltration and presence of insects. Reinforced Flooring: The floor to be made of thick, waterproof, durable material like PVC, designed to handle high foot traffic and resist damage from rough terrain. It is also easy to clean, ensuring hygiene for the families using it. also attached to the tent structure as one piece.
- Anti-fungal fabric to prevent respiratory diseases.
- The materials need to demonstrate durability when subjected to harsh environmental conditions such as strong winds, direct sunlight, and saline environments, with a minimum lifespan requirement of six months in Gaza context, as tents are considered deteriorated after this period, due to multiple displacement, harsh weather condition, and continued bombardment.
- Fabrics must have fire retardant treatments.

[5] IFRC Standard Products Catalogue, Geodesic Tent

[6] There has been anecdotal feedback on internal height being insufficient. An adult can stand up only in the middle of the tent. The tent is suitable for sleeping, not for other domestic activities.

- Irrespective of the size of the tent, a minimum of 3.5 square meters per person living space standards (excluding cooking and WASH) as per SPHERE living space standards must be respected[7].
- Compact when Packaged: Despite their size when set up, the tents are often designed to be compact and relatively lightweight when packed, allowing for easier transportation and deployment, with minimum skills and tools needed for installation. Thus, SC considers tents as a first emergency shelter assistance for ease of transportation and distribution in the event of large-scale displacements, followed with ESK in a period of less instability when it is operationally feasible.
- Consider including repair kits: Many of these tents come with repair kits that allow for quick fixes to small issues like rips or tears, extending the life of the tent in challenging environments.
- For winterization, a hole and an exhaust pipe for the stove.
- Winterization kits or layers for improved insulation particularly to the ground, including carpets, should be considered

The distribution of tents that do not meet minimum standards by humanitarian actors can lead to:

- False sense of protection, safety, and health among affected individuals.
- Increased GBV risks and risks for vulnerable groups such as adolescents and persons with disabilities.
- Aggravate or provoke health problems and spread of diseases.
- Distrust in humanitarian actors.
- Putting affected individuals at risk (fire, respiratory diseases, heat strokes).
- Create frustrations and tensions among recipient groups of different tents quality.
- Disrespecting and undermining the dignity of the people receiving the tents.

The distribution of tents must be accompanied, when possible and when needs are identified, by essential household items to allow for a dignified and safe life.

- Bedding sets (mattress, blankets, sheets, pillows)
- Kitchen sets and Solar lamps
- Clothing items.

Space Required to Install a Tent

With severe congestion and little to no land availability for families to set up emergency shelters, partners may consider complementing the tent distribution with MPCA or a temporary cash for shelter modality as households are being charged rent to set up tents[8].

Below indicates the footprint of space per tent. The figures do not include circulation space between tents and exclude the distance between tents.

[7] Find more in Shelter and Settlement Chapter, Standard 3 - Living Space of The Sphere Handbook

[8] With the ongoing displacements from Gaza City, displaced families are asked to pay 250-600 Shekels (75-180 USD) rent per tent space, while for tents the prices reach 1,200 USD for Geodesic tent, and over 2000 USD for Family tents. The prices in the market change depending on needs, access, and availability of shelter materials.

- Space required to install the Geodesic family tents along with the distance to fix the ropes is (1-1.5M) is 55 sq.m.
- Space required to install UNHCR family tents is 67 sq.m.

Tents Packaging:

Pallet Types:

- **Iron Double Pallets:**
  - Can hold **12 units, with a range of 16-22 pallets per truck, 192-264 households could be assisted with tents.**
  - Provide greater stability for warehouse stacking.
  - Offer secondary use ("second life") value.
  - Some partners secured approval for these cages during the last ceasefire.
  - To be considered that these pallets can cause injuries in case of looting off the trucks
- **Wooden Double Pallets:**
  - Can hold **6 units, with a range of 16-22 pallets per truck, 69-132 household could be assisted with tents.**
  - Less stable compared to iron cages and not recommended for long-term stacking.
- **Winterization Requirements:**
  - Partners must prepare for **double wrapping** of pallets.
  - Application of **nylon caps** on top of each pallet is required for additional protection against weather.

Annex

Tent Durability in Gaza: Contributing Factors
The Shelter Cluster has consulted with partners on the ground regarding the average lifespan of tents in Gaza. Findings show that tents last on average **six months**, significantly shorter than in other contexts. This is due to a combination of conflict-related, environmental, and usage-related factors:

1. Conflict-related factors

- Repeated displacement: tents are frequently erected and dismantled, stretching and weakening the fabric causing tears in the fabric.
- Active bombardment: tents are often damaged or destroyed during military attacks.
- Limited availability of spare parts: restrictions on entry of poles, ropes, and repair kits mean damaged tents cannot be properly maintained.

2. Environmental factors

- Extreme seasonal temperature variations: Gaza experiences very hot summers and cold, wet winters. The heat makes fabrics brittle and weak, while cold and moisture cause shrinkage, mold, and material stress — together accelerating deterioration. Heavy rains and flooding: waterlogging leads to mold, mildew, and structural damage.
- Coastal humidity and salinity: the salty air corrodes metal poles and weakens fabrics.
- Strong winds: tents are destabilized, especially when installed on uneven or inadequate ground.

3. Usage-related factors

- Overcrowding: tents host larger families than intended, increasing wear and tear.
- Improper installation: lack of flat, safe land forces families to erect tents in unstable conditions, heightening friction and strain.
- Multi-purpose use: tents are adapted for cooking or heating, exposing fabrics to fire sparks, smoke, and heat.
- Pest infestation: rodents and insects damage fabrics and insulation.
- Limited technical support: families often install tents without proper training or tools, reducing durability.