

The state of shelter in conflict-affected countries

Winter 2024



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Ali and his family, including three small children, live on the fourth floor of a bombed-out apartment building in Khan Yunis. His family improvised stairs so that they could reach their home through the rubble of the rest of the building. The floors and walls all have huge holes. Ali explains: “We had fled for our lives too many times. It is better to be here, at home, even if it is in ruins.”

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1 Global shelter crisis

As of 2024, **91 million people are in urgent need of shelter support** to protect them from the elements, violence and disease, and so that they have privacy and place to feel safe.¹ This is more than double the scale of the emergency shelter crisis in 2019, when 37.5 million people needed shelter support. The funding has not kept pace with the needs – and the sector is only 27% funded so far into 2024.²

As of mid-2024, 122.6 million people are displaced globally. Of these, **68.3 million** are internally displaced people (IDPs), forced to flee their homes in places such as Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine.³ Others are not displaced but are exposed to conflict, still living in their homes and taking in friends and family. They all need help to find adequate housing that is not damaged by war.

1.1 Living through displacement

While families are experiencing bombardment, violence and protection risks, making sure people are not exposed to climatic threats and have a safe place to call home is vital for life preservation, wellbeing and health.

Losing your home is more than just losing a physical space – it also means losing a community, support networks, access to land and income, and the ability to send your children to school. It's the catalyst to a downward spiral. That's why shelter support is so vital to help families to get back on their feet and start to recover, increase their resilience and become independent.

A home is the foundation families need to rebuild their lives. Once you have shelter, you'll feel safe enough to address the other needs in your life. You'll have a place to keep your belongings and perhaps space or land to start a home-based enterprise. You will also be able to save money for food, medicine and school fees. It's not easy to provide everyone in need with adequate shelter, however.

Looking at the emergency shelter solutions in some of the direst humanitarian situations – specifically Palestine, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria and Ukraine – funding is

¹ [Global Shelter Cluster Dashboard](#).

² [United Nations Office of Coordinated Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\) Financial Tracking Service - Shelter Sector 2024](#)

³ [Global IDCM report 2024](#)

stretched and shelter support is not sufficient. Distributions to families include family-sized tents, kits of essential materials for sealing off openings in damaged buildings, tarpaulins and timber to build simple makeshift shelters, and emergency cash and tools for repairing shelters. These solutions are all temporary and inadequate. People are often left in very overcrowded conditions, which pose health risks such as infectious diseases, protection risks and negative mental health impacts. These shelters do not always offer protection from the elements or extreme weather, and they may not even have any sanitation facilities.

Shelters need to be replenished, reinforced or improved regularly, which is very challenging to do when populations are forced to move time and time again. In Syria, more robust shelters can be built because the context is more stable than in locations where people are being repeatedly displaced, such as in Gaza. Wherever possible, more robust shelters are essential to support families who have been displaced for extended periods – sometimes decades, in the case of Syria – to live in dignity.

Despite hot summers, the temperatures at night in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine can drop to -5C, with snow and frost in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. In Sudan, temperatures can drop below 8C. If people don't have shelter, these conditions can result in hypothermia and stress on the body's systems, including the heart, lungs and brain. This is even more critical in Ukraine, where temperatures can drop to -15C and access to energy for warmth is very challenging.

Our response

The Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC's) shelter and settlement teams are working hard to reach people in locations across the world. We are present in 32 countries, with over 170 shelter projects reaching 1.5 million people. We are working alongside other agencies in Ukraine, Sudan, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon to meet critical shelter needs as we go into winter, including provision of clothes, fuel distributions, extra blankets and materials to improve and insulate shelters.

Taking these five locations, 1.4 million people need support for emergency housing in Gaza⁴, 4 million need shelter support in Ukraine⁵, 9 million in Sudan⁶, 6.8 million in Syria⁷ and 1.5 million in Lebanon⁸ – that amounts **to over 22 million people in need of shelter**, the equivalent of the whole population of Mumbai, India.

⁴ [Palestine, Shelter Cluster Snapshot Gaza Hostilities](#)

⁵ [Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024](#)

⁶ [Shelter and NFI Cluster Sudan, January to October 2024](#)

⁷ [Shelter Cluster Whole of Syria Snapshot 2024](#)

⁸ [Lebanon Flash Appeal](#)

1.2 Gaza, Palestine



66% of the population in Gaza needs shelter



 ≈ 200.000

Our ability as humanitarians to truly support displaced families in securing meaningful shelter is incredibly limited. Agencies are distributing materials, such as flour bags to be filled with sand, to build walls so that people can feel a semblance of privacy from the outside world. Families are digging their own toilets using what precious concrete they can find. On top of the scarcity of suitable materials to build an emergency shelter, families are forced to relocate repeatedly, abandoning the shelter they may have been able to create and having to start again in a new, precarious location.

Overall, **1.4 million people need shelter support**. Even if they received a tarpaulin or tent in the past six months, many have been forced to flee again and again, leaving their emergency homes behind.⁹ The Shelter Cluster anticipates that nearly all of these people (around **1.2 million**) will need urgent support to survive through the winter, as they are living in deteriorating tents and makeshift shelters with no protection from rain and cold.¹⁰



A woman doing her daily chores in her emergency shelter. Photo: Amjad al Fayoumi/NRC

⁹ [Palestine, Shelter Cluster Snapshot Gaza Hostilities.](#)

¹⁰ [Gaza Winterization Update, 25 November 2024.](#)

Over 200,000 houses have been destroyed across Gaza. This goes beyond destruction of buildings to destruction of the entire urban environment, affecting everyone’s feeling of home and sense of place.¹¹ The reconstruction of Gaza, where there is no end to the violence in sight, is estimated to take decades. This will not be a linear process – the rubble alone will take nearly 10 years to clear.¹²

In northern Gaza, people are left with nothing. Many are living in school classrooms, with 25 to 30 people staying in one room. They have no blankets or mattresses, no clothes for the oncoming winter, no covers for the windows, no way to partition the rooms for privacy. Some are living in corridors or cupboards under the stairs.

Alison Ely, the Shelter Cluster Coordinator, reports: “The worst thing I saw was people living in bathrooms, with only a sheet covering the latrine, which was full of human waste – leaving people exposed to diarrhoeal diseases such as cholera and dysentery.” She adds that people do not feel safe in Gaza City: “There is systematic targeting of schools where people are living, and you can hear the constant noises of shelling from North Gaza, which severely impacts mental health.”

Today, shelter agencies only have a few hundred items left in northern Gaza, and these are all about to be distributed. There are little to no new shelter items coming in.

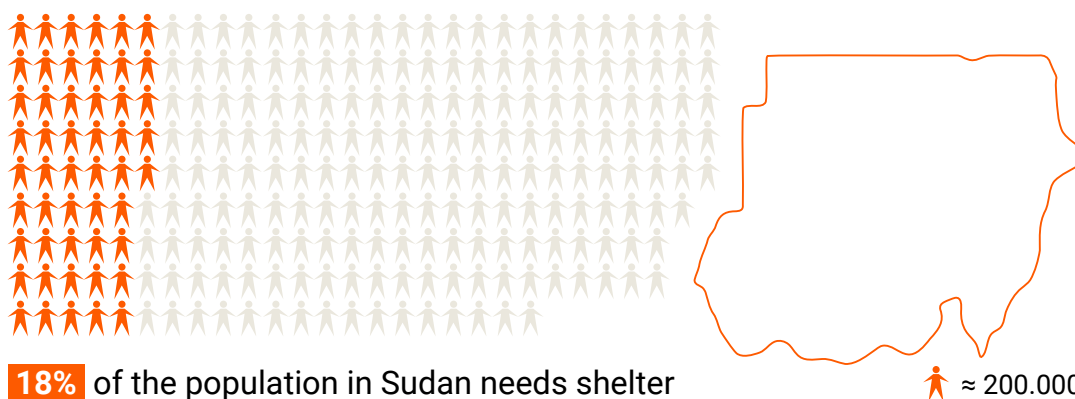


The new cityscape of Gaza. Photo: Mustafa El Halabi/OCHA

¹¹ [Palestine, Shelter Cluster Snapshot Gaza Hostilities.](#)

¹² Interview with Cluster Coordinator.

1.3 Sudan



More than **11 million** people have been forcibly displaced within Sudan due to the conflict there.¹³ A further three million people have been forced to flee into neighbouring countries, including Chad, Egypt and South Sudan.¹⁴ Amid the ongoing hostilities and devastating destruction of infrastructure, millions have lost their homes and are now living in overcrowded dwellings and structures not intended for prolonged human habitation. Around 75 per cent of people say they are living in damaged homes, with the majority in overcrowded spaces¹⁵ – 33 per cent of IDPs live with **two other households in one room**, while 36 per cent **share less than one room per household**. Fourteen per cent of IDPs and 8 per cent of host families have no latrines where they live.¹⁶

The recent floods in the Darfur, River Nile and Red Sea localities have exacerbated the situation, with an additional 181,000 people displaced, 32,000 houses destroyed and another 32,000 damaged. In 2024, the total number of people in need is **11.6 million**, marking a 36 per cent increase from last year. **Nine million** of those people now need support to find shelter and housing. Women and children are most in need, while men are caught up in the deadly conflict, trying to protect their homes.¹⁷ At the family level, the impact is striking. Almost all IDPs and most host communities are now struggling to meet basic needs for their families or even feed themselves.

Many people are living in self-built shelters, often made from everyday found materials that do not stand up to climatic risks, such as the frequent flooding in the

¹³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) [Sudan Humanitarian Update, 1 October 2024](#).

¹⁴ [UN Refugee Agency, Sudan Situation Report](#).

¹⁵ [Shelter Cluster Multi Sectoral Needs Assessment](#).

¹⁶ NRC IDMC Sudan Displacement Report Nov 2024 (forthcoming).

¹⁷ [UN Women, Sudan Crisis In-Depth Gender Assessment 2024](#).

country. Living under flimsy materials without a door to lock, they are unable to protect themselves from threats of violence, including gender-based violence, rapes and killings.

Others are living with host families, whose costs are spiralling. Some shelter in schools or community buildings alongside many others, resulting in severe overcrowding, protection risks, lack of privacy and often lack of essential sanitation or household items to survive and manage their daily needs – such as bedding, mosquito nets and solar-powered lights. Schools will also need to reopen eventually. And people will be displaced yet again.

Safe shelters are vital not only for the health and mental wellbeing of these families, but also for stability, which is a prerequisite for livelihoods and education. Displaced people, who lack adequate shelter as well as critical non-food items like plastic sheets, blankets and sleeping mats, face exposure to extreme weather conditions. Sudan's climate, characterised by intense heat and periodic heavy rains with flooding, can be particularly harsh. Without proper shelter, individuals are vulnerable to health risks like heatstroke, dehydration and hypothermia during colder nights, especially in desert areas where temperatures drop to 8C.¹⁸

The worst-case scenario, if fighting continues, is that displaced families remain confined to insecure, expensive temporary homes or overcrowded collective shelters with no prospect of permanence. Host families, meanwhile, risk losing their housing stability due to economic or social shifts.¹⁹



Hawa's family from inside their shelter (*Rakouba*) in Al-Houri camp. Hawa and her children were displaced from Sennar to Gedaref State, where they now reside in Al-Houri camp along with more than 1,115 families. Photo: Mohammed Abdulmajid/NRC

¹⁸ [Sudan Shelter Cluster Strategy 2024](#).


¹⁹ NRC IDMC Displacement Report November 2024 (forthcoming).

1.4 Lebanon



27% of the population in Lebanon needs shelter



 ≈ 200.000

The recent and long-overdue ceasefire followed more than two months of unprecedented attacks across the whole of Lebanon, and more than a year of conflict affecting civilians on both sides since October 2023. National authorities report that 1.3 million people, including Lebanese nationals and Syrian and Palestinian refugees, have been affected, with up to 900,000 people displaced. This includes nearly 100,000 Syrian refugees displaced again inside Lebanon after having fled the war in their homeland.²⁰

In total, 1.5 million people in Lebanon need shelter support, among other basic needs.²¹ This catastrophic humanitarian crisis comes against a backdrop of multilayered governance, economic and financial crises in Lebanon, including a steady deterioration of social stability and systems amid internal and external shocks, such as Covid-19 and the Port of Beirut explosion in August 2020.



Hanan lives with her daughter in a collective shelter at Zahle Secondary School. Photo: Ed Prior/NRC

²⁰ [OCHA Updates, 21 November.](#)

²¹ [Shelter Sector at a Glance, 24 September.](#)

Recent humanitarian assessments show that the large-scale displacement has left families in dire need of adequate shelter, with many now residing in collective sites, unfinished buildings or informal settlements.²² Vulnerable groups – including female or child-headed households, persons with disabilities, migrant domestic workers and migrant families, and families with protection risks – face heightened challenges in securing safe, private and secure spaces to call home temporarily.

Because of indiscriminate shelling and shrinking safety, it is not easy for families to find and afford safe shelter. Some desperate families have found shelter in construction sites.²³ Others are living with friends or family in overcrowded apartments with scarce resources (including food, fuel and cash) to share among the extended household. Overcrowding in collective shelters and inadequate housing conditions pose risks to safety, hygiene and protection, particularly for women and children. As winter sets in, their conditions will only get worse.



Family of refugees from Syria living in Bourj Hammoud, a city adjacent to Beirut, after being displaced from Southern Lebanon. They found refuge in the apartment of their relatives in Bourj Hammoud. As a result, the living conditions became especially hard, with 19 people – adults and children – in one home. Photo: Grzegorz Zukowski/NRC

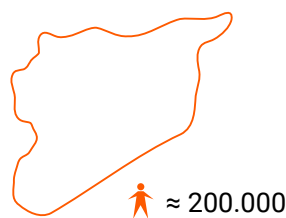
²² [Lebanon Flash Appeal 2024.](#)

²³ [UN Migration \(IOM\) Displacement Tracking Matrix, Lebanon Mobility Snapshot, Round 46.](#)

1.5 Syria



29% of the population in Syria needs shelter



As we approach the end of 2024, humanitarian needs in Syria continue to grow relentlessly, driven by escalating violence. This is leading to further displacement and extreme suffering for families. The socioeconomic situation has also continued to deteriorate, exacerbated by the February 2023 earthquakes as well as tensions and conflicts in the region, resulting in a negative impact on social cohesion and amplified vulnerabilities.

In 2024, a total of **16.7 million** people needed some kind of humanitarian assistance in Syria,²⁴ the largest number since the beginning of the crisis in 2011. The effects of the rapid economic deterioration and lack of livelihood opportunities have further exposed vulnerable people to protection risks and threats such as sexual exploitation and abuse and other forms of gender-based violence for women and children as they explore feasible means to meet their day-to-day basic needs.



Hasan and his son in the yard of the collective shelter where they live. Photo: Tareq Mnadili/NRC

²⁴ [Syria Humanitarian Response Plan 2024.](#)

Across the whole of Syria, **6.8 million** people are in need of shelter support, but humanitarian agencies only have the resources to reach 60,000 families – and have only managed to reach 4.3 per cent of that number.²⁵

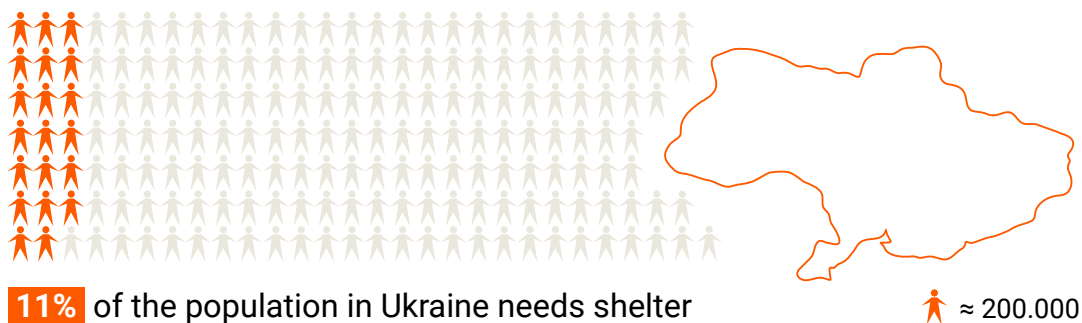
In Syria, snow is not uncommon, and temperatures often drop below zero. The harsh winter conditions pose a particular challenge, with many shelters lacking proper insulation or heating facilities. Those still living in camps and inadequate housing are particularly at risk of being exposed to the cold this winter. Without proper winter clothing or fuel for heaters, families are at risk of severe health problems and chronic illness.



Neighbourhood in Aleppo, October 2024, showing empty plots where buildings once stood and damaged housing stock that is ill-suited for winter. Photo: Tareq Mnadili/NRC

²⁵ [Shelter Cluster Whole of Syria Snapshot 2024.](#)

1.6 Ukraine



The ongoing catastrophic repercussions of the Russian invasion in 2022 have created a complex humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, especially in terms of people's right to live in safe, secure and adequate housing. Ensuring people have a shelter where they can keep warm during the winter and maintain their health and dignity is paramount. With systemic attacks on vital energy infrastructure by Russian forces, protecting those people in need will be hugely challenging this winter.



Nadiia (69) from Andriivka has suffered from the attacks on her village. She, together with her husband, lived for months without electricity, gas, and communication. Photo: Ingrid Prestetun/NRC

As of November 2024, there are nearly **eight million** people in Ukraine in need of humanitarian assistance of some kind, and around **four million** of them need better shelter.²⁶ The Government of Ukraine reported that in 2023 alone, two million houses were destroyed.²⁷ This level of obliteration results in loss of any sense of home and place. Inflation means that many cannot afford their rent. Shelling has disrupted essential services, including water, electricity and gas supplies – all essential for surviving the winter.

This winter, NRC and other humanitarian organisations are trying to assist 1.8 million people living in damaged homes on the front line, who are most vulnerable to the cold, as well as 85,000 people in collective centres, who live in buildings not meant for habitation.²⁸ Their needs vary: families still living in their homes need support with comprehensive repairs, and families living in the collective centres need bombed buildings to be repaired. Many of the most vulnerable Ukrainians are living in rural areas, which are cut off from supplies and where housing is very basic. Everyone needs blankets, warm clothing, heating appliances, and access to energy and food.



In Pisky-Radkivski in February 2024, Viera receives the winterisation and hygiene kit. Photo: Filippo Mancini/NRC

²⁶ [Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024.](#)

²⁷ [Ukraine Winter Response Plan 2024–2025.](#)

²⁸ [Ukraine Winter Response Plan 2024–2025.](#)

Resources

[Global Shelter Cluster Dashboard](#)

[Global IDMC report 2024](#) (data for end of 2023)

[United Nations Office of Coordinated Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\) Financial Tracking Service - Shelter Sector 2024](#)

Lebanon – [Lebanon Flash Appeal](#)

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Sudan – [JSON displacement figures, 29 October 2024](#)

Sudan – [Shelter Cluster Multi Sectoral Needs Assessment](#)

Sudan – [UN Women, Sudan Crisis in-Depth Gender Assessment Report 2024](#)

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Sudan – NRC IDMC Sudan Displacement Report November 2024 (forthcoming)

Syria – [Shelter Cluster Whole of Syria Snapshot 2024](#)

Syria – [Syria Humanitarian Response Plan 2024](#)



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