Briefing Paper | November 2026

Flooding in Gaza:

The heightened impact on persons with disabilities and people with injuries



Photo caption: The aftermath of recent rainfall and flooding in Gaza, with displacement camps and makeshift shelters surrounded by muddy, waterlogged roads. ©HI/K.A

Key messages

1. **The flooding has compounded an existing crisis**. Heavy rainfall from 6 November damaged or destroyed the shelters of more than 40,000 families (OCHA, 11 November 2026). Most of those affected were already displaced and had lived through years of restricted aid and repeated displacement.

2. **Persons with disabilities and people with injuries face heightened risk.** Disability-disaggregated data on this event is still limited, but the risks are clear from field reports and the conditions on the ground. These groups are less able to relocate a tent, raise belongings above the water or move through mud and standing water. Their wheelchairs, crutches and prostheses can be damaged or become unusable, and cold, damp and contaminated water threaten people with open wounds and recent amputations.

3. **The risk will persist through the winter**. A strong to very strong El Niño is forecast through March 2027, and another storm is expected around 20 and 21 November [add source]. Of the 1,764 sites assessed, 989 are in medium or high flood risk areas, hosting 956,389 people. More than 2,300 inhabited buildings at risk of collapse shelter about 44,000 people.

4. **Service continuity depends on the people delivering it**. Rehabilitation, primary health care and prosthetics and orthotics (P&O) services are already constrained, and around 60% of HI staff in Gaza are displaced and living in tents. Supporting humanitarian personnel with adequate duty of care is a condition of sustaining the response.

5. **What is needed now.** Flexible funding and top-ups to existing grants, disability-inclusive flood and winter response across clusters, and predictable entry of shelter, fuel, assistive devices and rehabilitation materials.

1. Introduction: flooding compounds an already devastating humanitarian crisis

On 6 November, heavy rainfall hit the Gaza Strip for at least two consecutive days, causing extensive flooding and damage to infrastructure, displacement sites, humanitarian facilities and learning spaces, as well as the collapse of already damaged buildings and disruption to essential services. An infant reportedly drowned, while four other children and one woman were killed when a sand dune collapsed on their tents.

According to UN OCHA1, at least 26,000 households have been affected in different ways, including damage to tents and the loss of belongings that have become increasingly scarce due to limited availability and high prices in Gaza's markets. As of 9 November, approximately 3,900 households reportedly had no shelter, while 6,000 family shelters had been destroyed and another 17,400 damaged. These households are among the 1.4 million people who have remained

[1] Humanitarian Situation Report: Heavy Rains in the Gaza Strip | 8 November 2026 | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory

displaced over the past three years, enduring the cumulative consequences of restrictions on humanitarian assistance, starvation and inhumane living conditions, with needs that remain far from being met.

For persons with disabilities and people with injuries, flooding has compounded existing barriers to safety, mobility and access to essential services, as explored in the following sections.

These impacts must be understood against the backdrop of three years of conflict, repeated displacement, inadequate shelter, damaged infrastructure, and restrictions on humanitarian assistance. Destroyed or uneven roads, damaged drainage systems, disrupted water and sewage networks, food insecurity and restrictions on essential humanitarian supplies have compounded existing barriers for persons with disabilities. Materials necessary for a disability-inclusive response, including fuel and engine oil for outreach activities, spare parts, assistive devices, and equipment and technologies required for rehabilitation and prosthetic production, have been severely restricted by the Israeli authorities (as they are considered part of the so-called "dual-use" items).

2. The suffering will not stop with the end of this rainstorm

The first wave of flooding is unlikely to be the last this winter. A strong to very strong El Niño[2] is forecast, with more than an 83% chance of persisting through March 2027. Israeli forecasters anticipate potential for a rainy, storm-heavy winter. While Gaza-specific long-term forecasts are unavailable, forecasts for Palestine indicate rainfall levels of 140–145% of the average.

Gaza is entering another winter largely unprepared, with almost no buffer to absorb further shocks. The Israeli forces have pushed the displaced population into increasingly limited areas, many of which consist of highly flood-prone land. Most displaced people live in worn-out tents[3]. 80% of sites assessed by the Site Management Cluster (SMC) are makeshift. Available winter

[2] **Reference**

- **El Niño:** NOAA's Climate Prediction Center (8 October 2026) has an El Niño Advisory in effect. The Niño-3.4 index stands at +2.1 °C. A strong to very strong event is likely (>83%) through January–March 2027. There is an 83% chance that the October–December index exceeds any event since 1950. (CPC)
- **Regional forecaster view:** In July 2026, the Israel Meteorological Service described strong potential for a rainy, storm-heavy winter. It modelled totals of about 140–145% of average in the northern Negev and Judean hills. It estimated 11–15% more annual rain for each 1 °C of the El Niño index. It also warned that uncertainty is high and that strong El Niño winters do not always deliver. (Ynet)
- **Seasonal model:** An ECMWF SEAS5 analysis started on 1 August 2026 points to stronger autumn and winter rainfall across the Eastern Mediterranean. It is a preprint that has not been peer reviewed, and it gives no Gaza-specific anomaly. (EarthArXiv)
- **Gaza's normal rainfall:** About 319 mm a year on average: about 407 mm in the north and about 259 mm in the south, falling between October and April. (RCCC)
- **Storm intensity:** In the Wadi Gaza basin, the heaviest daily rainfall expected every 2 years is 22 mm. It rises to 35 mm at 10 years, 52 mm at 50 years, 59 mm at 100 years and 77 mm at 500 years. (Al-Najjar et al., 2022).

[3] Gaza_Shelter_Cluster_Winterization_Needs_2026_2027_1_0.pdf

shelter supplies cover only part of the needs of fewer than one-fifth of the nearly 300,000 families requiring winter shelter support.

The threat extends beyond tents and temporary shelters. More than 2,300 buildings requiring full or partial demolition remain inhabited, sheltering approximately 44,000 people. These buildings are at high risk of collapse[4]. Damaged sewage infrastructure also makes flooding a serious public health hazard. Wastewater lagoons, damaged pumping stations and a largely non-functional solid-waste management system mean that floodwater can become contaminated, increasing exposure to health risks.

The scale of exposure is considerable. Approximately 2.1 million people are concentrated in roughly 35% of the Gaza Strip, while the remaining areas are under Israeli military control, resulting in a population density of around 16,000 people per km². Much of the area where people are sheltering consists of low-lying coastal sand or densely populated urban land, where drainage is obstructed by rubble and damaged infrastructure. Access restrictions cover approximately 65% of the Strip (around 237 of 365 km²), according to OCHA. Against this backdrop, the Site Management Cluster (SMC) and IOM's Phase One outlook for 2026–27 found that 989 of 1,764 assessed sites (56%) are located in medium- or high-flood-risk areas, hosting 956,389 people. Of these, 451 sites are in high-risk areas, where more than 400,000 people may need to be relocated[5].

Recurrent flooding, inadequate shelter, damaged infrastructure, and restricted humanitarian access leave communities with little capacity to absorb further shocks. This is particularly concerning for persons with disabilities and people with injuries, who may be less able to relocate tents, protect belongings, navigate flooded and uneven pathways or evacuate safely, especially when relying on wheelchairs, crutches, assistive devices or caregivers. With further storms expected during the winter, including around 20–21 November, these barriers risk further restricting their mobility, access to healthcare and humanitarian assistance, with consequences extending well beyond the rainfall itself.

3. Why the impact is disproportionate for persons with disabilities and people with injuries

Reliable, comprehensive, and disability-disaggregated data on the impact of this first major flooding episode remains limited. However, field observations and HI's operational experience indicate that persons with disabilities and people with injuries face heightened exposure to harm. Their ability to evacuate, protect essential belongings, access services and maintain their health and independence is often constrained by barriers that flooding further exacerbates.

[4] (OCHA, 2 Oct 2026; IOM Oct 2026)

[5] Sites Exposed to Flooding Risk_21 Sep 2 (1).pdf

I. Restricted mobility and inaccessible evacuation

Flooded pathways, deep water, mud and debris make movement particularly difficult for persons with disabilities, including those with lower-limb amputations who use wheelchairs, crutches or prostheses. During winter storms and flooding, reaching safer shelters and accessing assistance or health services can become impossible for persons with disabilities and conflict-related injuries.

People who rely on caregivers or personal assistance may face additional barriers when entire families are forced to move at short notice. Inaccessible routes, inadequate evacuation arrangements and the lack of suitable transportation can prevent people from reaching safety in time.

II. Greater exposure to health risks, interruption of healthcare and other essential care

Health and well-being: Persons with disabilities and people with injuries whose tents and other temporary shelters have been flooded are exposed to cold conditions, damp clothing and bedding, contaminated water and unsanitary environments. **These conditions can increase the risk of hypothermia and respiratory illness, as well as skin irritation, infections and wound complications.** This is particularly concerning for people with open wounds, recent amputations or other injuries requiring regular care.

People with spinal cord injuries, severe burns and other complex injuries have specific needs relating to wound care, hygiene, positioning and regular rehabilitation. **Disruption to these essential care arrangements can increase the risk of secondary complications and deterioration in functioning.**

Flooding has also disrupted healthcare facilities, including mobile clinics, primary healthcare centres, hospitals and rehabilitation centres, interrupting or suspending services and affecting access to medical follow-ups, rehabilitation and physiotherapy.

A father of a child receiving rehabilitation services from HI told the team:

> **"Bad weather and flooded, muddy roads prevented my child from attending his scheduled physiotherapy session. I worry that if winter storms and flooding continue, he will regularly miss his sessions. This could take a serious toll on his mental health and delay his recovery."**

On 8 November, HI-supported rehabilitation service points in Al Sawarha, Al Qarara and Khan Younis, as well as outreach locations in Mawasi, Khan Younis, were affected. Water infiltration, muddy flooring and unsuitable conditions disrupted service delivery and affected rehabilitation equipment, materials and furniture. Roads, movement restrictions and damage to service structures disrupted rehabilitation, P&O and MHPSS activities, affecting a total of 99 reported beneficiaries, including 20 at rehabilitation primary healthcare centres, 33 in outreach communities, six P&O beneficiaries and 40 MHPSS beneficiaries. New beneficiary assessments also decreased by approximately 70%. HI's P&O workshop in Khan Younis sustained no infrastructure damage. However, restrictions on staff movement disrupted services, while water infiltration affected the rehabilitation tent at the Al-Zawaida P&O facility.

Mental health and psychosocial support: Repeated displacement, loss of belongings, uncertainty and the inability to reach safety or meet basic needs can **intensify persons with disabilities and their caregivers' psychological distress, anxiety and feelings of insecurity, particularly among people already experiencing trauma**.

In the past few days, HI's MHPSS teams on the ground reported increased psychological distress among beneficiaries affected by shelter damage and flooding, including feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and anxiety about their families' safety and shelter conditions.

A parent described the impact when HI staff called to check on programme participants:

"When I saw the tent had collapsed and realised that I was unable to help my family, I felt completely helpless."

Inclusive education: As of 10 November, heavy rainfall and flooding had affected approximately 109 learning spaces across all seven education directorates in the Gaza Strip, impacting an estimated 5,500 pre-school and school-aged children, including children with disabilities and conflict-related injuries. Six temporary learning spaces were also sheltering 19 displaced households, forcing the suspension of learning activities at these locations. Damage includes flooded classrooms, leaking and collapsed tents, and inaccessible sites. For children with disabilities, these disruptions can create additional barriers to accessing learning, inclusive education support and safe environments.

HI's inclusive education manager described what the flooding meant for his own children: "As a father, one of my hardest decisions is whether to send my children to their temporary learning space (TLS) amid heavy rains and flooding. I worry whether the tent is warm, waterproof and safe, and whether they can safely navigate the muddy, damaged roads to get there. No parent should have to choose between their children's right to education and their right to safety, protection and dignity."

III. Damage to assistive devices and loss of independence

Water and mud can damage wheelchairs, walking aids, prostheses and other assistive products, while inaccessible and uneven surfaces make their use more difficult. Losing access to these devices can mean prolonged waits for maintenance or replacement, given the exceptionally high demand and acute shortages resulting from Israeli restrictions on the entry of assistive devices, spare parts and other essential rehabilitation supplies into Gaza. **Such delays can significantly restrict people's mobility and independence, increase their reliance on caregivers, and prevent them from reaching safety, accessing essential services and receiving much-needed humanitarian assistance.**

IV. Increased protection risks and loss of dignity

Losing access to toilets and bathing facilities can make it difficult for persons with disabilities to maintain personal hygiene, privacy and dignity. Women and girls with disabilities may face additional barriers and protection risks when safe, accessible sanitation facilities are damaged or become inaccessible.

People who cannot move independently or evacuate without assistance may also face increased isolation and dependence on others, while caregivers experience additional physical and emotional pressures. Inadequate shelter and inaccessible sanitation facilities can further undermine people's safety, dignity and ability to meet their basic needs.

V. Explosive ordnance risks continue after the waters recede

Floodwater can displace or expose explosive ordnance (EO), creating additional risks for people returning to or moving through affected areas. Runoff and wadi flows can erode sand and loose debris, exposing buried items and carrying them downstream to new locations. Areas previously assessed or cleared can therefore no longer be assumed safe following major flooding.

Saturated rubble may also collapse, exposing or shifting buried explosive ordnance and potentially triggering detonation. **Persons with disabilities may face additional barriers to recognising, avoiding or moving away from these hazards, particularly when pathways are obstructed and accessible safety information is unavailable.**

HI teams reported an incident described on social media in which a civilian reportedly found an item of explosive ordnance (EO) on the beach. More such items are expected to be found. Accessible explosive ordnance risk education and clear, inclusive safety information are essential to help affected communities understand and mitigate these risks.

4. An existing disability crisis leaves little room for further disruption

The consequences of flooding must be understood against the scale of existing disability- and injury-related needs in Gaza. Over three years of conflict, continued attacks on civilians have resulted in further life-changing injuries, amputations and other impairments. Alongside widespread disruption and damage to healthcare services and limited access to rehabilitation, these factors have created substantial and growing needs. Any further disruption risks compounding these needs and deepening the barriers faced by persons with disabilities and people with injuries.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as of 1 April 2026:

- **172,043 people** had been injured since October 2023.
- **43,011 people** had sustained potentially life-changing injuries, representing approximately one quarter of all those injured.
- Between **49,462 and 55,914 injuries** were estimated to require extended rehabilitation.

- More than **5,000 limb amputations** had been recorded, with one in five amputees being a child.

These needs exist alongside those of people with pre-existing disabilities and chronic health conditions, who also face significant barriers to healthcare, rehabilitation and assistive products.

Rehabilitation services remain severely constrained. WHO reported that no rehabilitation facility in Gaza was fully functional, while shortages of equipment, supplies and assistive products continued to limit service provision. Flooding and further disruption to already fragile living conditions risk compounding these gaps and undermining the recovery of people who require ongoing care and support.

5. Impact on humanitarian workers and the duty of care

Humanitarian workers in Gaza, including HI staff, are living and working in the same conditions as the communities they support. Around 60% of HI staff in Gaza are themselves displaced and living in tents.

In recent days alone, 80 HI staff reported needs related to tarpaulins, tents, blankets and mattresses. Six staff members and their families have been directly affected by the flooding and have had to prioritise securing their families' safety and finding alternative shelter, temporarily limiting their ability to report to work and deliver assistance.

The possibility of recurrent flooding throughout this winter could have direct implications for the continuity of essential services for persons with disabilities and people with injuries, including rehabilitation and physiotherapy in clinics, primary healthcare services, and the functioning of P&O workshops.

Humanitarian workers cannot be expected to maintain services unaffected when their own families face the same immediate threats and displacement pressures as the people they serve. Disruption to staff safety, shelter and basic needs can translate directly into interruptions in service delivery for communities already facing significant barriers to essential care.

Ensuring the safety, well-being and basic needs of humanitarian personnel is therefore not separate from the humanitarian response; it is an essential condition for sustaining it. Adequate operational and donor support must recognise the realities facing frontline staff and enable organisations to maintain service continuity while meeting their duty of care towards their personnel.

6. HI's response

Despite the challenging conditions, HI teams in Gaza took immediate measures to adapt their operations and maintain continuity of essential services during this critical period for the individuals and communities they serve. This included:

- **Removing accumulated water** from affected rehabilitation and MHPSS tents, enabling services to resume where feasible.
- **Relocating MHPSS sessions** to alternative spaces within primary healthcare centres and the P&O facility, while rescheduling affected appointments to maintain service continuity.
- **Activating remote P&O follow-up sessions** through HI's dedicated WhatsApp channel and arranging remote MHPSS sessions where in-person services were disrupted.
- **Stepping up awareness-raising efforts** among affected communities about potential explosive ordnance (EO) risks and continuing to explore ways to monitor exposure resulting from flooding. This includes social media monitoring, reporting through UNMAS and HI's EORE teams, and referrals to the Mine Action Thematic workstream (under the Protection Cluster).
- **Activating the duty of care mechanism** to provide staff with resources to address the direct impacts of the rainfall on their living conditions. This includes financial support to purchase or replace essential items damaged or lost, such as tarpaulins, wood and other basic shelter materials.

  While HI will continue to adapt its service delivery arrangements, it will also continue to monitor emerging rehabilitation, accessibility and psychosocial needs.

7. Priority actions: addressing the barriers to a disability-inclusive flood response and winter preparedness

HI calls on the following actors to take urgent action ahead of the next forecast storm and sustain these efforts throughout the winter, through March 2027.

States and diplomatic actors

1. **Engage with the Israeli authorities to enable predictable entry of essential items.** This covers shelter materials, fuel, engine oil, spare parts, machinery and the materials needed for rehabilitation and P&O services, including items classified as dual use, on a regular basis and on more days of the week [confirm current entry arrangements].
2. **Support expanded commercial channels** for fuel, engine oil, spare parts, assistive devices, and rehabilitation technologies.
3. **Support the revocation of the Israeli registration** requirements INGOs registration and visa provision for international technical staff would relieve pressure on national teams and support them in strengthening the response"

Donors

1. **Provide flexible funding for the overall flood and winter response. Provide top-ups** and no-cost adjustments to humanitarian organisations' existing grants where needed, so that partners on the ground can respond within days.

2. **Provide disability-specific funding for winter needs.** This includes repair and replacement of wheelchairs, walking aids and prostheses; accessible shelter, flooring and sanitation; and winter kits that include disability-specific items.

3. **Provide funding for predictive modelling and anticipatory action frameworks** to enable the early identification and prioritisation of at-risk communities, inform in-depth risk assessments, and facilitate the pre-positioning of resources ahead of flooding.

4. **Cover Duty of Care costs.** Include shelter, blankets and basic needs for humanitarian staff and their families as eligible costs, so that humanitarian personnel are supported and enabled to continue providing services through repeated flooding.

Humanitarian coordination (clusters, HCT and site management)

1. **Apply disability criteria in flood risk prioritisation and relocation.** Of the 451 sites in high-risk areas, those hosting people with limited mobility, caregiver-dependent households, and people with recent injuries should be prioritised for relocation and drainage support.

2. **Make early warning and evacuation information accessible.** Use formats suitable for people who are blind, deaf or have intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, and plan evacuation with caregivers and families together.

3. **Collect and share disability-disaggregated data.** Use the Washington Group Short Set in flood impact assessments, so the next review can show who was affected and how.

4. **Re-survey and re-communicate explosive ordnance risk.** Areas previously assessed or cleared should not be assumed safe after major flooding. Provide accessible risk education to affected communities.

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