



MIFTAH Policy Paper | March 2026

The Gendered Impact of Forced Displacement on Palestinian Women

Executive Summary

Forced displacement remains a central mechanism of Israel's settler-colonial project in Palestine, operating as a long-term strategy to reconfigure demographic and geographic realities. Since 2024, intensified Israeli operations in the northern West Bank particularly in Jenin, Tulkarm, Tubas, and Nablus have resulted in the forced displacement of approximately 40,000 Palestinians and the widespread destruction of homes and infrastructure. [1]

These outcomes are not incidental, but consequences that are structurally embedded within Israel's expansionist policies. Displacement is a continuous and long-standing strategy that has persisted since the Nakba of 1948, aimed at uprooting the indigenous Palestinian population from their land and reshaping geographic and demographic spaces in accordance with a logic of displacement and replacement. Within this historical context, the current waves of forced displacement targeting Palestinian refugee camps in the northern West Bank cannot be understood as temporary security measures or isolated events. Rather, they represent an advanced phase in a prolonged and systematic colonial policy of exclusion, intended to empty the camps of their inhabitants and undermine their political and legal significance as living testimony to the Palestinian refugee question and the right of return. Refugee camps, in this sense, are not merely sites of humanitarian concern, but political spaces embodying the unresolved question of return.

Gendered Dimensions of Displacement

Forced displacement produces distinct and gender-specific consequences for Palestinian women and girls, exposing them to overlapping forms of vulnerability and rights violations. Displacement is often accompanied by threats to personal safety, loss of homes and livelihoods, and the fragmentation of community support systems. For women, these impacts are further compounded by gendered inequalities that affect access to resources and protection.

Throughout 2024-2025, MIFTAH's fieldworkers collected surveys from 300 forcibly displaced Palestinian women, and 20 sworn testimonies geographically distributed across refugee camps and governorates in the northern West Bank. They have been analyzed for their gendered impact of forced displacement and are summarized as follows:

[1] OCHA Northern West Bank humanitarian response update 21 January - 30 April 2025, updated 11 July 2025.

a. Economic Marginalisation

Displacement significantly disrupts women's economic roles and survival strategies:

- Loss of home-based businesses and micro-projects
- Increased reliance on humanitarian aid
- Limited access to employment opportunities
- Rising living costs and financial instability

Women are increasingly compelled to assume the role of primary breadwinner under precarious conditions, often without adequate support. This shift not only intensifies economic pressure but also exposes women to exploitation within informal and unstable labour arrangements.

b. Health and Psychological impact

The health consequences of displacement are severe and multifaceted including:

- Reduced access to healthcare services, particularly for pregnant women, elderly women, and those with chronic illnesses
- Deterioration in physical health due to poor displacement living conditions
- Weakened psychological health with heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and trauma

The collapse of stable living environments and support systems contributes to long-term psychological distress, with women bearing the dual burden of managing their own trauma while providing care for others.

c. Social Disruption and protection Risks

Displacement reshapes family and community dynamics in ways that disproportionately affect women:

- Increased domestic responsibilities and caregiving burdens
- Overcrowded and inadequate shelter conditions
- Loss of privacy and autonomy

Living in shared or unfamiliar spaces significantly heightens risks of gender-based violence (GBV), exploitation, and abuse. The erosion of social networks further isolates women and restricts their access to support mechanisms.

Humanitarian Implications

The findings highlight critical gaps in current humanitarian and protection responses:

- Gender-neutral approaches fail to address the specific needs of women in displacement settings
- Insufficient protection mechanisms leave women exposed to violence and exploitation
- Limited access to services exacerbates inequality and long-term vulnerability

Importantly, these gaps exist within a context governed by International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Human Rights Law, and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, all of which impose clear obligations on the occupying power and the international community. Failure to address these issues not only deepens the immediate suffering of women, but also contributes to long-term social fragmentation and inequality.

Policy Recommendations

To address the gendered impact of forced displacement, the following policies are recommended:

1. Accountability and Protection

a. End Forced Displacement and Demolitions

- Hold Israel accountable for policies and practices of forcible transfer, including the demolition of Palestinian homes and infrastructure, in violation of international law.

b. Uphold the Right of Return

- Enforce the right of return for Palestinian refugees and prohibit policies that result in repeated or prolonged displacement.

c. Lift Movement Restrictions

- Oblige Israel to remove checkpoints and movement barriers that unlawfully restrict access to essential services, livelihoods, and healthcare.

d. Guarantee Humanitarian Access

- Ensure Israel facilitates immediate, safe, and unimpeded humanitarian access to all affected populations, in line with its obligations under international law.

e. Protect Women and Vulnerable Groups

- Hold Israel accountable for addressing the disproportionate impact of displacement on women, children, and the elderly, including risks of violence, economic marginalisation, and lack of access to services.

2. Gender-Responsive Humanitarian Assistance

a. Protection from Gender-Based Violence

- Establish safe, private, and secure shelter conditions
- Develop targeted GBV prevention and response mechanisms
- Ensure confidential and accessible reporting systems

b. Economic Empowerment

- Support women-led income-generating initiatives
- Facilitate access to resources, training, and financial assistance

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