

Lessons learnt from winter clothing distribution

Gaza Response, May 2025

Introduction

Palestinians in Gaza face severe challenges in accessing humanitarian aid due to the closure of entry points, stock shortages, multiple checkpoints within Gaza, and pervasive insecurity.

While the Shelter Cluster globally encourages using cash or vouchers for non-food items (NFIs) such as clothing, this approach was not feasible in Gaza due to liquidity constraints and market dysfunction. IOM under the shelter Cluster umbrella launched a survey on lessons learnt for last winter clothing distribution, 10 Shelter Cluster partners participated in the survey, this document is reflecting the survey's results and some bilateral discussions with few shelter cluster partners, to be used for future programming.

Context and Challenges

Gaza experiences significant clothing shortages due to multiple factors: non-functional markets, borders closures, restricted population mobility, and non-operational local factories. These conditions create substantial barriers to meeting basic clothing needs for displaced populations.

Clothing distributions require careful planning as they directly impact people's health, dignity, privacy, protection, and cultural practices. This is particularly crucial in Gaza, where the cultural context is sensitive, and privacy is already compromised due to overcrowded conditions in temporary shelters.

90% of the population in Gaza is internally displaced. Clothing serves as essential protection and privacy for displaced populations. Therefore, partners must ensure appropriate procurement and distribution practices to avoid causing harm while addressing acute needs effectively.

Key Indicators for clothing from SPHERE standards:

- People have **at least two full sets of clothing** per person that suit the climate and culture.
- Children, older people, and other vulnerable groups have **specific clothing** as required.
- Clothing is **safe, comfortable, and does not pose risks** to health or dignity.
- Materials and sizing are **suitable for the local climate** (e.g., warm clothing in cold climates, breathable fabrics in hot areas).

It is important when designing clothing for the context in Gaza to take the below under consideration:

- Hot, dry summers (May–September): Highs 30–35°C, high humidity.
- Cold, wet winters (November–March): Lows of 6–10°C, with rain and occasional cold winds.

Cultural Appropriateness

- Respect local dress norms, procure loose-fitted clothing (especially for women and girls)
- Ensure privacy in clothing distribution (e.g., separate lines for men and women)
- Offer options for head coverings, but do not enforce them

Neutral, or patterned clothing (avoid overly bright or flashy colors)

Gender-Sensitive Clothing Selection

IOM carried out bilateral consultations with partners on clothing preferences they gathered from Gaza. Based on these consultations, protection need to be mainstreamed in the design of the kits: Ensure privacy in clothing distribution (e.g., separate lines for men and women)

Women & Girls:

- Loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts/tunics
- Long skirts or loose trousers (not tight-fitting)
- Head coverings (hijab, keffiyeh, or shawl) as per preference
- Breathable, comfortable fabrics
- Breastfeeding-friendly clothing for lactating mothers

Men & Boys:

- Loose trousers (no shorts)
- Long-sleeved shirts or t-shirts
- Keffiyeh/hat (for sun protection)

Children:

- *Modest and comfortable clothing*
- *Procure darker shades of diverse colors to ensure there is a sufficient variety of design and personal choice.*

Based on the clothing lessons learned survey findings, The below comparison shows the main considerations to be taken in mind before programing, some of the challenges can be mitigated, and some there is no control over it, according to the survey launched 60% of the partners conducted clothing distribution through in-kind, 30% through voucher, and 10% through both modalities

In-Kind	Voucher
Cost: The prices of items of clothing in the region outside Gaza Strip are much lower than in Gaza, less than 125% than prices in Gaza. Will have positive impact on local market, as it will support the local market by affecting the prices of the items available locally.	Cost: Much higher prices, manipulation of prices, fluctuating the market which will impact bigger communities. Clusters to indicate the value of voucher per household size and keep it relevant to the market price in coordination with cash working group. It might stimulate the local market, and risks exclusion of smaller vendors. Considering the above, it should be checked whether vouchers are an appropriate form of assistance.
Quality: More control over quality, close follow-up with vendors, checking samples at procurement stage, and after delivery as well. It is also important to highlight that partners need to check the sizes before delivery and after delivery, to make sure the right size is provided for the right age, provide the sizes to vendors before production, use the middle east range of sizes per age, to reflect the height, the waist, shoulders,	Quality: Shortage of clothing items in the market, bad quality, absence of some appropriate sizes and culturally accepted clothes.

etc..	
Kitting issues: sizing issues, preference of the people, labeling of the boxes to include size, gender and the types if items and quantity, individual packaging of the items inside the cartoons to protect from getting wet, cartoon to be 5 layers at least, it is recommended to compress the packaging as much as possible to decrease the space needed on trucks and for warehousing.	Kitting issues: no kitting issues, people need can be met better through self-shopping,
Looting/Damage/ higher risks of cargo loss.	For voucher will be limited.
Targeting: Huge caseload can be handled. The selection for some partners was done through a community-verified approach due to access issues. Duplication was checked with the cluster/s, partners on ground, one of the main requirements from the partners involved in this survey is that the clusters support the provision of data disaggregated by size and gender. Can respond to protection cases/referrals in a safer way, the targeting needs to follow cluster/s recommendations and prioritization, for less than 18 protection clusters, for over 18 Shelter cluster.	Targeting: Limited caseloads can be assisted due to the market's limited availability of items. Same for duplication might have risks in some protection cases to not be able to respond confidentially, overload the market (grouping is needed). SEVAT was conducted by few partners at household level, then de-duplication was cross-checked with MOSD, also to ensure alignment with national vulnerability database, also checked through household visits, when possible,
Transportation: From the regional market to Gaza, and inside Gaza, also beneficiaries to pay till the distribution sites.	Transportation: Beneficiaries pay till the market.
Warehousing: High costs of warehousing in and outside of Gaza. Spoilage of items due to delays.	Warehousing: no warehousing costs and risks; it remains with vendors.
Entry of items: COGAT approval, cargo prioritization, blockade of aid. More advocacy and prioritization of clothing is needed as a basic necessity.	Entry of items: The blockade of entry will impact on the availability and functionality of the market. But it still will be the only way to support in the blockade of aid period.
Distribution: Control the distribution sites, distribution according to people's needs and size is difficult, delays in seasonal clothing distribution, difficulties in distribution in a bazar model due to many factors,	Distribution: Schedule visits, expand vendor network to cover seasonal, gender, sizing, and PWD needs. Monitor visits and people's expenditures. For far areas partners negotiate with vendors to provide closer shopping points.
Communication: label boxes in Arabic and English, mentioning the quantity and item types,	Communication: IEC materials to be available to explain the procedure, the targeting criteria, mapping for the vendors, hotline number during the shopping period and an active team on ground to act immediately,
Protection: GBV and disability inclusion need to be mainstreamed at distribution sites targeting, in the design of the kits, etc.	Protection: mainstreaming is needed throughout the program cycle, control over vendors, need for strong legal MOUs to protect people, this approach promotes dignity and satisfaction of people. reduce exposure of staff and beneficiaries to risks related to large-scale distributions.
Monitoring: Only 50% of the partners were able to conduct PDMs, either through phone calls when access was an issue, or through field on-spot visits interviews by MEAL teams at distribution time and then PDMs.	Monitoring: Monitoring can be carried out through a combination of post-distribution monitoring (PDM) surveys, vendor sales record reviews, and, where feasible, direct follow-up with a sample of beneficiaries. close monitoring is needed over the prices also to check how fund is utilized, vendors performance and behavior, products availability,

	customer satisfactions,
Coordination: is needed with the shelter cluster, protection cluster, SMC, MOSD, partners on ground. Partners reported the need for clusters to provide a system and guidelines to cross check duplication between partners and clusters as well as joint market assessments.	
Timelines: Slower due to procurement, shipping, clearance, and distribution timelines.	Timelines: Faster response possible once vendor agreements are in place. Shopping can begin almost immediately.
Localization: Since clothing needs more engagement with affected communities, it is recommended that local partners and organizations with Gaza experience conduct this kind of programing. Engage communities with the design of the kit's contents, colors, and programing, to be up to date with the evolving needs and situation in Gaza.	Localization: Same, but engagement of community needs to be done, capacity building for local vendors, updated market surveys to shift to voucher,

The above factors and considerations are dynamic, reach out to the shelter cluster to support you on the best way forward for your programming.

Key Recommendations:

- Maintenance kit to be included in the kits, also allowed in the voucher modality, to increase the durability of the items, fit the sizes, fix what might not be in preference of the beneficiaries. The maintenance kit includes needles, scissors, thread bundles, and other sewing materials.
- On shoes the focus can be on bigger sizes in in-kind modality, with the provision of insoles, to be able to assist in all sizes.
- Include water-proof back bags in in-kind modality, people are facing recurring displacement
- In the procurement stage, if there are recommendations required on vendors from other agencies, utilize the procurement whatsapp group set up by some agencies, contact Cluster for more information.
- The clothing sets should be packed in reusable good quality water-resistant bags; avoid simple plastic bags as this will contribute to the solid waste issues in Gaza.
- While in-kind, flexible about sizes (provide an average size) given to the households and also depend on their capacity to alter or exchange, when voucher, can consider providing based on the household's specific sizes.
- Coordinate with Shelter Cluster to avoid de-duplication
- Consider clothing requirements for all age groups, i.e. adults, adolescents, and children, including baby kits.
- Shelter Cluster partners who are providing children's clothing should coordinate and report to Protection Cluster
- Access of aid to Gaza fluctuates a lot. Consider loading categorized age and gender groups of clothing onto separate pallets. However, if you are sending 5 trucks of clothing, ensure that the pallets of different age groups are distributed across the trucks, so you are able to meet some degree of coverage considering looting and access issues.
- As has been witnessed in the winter, a lot of families have used other items such as blankets to make clothes. Raw materials need to be explored further.
- Planning needs to be done ahead for each season to avoid delays.

- Establish rapid Feedback Mechanism, if possible, through hotline or feedback channel during and after distribution, also during shopping for the voucher modality, to monitor satisfaction, and flag protection concerns in real-time. Leaflet for feedback can be distributed with the clothes, or to be kitted with the items. Or to be sent as messages for voucher,