PALESTINE
SHELTER CLUSTER
Coordinating Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements

# Key considerations for prefabricated shelters for Gaza's early recovery

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## Executive Summary

People in Gaza are enduring dire living conditions. Current humanitarian shelter and settlements responses are enormously constrained and therefore inadequate to meet people's needs. When transitional or early recovery shelter responses are possible, it is likely that agencies will be unable to provide culturally adequate shelter solutions that meet Sphere or international standards, due to ongoing restrictions on importing construction materials and the huge task of mine and debris clearance, and limitations on conducting meaningful community-based programming. Whilst acknowledging these considerable limitations on future shelter and settlements programming, agencies and coordinating bodies are developing their medium-term strategies. Prefabricated shelters (prefabs) are being considered by several agencies as one of the transitional shelter solutions. In order to contribute to ongoing discussions[1] of the appropriateness of prefabs to meet post-conflict shelter needs, the Gaza Shelter Cluster's Transitional Shelter Assistance Technical Working Group initiated research, in the form of a rapid evidence synthesis, **conducted by CARE International UK and Catholic Relief Services (CRS).**

Findings of this research suggest that prefabs should be considered as a last resort, for households with no other means of sheltering in the medium-term. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach embodied in rows of prefab structures in a camp-like setting, commonly divorced from existing social networks, livelihoods and services, brings many risks within the post-conflict context of the Gaza strip. If, as is likely, prefab solutions are used in Gaza, the findings point to key considerations for such interventions, regarding prefab sites (size in terms of number of households, and location), and the design and materials of the units themselves. In addition to key considerations for prefabs, the research findings prompted recommendations regarding transitional shelter approaches.

## Research context

As of the time of the research, December 2024, approximately 69% of the buildings in Gaza were damaged or destroyed[2]. Close to 90% of the Gaza Strip had experienced multiple evacuations, and there were massive gaps in the provision of emergency shelter materials due to changing access constraints. At that time, the majority of Gaza's 2.3 million population was displaced, with most displaced households in the middle and south of the Strip sheltering in poor-quality makeshift structures due to a severe lack of shelter materials. Many displaced households were also residing in overcrowded collective centers, being hosted, or had returned to damaged dwellings where possible. In the South of Gaza, the majority of the population was concentrated in a shrinking and increasingly dense "humanitarian zone," whose boundaries continued to shift due to multiple evacuation orders[3]. The winter conditions at the time exacerbated urgent needs for emergency shelter materials[4], while many of the emergency shelter items distributed throughout the year, such as tents, had already deteriorated and become unfit for habitation[5].

Given the ongoing military action and the scale of needs, the emergency response was already protracted. In addition to providing emergency shelter materials, including sealing-off kits, the Shelter Cluster and partners were developing strategies to support households in returning to partially damaged dwellings. This included repair assistance and a range of transitional solutions. In previous Gaza responses, prefabricated (prefab) shelters had been used on a small scale and were considered as one of the solutions for a later stage of the response. To assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of prefabricated shelter units for post-conflict shelter needs in Gaza,[6] CARE International UK and Catholic Relief Services, members of the Shelter Cluster's Transitional Shelter Assistance Technical Working Group (TSA TWG), initiated research to gather relevant evidence to inform future shelter, settlements, and site management activities. This research has been endorsed by the Palestine Shelter Cluster and the Site Management Working Group

[1] *The Palestine Shelter Cluster's Strategic Advisory Group published a position paper on prefabs in December 2024.*
[2] *UNOSAT Gaza Strip Comprehensive Damage Assessment (December 2024)*
[3] *Palestine Shelter Cluster Module 1 Emergency Shelter Assistance (November 2024)*
[4] *Palestine Shelter Cluster Strategic Recommendations on Winterization (September 2024)*
[5] *Palestine Shelter Cluster National Cluster Meeting, IM Updates (November 2024)*
[6] *Bearing in mind that all humanitarian interventions must meet, as a minimum, [Sphere] Core Humanitarian Standards.*

## Research aims and research questions

The research aimed to collate lessons learned from previous prefab and other temporary and 'transitional'[7] shelter solutions to guide post-conflict shelter options in Gaza, in order to provide evidence-based advocacy and recommendations[8]. To these ends, the research questions were:

- What were the impacts of previous shelter interventions using prefabricated units as temporary or transitional solutions for displaced populations?
- What lessons were learned in previous responses using prefabs and other temporary and transitional approaches?
- What are the consequent considerations for future transitional interventions using prefabs in Gaza, and what are other recommendations for transitional shelter?

The research, a rapid evidence synthesis, used mixed qualitative methods (literature review and key informant interviews). 24 key informants with experience of prefabs and other temporary and transitional shelter solutions in relevant contexts were interviewed. Researchers were mindful of the sensitivities of the topic, and the Gaza context. See Annex: Methodology for details. The sections below summarise the findings from literature and interviews in response to those research questions.

## Research findings

The sections below summarise key aspects of the impacts and consequences of prefab and other solutions which featured in the secondary and primary data. Findings are organised into those related to the shelter units themselves and to the 'settlement' aspects of interventions using prefabs, including the project design/ implementation/ management approach. Inevitably, physical and technical, social, financial, environmental and other impacts of prefab approaches are intertwined. The impacts of specific prefab units/designs in specific locations, and the technical comparison of prefabs versus other transitional solutions, is beyond the scope of this rapid evidence review. Rather, the sections highlight themes that emerged from the research, which in turn suggest considerations for future humanitarian interventions, and longer-term shelter and settlement solutions planned by other actors in Gaza, as the extremely challenging, evolving, geopolitical environment allows.

### Prefab sites: spatial planning, layout, services and infrastructure

The establishment of any prefab sites in Gaza will be logistically challenging, but also socially, financially and politically sensitive. The historical and political context of Gaza inevitably shapes responses about future transitional shelter options. For Gaza residents, memories of previous escalations and resulting long-term displacement in camps are profound and vivid. It is known that what started as temporary or transitional shelter solutions in many cases became permanent. Following the war in Gaza in 2014, prefab shelters were mobilized for the response, in coordination with Gaza's Ministry of Public Works and Housing. Some containers were manufactured within Gaza, and others imported at donors' considerable expense[9]. In general, the containers were provided to households on their own lands, but three container sites were also established, where displaced households lived for three years until their houses were reconstructed. Key informants reported on the poor quality of these containers, which needed regular maintenance.

A range of key informants acknowledged that the current level of destruction and future shortages of land indicate that **the provision of containers or other prefab units on people's own land, or the sites of damaged and destroyed homes, will not be possible**. In addition, the huge tasks of rubble and unexploded ordnance clearance ahead, it is unlikely that prefabs can be placed in urban areas, perhaps for years. Hence, there is a risk of establishing sites of prefabricated shelters.

*We cannot say we don't want it [prefabs] because we are forced to have it. (KII, INGO)*

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*[7] Within and beyond the shelter and settlements sector, understandings of the term 'transitional shelter' are varied. The term can refer to an approach or to a range of 'products'. The focus of this paper is prefabricated units (prefabs) which are often referred to as types of transitional shelter. See Annex: Transitional Shelter for further discussion.*

*[8] The researchers and their key informants were cognisant of the fact that, while no other contexts are fully similar to Gaza, some learnings from other contexts are relevant.*

*[9] A KII reported 17,000 USD per container in 2014. Costs of prefabs vary considerably and this topic, while clearly significant, is not enlarged upon below when referring to the range of contexts referred to by KIIs and literature.*

All actors should be aware that communities and individuals may well regard the future creation of camps, or camp-like settlements, extremely negatively. Key informants in Gaza indicate that the majority of the population want to return to their homes, or at least their home sites. Setting up prefabs in a new location within Gaza is, in effect, dictating where people live. In turn, this dictates what **livelihoods** they can undertake, how they can access **social networks**, where children can go to **school** and where people can access **medical care and other services**.

In addition to these overarching concerns regarding the establishment of prefab sites and their location, key informants urged caution regarding several specific issues:

***Space** and **distancing** and **number** of units, access to **WASH, energy and cooking provision,** the need for **hazard-resilient infrastructure** and, **land tenure**[10] issues. If prefab sites are used, organisations must have **capacity for site planning**.*

As importantly, the **social aspects** of site development and management must be considered - lessons from Gaza and elsewhere indicate that **small container clusters work better when they are inhabited by extended families, for example.**

Informants from several contexts stressed the importance for future residents of prefabs having the opportunity to occupy units close to relatives and pre-displacement communities. **Targeting criteria** for people's inclusion in interventions using prefabs should be transparent and involve local leadership and coordination with a wide range of stakeholders. **Prioritization** should be informed by people's current shelter arrangements, as those in tents are likely to regard the option of prefabs differently than those sheltering in collective centres, as emphasised by one key informant:

*Households will accept anything better than tents. Experience in tents is very problematic; all want to be in a better situation. If you ask households living in a tent, they will still agree if the tent is their only option. If they are in a school (with walls and slabs) they will not move to prefabs. (KII, INGO)*

Potential recipients of prefabs must have the opportunity of making **informed choices** between transitional options. In terms of humanitarian inputs, Shelter and Settlements and Camp Coordination and Camp Management specialists must work together, and with other sectors, including WASH, Education and Health. Using a 'Settlements Approach'[11], thereby addressing multi-sectoral needs in targeted areas, may be valuable.

Contrasts between existing, large scale prefab camps in Jordan points to advantages and disadvantages of varying degrees of flexibility regarding site layout and 'moveability' of household units[12]. The moveable 'caravans' in Za'atari enabled residents to mitigate **privacy** and other social issues, enabling an organic layout including extended-family compounds and 'neighbourhoods'. In contrast, the (cheaper, locally produced) container units in Azrak were fixed in rows, with negative social impacts[13]. However, one key informant reported that the relative rigidity and order of Azrak camp has avoided **protection issues** created by powerful groups reordering Za'atari camp and controlling where individuals and groups can live and feel safe. The altered settlement layout there has also created access and fire safety hazards. **Fire safety** - linked both to site layout and the flammability of materials used in prefabs, was raised by several key informants.

## Characteristics of prefab units themselves

In addition to prefab site issues, key informants highlighted several considerations related to the prefabs[14] themselves. The most commonly occurring issue was **thermal (dis)comfort** under extreme temperatures. Academic research has also highlighted thermal discomfort in a range of containers and prefabs, as well as other physical shortcomings of such units, many of which have associated **negative impacts on health and well-**

*[10] Housing Land and Property (HLP) issues can influence whether a solution is more temporary or durable, in terms of stability (including providing relative, even if minimal, peace of mind) versus being exposed to evictions or further displacement.*
*[11] See, for example, the Settlements Approach Guidance Note (2020)*
*[12] See also Step into Zaatari Camp (NRC, 2022) and Scott-Smith and Breeze (eds), (2020), Structures of Protection Forced Migration Series volume 39*
*13 Davies (2016) The grey ghost town and the camp in search of a soul*
*14 The majority of prefabs discussed in key informant interviews were household units, rather than community buildings.*

**being**[15]. Metal containers and plastic units commonly lack sufficient thermal mass and insulation, making them excessively hot in summer and cold in winter. Additional activities and materials are often found to be necessary for weather proofing containers[16].

Key informants cautioned against the use of corrugated iron roofing sheets, recommending instead sandwich panels with sufficient insulation, noting the inevitable cost and reach implications of such materials. KIIs with experience of containers in Jordan, Morocco, NW Syria and Gaza stressed the importance of budgeting for **sufficient insulation** at the start of a response. While in some cases, such as Azrak refugee camp in Jordan, insulation was added later to some units, such retrofitting risks sub-optimal installation and unaffordable additional costs after the original funding has ended.

The selection of materials must also take **flammability** and other safety concerns (such as sharp edges of materials causing injuries) into account. Unit design must also address the need for cross **ventilation** (with due attention also to privacy issues). Inadequate ventilation is associated with poor air quality and condensation, which both have health implications[17]. Poor **sound proofing** affects mental well-being as well as physical health.

The **size** of any container or other prefab unit should be sufficient for a family to live in comfort, perhaps for many years. **Flexibility** of living spaces and the ability to subdivide a unit to create **private spaces** can be valued by households above the overall size of a unit. The fact that prefab units are often used longer than originally planned means that the **quality of materials** used is crucial. Initially-cheaper materials degrade over time and structural problems develop, commonly causing **weatherproofing** issues and instigating unaffordable **maintenance costs**[18]. If well maintained, prefabs can last many years. However, experience from several contexts suggests that resources for maintenance commonly become unavailable as a situation becomes protracted, also causing responsibility for maintenance to be contested. **Costs** of prefabs per household, particularly those using high-quality materials, are high compared with other transitional solutions. This limits the number of people that can be assisted and puts long-term **value for money** in question.

With regard to **durability** of prefabs, experience in many settings suggest that living conditions for inhabitants will likely decline over time, as materials degrade. Once they are no longer habitable, people can become homeless, if no progress towards a more durable solution has been made since their implementation. If we use land to construct prefab sites, we cannot use that same land for more sustainable housing or indeed for agriculture/other uses that would support early recovery.

Linked to this, the issue of **'reusability'** of prefabs and whether their materials can be repurposed for self-recovery was addressed by several key informants. In Yemen and Morocco, informants reported that locally manufactured prefab containers were preferred to imported units, for political, financial and environmental reasons. The procurement of imported metal and plastic prefab units raises **environmental concerns**[19]. Ideally, prefabs can be dismantled and reused[20] in another location when reconstruction is possible, although there are examples where the environmentally responsible reuse and/or eventual disposal of prefabs or their component parts is problematic. Many prefab solutions are very rigid, but designs and materials that enable upgrades and support local markets are preferable.

## One-size-fits-all?

While containers' and other prefab modules' basic physical qualities make them stable enough to be protective in the short term (and certainly more protective than tents and current makeshift shelter and collective shelter realities in Gaza), there are many potential pitfalls in the implementation of prefab units highlighted by literature and interviews. **A 'one-size-fits-all' approach embodied in rows of prefab structures in a camp-like setting, commonly divorced from existing social networks, livelihoods and services, brings many risks within the post-conflict context of the Gaza strip**.

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*[15] In particular, see outputs from the Healthy Housing for the Displaced project by the University of Bath. Evidence from seven countries revealed poor conditions within many shelters, including excessive temperatures, condensation, lack of privacy and poor air quality, all of which contribute to increased morbidity and mortality.*

*[16] See, for example, Türkiye Shelter Cluster guidance for shading containers in summer and adding a tarpaulin to reduce leakage in winter.*

*[17] See, for example, Albadra et al (2020) Measurement and analysis of air quality in temporary shelters on three continents and Conzatti et al (2022) A review of the impact of shelter design on the health of displaced populations*

*[18] In addition to the cost of maintenance, whether technically, maintenance can be carried out in the in situ context rather than under factory conditions, should influence decision making over prefabs selected.*

*[19] See Scott-Smith, 2017, A Slightly Better Shelter*

*[20] It was reported that prefabs used in Gaza after the 2014 war were repaired and reused for government and other public institutions locally. This followed "celebrations" when the household units were finally decommissioned.*

Using standardised prefab units and thereby envisaging transitional shelter as a *product*, rather than a *process*[21] led by displaced people themselves, risks compromising recovery. Key informants with experience of varied contexts opined that prefabs can be a suitable solution for some groups if they reach minimum [Sphere] standards and provide sufficient space for fire safety and many other social considerations. However, uniformity of units and the lack of possibilities to create extensions or modify units over time, due to regulations, space, resources or other constraining factors, are likely to be problematic for residents' well-being[22].

In addition to the physical health impacts of poor air quality, extreme temperatures and inadequate sanitation, living for extended periods in inflexible and isolated prefab camps, or settlements, has negative impacts on **mental health and well-being.** Protection concerns, especially for groups such as women, children, and people with disabilities, is a strong rationale for finding alternatives to tents, makeshift shelters and overcrowded collective centres and investing in longer-term solutions in protracted contexts (such as NW Syria, where the Shelter Cluster has successfully advocated for a 'Dignified Shelter and Safer Living Conditions' approach). However, long-term living in camp or camp-like settings, especially for children, risks negative **psychosocial impacts** and raises human rights[23] and development concerns.

Given the significant constraints of life in shelter intended to be temporary, commonly for extended periods, opportunities for **homemaking activities**[24] are important. Creating opportunities for people to make decisions about their living environments is itself part of an adequate humanitarian response incorporating mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)[25]. Personalisation of living environments and space for people to conduct social relations are important for mental health and well-being and can be either fostered or hindered by project design and implementation. Homemaking activities are commonly constrained by limited resources, rigid shelter design, lack of site planning and/or lack of camp management which fails to allow residents to alter their immediate surroundings (for example by creating private spaces around household units). While acknowledging the inevitable space constraints in any future Gaza response, **private outdoor spaces** between units, **community spaces**, and **shade**, are important for residents' well-being.

The research highlighted that **similar mistakes regarding the design, implementation and monitoring of prefab shelters are repeatedly made**, despite well-known shortcomings of such units and settlements, especially regarding habitability and social aspects. There is a dearth of publicly available evaluations[26] or 'lessons learned' reports and Shelter Projects case studies which contributes to a lack of learning over time and space.

*If you can't measure it, you can't improve it. (KII, academic)*

*It's very difficult to find documentation and lessons learned [about the use of prefab solutions]. Even in Shelter Projects [...] we don't have a lot of container examples because we don't think it's good. So we don't feature it, but also we're not learning from it because we're not studying it. (KII, INGO)*

## Alternatives to prefabs

Several key informants stressed that it is important to explore a **range of shelter options** for Gaza, promoting solutions that enable people to return to their permanent homes and neighbourhoods. Prefabricated shelters can be as costly as rebuilding homes, but lack cultural sensitivity. **Locally constructed transitional shelters** could offer similar durability and impact to prefabs while being more cost-effective and socially accepted. **Incremental approaches** are better than prefab solutions in many contexts, such as rehabilitating partially damaged houses on people's land, which allows them to return, moving more quickly to a more permanent solution than using prefab units, especially in large 'camps'.

*An incremental approach can bring life back to communities (KII, UN agency)*

[21] *See further discussion of transitional shelter products and processes in Annex B.*
[22] *Hart, Paszkiewicz and Albadra (2018) Shelter as Home?: Syrian Homemaking in Jordanian Refugee Camps*
[23] *Such as the Right to Adequate Housing*
[24] *Homemaking activities consist of "actions and aspirations of camp residents to imbue their dwellings with a sense of home" See, for example, Hart, Paszkiewicz and Albadra (2018) as above.*
[25] *See GSC (2024) Connecting Shelter and MHPSS; a guidance note*
[26] *See, for example, ALNAP (2022) The State of the Humanitarian System, on the need for more evidence to improve humanitarian action.*

This approach also allows greater scope for the delivery of indirect shelter support; for HLP issues, to augment local building skill levels, improve livelihood opportunities, and boost disaster risk reduction. The voices of displaced people in Gaza concerning their own priorities for recovery must be incorporated into future humanitarian and development planning. Affected people must be empowered to make decisions about time, money, labour, building materials, technology, design, layout, etc. **Shelter and settlement actors should advocate for suitable materials to be allowed into Gaza for a range of transitional shelter solutions**, protective of cultural identities. Strategic planning may enable longer-term solutions that can improve living conditions without being perceived as permanent[27].

Nevertheless, in Gaza, enormous constraints with regard to access to materials and land and other factors mean that prefabs are likely to be used. The section below highlights the considerations that should be front and centre of any such response.

## Key considerations for prefabricated shelter in Gaza

Learning from previous humanitarian responses in Gaza and in other relevant contexts points to the need to consider the many interconnected impacts of prefab responses (at household unit and site/settlement level). These are also crosscutting with time; solutions appropriate for weeks or months will become inappropriate for long term dwelling. Previous small- and large-scale implementations of prefabs show that they are frequently inhabited for years - far beyond the original intention of local authorities, INGOs, UN organisations and their donors. With the reality that prefabricated units will form a part of the future humanitarian response in Gaza, these are the key considerations for prefabs and prefab sites prompted by the research findings:

- **Keep any prefab sites small-scale with adequate spacing between units, for fire safety and social reasons.** Sites with prefabs should consider taking an urban planning approach rather than a site planning approach, as they may last for a while till reconstruction or other alternatives are mobilized.
- Targeting for prefabs should focus on those with severely or totally damaged houses and with no other alternatives, such as hosting arrangements.
- Site location must consider social networks and access to services.
- Prefab units must offer adequate space and privacy. Flexibility of living areas and separation of spaces may be more valued than overall size.
- Quality of materials and unit design must be adequate for thermal comfort and consider all physical aspects of the units and site layouts related to health and well-being[28].
- Mental health aspects of living in prefab units and sites and the importance of opportunities for homemaking activities must be incorporated into programming.
- WASH and cooking facilities should be provided at the household level.
- Access to WASH and other services must be culturally appropriate and mindful of risks for groups such as women, children and those with disabilities.
- Resources for maintenance should be factored into planning for prefab units and prefab sites.

### Further recommendations arising from this research

- Humanitarian shelter and settlements (and other sector) actors, and development actors, should develop a linked strategy which takes into account the limited land availability in Gaza for prefab sites.
- Affected people must have opportunities for informed consideration of transitional shelter options. Agencies must develop and share modalities and tools for consultation with affected communities, learning Gazans' key considerations for medium- and longer-term solutions.
- Further research should be undertaken to ensure that the experience and lessons from the previous use of prefabricated shelters in Gaza and elsewhere is incorporated into any future programming.

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*[27] For example, the NW Syria Shelter Cluster's evolution of its approach to 'Dignified Shelter and Safer Living Conditions' has prompted a shift in authorities' and donors' thinking and understanding of cost-effectiveness and appropriateness of designs and materials that were previously excluded from humanitarian options in that context.*

*[28] All stakeholders considering the use of prefabs and other temporary/transitional household structures should use appropriate tools to plan, evaluate and monitor such units, such as the Shelter Assessment Matrix (SAM). This tool includes 34 criteria of planned temporary/transitional shelter solutions and was developed to avoid oft-repeated and avoidable mistakes. The ShelTherm and SheltAIR tools allow close attention to thermal comfort and air quality. All these tools are publicly available. Shelter actors should connect with private sector actors to access building physics expertise to support the analysis of prefab designs in terms of thermal performance, air quality etc.*

- Further guidance[29] for agencies developing transitional solutions using prefabs should be developed and shared.
- Humanitarian donors should fund a range of transitional shelter solutions, focusing as much as possible on the process of transitional shelter, rather than product-based approaches

[29] *Existing guidance on prefabs is limited. For example, USAID/BHA's Pre-fab shelter; some points to consider dates from 2008 and Shelter Centre/IOM's Transitional Shelter Guidelines were published in 2012. Specific guidance and technical specifications for prefab units, prefab sites, and site management will need to be developed and disseminated. To an extent, guidance developed in other contexts can be adapted for the Gaza context, augmented by lessons learned.*

# Annex A: Methodology

The research, a rapid evidence synthesis, collated and analysed information on the impacts of different shelter solutions, focusing on planned 'camps' or settlements using prefab shelters, such as containers and foldable units. The research was conducted by a small group of researchers and technical advisers from CARE International UK and Catholic Relief Services between October and December 2024.

**Data collection** took the form of literature review and key informant interviews. The research used an iterative approach: the literature search and KII interviews informed the direction of the research questions. Academic and 'grey' literature was collected from academic and public platforms including Researchgate, Shelter Projects, the Global Shelter Cluster website, the Humanitarian Library and ReliefWeb. Searches were limited to articles and reports relating to transitional/recovery humanitarian shelter interventions using prefabricated shelters/containers since 2000, in English.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were used to uncover practitioners' and affected populations' previous experience and resulting perspectives on the future use of such solutions in the Gaza context. Key informants were recruited via an informal opportunistic snowball technique. KIIs were conducted with a mix of shelter and settlements and site management practitioners from INGOs and NGOs, humanitarian donors, academics and others with experience of prefab shelter use in the MENA region and elsewhere. Examples in the literature reviewed and KIIs' experiences of prefab and other transitional shelter implementation came from Morocco, Jordan, Ukraine, NW Syria, Gaza and Türkiye.

| | |
|---|---|
| INGO and UN agencies' S&S and CCCM specialists (global and national/sub-national positions, including Shelter Cluster Coordinators) | 15 |
| Implementing national and local NGO S&S specialists | 3 |
| Humanitarian donor S&S specialists | 2 |
| Academia; researchers with building physics, architecture and social science specialisms | 4 |

**Data analysis**

Information from literature and KIIs was collated and analysed. Thematic areas arising in the data were identified and the material was coded and organised into the sections in the Findings: those related to the layouts/organisation of sites or camps of prefab units, the units themselves, and to the overall approach to temporary or transitional shelter using prefabs.

**Limitations of the research**

The lack of publicly available reports and evaluations of shelter and settlement projects involving the use of prefabs/containers was notable. Key informants were willing to speak about their personal and their organisations' learning from such projects, but few were able to share reports/evaluations. Very few published Shelter Project case studies include prefabs or containers. Sector guidance on 'transitional' shelter units or approaches is limited and is likely to be outdated and/or not appropriate for the Gaza context[30]. While an attempt was made to include Gazan voices in KIIs, there was limited success, although several key informants have first-hand knowledge of the context. This rapid evidence synthesis certainly identified gaps in knowledge and the need for further research and development of context-specific guidance.

[30] *For example, USAID/BHA's Pre-fab shelter; some points to consider dates from 2008 and Shelter Centre/IOM's Transitional Shelter Guidelines were published in 2012.*

## Annex B: Terminology regarding temporary and 'transitional' shelter

Definitions of the term 'transitional shelter' are complex and have been contested[31]. Some humanitarian actors refer to transitional shelter as a physical product which offers more robust protection from the elements than emergency shelter items such as tarpaulins and tents. Various transitional solutions would fit under this category, including core shelters and many types of relocatable structures that offer (more) dignified living conditions while reconstruction unfolds, including prefabricated units and containers.

However, many shelter and settlements specialists urge that transitional shelter be regarded as a *process*, or an approach, not a *product*. The question of 'transitional to what?' should therefore be considered carefully. How will any externally provided prefab unit (or T shelter) enable affected people's transition from emergency displacement to their preferred permanent housing solution, and recovery? With this understanding, transitional shelter assistance can include many options, such as repairs and other direct and indirect support for self-recovery. People who are made homeless because of disaster or conflict need somewhere to live while they rebuild their houses or find alternative accommodation. Shelter and reconstruction therefore happen in parallel, rather than consecutively. The approach of transitional shelter acknowledges that reconstruction usually takes between two and five years[32], but that a tent only lasts around one year. Tents are meant to serve only in the "emergency" phase of a crisis response and cannot be considered to provide adequate sheltering in the medium- and longer-term. The approach emphasises a process of incremental improvement, rather than just a physical product.

The design, construction techniques and implementation of a range of transitional shelter modalities should be done in close consultation with the affected population, relate to local building practices and support the development of local capacity and markets.

*[31] See, for example, Shelter Centre (2012). Transitional Shelter Guidelines, for a discussion of evolution and varied uses of the term 'transitional shelter'*

*[32] This commonly cited timeframe is based on anecdotal evidence from a number of different disaster and crisis contexts. In Gaza, reconstruction is likely to take longer.*