



مركز الميزان لحقوق الإنسان
AL MIZAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



Assault on Gaza in Numbers

A Statistical report of civilian casualties and damage to private and public properties by Israeli occupation forces during Israel's full-scale military operation on the Gaza Strip between 10-21 May 2021

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The Palestinian human rights organisations, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, and Al-Haq, operate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, investigating, monitoring and documenting violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law carried out in the Occupied Palestinian Territory regardless of the identity of the perpetrator. The organisations have previously submitted extensive documentation and evidence to the Court.

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Smoke and fire rise as a result of an attack on a building in Gaza on the morning of May 2021 ,12. (Ali Jadallah / Anadolu Agency)

Introduction

On Monday, 10 May 2021, the Israeli occupation forces carried out intensive airstrikes in the Gaza Strip, targeting people, houses, agricultural lands, and security sites. This marked the start of a full-scale military offensive on the occupied Gaza Strip which continued until the early hours of 21 May 2021.

On the first day of the military operation, and in parallel with the escalating military attacks, the Israeli occupation authorities closed its crossings with the Gaza Strip and prohibited access to Palestinian territorial waters. Over the course of the next eleven days, the Israeli forces repeatedly struck civilians and civilian objects. The extensive damage to civilian and public infrastructure further compounded the long-lasting humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, where the population had already been living under dire humanitarian conditions due to Israel's 14-year closure and blockade. The military offensive dramatically undermined the economic and social components of life in Gaza and impacted the provision of basic services, in particular health care, water, electricity, and sanitation.

The Israeli occupation forces launched heavy attacks on the Gaza Strip throughout the 11-day aggression, during which their artillery forces stationed along the perimeter fence carried out intense shelling of the densely populated residential areas along the eastern and northern parts of the Strip. Israel's air force systematically and deliberately targeted civilians and civilian objects with powerful missiles, destroying homes over the heads of families and spreading fear among residents. Thousands

of families fled their homes fearing for their lives after they or their surroundings were targeted, or they received warnings of impending attacks. Those that sought refuge in schools faced a lack of accommodation and relief preparedness, which added to their suffering and degradation.

The Israeli occupation forces proceeded to target residential towers, industrial and commercial installations, government facilities, poultry and livestock farms, agricultural lands, and infrastructure. The Israeli forces also destroyed electricity distribution, water and sanitation networks and maintained the closure of all crossings under Israel's control, banning in effect the entry of food and medicines, with serious health and humanitarian consequences for the population, in particular vulnerable groups.

While the limited resources of Gaza's health sector were overstretched due to the coronavirus outbreak, the escalating military attacks and accompanying additional punitive closure measures pushed local hospitals to breaking point. The care of the wounded was assumed in parallel to that of hundreds of coronavirus patients, on an acute shortage of medicines and medical supplies.

The closure of Beit Hanoun 'Erez' crossing—the sole pedestrian crossing between Gaza and Israel—put at risk the lives of hundreds of referral patients whose treatment was unavailable in the Gaza Strip and had been referred for care in the West Bank and Israel. During the military assault, two children referred for treatment outside Gaza died waiting for access.

It should be noted that since 1967, Israel has been occupying Palestine, and accordingly, Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip, constitutes an occupied territory under international law, with its civilian population being protected by international humanitarian law. Israel's restrictive measures on the Gaza Strip have been in place since 9 October 2000 and were intensified at the end of September 2007. The closure constitutes collective punishment of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and fundamentally infringes upon their rights, putting Israel in serious breach of its international law obligations, which *inter alia* prohibits collective punishment against protected persons.

Against this backdrop, this report presents data and facts pertaining to the May 2021 full-scale military offensive based on field documentation performed by the co-signing human rights organizations concerning the human casualties and material losses inflicted through military attacks. These attacks targeted family homes and residential buildings, as well as other civilian facilities and properties, including education, health, industrial and commercial facilities, vehicles and agricultural lands.



Smoke rises after an Israeli air strike on Gaza near Barcelona Park and several government offices, in one of the largest air strikes on the Strip. May 2021 ,12 - (Magdy Fathy - Nour Photo / Getty Images)

Data collection methodology

The data presented in this report is the outcome of a documentation campaign launched by three human rights organizations: Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (Al Mezan), Al-Haq “Law in the Service of Man”, and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR). The three organizations have worked in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) for decades, and the foundation of their work is rooted in human rights monitoring, collection of information and conduct of investigations. The organizations share their field information, including with all international commissions of inquiry mandated to investigate Israeli violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL). These organizations have qualified teams with in-depth experience in the monitoring and documentation of human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territory whether by the Israeli occupation authorities, the Palestinian authorities, or other actors. The collection of qualitative and quantitative data was carried out using the following methodology:

- Since the start of the offensive, the field teams of the three organizations worked rigorously to monitor the apparent serious violations of international law committed by the Israeli occupation forces. The 12 main fieldworkers of the three organizations visited the areas under attack to record the incident and its aftermath, including by inspecting weapons fragments in the areas they had access to. The fieldworkers interviewed victims and eyewitnesses to collect information and record the circumstances of the attack, including by interviewing victims and

their companions arriving at emergency departments in ambulances. The three organizations also recruited trained volunteers to monitor the arrival of casualties at hospitals across the Gaza Strip, obtaining personal information to ensure that patients transferred between hospitals were only counted once. Following the offensive, the three organizations recruited volunteer fieldworkers in addition to the main fieldworkers to conduct a comprehensive field survey.

- The three organizations filled thousands of forms used to collect data on victims of violations and damaged properties. The forms are divided per the following categories: violation of the right to life (death/injury); house destruction; agricultural land levelling; crop destruction; poultry and livestock farm destruction; commercial or industrial facility destruction; public facility destruction (including governmental or non-governmental, educational, healthcare facilities, etc.); destruction of vehicles; and detention. Each form is composed of a series of questions, 95% of which are close-ended, while the open-ended questions are limited to the names of casualties and those affected, notes and incident narration, thereby facilitating the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data.
- The field surveilling started on the ground across the Gaza Strip just before the offensive ended, ensuring that areas under attack were inspected and that casualties and property damage were recorded.
- The data captured in the questionnaires was based on interviews with victims and first-degree relatives. In many cases, the fieldworkers interviewed first responders to record their observations of the immediate aftermath of attacks, upon arriving at the site in question to evacuate bodies or injured people or to extinguish fires. The personal information of casualties was recorded based on official documents, such as ID cards, birth and death certificates, and medical reports, while information on damaged properties was recorded from deeds of ownership. After conducting the field surveys, the forms documenting incidents of killing were re-distributed to the fieldworkers to again verify and crosscheck the information from different sources before the final narrative description of the incident was adopted.
- All forms and data collected by the fieldworkers underwent an initial inspection process to make sure that all areas targeted by the Israeli occupation forces were covered. The paper forms were entered into the database and held in designated binders before being referred to specialized staff to review and inspect the data and then crosscheck it on the database with each form separately. This process ensured that the contents of the forms was entered correctly. If missing information or a mistake was identified, the form and the corresponding database record were flagged for further review, and the paper form was returned to the fieldworker. Once this process was complete, the database was updated, and the paper forms were archived.
- Many meetings were held to review the outcomes of the field surveys, inspect the casualty

and damage data, and to cross-check the information collected by the fieldworkers in each organization separately, in order to fill the gaps in information and to reach verified, joint results. It is noteworthy that regarding the quantitative data, the margin of error did not exceed 5% and mostly originated from inconsistencies in non-essential fields in the data collection forms concerning damaged houses and other facilities, such as the number of people working in a facility that was attacked, the number of families who lived in a given house, or the main breadwinners—areas that do not affect the accuracy of the main figures or findings.

- The above processes concerning the inspection and verification of information resulted in a set of joint statistics and unified information to be presented in this report.



Two Palestinian women inspect the damage inside an apartment in a severely damaged building in Gaza City on the morning of May 2021 ,12. (Mohammed Abed/AFP)

List of definitions

Child:

The definition is based on the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines a child as any human being under the age of eighteen. Unborn children were not included.

Female:

The term 'female' includes both women and girls.

Women:

Every female aged 18 or older, regardless of her marital status.

Civilian:

A person who does not participate in hostilities—whether through direct participation in hostilities, training, gathering intelligence or logistical support. This category includes persons who have political affiliation, but whose roles are confined to non-combat activities, and of whom there is no evidence or reasonable doubt of their involvement in or contribution to military operations.

Militant/fighter:

Any person participating in major or minor hostilities with Palestinian resistance groups—whether in direct confrontations against Israeli occupation forces or in other circumstances. This category includes persons killed in assassinations (extrajudicial executions) by Israeli forces as known affiliates of armed resistance groups who took part in hostilities continuously or sporadically, even if the individual was not actively participating in hostilities at the time of targeting. Conversely, this category excludes persons otherwise considered civilian who were present in the location of the attack and were therefore killed. It should be noted that tens of people were categorized as militants/fighters even though they were not killed in action based on comprehensive online research conducted by human rights organizations, including of Palestinian armed groups' websites, which indicated their affiliation with the armed groups.

Assassination (extrajudicial execution)¹:

The categorization of assassinated persons is based on Israel's explicit announcement—following the planning and the extrajudicial killing—that it targeted that individual specifically. This differs from targeted killings that are typically carried out by drones when they spot military activity in real time and pursue and attack those involved, without identities being known to the Israeli army at the time.

Presence on site of assassination (extrajudicial execution):

Casualties, whether residents living near the scene, passersby, or those accompanying the targeted person, who died in assassination operations that targeted other persons, are classified as civilians unless they were members of armed resistance groups per the definition of 'militant/fighter' above.

Forced displacement:

Persons forced to leave their houses due to fear of serious danger caused by Israeli military bombardments that targeted the home or its surroundings. This term also covers persons who were killed while fleeing their houses that were susceptible to Israeli bombardment.

Passerby:

A person coincidentally present or passing through an area targeted by the Israeli army and killed as a result. This term does not cover persons killed inside their houses, in their workplaces or while participating in hostilities.

At work:

Refers to persons killed while they were exercising their daily, routine work, such as farmers, shop owners, public servants, private sector employees etc.

1 For the purposes of this report, the term 'assassination' is used to refer to acts of 'extrajudicial killing'. The use of this term was motivated by practical concerns, since the translation of the latter term in Arabic is too long to be effectively used in the statistical reports with tables and charts.

Area type:

This classification groups casualties according to their area of residence, either rural or urban, regardless of their refugee status.

Refugee status:

This term indicates whether a casualty is a refugee or non-refugee. 'Refugee' describes anyone whose family was displaced from its hometown in 1948 Palestine and sought refuge in the Gaza Strip, including their descendants who were born in the Gaza Strip.

Residential house:

The fundamental criterion here is house ownership (with a house being a place with walls, a ceiling, and a floor, containing a kitchen and a bathroom with running water and electricity). Registration must be based on facility ownership and its allocation. A multi-story residential building owned by a single person, with one electricity and water subscription, is considered one residential house. A single apartment located in a building and owned by one person, with an independent water and electricity subscription, is considered a separate house. Furthermore, residential buildings such as villas or rural houses and one-story houses in the countryside or refugee camps are considered residential houses. In the same context, to show the extent of the damage in general, the report also illustrates the number of residential units, even if the building that is comprised of those units belongs to one owner and is therefore only one house, in order to identify the number of separate families and residents who were impacted.

Destruction (total damage):

Destruction (total damage) occurs when a property is destroyed or damaged to such an extent that it can be neither recovered nor repaired for further use, and must be demolished and rebuilt.

Partial damage:

Damage to a property's windows, doors, or water tanks and damage that led to the demolition of walls or main pillars; the house is repairable and can be used as new.²

Number of permanent inhabitants

This term refers to the number of people who were living in a residential house, permanently, at the time when it was destroyed or damaged. It is worth noting that the number of permanent inhabitants differs from the number of family members, because some family members may not permanently reside in the house for various reasons, including marriage, living in a separate home, or residing

² It should be noted that houses that sustained very minor damages, such as one or two broken windows, were not included in the report due to the difficulty of exhaustively documenting this type of damage, which affected tens of thousands of houses and therefore exceeded the limited resources of this documentation campaign.

outside the Gaza Strip. Extended family members may inhabit the same house with the nuclear family that owns the house.

Number of families

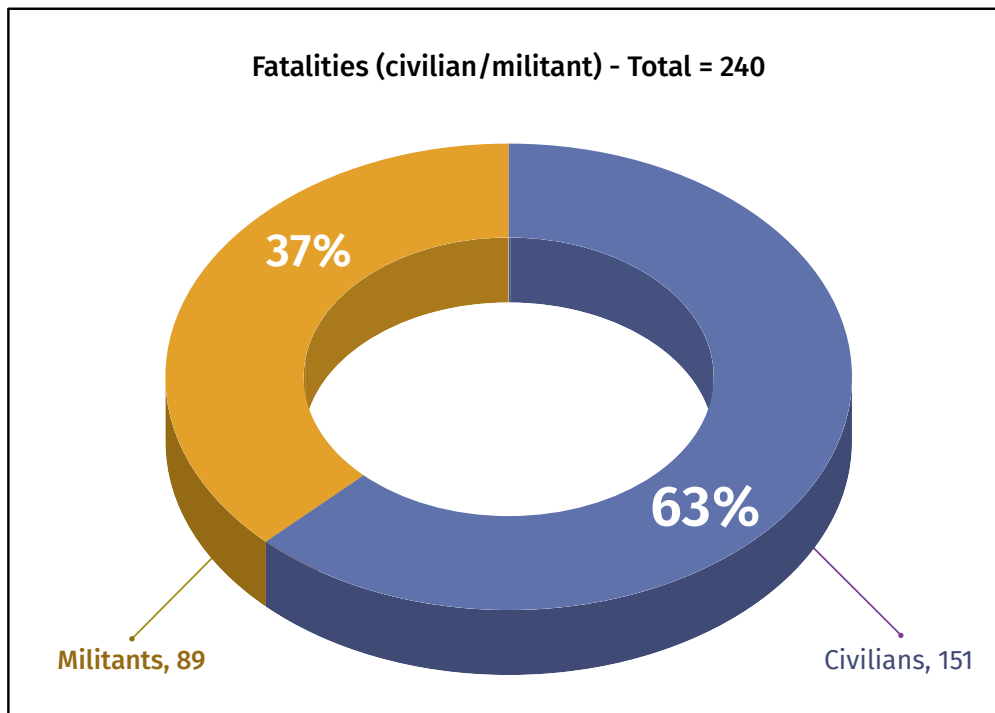
In the documentation, the campaign relied on proving house ownership by various means: the contract of ownership or lease, and subscriptions of electricity, water, and other services. In the process, it became evident that many residential buildings are registered in the name of a single person (typically the father) despite containing more than one housing unit inhabited by more than one nuclear family (typically the families of the owner's married sons). Therefore, the number of families living in the house is reported to indicate in particular the number of families forcibly displaced by military attacks.



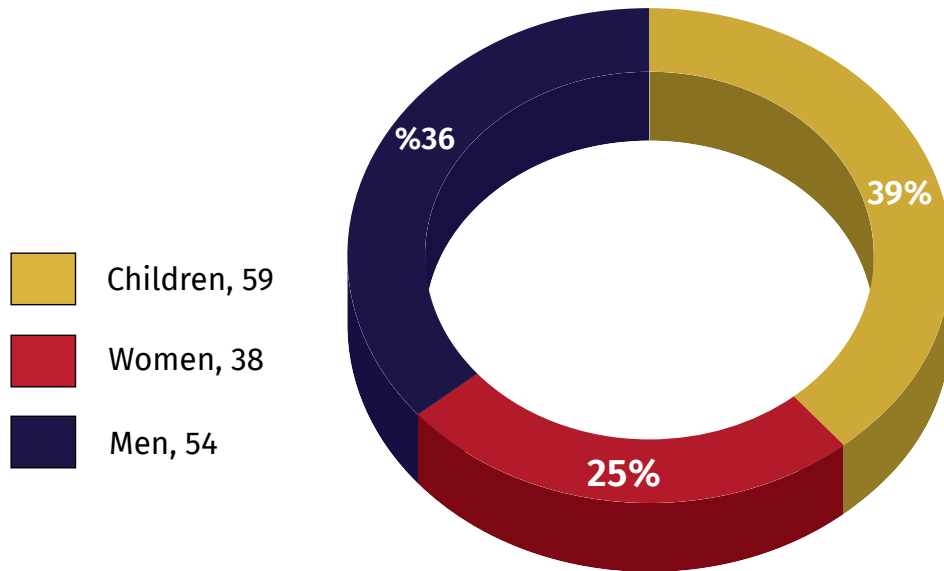
A Palestinian walks through the rubble in front of the badly damaged Al-Jawhara Tower in Gaza City after it was hit by Israeli air strikes during the night, May 2021, 12. (Mahmoud Homs/AFP)

Statistics on civilian casualties and damage to private and public properties by Israeli forces in Gaza, 10-21 May 2021:

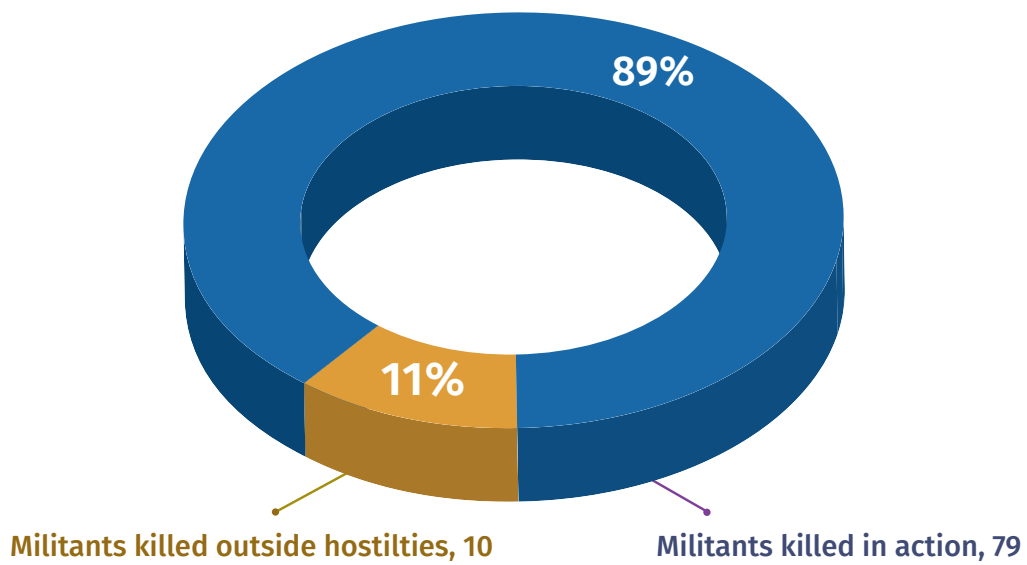
1 Palestinians killed by Israeli occupation forces

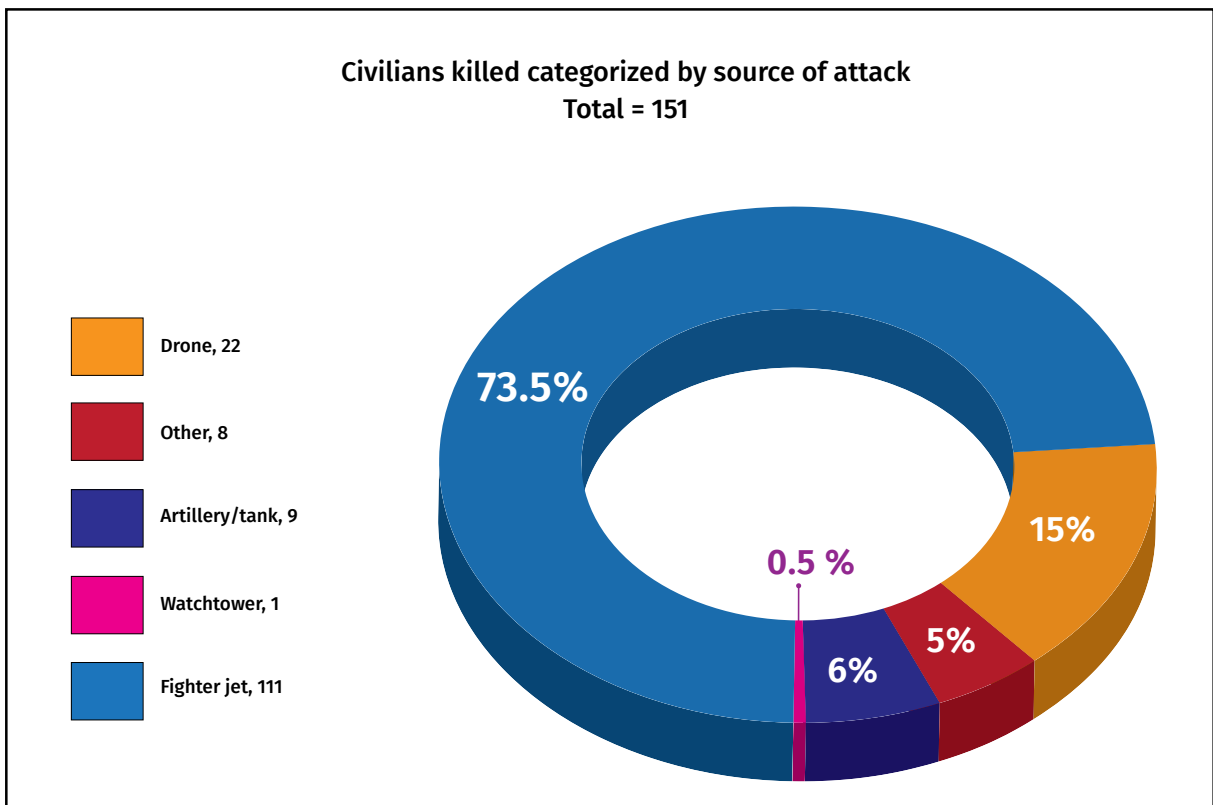
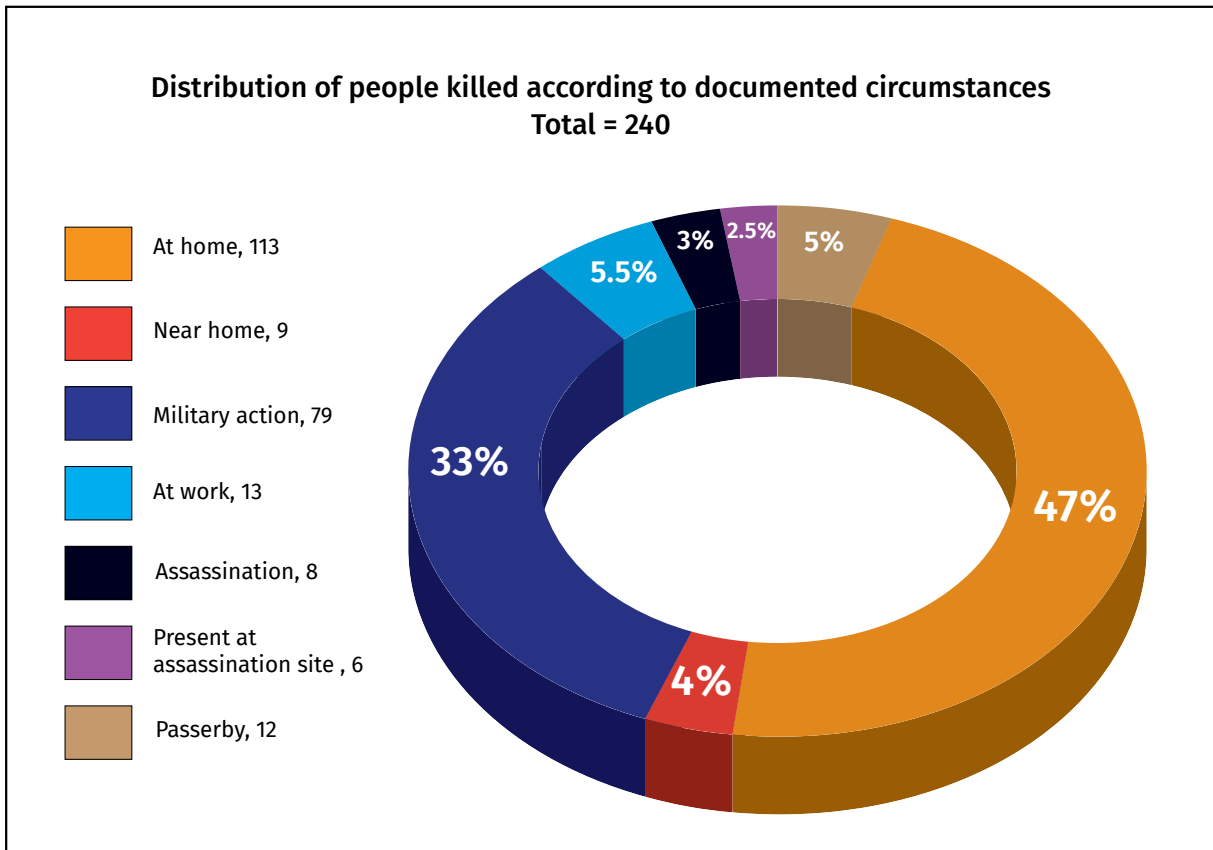


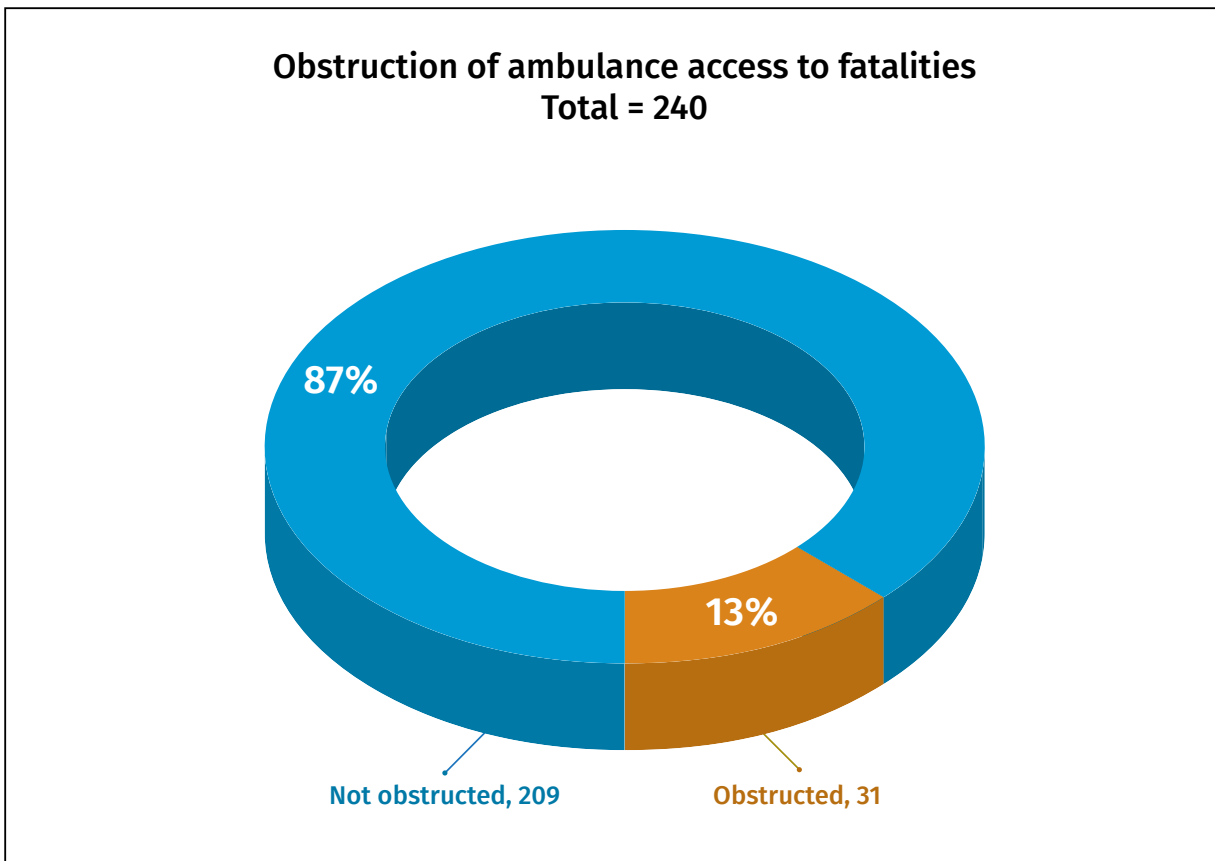
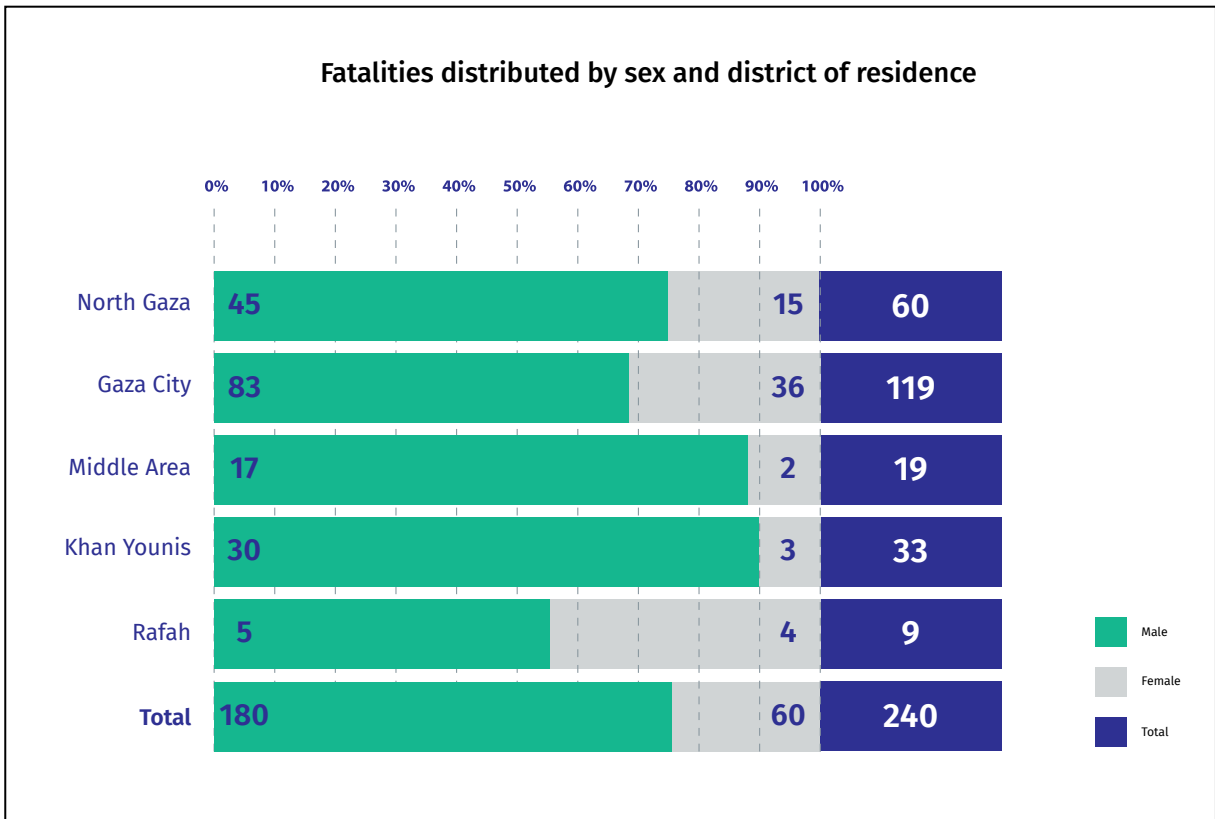
Distribution of civilians killed - Total = 151

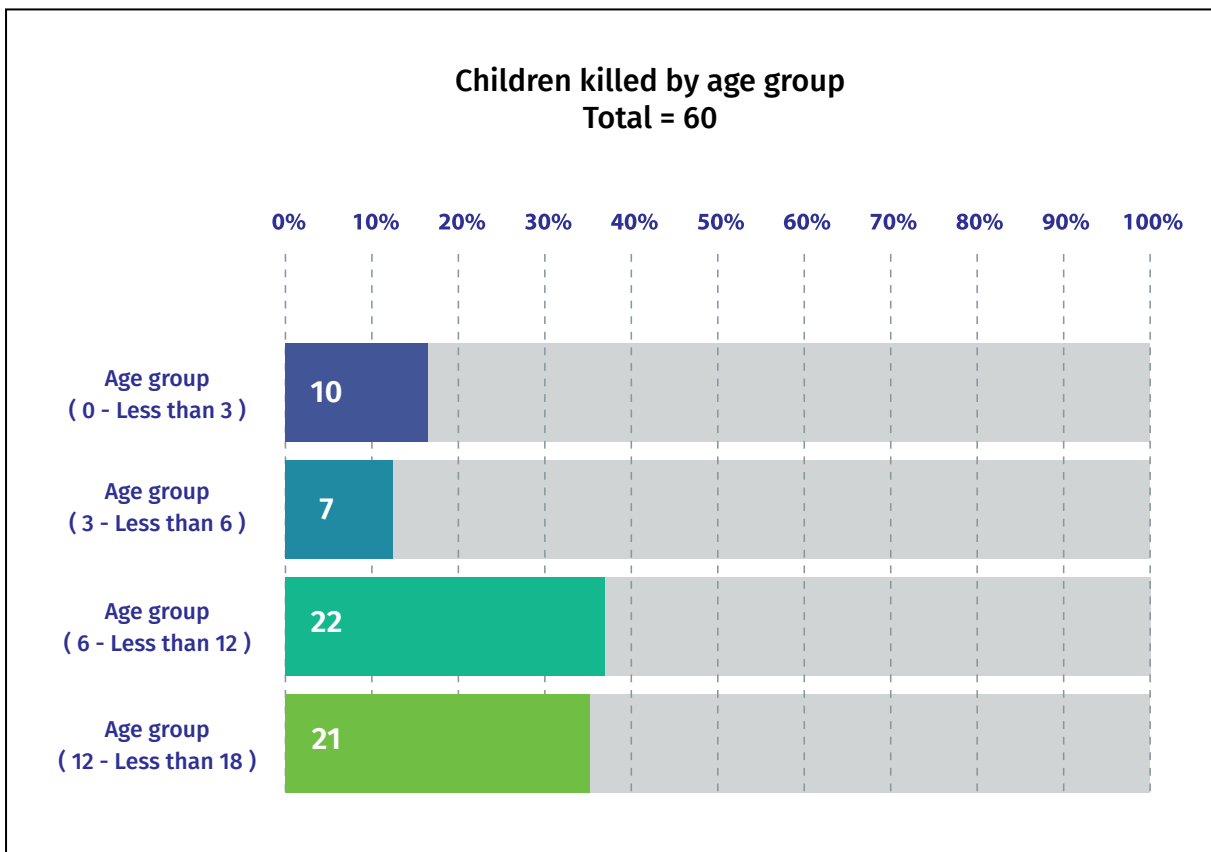
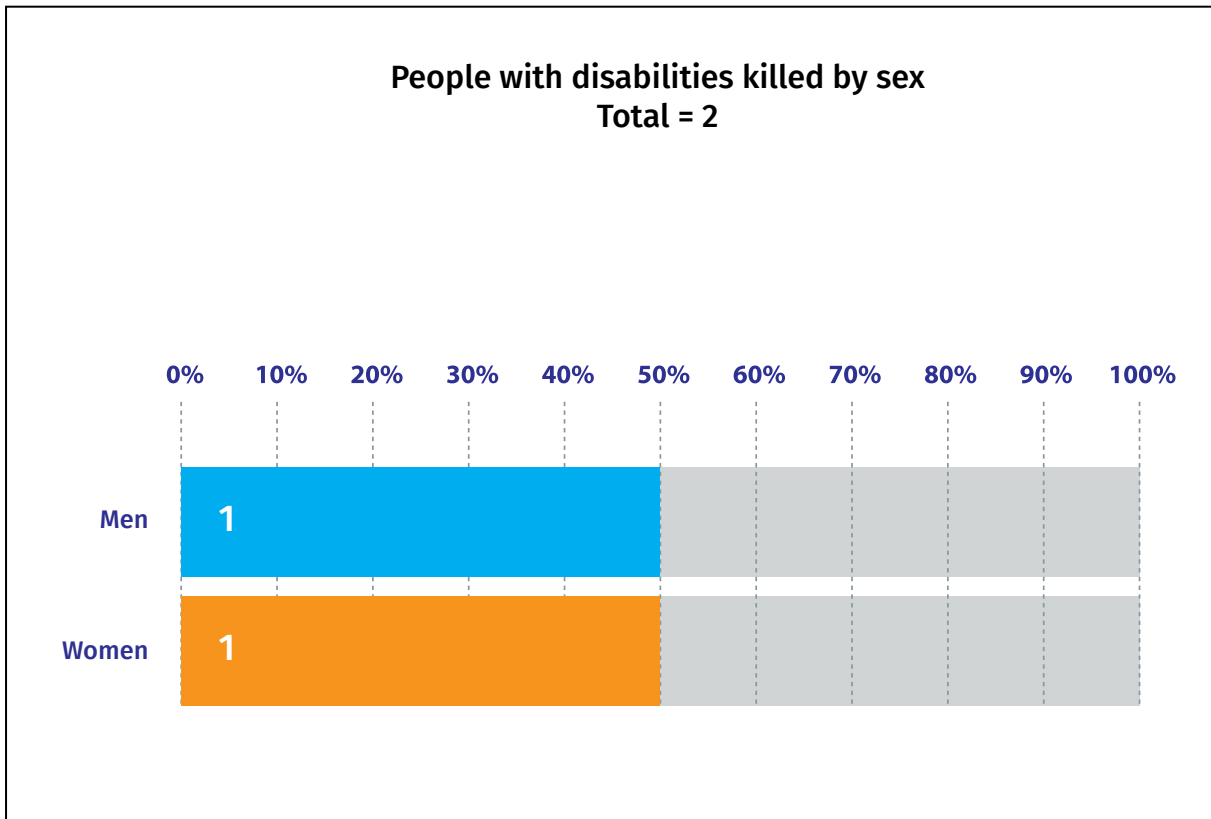


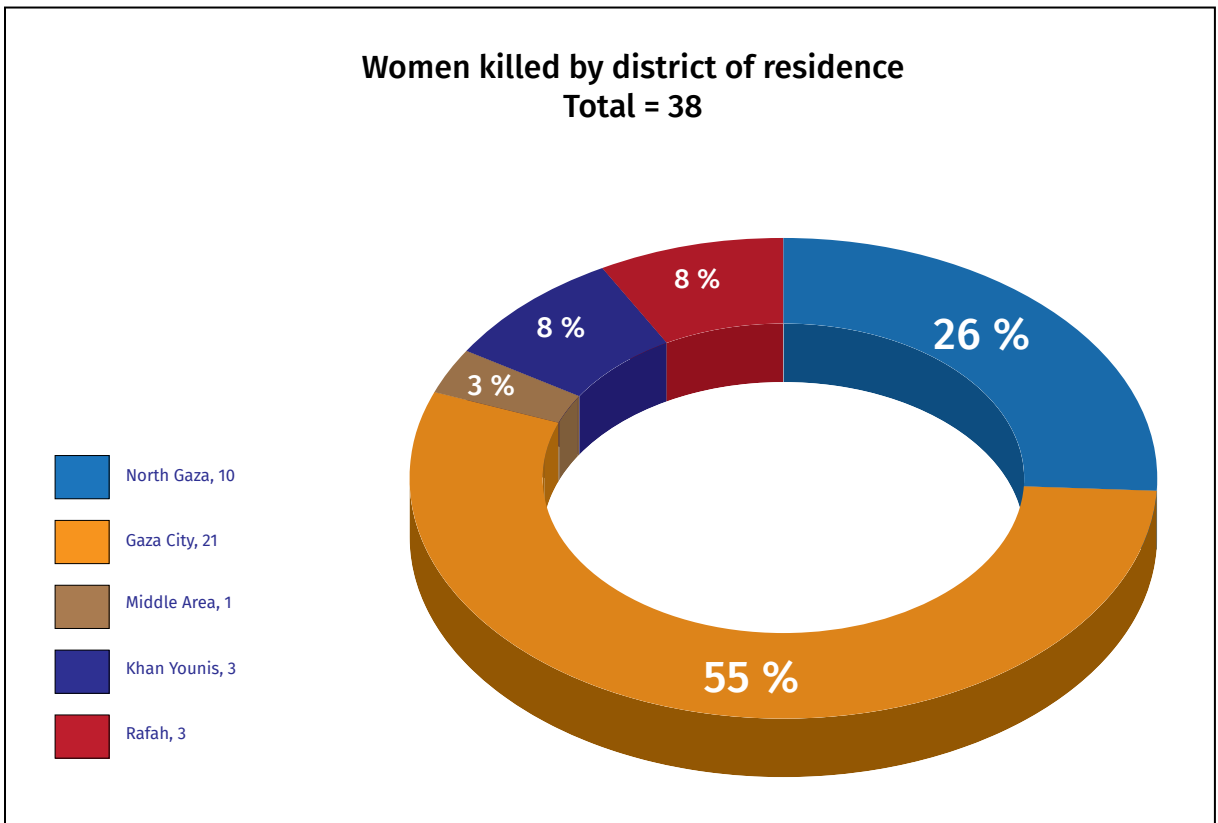
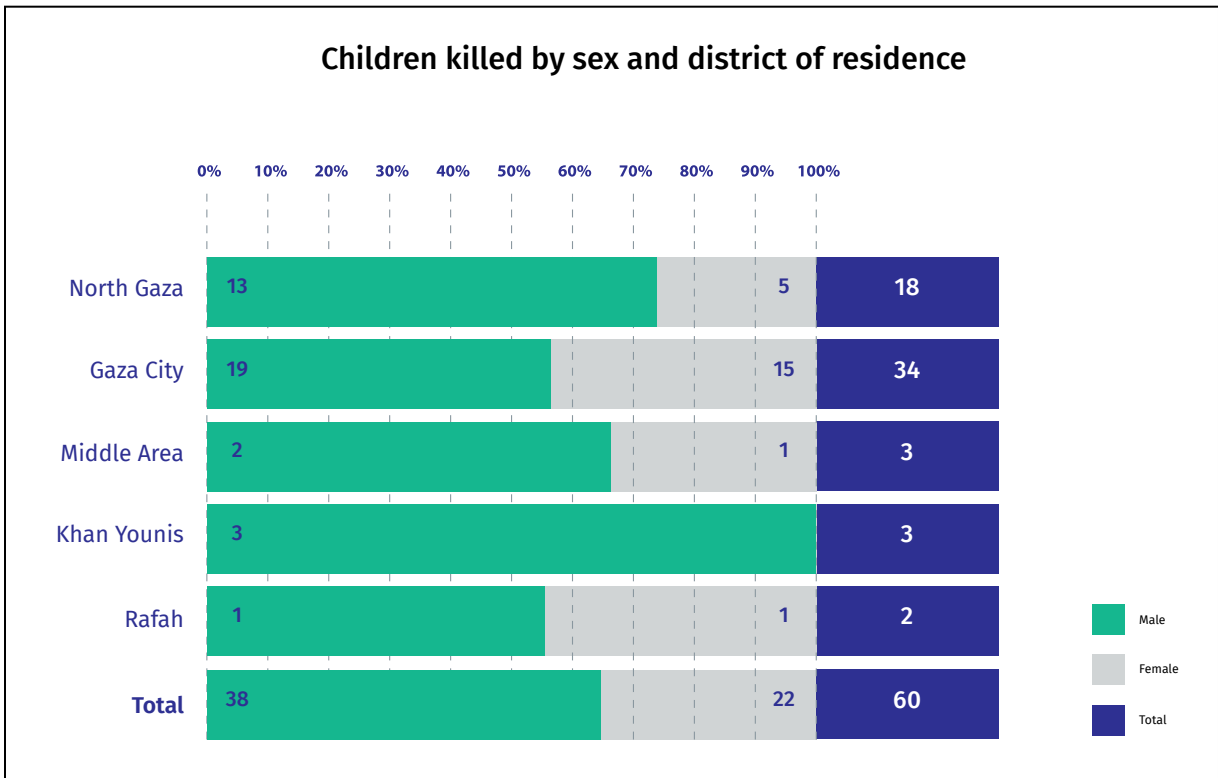
Distribution of militants killed - Total = 89

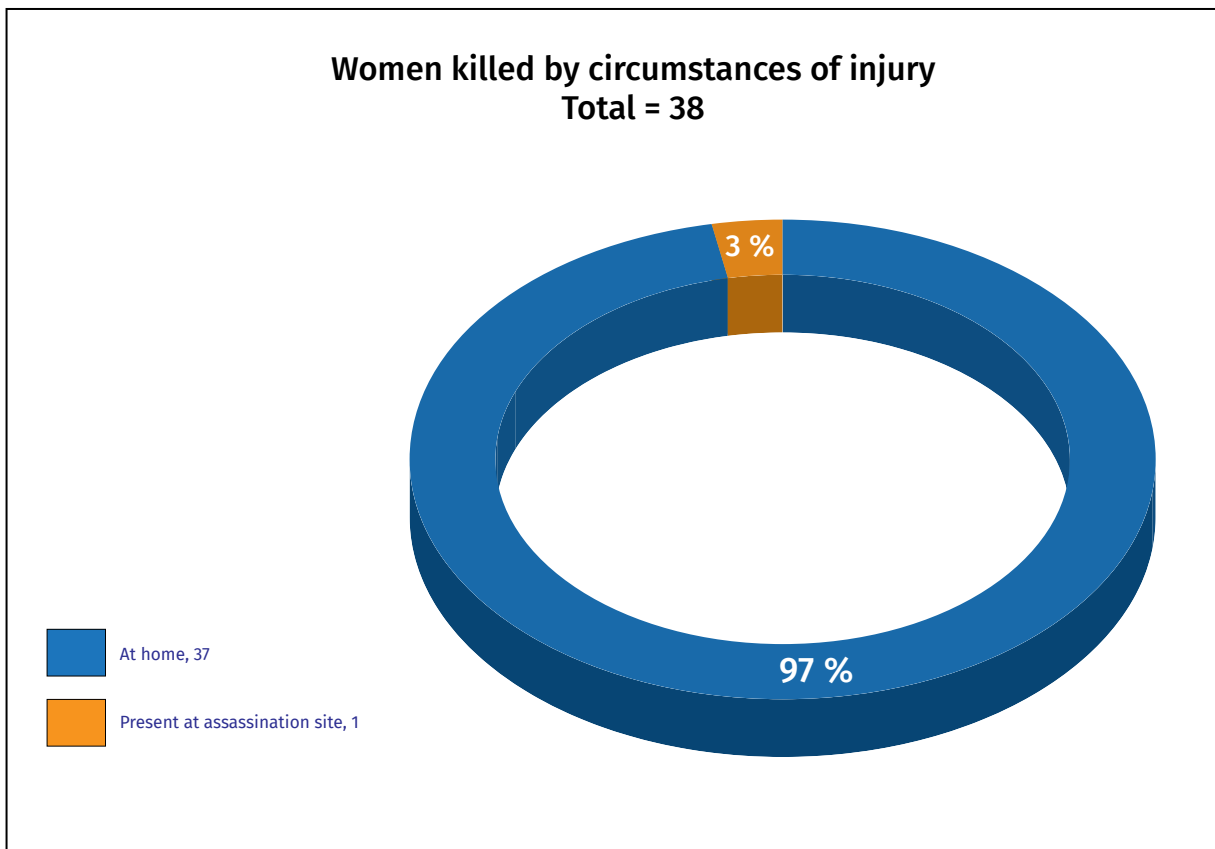
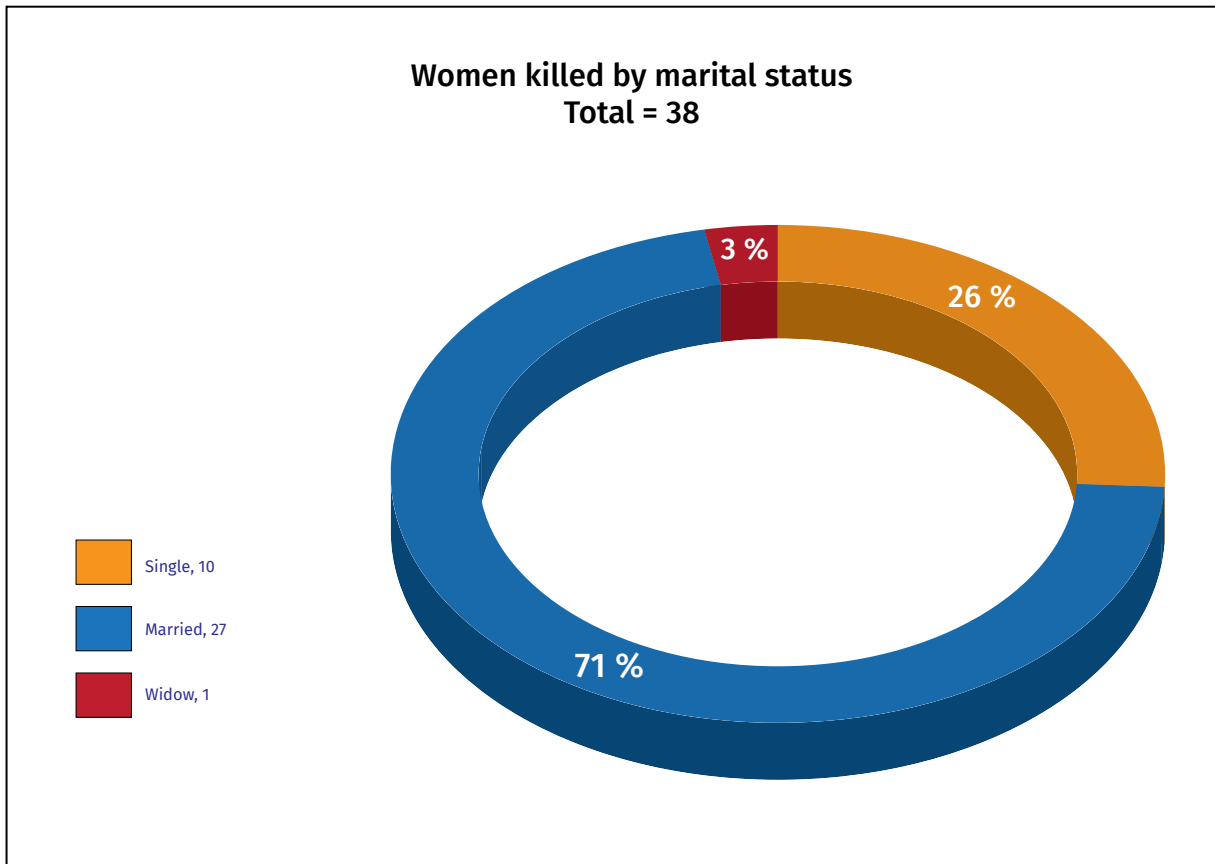




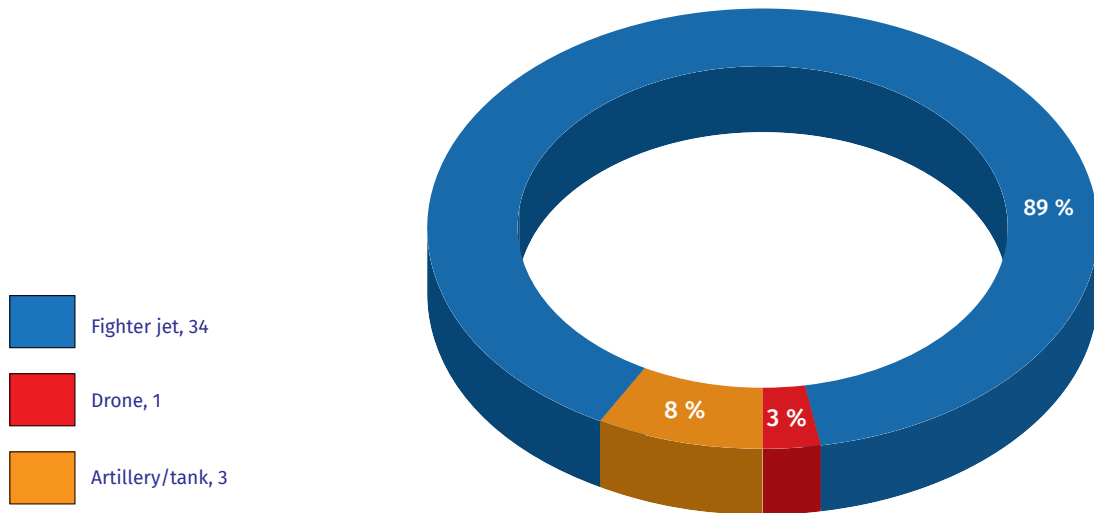




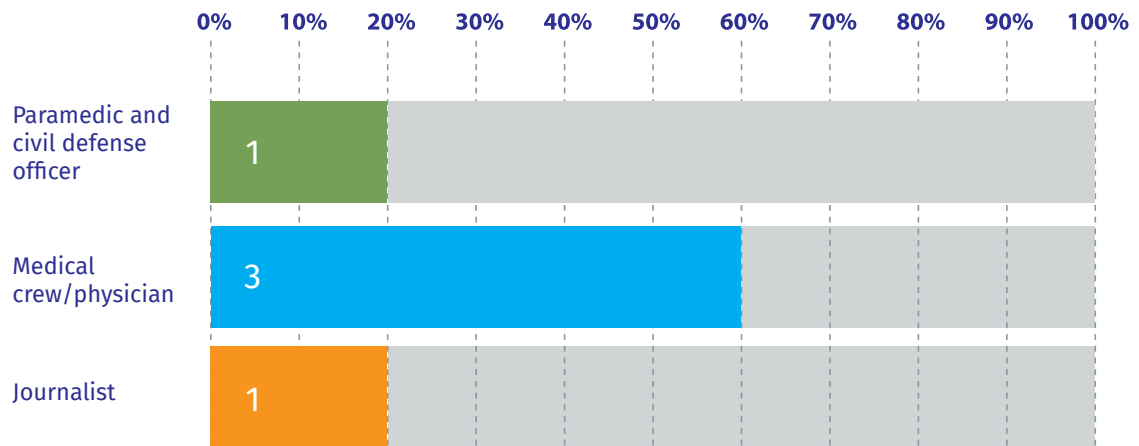




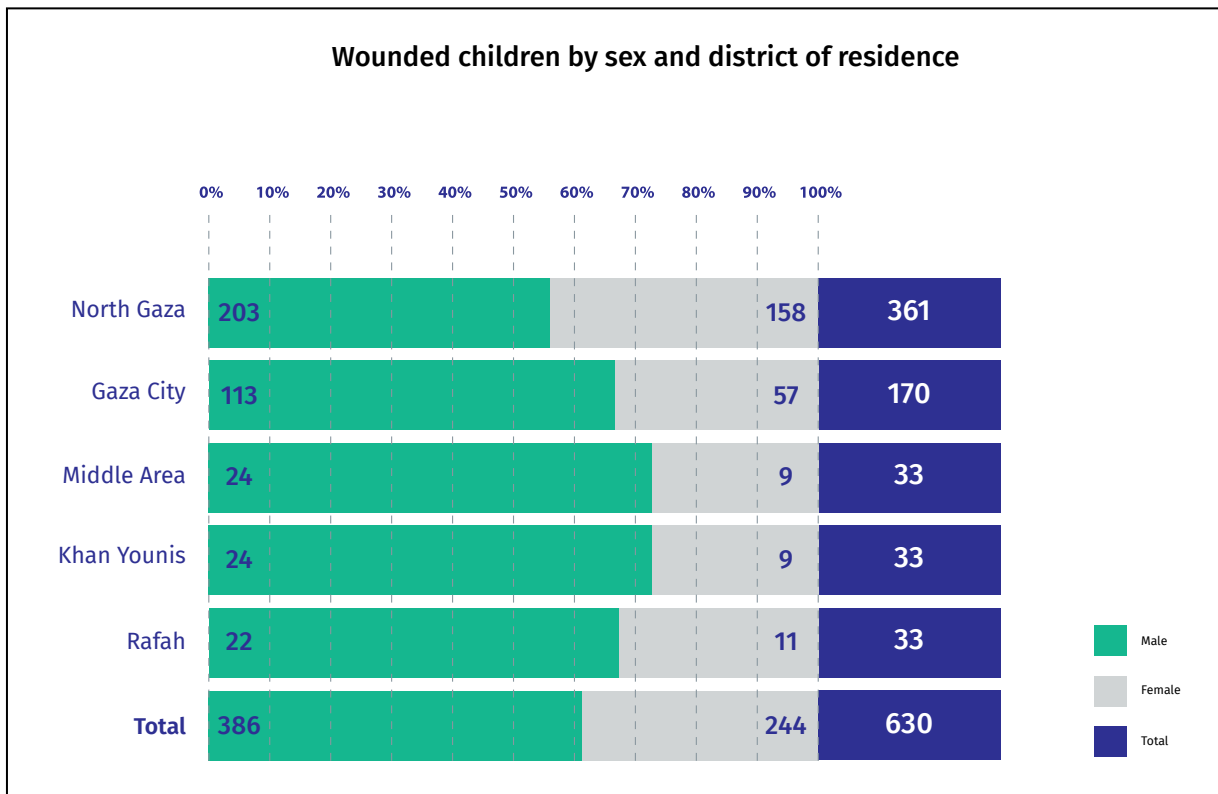
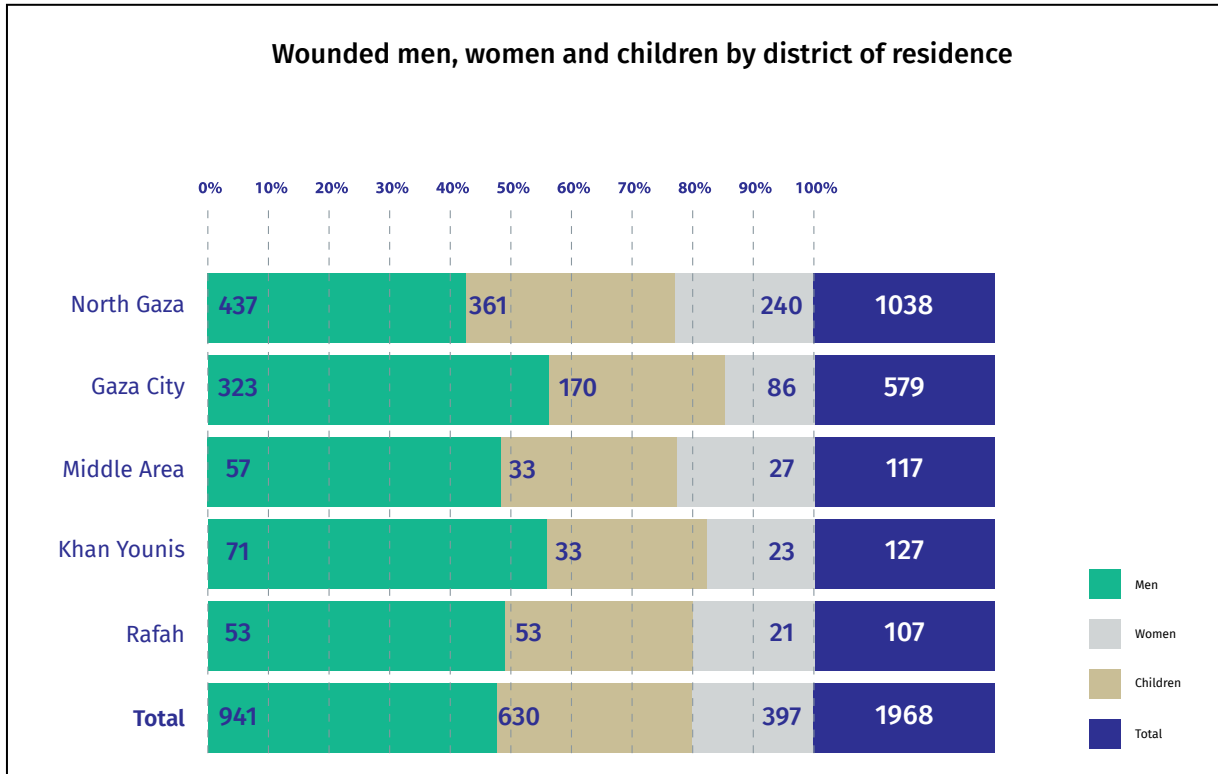
Women killed by source of attack Total = 38

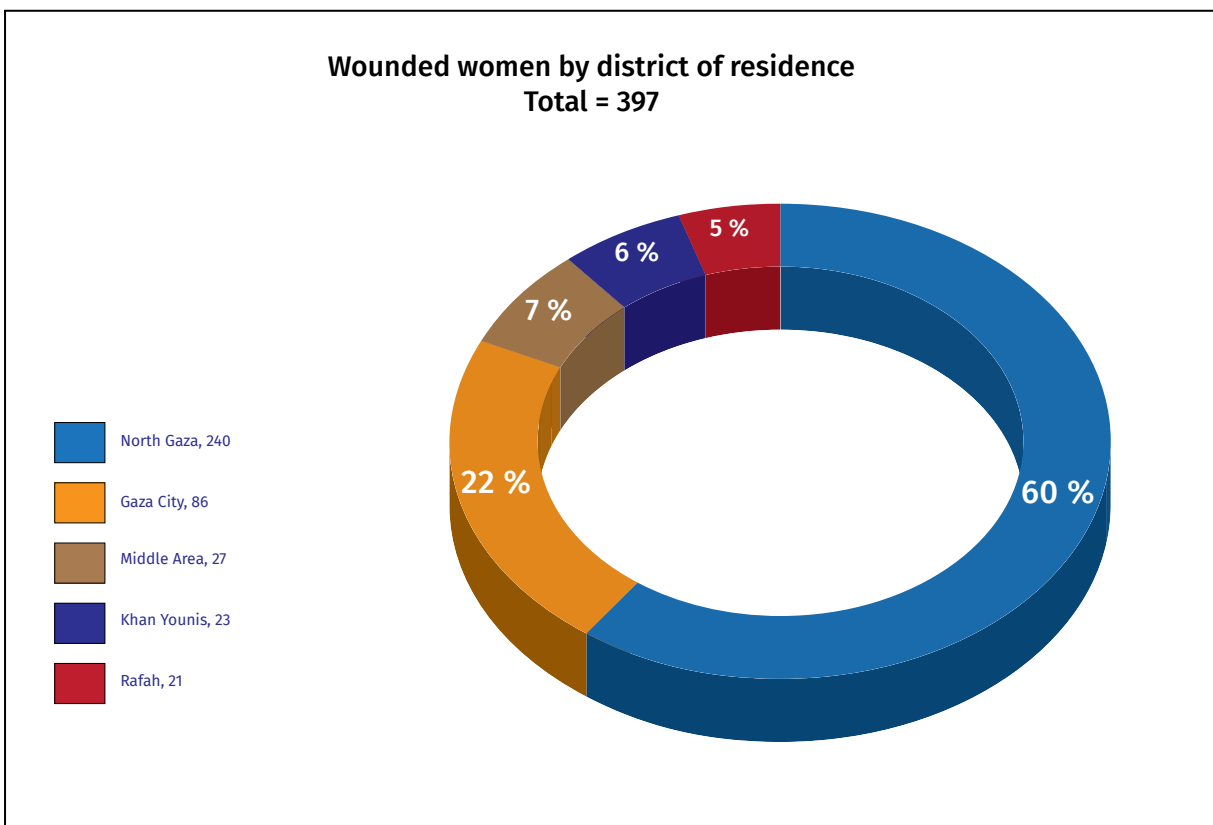
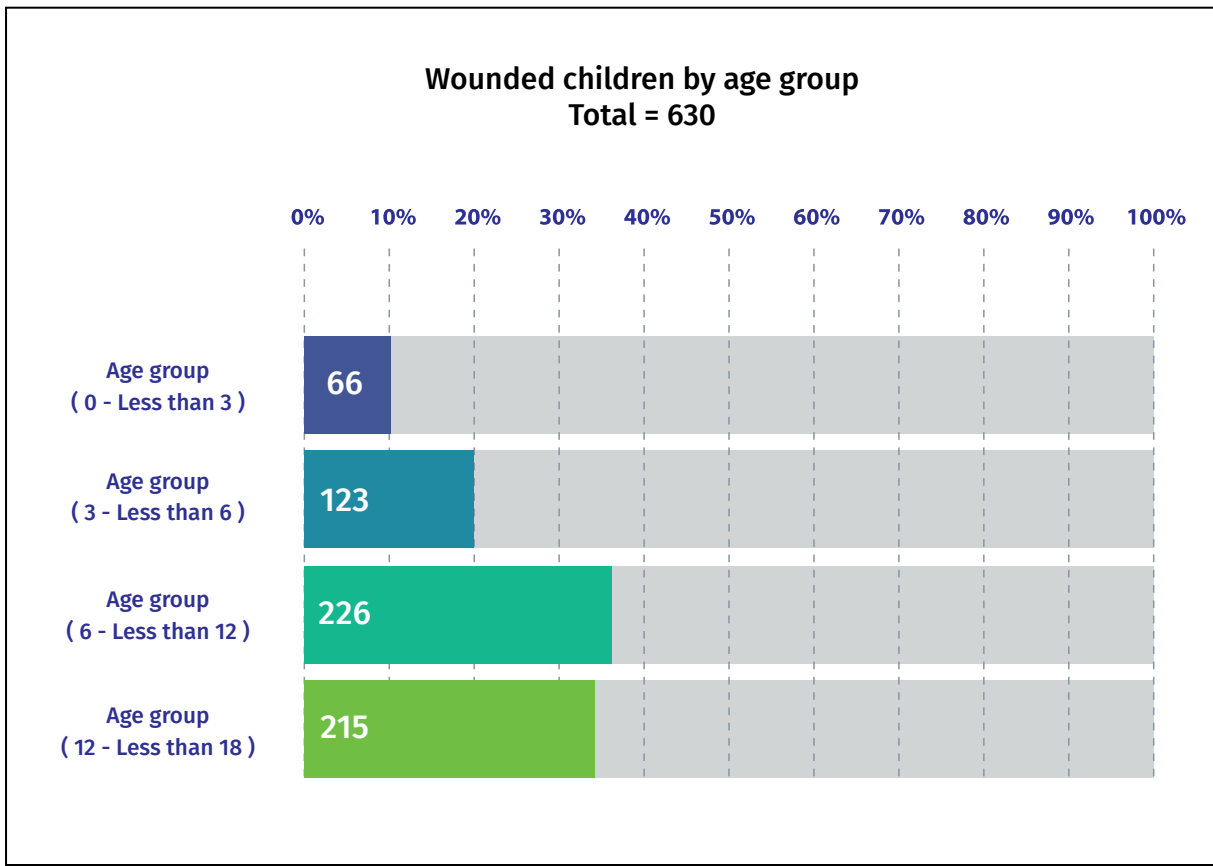


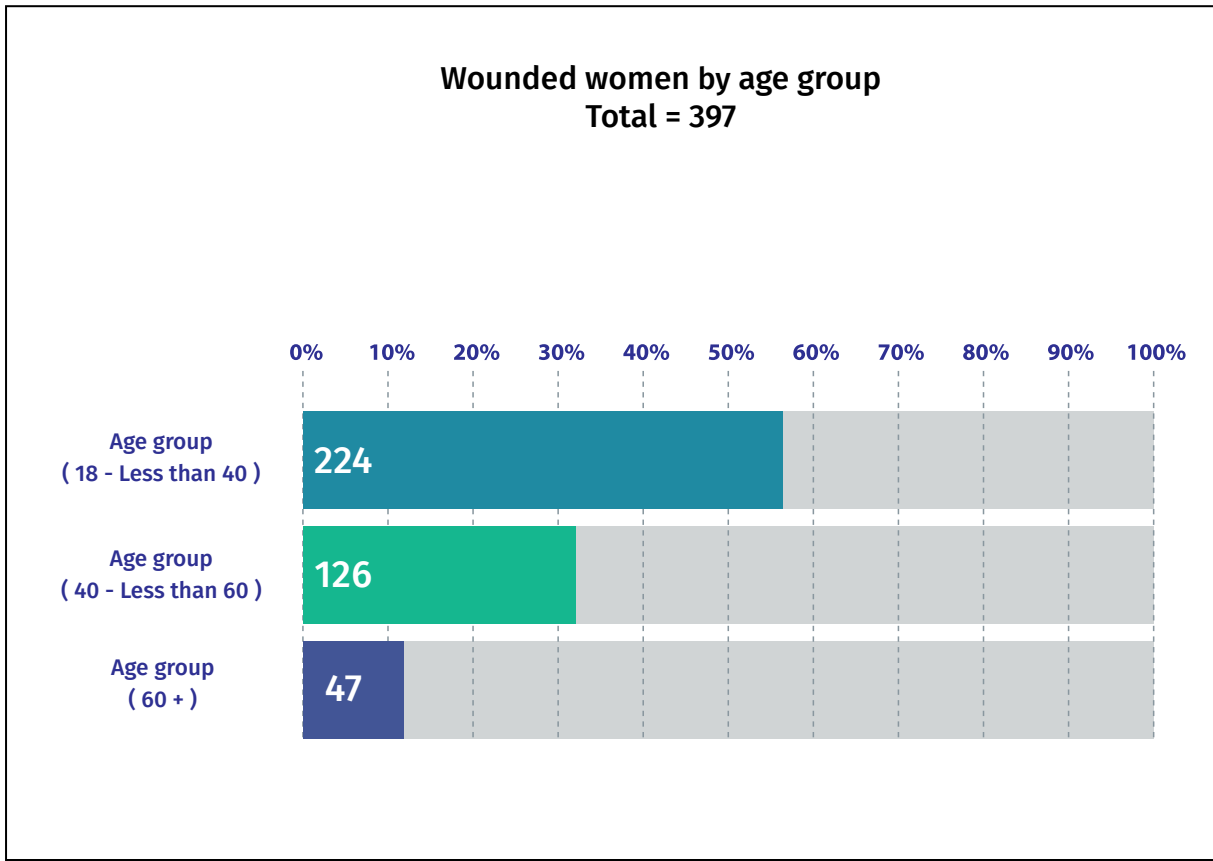
Fatalities among certain professions Total = 5



2 Palestinians wounded by Israeli occupation forces

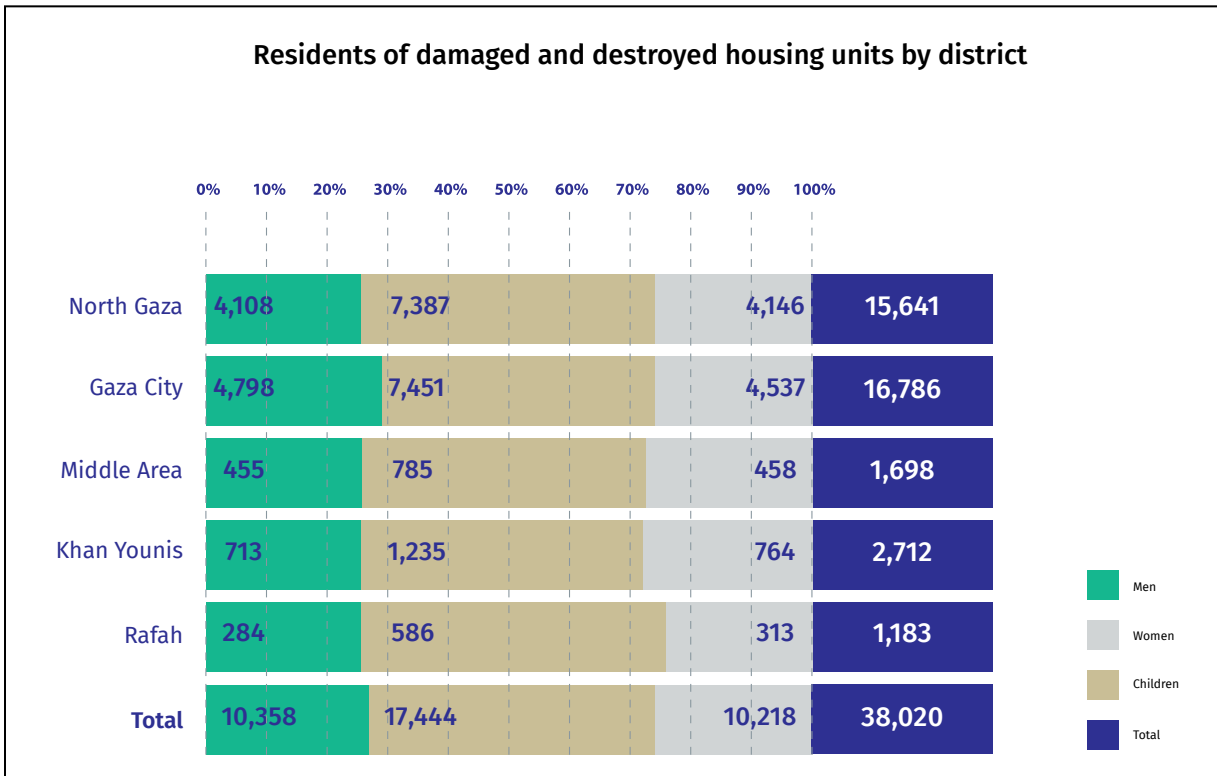
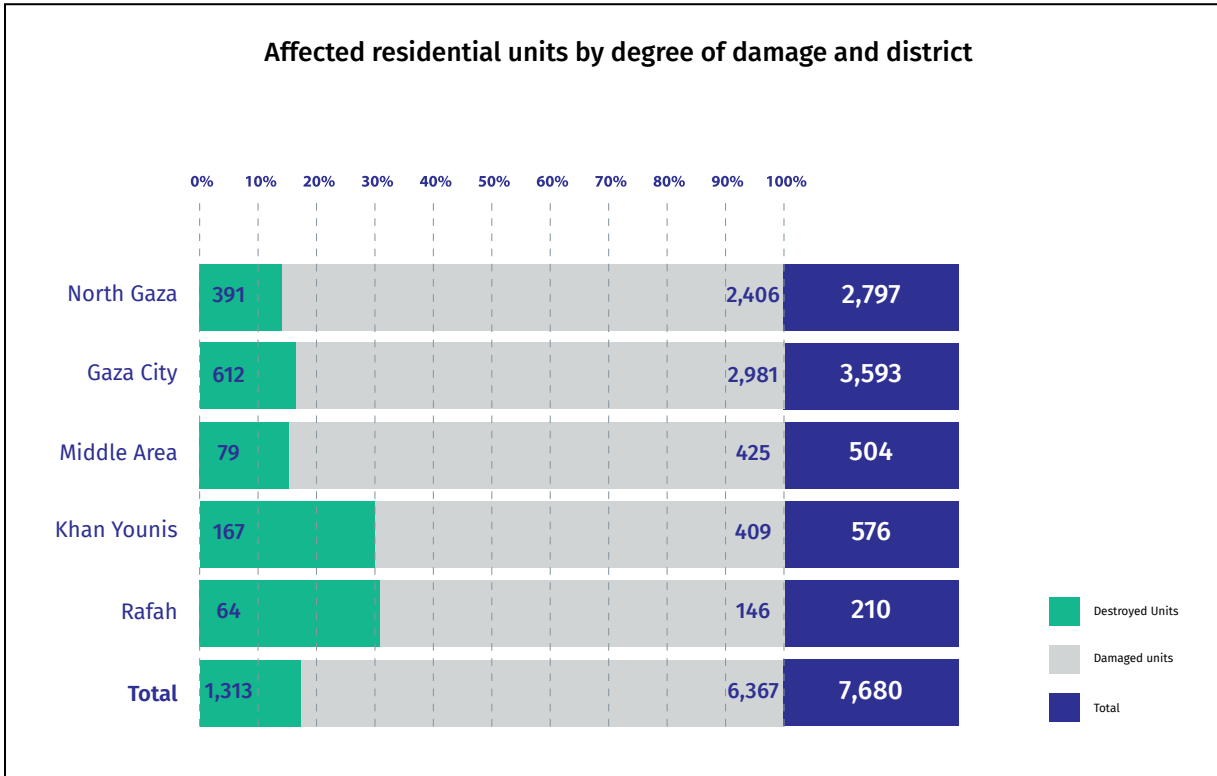






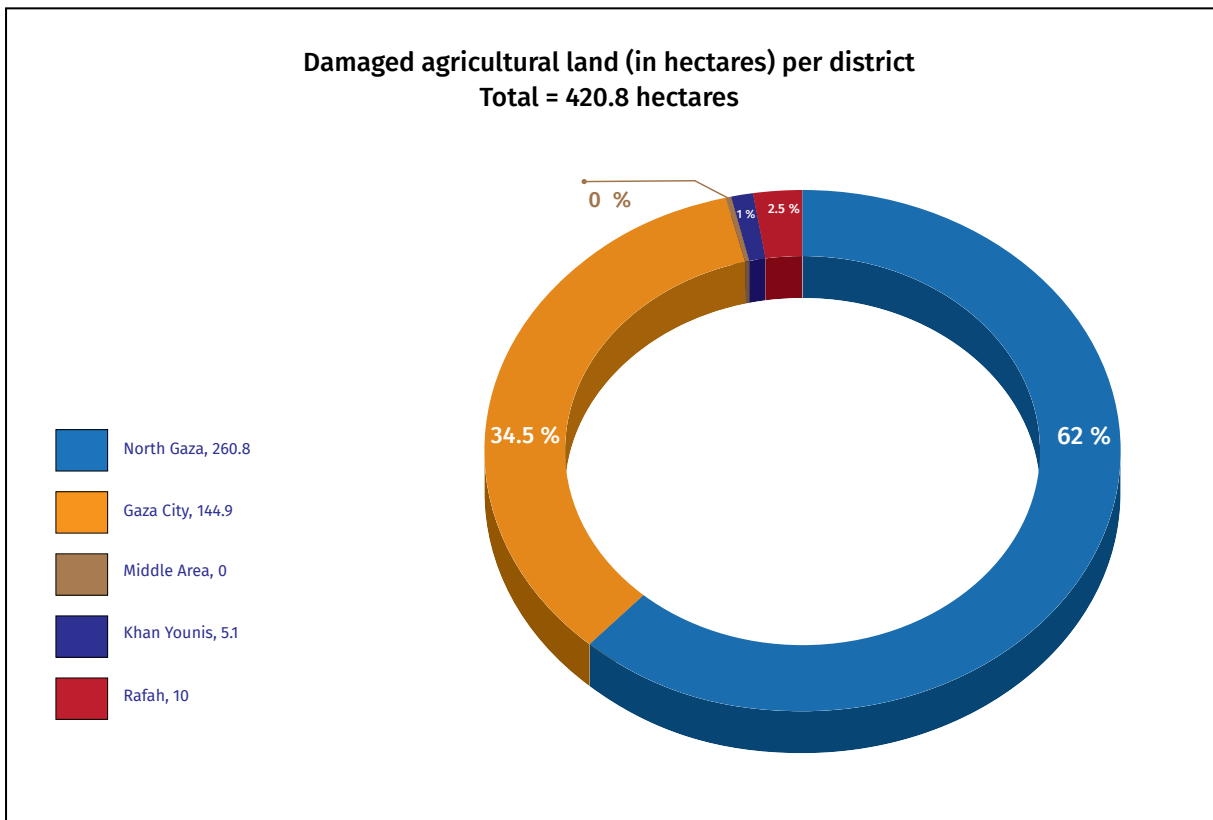
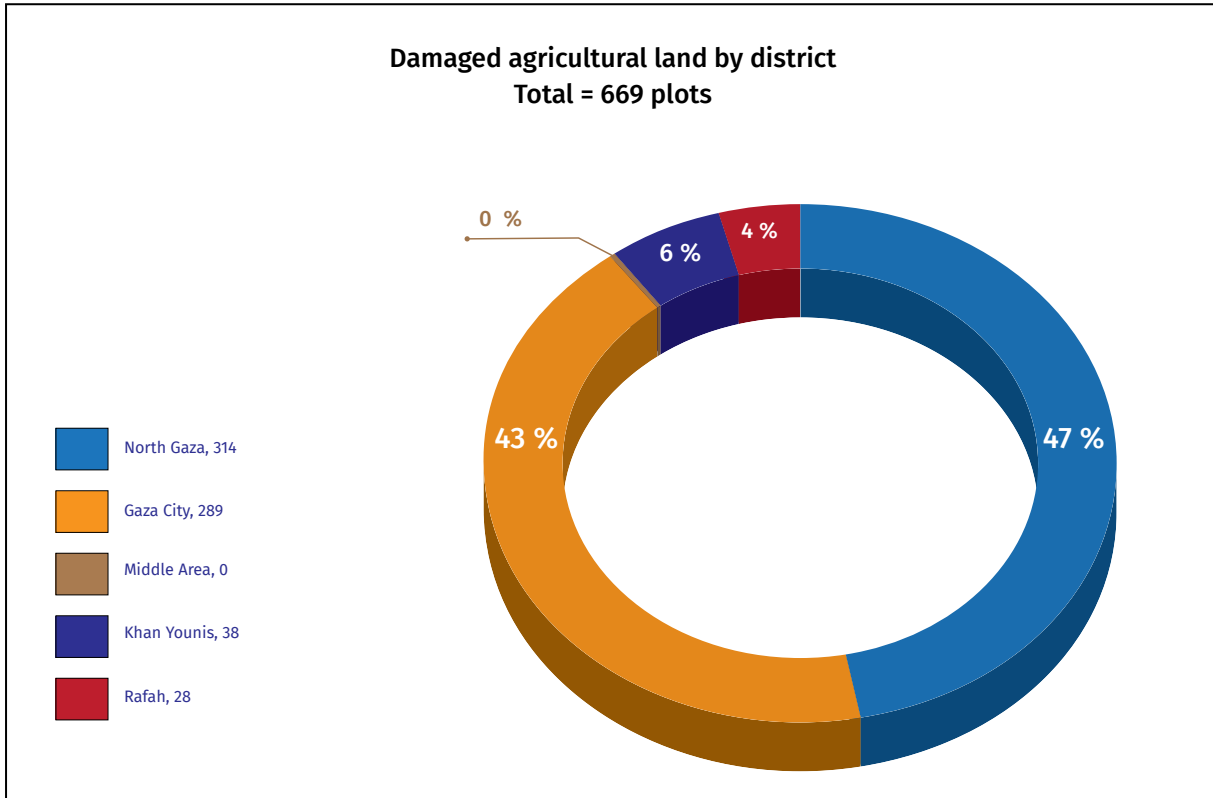
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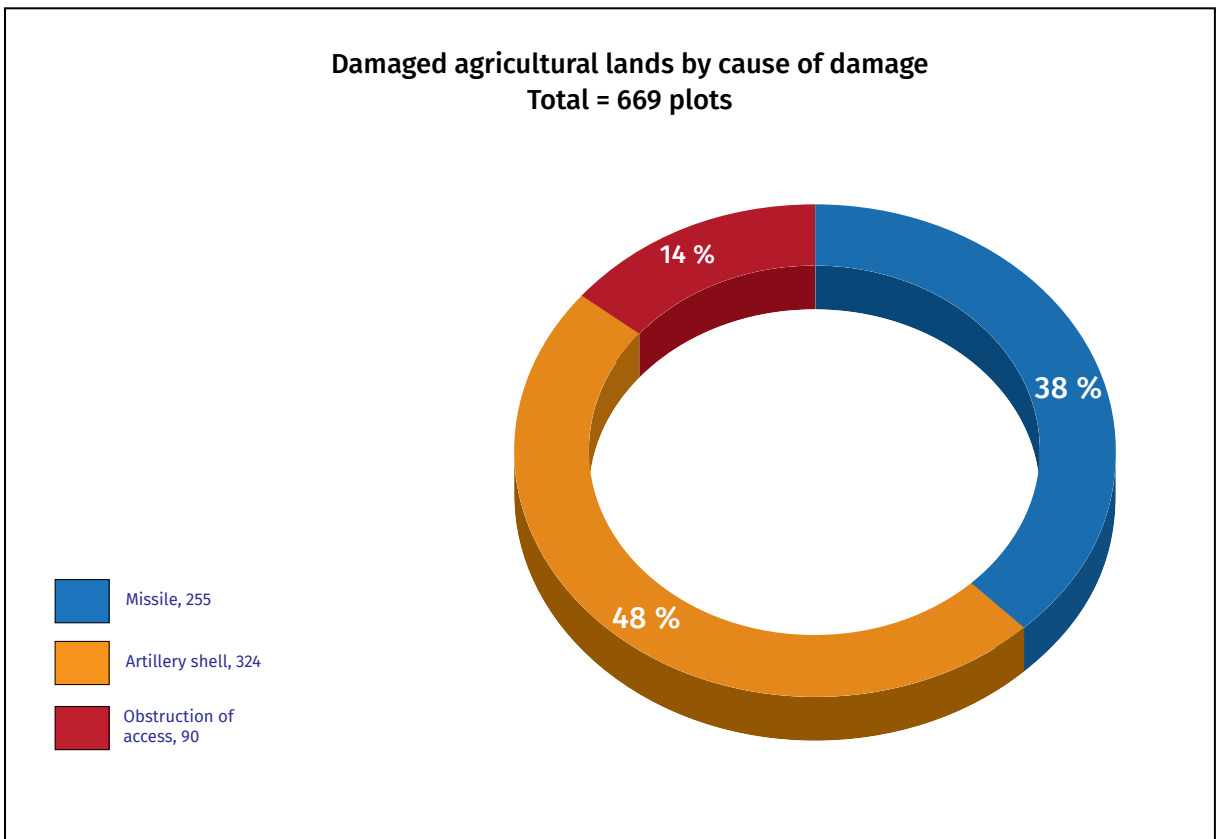
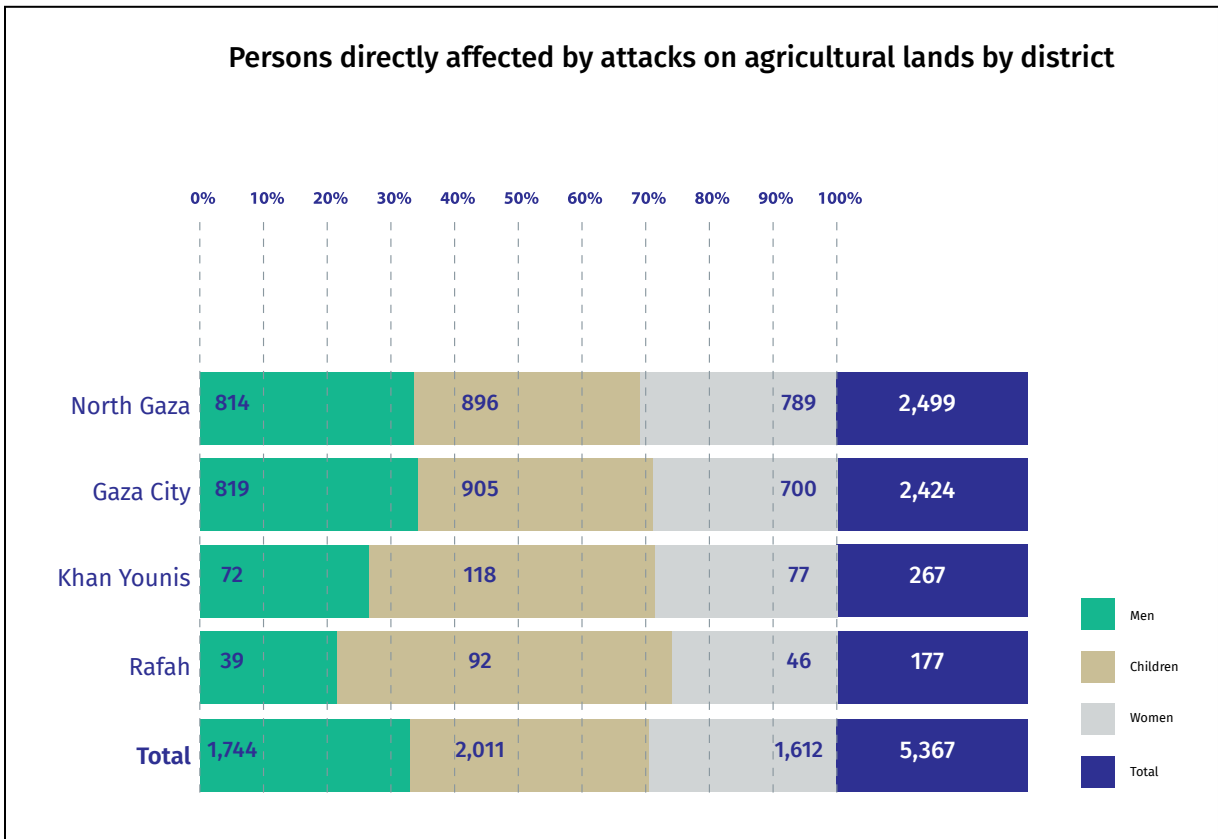
Affected residential units



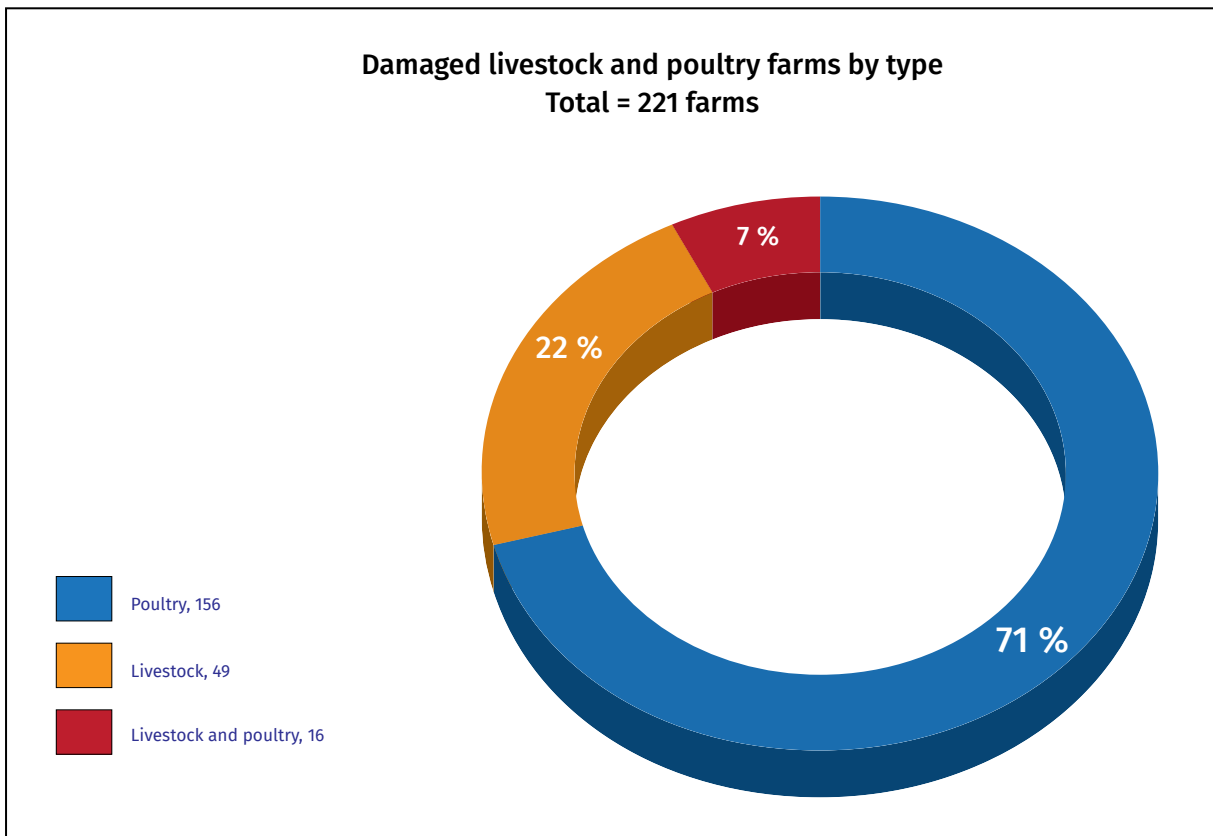
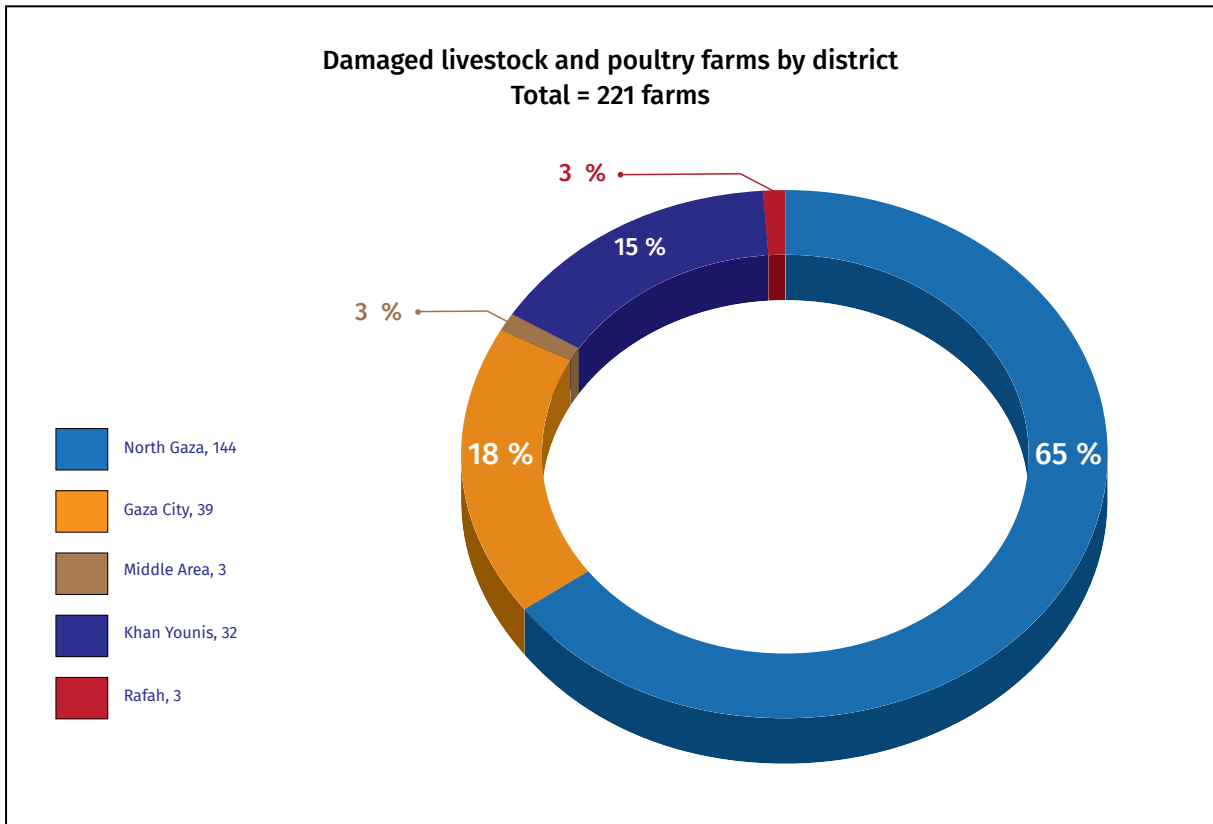
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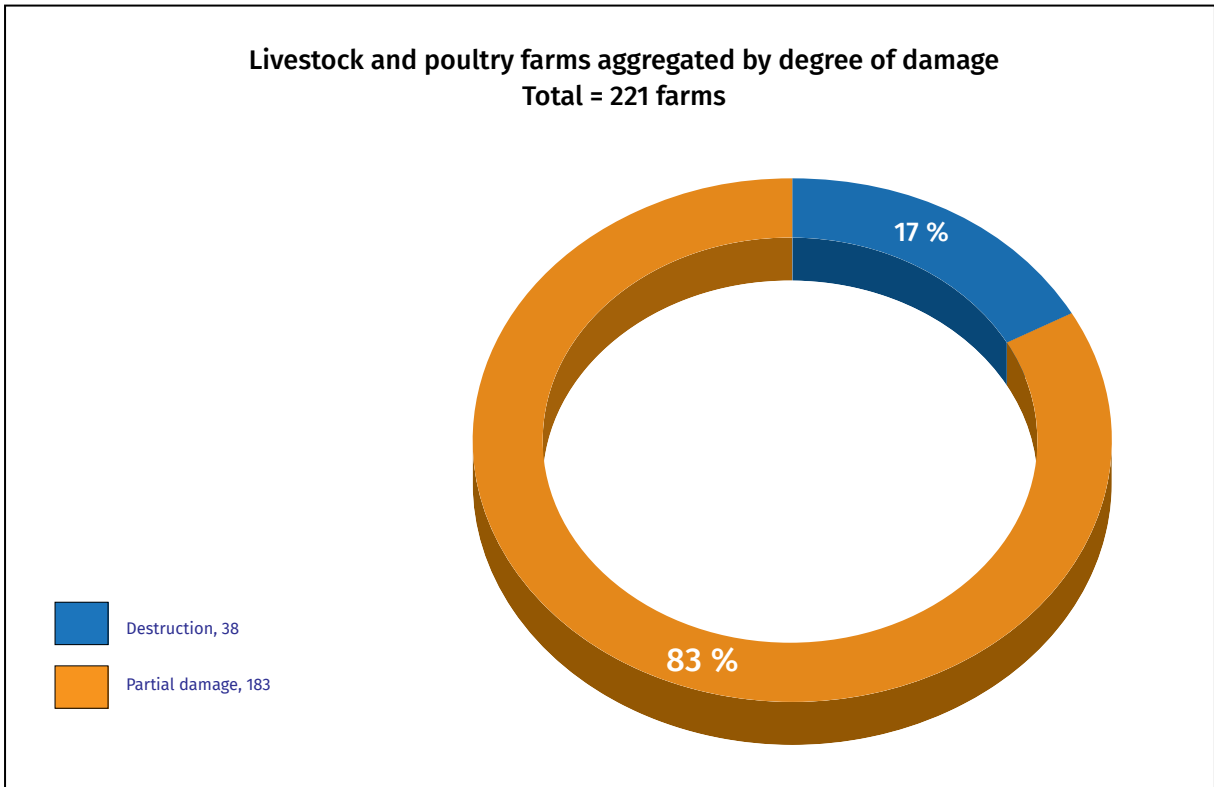
Agricultural land



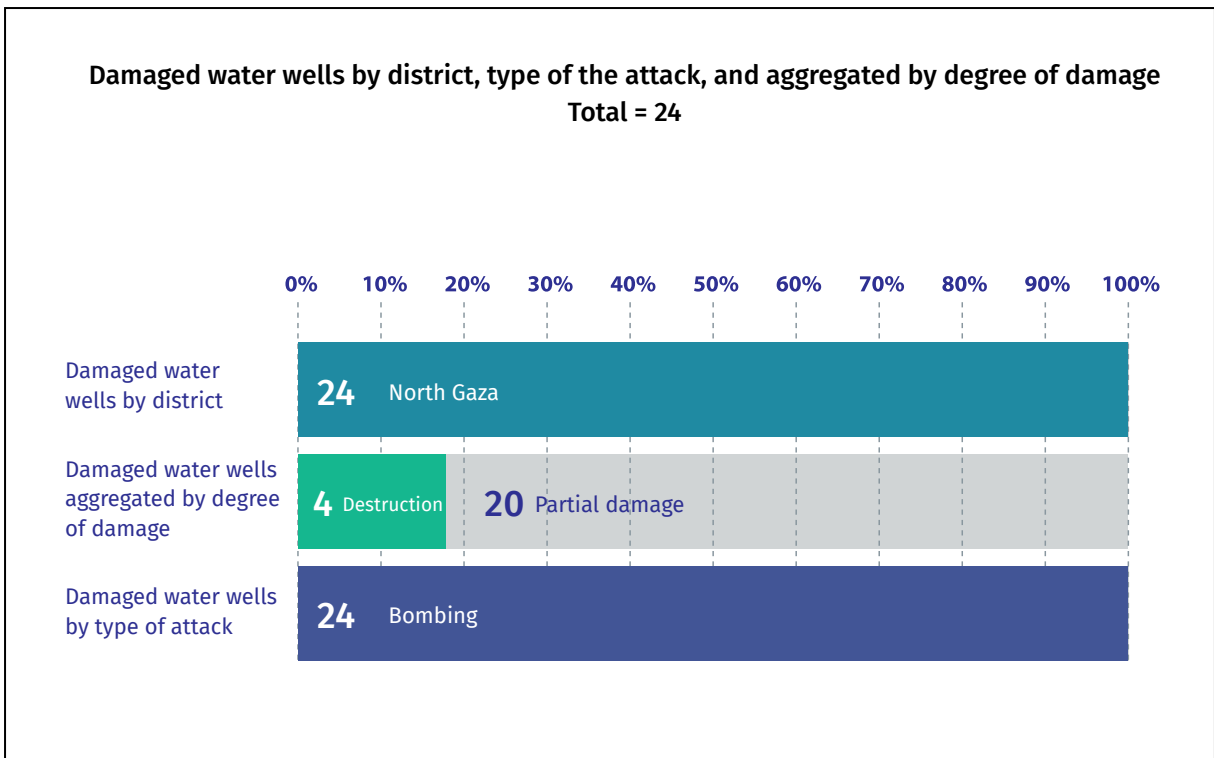


5 Livestock and poultry farms

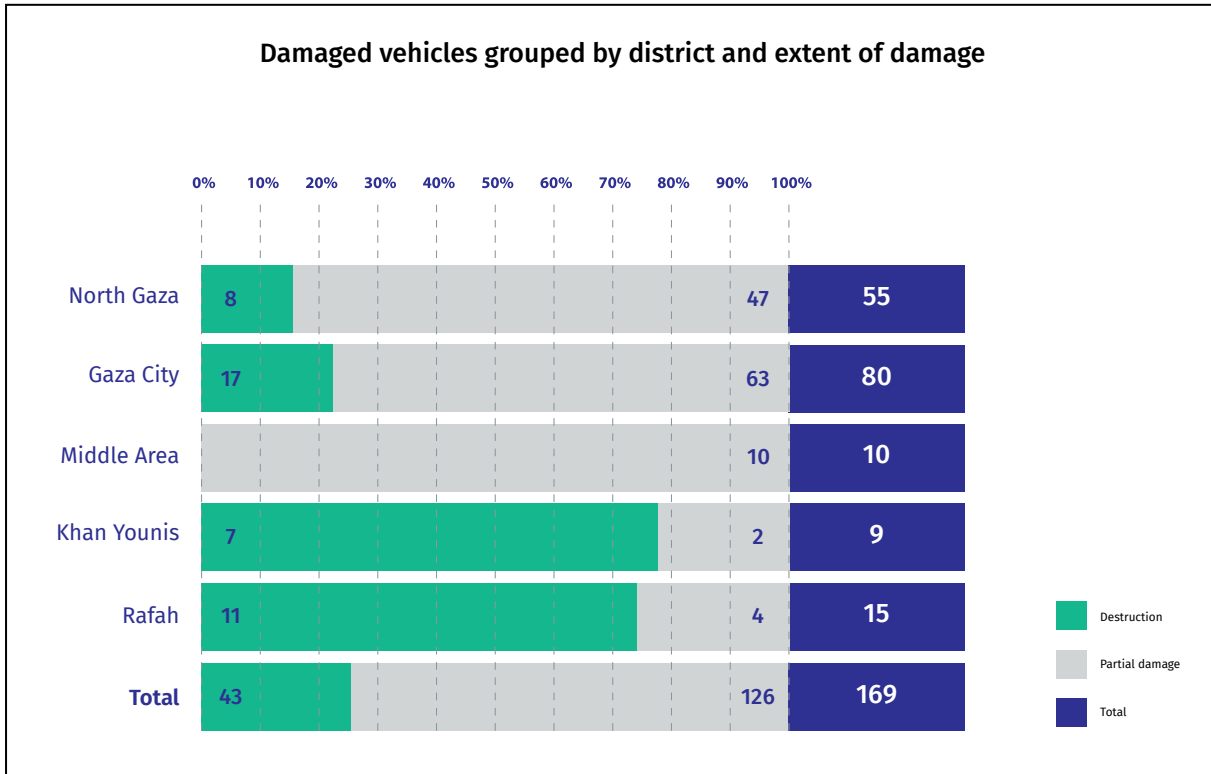




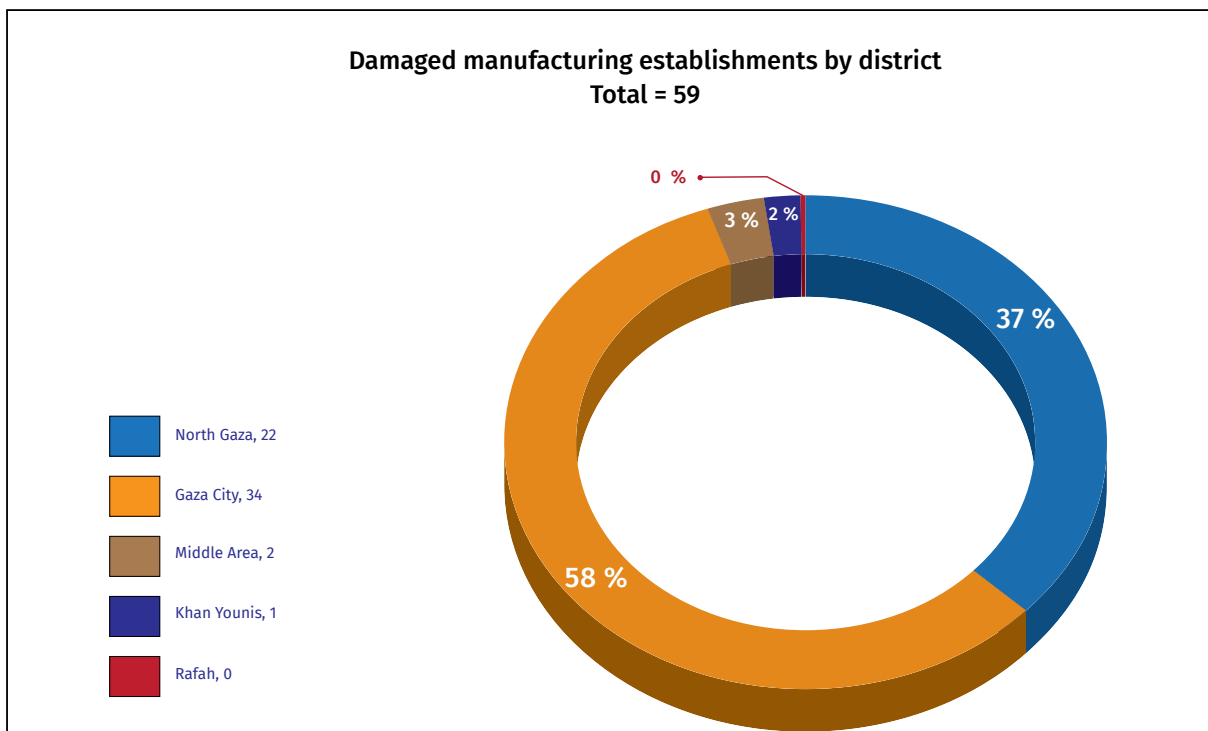
6 water Wells

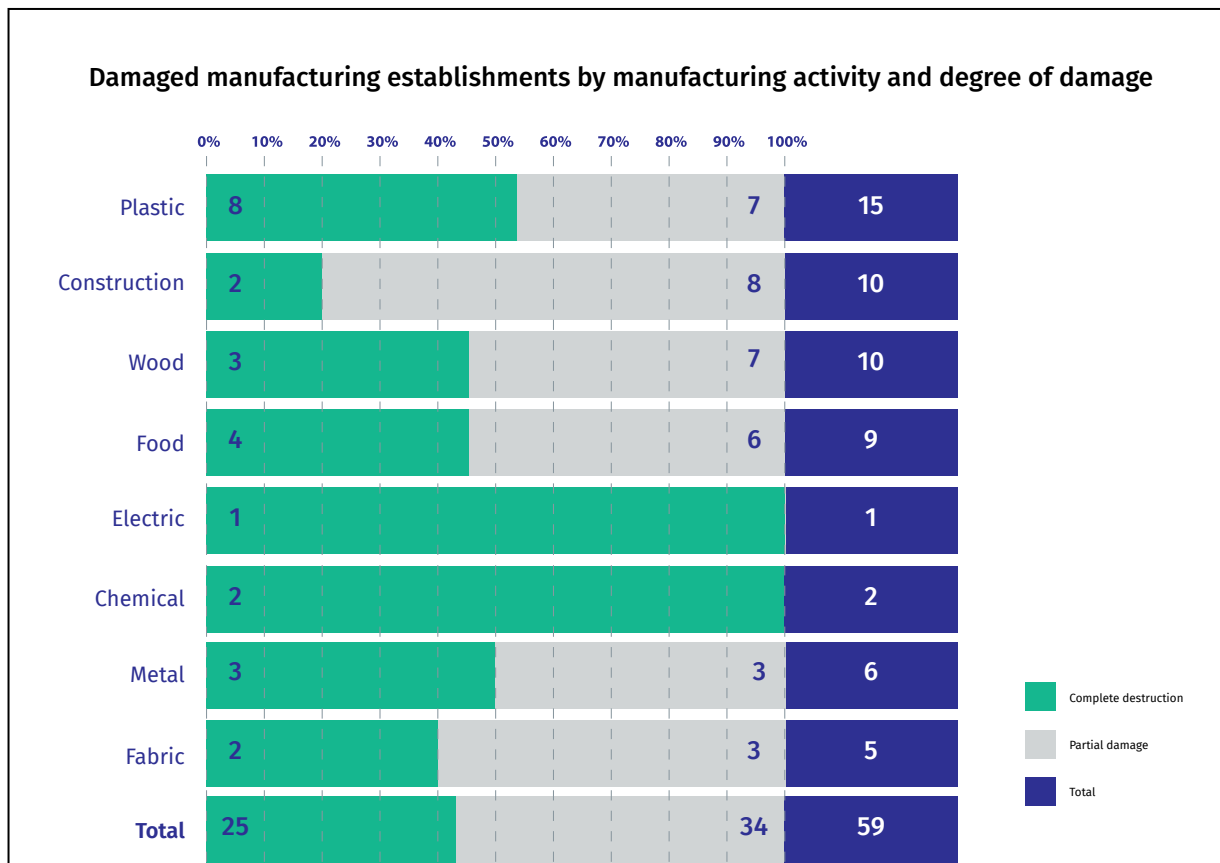
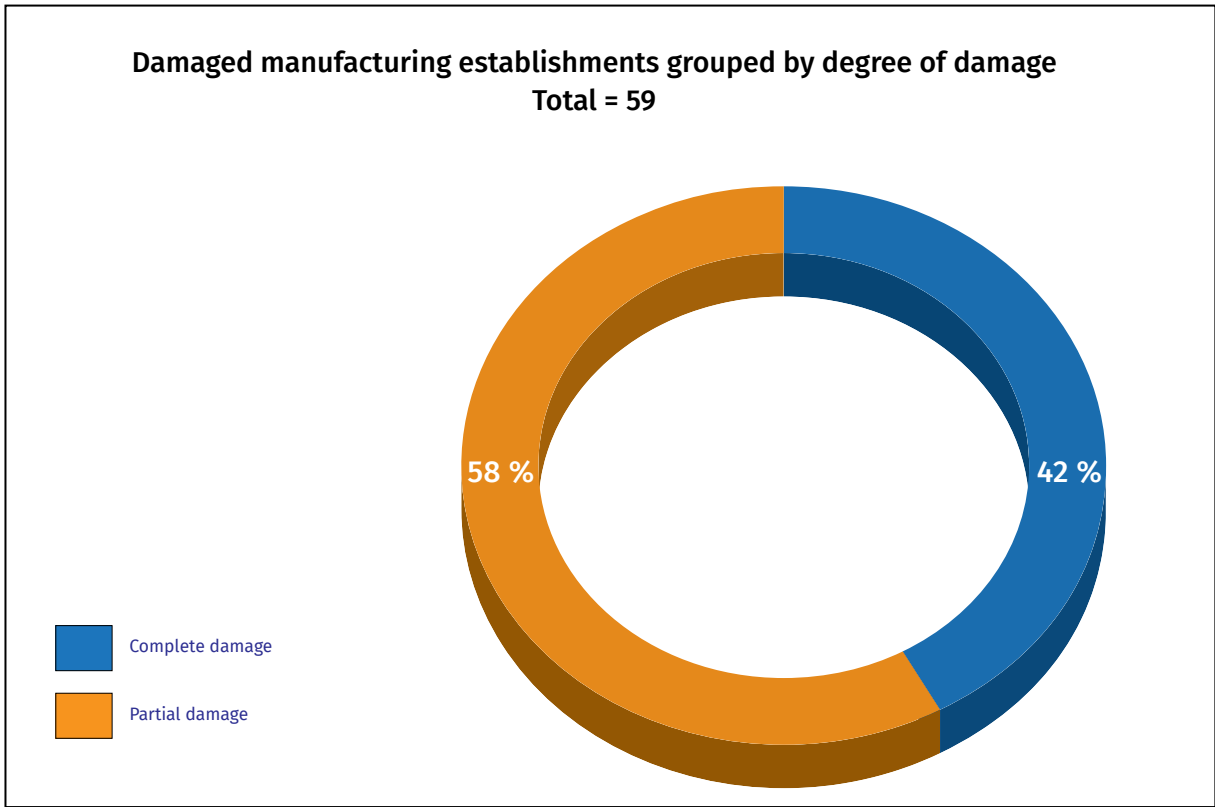


7 Vehicles



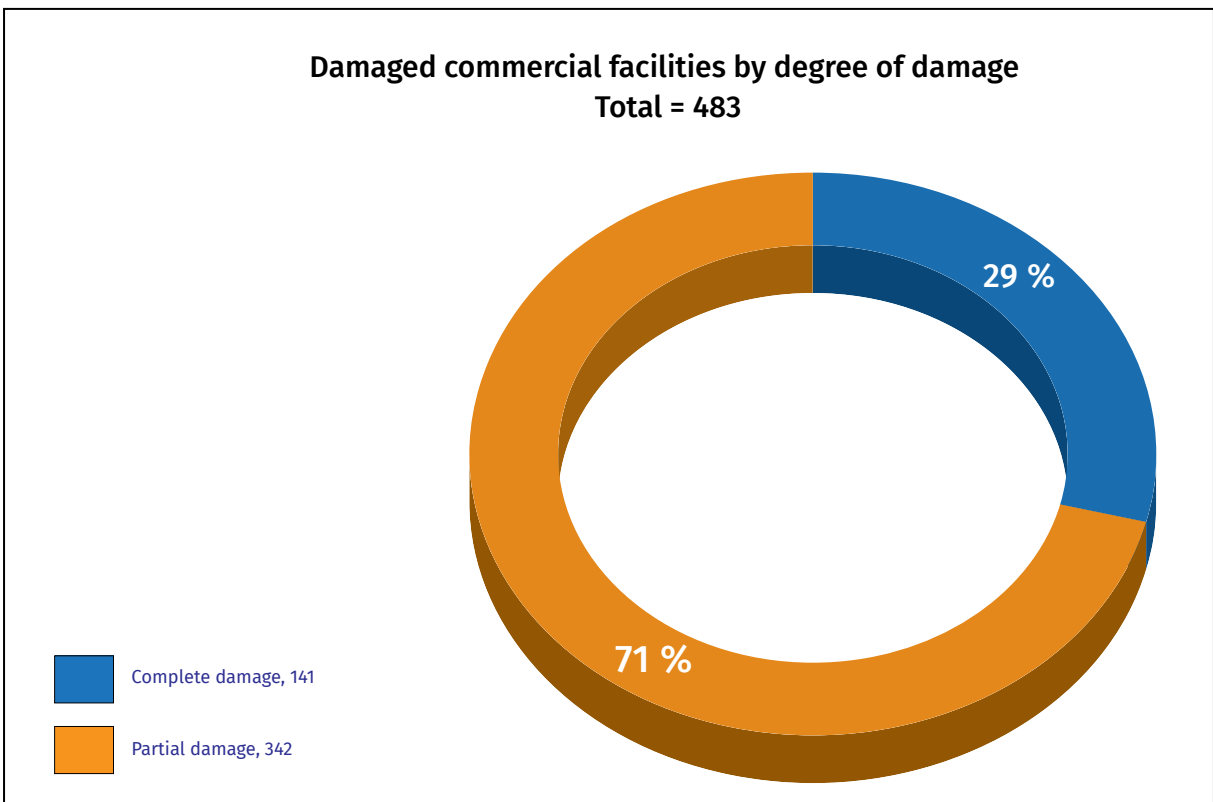
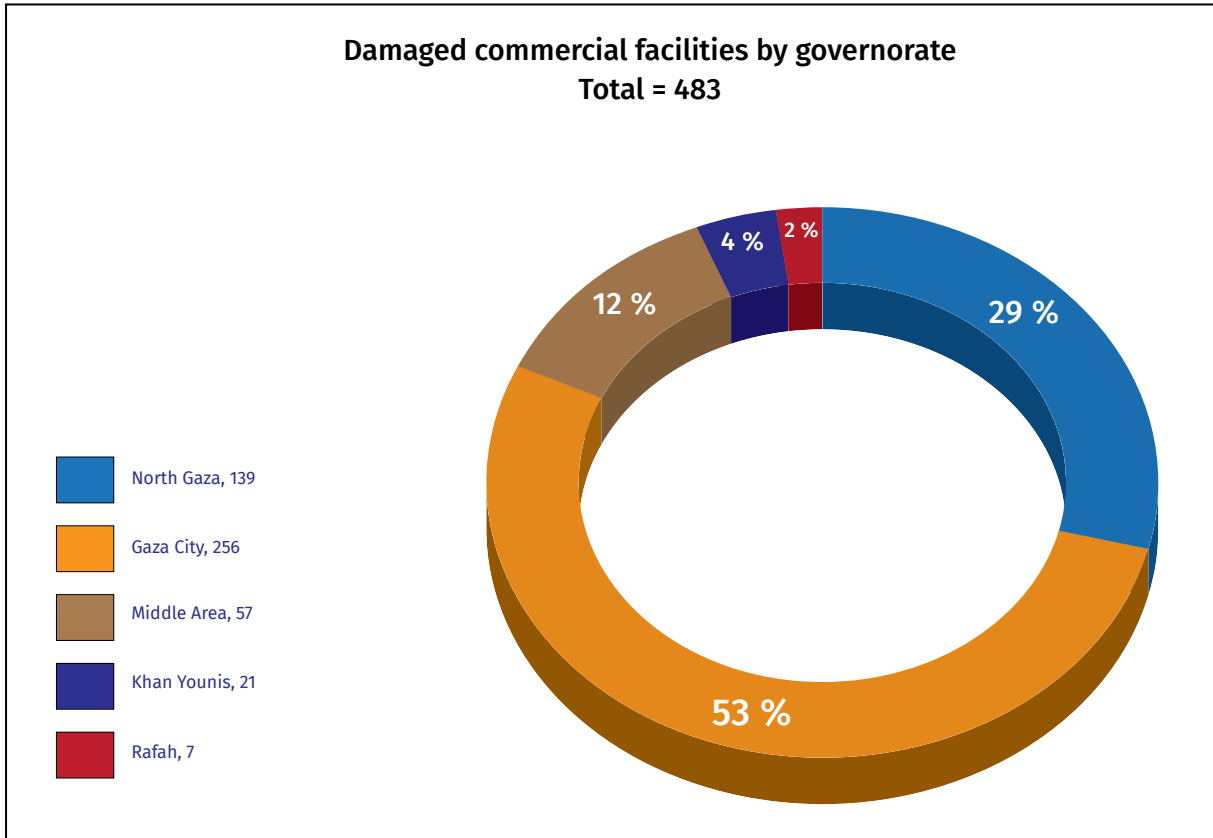
8 Manufacturing establishments



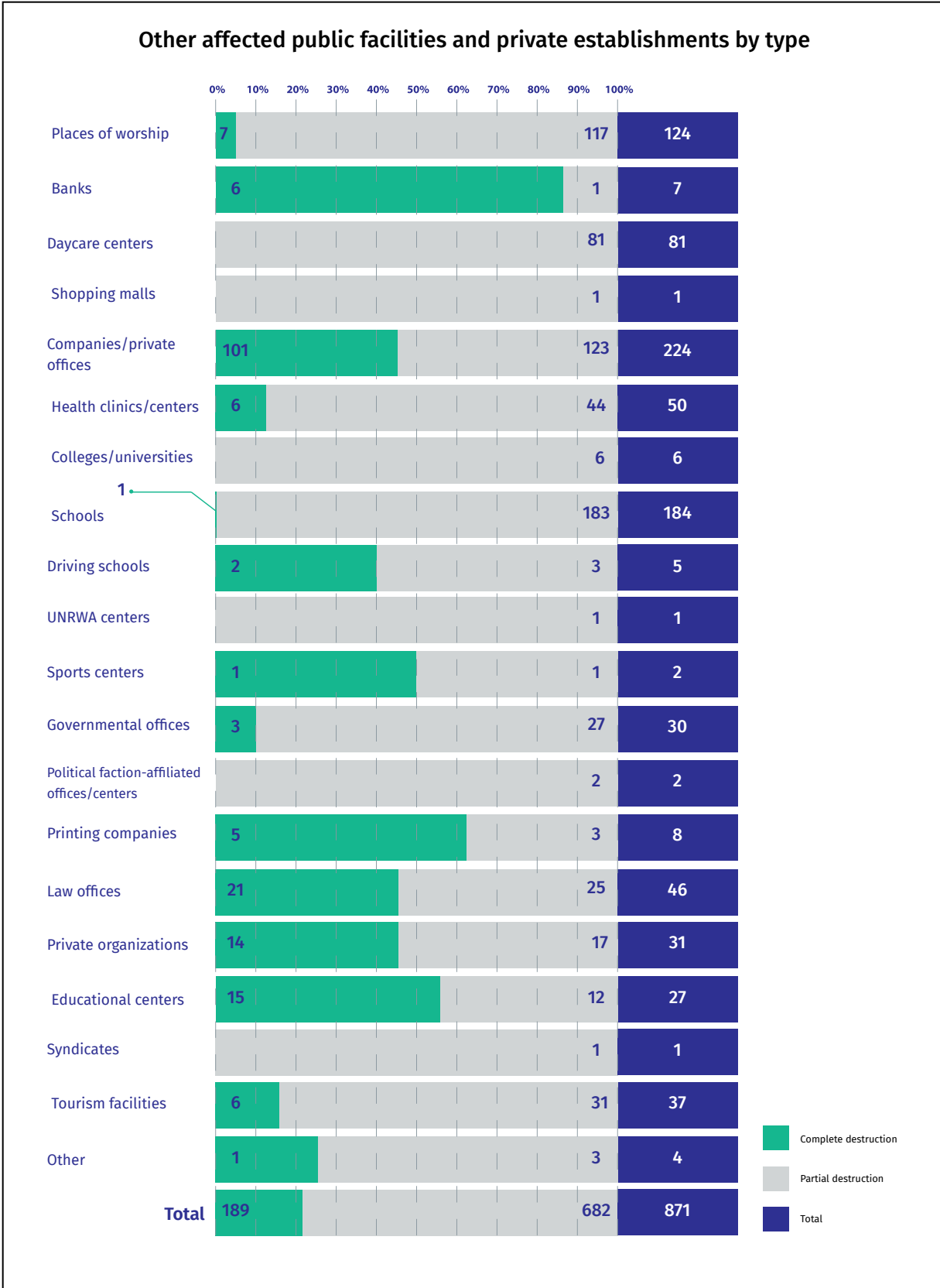


9

Commercial facilities



10 Public Facilities





A Palestinian woman passes in front of a destroyed building in Gaza City early on May 2021 ,12, after the continuous Israeli bombing of the Strip. (Mohamed Abed/AFP)

Conclusion

The statistics contained in this report layout the casualties and material damage that affected civilians and their properties, facilities, and public utilities during the Israeli military operation on the Gaza Strip between 10-21 May 2021. The figures reflect the large number of casualties compared to the short duration of the military operation, and the overall number of civilians, including children and women, killed during the operation. This evidence supports the co-signing organizations' conclusions that the Israeli occupation forces intentionally and repeatedly targeted civilians and their property in flagrant disregard for the legal standards in the laws of war and the lives of civilians, with an emphasis on children.

The investigations conducted by the co-signing human rights organizations and others, both international and local, bring to light an overwhelming body of evidence indicating that systematic and flagrant violations of international humanitarian law were committed that clearly amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in particular. Among these crimes are willful killing, including by bombarding houses while residents were inside; indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force; and extensive, unnecessary and wanton destruction of property, among others.

There exist strong grounds to conclude that this conduct forms part of a broader policy of harm adopted at the highest levels of the Israeli political and legal systems. In particular, the widespread

targeting of family homes in Gaza has appeared as a key feature of Israel's military attacks. Following Israel's 2014 assault, the UN Commission of Inquiry raised specific concern that similar "strikes may have constituted military tactics reflective of a broader policy, approved at least tacitly by decision-makers at the highest levels of the Government of Israel", and asked "why the political and military leadership did not revise their policies or change their course of action, despite considerable information regarding massive death and destruction in Gaza, which in turn raises questions as to potential violations of international humanitarian law and criminal law by these officials".

It is imperative to note that this conduct did not occur in a vacuum, but rather forms part of Israel's institutionalized system of racial discrimination and intent to dominate and oppress the Palestinian people as a whole—a policy that amounts to the crime of apartheid under the 1973 Apartheid Convention and constitutes a crime against humanity under the ICC Rome Statute.

The May 2021 assault—Israel's fourth full-scale military offensive against the Gaza Strip in 13 years—denied Palestinians in Gaza their right to life and liberty through excessive and indiscriminate use of lethal force, amounting to extrajudicial killing. Similarly, the tightening of closure, the destruction of water, electricity lines, roads and waterworks that feed entire residential neighborhoods, and the psychological suffering caused by massive attacks on residential areas form part of Israel's deliberate imposition of inhumane living conditions on over two million Palestinians in Gaza. These practices amount to inhuman acts defined by the 1973 Apartheid Convention under Article 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii) and 2(b), especially in relation to the deliberate imposition of living conditions calculated to cause the physical destruction of the population in whole or in part, and the denial of the right to life.

As evidenced by the long engagement by Al Mezan and PCHR with Israel's military investigative mechanism, Israel is unequivocally unwilling or unable to investigate crimes committed by its forces in accordance with international law and to hold perpetrators to account. The co-signing organizations point out that the protection and impunity that Israel affords its members of the military and government officials who committed and ordered these apparent crimes require that the international community activate international accountability mechanisms in the interests of justice.

The international community must also support the mandate of the United Nation's International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, established in May 2021, as well as the independence of the ICC as it conducts its investigation into the Situation in Palestine, which will include the events that occurred in May 2021 that fall within the jurisdiction of the Court. Lastly, the co-signing organizations call on the international community to fulfill its legal and moral obligations to ensure that Israel lifts its unlawful closure of the Gaza Strip that amounts to collective punishment under international law.



A citizen walks through the rubble outside a severely damaged building in Gaza City after the Israeli air strikes on Palestinian territories continued through the night. (Mahmoud Homs/AFP)



Notes



A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.



Notes



A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

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-  www.pchrgaza.org



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About the Organisations

Al-Haq is an independent Palestinian non-governmental human rights organisation based in Ramallah, West Bank. Established in 1979 to protect and promote human rights and the rule of law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), the organisation has Special Consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Al-Haq is the West Bank affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists and is a member of the International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net), the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Habitat International Coalition (HIC), the Palestinian Human Rights Organisations Council (PRHOC), and the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO).

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights is an independent human rights organisation, established in 1995, based in Gaza City. The Centre enjoys Consultative Status with the ECOSOC. It is an affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists; FIDH; EMHRN; International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC); the Arab Organization for Human Rights; and the World Coalition against the Death Penalty.

Al Mezan is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental human rights organization based in the Gaza Strip. Since its establishment in 1999, Al Mezan has been dedicated to protecting and advancing human rights, supporting victims of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and enhancing democracy, community and citizen participation, and respect for the rule of law in Gaza.

