

DONOR BRIEF | PALESTINE | NOVEMBER 2026

Still here

How Palestinian women-led organisations continue to support communities – and what must change

Through war, occupation and deep aid cuts, Palestinian women-led organisations (WLOs) are still here – often the first place women and girls turn to. This brief draws on August 2026 interviews with nine of CARE's partner WLOs,[1] from Gaza City to Jenin, Nablus, Hebron and Bethlehem.[2] It also draws on CARE research mapping 125 WLOs and women's rights organisations (WROs) across Palestine.[3]

WHAT DONORS, UN AGENCIES AND INGOS SHOULD CHANGE

1 Fund WLOs as equal partners, not short-term implementers

"We need core funding... to support our capacities, to maintain our staff." – **Women's Affairs Technical Committee**

- Provide direct, more predictable, multi-year and flexible funding that covers core and indirect costs and duty of care.
- Publish targets for direct funding reaching Palestinian WLOs/WROs, broken down by type of organisation.
- Prioritise smaller and under-resourced organisations, tailoring grant size and requirements to their capacity.
- Fund WLOs' established work – legal aid, economic empowerment, advocacy and education – alongside emergency response.

2 Make procedures proportionate, contextualised and workable

"Donors... need to take into consideration the specificity of the situation in Gaza... and to lessen their procedures." – **Women's Affairs Center**

- Simplify and harmonise due diligence, applications, vendor registration and reporting.
- Preserve donor flexibility through each intermediary.
- Adapt requirements on board elections, registration and approvals when displacement or hostilities make compliance impossible.
- Press for banking and financial channels serving Palestinian civil society to remain accessible, and ensure that screening and compliance measures do not create disproportionate barriers to WLOs' access to and transfer of funds.
- Advocate for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, and support independent investigations and accountability for violations.

3 Shift from subcontracting to shared power, risk and responsibility

"Localisation must translate into genuine power-sharing and influence." – **Society of Women Graduates**

- Co-design priorities, programmes, budgets, indicators and delivery changes with WLOs.
- Act as enablers, advocates and risk-sharing partners where capable local organisations exist.
- Agree transparently how compliance, safeguarding, visibility, security and reporting risks will be shared.
- Profile and credit WLOs' expertise and achievements in communications, fundraising and advocacy.

4 Turn participation into influence

"There is a difference between an organisation being present in coordination spaces and having a meaningful influence on the decisions." – **Mothers School Society**

- Reserve leadership, co-chairing and governance roles for Palestinian WLOs in clusters, pooled funds and advisory bodies, including voting rights and authority over funding allocation decisions.
- Make Arabic interpretation standard in coordination meetings.
- Create clear feedback mechanisms showing how WLO data and recommendations inform decisions.

[1] Business Women Forum, Mothers School Society, Not to Forget Women Society, Psychosocial Counselling Center for Women, Society of Women Graduates, Women Media and Development, Women's Affairs Center, Women's Affairs Technical Committee and Zakher Association.
[2] This brief summarises a joint advocacy briefing developed by CARE and these nine WLOs. The Women's Affairs Technical Committee has staff in Gaza and the West Bank, while the Business Women Forum has staff in the West Bank and operates through consultants in Gaza. All are medium-sized organisations except the Women's Affairs Center, which is large.
[3] CARE Palestine (2026) *WLOs/WROs Mapping in Palestine: Final Report* (unpublished); CARE Canada and CARE Caucasus (2026) *Dual Impact of Aid Cuts and Repressive Laws on WLOs and WROs in the Global South*. The mapping surveyed 125 WLOs/WROs across the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza (November–December 2025); the global research surveyed 70 WROs, WLOs and feminist organisations in eight countries, including 11 Palestinian WLOs/WROs (August–September 2025).

WHY THESE CHANGES ARE NEEDED

WLOs are constantly adapting to keep operating, but they are doing so within funding, access and partnership arrangements that continue to limit their ability to sustain services and shape the response.

1 Insecurity and movement restrictions shape whether services can operate

In Gaza, attacks, shifting military zones, destroyed infrastructure and the absence of safe locations put staff, most of them women, and communities at constant risk. In the West Bank, military operations, settler violence, arrests, road closures and more than 1,000 military gates and checkpoints restrict movement and isolate communities.

> *"I have to take bypass routes that are very dangerous... even if I arrive, sometimes I cannot go back home."* **– Mothers School Society**

2 Working on women's rights and gender equality further compounds security risks

In addition to the security and safety risks they face because of the war and occupation, WLOs and their staff face threats that come specifically from their work with women and girls. For example, the Psychosocial Counselling Center for Women was forced to close its Hebron office for a few days following threats from a local religious group, identified by the organisation as Hezb al-Tahrir, which used social media to accuse it of being against religion and culture.

> *"...many of our attorneys are threatened by the husbands of women we support."* **– Women's Affairs Center**

3 Staff and volunteers carry the impact of war and violence twice

Staff and volunteers – many of them mothers – are living through displacement, bereavement, insecurity and economic pressure while supporting women and girls facing profound trauma and distress. Yet only one WLO described a structured, resourced staff-support system; funding for staff psychosocial support, safety and security is rarely available.

> *"The team itself has this kind of burnout and psychological difficulties, the fears, the worries, because most of them are mothers, they have children, but they move from place to place in the West Bank. Even though it's dangerous for them to reach these communities, we continue working."* **– Psychosocial Counselling Center for Women**

4 WLOs are not being treated as equal partners

WLOs described being brought in after priorities have been set, while intermediaries retain control over funding and programme design. Some donors even require "humanitarian" project titles, sidelining WLOs' feminist and rights-based agenda. Some international actors now implement directly, recruiting WLOs' staff.

> *"A lot of international organisations treat the local NGOs or the local women-led organisations, CBOs and so on, as an implementer, not as an equal, not as a partner... not as a partner from the very beginning, co-leading, co-creating and co-everything."* **– Not to Forget Women Society**

5 Funding is a structural constraint

All nine WLOs identified funding constraints as a major barrier to sustaining their organisations. The most common challenges cited by WLOs include:

- **Funding cuts and withdrawn grants:** Chronic underfunding, compounded by grant withdrawals since October 2023 and the sudden 2025 funding cuts, has weakened WLOs' ability to sustain operations. Funding gaps have forced WLOs to reduce staffing, leave salaries unpaid and rely more heavily on unpaid volunteers; WLOs also compete for shrinking resources with one another and with a wider range of actors moving into project implementation.
- **Short-term funding and lack of core support:** Grants typically lasting three to twelve months undermine organisational stability, longer-term planning and continuity of services, while requiring constant fundraising.
- **Unequal access to funding:** Some West Bank WLOs described resources concentrated among larger organisations headquartered in Ramallah, with less reaching frontline organisations in the north.
- **Misaligned donor priorities:** Funding priorities can pressure WLOs to move away from their expertise and mandates or pursue activities poorly aligned with communities' immediate needs.
- **Restrictive funding conditions:** "Anti-terrorism" and political vetting clauses that several WLOs refuse to sign exclude them from major funding streams.
- **Disproportionate administrative requirements:** Extensive due diligence, registration, documentation and screening requirements often apply regardless of grant size, placing particular strain on smaller organisations.

The full findings and recommendations are available in the joint CARE and Palestinian WLOs advocacy briefing, *Still here: How Palestinian women-led organisations continue to support communities – and what must change*.