



FACT SHEET: Children of the Gaza Crisis

8 January 2009

Save the Children is calling for a peaceful solution to the current crisis that endangers the lives of nearly every child in Gaza, and the lives of Israeli children in areas subject to attacks. Save the Children is calling for a cessation of hostilities by all parties including air and ground assaults from Israel and rocket attacks from Gaza. The agency is also seeking free access for humanitarian assistance to allow aid agencies to provide much-needed relief to vulnerable children and so that children and their families can access essential services. Save the Children has reached some 9,500 people, including 4,700 children, in the first two weeks of the crisis, and we continue to strive to meet the needs of Gaza's vulnerable children and families.

Save the Children seeks to highlight the situation for children living in what the United Nations is calling “a humanitarian crisis coupled with a massive lack of protection for civilians.”

Child fatalities to date

- At least 139 children have been killed as a result of the Gaza conflict since it began 14 days ago. This number is expected to rise as confirmation of deaths has been difficult. ([al Mezan](#))
- As of 8 January, the Palestinian Ministry of Health reported that at least 3,100 Palestinians have been injured, 1,271 of whom are children and women. ([WHO](#))

Displacement:

Of increasing concern is the number of children and their families fleeing the fighting and bombardment or seeking refuge because their homes have been destroyed or damaged. UNRWA has identified 91 schools to serve as displacement shelters, with capacity to house 40,000 people. However three of these shelters have been shelled, killing and injuring people sheltering there.

- As of 8 January, approximately 19,800 people, including 11,088 children, were staying in 27 emergency shelters. ([OCHA](#))
- An estimated 80,000–90,000 people have been displaced, among them 44,800 to 50,400 children ([al Mezan](#)).
- On 6 January UNRWA Jabalia Prep C Girls School, which is serving as a shelter for displaced people, was hit by three shells, resulting in 42 fatalities, including 13 children. ([OCHA](#))
- Asma Elementary School — an UNRWA shelter serving around 400 displaced people from Beit Hanoun, including approximately 224 children — was struck by a missile 6 January, killing three people. ([UNRWA](#))
- The Palestinian Red Crescent Society estimates the homes of thousands of children have been severely damaged, forcing the residents to seek shelter elsewhere. ([OCHA](#))

Access to water, sanitation and electricity

Children, especially infants, are particularly affected by the lack of clean water and electricity.

- According to OCHA, virtually all of Gaza's 1,417,000 people, including its 793,520 children, are now without electricity. ([OCHA](#))
- With the delivery of some fuel to power pumps, the number of people without running water has decreased to around 500,000, among them 280,000 children. Those who do have access to

water face difficulties in purifying it, which increases health risks to children and adults. (OCHA)

- 80% of drinking water in Gaza is not safe for human consumption, according to WHO guidelines. (UNICEF)
- Sewage continues to overflow in many parts of northern Gaza, in particular Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya, affecting around 91,727 people including 51,367 children in these areas alone. OCHA has warned that the sewage situation poses serious health risks, particularly for children, as it increases the likelihood of the spread of waterborne diseases. (OCHA)
- In Beit Lahiya, sewage is flooding from the wastewater treatment lagoon, affecting the health and well-being of 15,000 people, including approximately 8,400 children. In the past, an overflow at the same lake killed five people and displaced around 2,000, among them 1,120 children. (OCHA)

Health Care

Lack of access to health care remains critical for children and pregnant women, as movement inside Gaza is extremely dangerous. To date, four hospitals and three clinics have been damaged by shelling. Of these, three hospitals have taken direct hits¹. In addition:

- Of 56 Primary Health Care centers managed by the Ministry of Health, only 29 are functioning, and these only with major interruptions due to security and limitations on movement. (WHO)
- On 7 January, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) found four weak and emaciated children next to their dead mothers in the Zaytun neighborhood of Gaza City, an area to which the ICRC did not gain permission to enter. The ICRC had demanded immediate access to the wounded. (ICRC)
- The director of Primary Health Care (PHC) at the Ministry of Health reported that since 27 December, the use of primary health care services had declined by about 90%. About 70% of chronic patients regularly attending PHC centers have had to interrupt their treatment. (WHO)
- All vaccination programs have been interrupted due to closure of clinics, unavailability of electricity or fuel at clinics equipped with generators, movement restrictions affecting distribution of vaccines and lack of staff. Given the high population density and dire living conditions, the halt in vaccinations increases the risk of disease outbreaks. (WHO)
- Approximately 680,000 Gazans, including 380,000 children, from the Middle Area, Khan Yunis and Rafah cannot reach Shifa Hospital, the main referral hospital for specialized services, due to the bisection of Gaza by Israeli forces. In addition, the delivery of medicines throughout Gaza has become increasingly difficult as the central Ministry of Health is also located in Gaza City. (OCHA)
- Under normal circumstances, an average of 150–200 babies are born every day in Gaza, 25–35 of whom must be delivered by Caesarean section. To date, no deliveries have been made by C-section as all operating rooms are being used for surgeries related to the conflict. (UNFPA)
- Antenatal care is suspended due to lack of staff and electricity needed for ultrasound and other diagnostics. (OCHA)
- To date three mobile clinics and three ambulances have been hit or destroyed, and six medical personnel have been killed. (WHO)
- Thirty infants in the neonatal care unit at Shifa hospital, which is currently relying on back-up generators, are surviving with the help of lifesaving machines. However, the facility's generators are in danger of failing (OCHA).

Food and Nutrition

Even before the latest outbreak of violence, 50,000 Gazan children were malnourished; more than two-thirds of all children suffered from vitamin A deficiency and almost half of children under age 2 were

¹ Telephone information from Al Mezan.

anemic. Lack of access to food, clean water and medical supplies exacerbates threats to children's health and well-being.

Currently, not enough food is entering via Kerem Shalom crossing. Distribution of food that does enter is limited due to security concerns.

- Approximately 90% of Gaza's population – some 1,275,300 people including 714,168 children – depend on food assistance. On 8 January, UNRWA announced that it was suspending its operations due to the security situation, affecting at least 750,000 people and 420,000 children dependent on aid. ([OCHA](#))
- A child in Gaza is five times more likely to be stunted than in a healthy population. ([UNICEF](#))
- The risks of infection or malnutrition from using breast milk substitutes prepared with contaminated water are high, yet three-quarters of Gaza's infants under 6 months of age — around 30,000 babies — are not exclusively breastfed. ([UNICEF](#))
- Close to half of children under 2 in Gaza are anemic. ([UNICEF](#))
- Only 50 percent of the World Food Program's (WFP) warehouse capacity is being used (3,700 metric tons). An additional 4,000 metric tons of food (150 trucks) is needed to ensure adequate food supplies for WFP distribution in the coming period. ([OCHA](#))

Education

To date 16 schools have been damaged from airstrikes and related bombardment in Gaza. Of these, five received direct hits. In Israel, two schools have been hit by rockets fired from Gaza.

- Gaza's 346 government schools, 28 private schools and 214 UNRWA schools are closed, affecting around 441,452 students. ([UNRWA](#)) and ([MoE](#))
- Israeli schools within 20 kilometers of Gaza are closed ([Israel National News](#)). Following rocket fire from Lebanon on 8 January, schools in the northern Israeli town of Nahariya and schools in southern Lebanon have also reportedly closed ([Israel National News](#)).
- Eight UNRWA students were killed and another 18 injured while waiting for UN buses. ([OCHA](#))
- Military operations began at 11:30 a.m. on 27 December 2008, when many students were leaving or coming to school and when many others were sitting for exams. Some students were injured when school windows shattered. ([OCHA](#))
- The final exams of the current semester were disrupted and have been postponed because of the ongoing conflict. ([OCHA](#))

General Gaza Statistics

- The total population of Gaza is 1,417,000. ([PCBS](#))
- The total number of children in Gaza is approximately 793,520, or 56% of the population. ([PCBS](#))
- There are a total of 1,048,125 refugees in Gaza, or 74% of the total population. Among them, approximately 586,950 are children. ([UNRWA](#))