



17 August, 2024 Khan Younis Elementary Co-ed School "A" © 2024 UNRWA

Palestinian Education Under Attack in Gaza:

Restoration, Recovery, Rights and Responsibilities in and through Education

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Palestinian Education Under Attack in Gaza:
Restoration, Recovery, Rights and Responsibilities
in and through Education

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The authors dedicate this report to all of those who are contributing in supporting children and young people in Gaza. The authors also dedicate this report to the children, young people, teachers and counsellors of Gaza who daily demonstrate their spirit, determination, and courage to assert the right to equitable and quality education in Gaza.



1. Introduction

“There is no ‘post’ because the trauma is repetitive and ongoing and continuous.”ⁱ

“It is not overstating to say everyone is traumatised.”ⁱⁱ

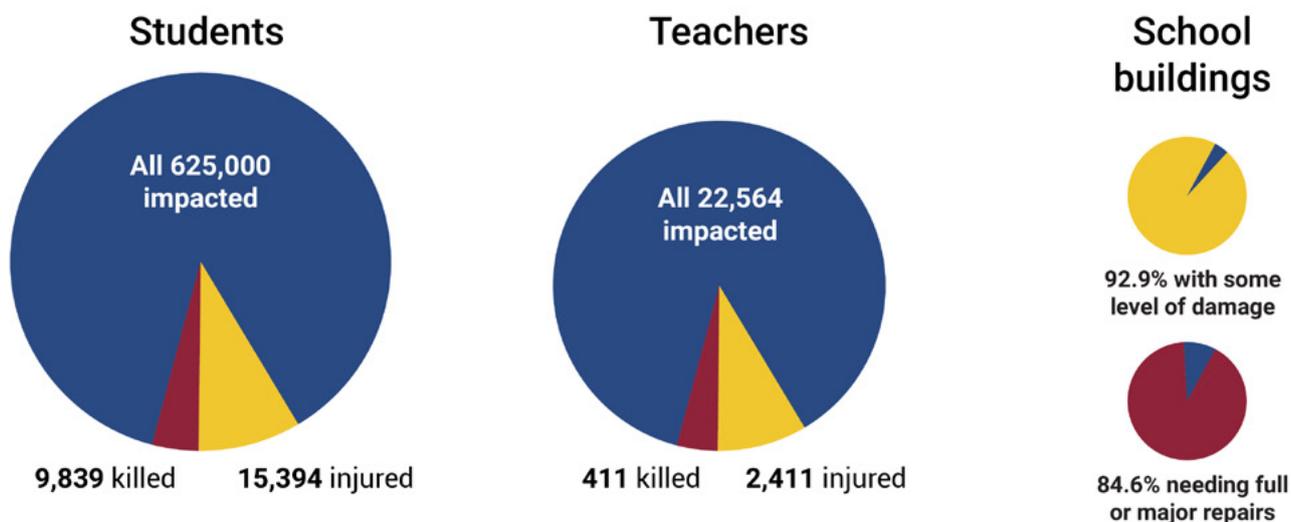
Education has long been a cornerstone of pride and a fundamental value for Palestinian families. The work of UNRWA, the Occupied Palestinian Territory Ministry of Education, together with other partners, have played a pivotal role in safeguarding and advancing the right to education for all Palestinians.

The current war in Gaza has severely disrupted the education of all the 625,000 students and impacted the lives and livelihoods of the 22,564 teachers (Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024a). Between October 2023 and July 2024, almost all school buildings in Gaza have been either entirely or partially destroyed following Israeli military strikes (Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024b). As of August 2024, OCHA reports figures from the Ministry of Health that identify these attacks have killed over 40,000 Palestinians, including 10,627 children and 411 teachers (OCHA, 2024b). Furthermore, these attacks have resulted in at least 94,000 Palestinians injured, including 15,394 students and 2,411 teachers (OCHA, 2024b) (Figure 1). Many more are unaccounted for. As of July 2024, nearly 1.9 million people in Gaza have been displaced, of which an estimated 1 million people have sought shelter in UNRWA installations, including schools, and in adjacent areas (UNRWA, 2024a). It is estimated that around half of those who are displaced are children (UNICEF, 2024). Many children and their families have continued to be displaced numerous times over the past 10 months.

The extent of the most recent damage and disruption to Gaza's education system underscores the urgent need for attention to education in humanitarian frontline planning to restore education now, and to plan for the rebuilding of the education system as soon as there is a permanent ceasefire. It is important to note that the impact on education in Gaza is compounded by 17 years of blockade and recurrent attacks that precede the

current war in Gaza (OCHA, 2022). This has compounded the devastating education effects on children, young people, teachers and communities, including as a result of direct hits on school buildings (Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024b).ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, restoring and rebuilding education needs to recognise how the severity of the current scale of destruction of the education system reinforces the compounding effects of Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which the International Court of Justice found to be unlawful (International Court of Justice, 2024a).

Figure 1: Overview of impact on students, teachers and infrastructure



Source: OCHA, 2024b and Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024b.

The report underscores the need for the international community to stand up to its obligations. The education Sustainable Development Goal identifies the right to equitable, inclusive and quality education as a key element of development and reconstruction. Education is a fundamental right just as much in times of peace as in times of emergencies and war, as set out in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. Protecting and ensuring access to education during conflict is also enshrined in international humanitarian law with provisions on the right to education and education more generally, for example, the protection of students, education staff and educational facilities.^{iv}

Protecting education from attack is vital to prevent harm to children, young people and teachers. General Assembly resolution 64/290 of 2010 urges United Nations (UN) Member States 'to implement strategies and policies to ensure and support the realization of the right to education as an integral element of humanitarian assistance and humanitarian response' (UN General Assembly, 2010).^v UN Security Council Resolution 2601 (2021) further 'calls on all parties to safeguard, protect, respect, and promote the right to education, including in armed conflict, and reaffirms its contribution to the achievement of peace and security, and emphasizes the invaluable role that education has for individuals and society including as life-saving safe spaces and acknowledges that providing and protecting as well as facilitating the continuation of education in armed conflict should remain a key priority for the international community', and 'urges [UN] Member States to develop effective measures to prevent and address attacks and threats of attacks

against schools and education facilities, and, as appropriate.’^{vi} Attacks on schools are also one of the six grave violations against children identified and condemned by the UN Security Council.^{vii}

The current war in Gaza is unlike any other war in recent times. Current understandings of protracted crises and wars have not encountered a context of multiple displacements, loss of life and injury, and the scale of destruction and damage to civilian infrastructure, including education spaces and learning opportunities as witnessed in Gaza. Post-war reconstruction will be more than “just” reconstructing buildings. It will have to centre the needs, views and aspirations of Palestinians in Gaza and empower them to take the lead in rebuilding their education system.

The war has severely disrupted educational opportunities, and has made Palestinian children and youth, and society, increasingly vulnerable to a range of risks, including disability and trauma. The lack of access to learning opportunities has an immediate impact, and a longer-term effect, even more so given the related damage and destruction of most university buildings. It is imperative for the international community to act now and with urgency to uphold the right to education for Palestinians. For this, it is vital to call for immediate humanitarian access as the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice state: ‘The State of Israel shall take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip’ (International Court of Justice, 2024b: para 4). More broadly, a permanent ceasefire and ultimately an end to decades of blockade and occupation are the only conditions that will enable education to thrive in Gaza in a normal environment.

A permanent ceasefire, in line with the International Court of Justice advisory opinion (International Court of Justice, 2024c), and an end to occupation, is required urgently as the right to equitable and quality education for Palestinians in Gaza cannot be deferred. Concrete action for a permanent ceasefire must be accompanied by support for the small green shoots of education actions by Palestinian teachers, students and communities in Gaza that is currently taking place, supported by UNRWA, other UN and international agencies and local and international NGOs.

The report notes the trajectory of the impact of the current war on education and identifies actions that need to take place now to resume education in Gaza, and those that need to occur soon as part of a wider Palestine reconstruction effort. This report focuses on schools and school-aged children and young people while recognising that universities have also been heavily impacted. This report presents evidence-based analyses of the immediate and enduring effects of educational disruption, drawing from a comprehensive review of existing data and direct insights from interviews with knowledgeable officials and stakeholders on the ground. The report also offers a series of recommendations for the international community and donors, aimed at resuming equitable and quality teaching and learning in Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Nelson Mandela reminds us *“The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success. It can contribute to nation-building and reconciliation.”* Enabling Palestinians to exercise their rights, take pride in their identity, and make meaningful contributions to their society and the global community is an urgent task to keep alive hope and belief in a just society and future. Anything less makes all

actors complicit in undermining the belief in the power of education to make this world a better, safer, just and more peaceful place.

Restoring and **Recovering** education, affirming education **Rights**, and taking collective **Responsibility** is the modest contribution that this report calls for from all actors to support the children and youth in Gaza.



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2. Methods

Data for this report drew on both documentary and interview data. Documentary information included data from Education Management Information System (EMIS) from the Ministry of Education and UNRWA; reports from UN agencies and other international organisations, such as the Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster and United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Norwegian Refugee Council and the World Bank. These reports provide information on the scale and effects of war on students, teachers, counsellors, learning, child protection and education infrastructure.

Primary data included 35 individual and group interviews with Palestinian children, young people, teachers and counsellors; as well as education, social protection, planning, technical and leadership staff, particularly those working in Gaza, from a range of organisations, including the Occupied Palestinian Territory Ministry of Education, UN and other international agencies, and NGOs. They provided insights into effects of the war in Gaza on education, actions that their organisations were undertaking, the education and related needs for children, young people, teachers, counsellors and communities in Gaza, education funding, and proposals for action now and for the future by all actors. The interviews were carried out online during the month of August 2024 and lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in English and later transcribed. In a few instances, interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated into English before transcription.

The study received ethical clearance from the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, and research permission was granted from UNRWA. All participants were provided with consent forms outlining the purpose of the interview and noting that all information would be confidential to the study team. They were informed that any information included in the report would be anonymous to protect their privacy. As such, the report does not directly attribute quotations to the institutions or individuals interviewed. Interviewees could stop the interview or not answer questions if they did not feel comfortable. The consent process was reiterated at the beginning of each of the interviews and was secured before the interview started.

The analysis of both primary and secondary data was carried out through thematic coding. Pre-existing themes—such as impact on infrastructure, learning loss, broader effects on students, funding and investment, and the impact on teachers—were used as a framework to analyse the data in a structured, thematic way.



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3. Threats to education progress for children and young people

Education progress for children and young people in Gaza has been significantly disrupted over many years, notably since the start of the blockade in 2007. More recently, this has been compounded by the effects of COVID-19. The unprecedented impacts of the current war have even more grave consequences for education and learning of children and young people. Without immediate action, there is a danger of losing education for a generation of young people, with potential broader consequences for them, their families and wider society.

In this section, we estimate the anticipated adverse effects on the education trajectories of children and young people. We then identify actions needed, including those currently being undertaken in Gaza to minimise these adverse effects in the most difficult of conditions.

Estimating effects on education progress

Prior to the war in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the overall student enrolment rate at the compulsory basic level (Grades 1 to 10) was 95.2%, closely aligning with the national enrolment rate of 96% in Palestinian schools (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024). The current war has had a significant effect on learning. In this section, we estimate the effects of the current war on the learning of children and young people,^{viii} factoring into the calculation, the compounding effects of recurrent escalations in hostilities and COVID-19. Given it is impossible to collect data in the current context of the war, the estimates are based on the probable effects on children and young peoples' learning competencies. The report presents three learning effect scenarios based on projected dates of resumption of education and recognising the amount of learning time lost; and draws on World Bank simulations to estimate learning poverty during COVID-19 and the current war.

In total, from 2019 to August 2024, children and young people have lost at least 14 months of schooling, equivalent to about two academic years, due to closures related to COVID-19, the escalation in May 2021, and the current war. As a result of COVID-19 and the escalation in May 2021, schools were closed for a total of 106 days. According to the Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) data, UNRWA school closures

during the academic year 2019/2020 reached 59 days and 38 days during 2020/2021 due to COVID-19. Moreover, schools closed for an additional 9 days during the academic year 2020/2021 due to the escalation in May 2021. These closures combined are equivalent to almost six schooling months (UNRWA, 2022).

During COVID-19 school closures, students could access remote learning, but under challenging conditions due to inadequate online education infrastructure, lack of devices and other factors resulting in significant learning losses (UNRWA, 2021; UNWRA, 2022). As such, learning conditions were already challenging before the onset of the most recent war beginning in October 2023, which has had devastating effects on children's ability to study. The current war has so far added an additional eight months of closure during the usual school opening time at the time of writing (August 2024).

Under normal circumstances, without any educational interruptions, students would be expected to have met established competency levels. By considering various scenarios from pessimistic to optimistic, we explore the depth of the losses children and young people are facing in their education trajectories, and forecast potential future outcomes based on when educational activities might resume. This analysis is grounded in three key assumptions. First, we assume that students remained in formal schooling and were promoted to the next grade level during both COVID-19 years. Second, we assume that learning occurred without interruptions in the academic years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023. Finally, the variation in outcomes between the pessimistic (loss of competencies equivalent of two years during COVID-19) and optimistic (loss of competencies equivalent of one year during COVID-19) scenarios is based on anticipated efforts to accelerate learning during and after COVID-19 and students' abilities, which are likely to vary between different students and types of schools.

Our analysis begins by tracing the educational trajectory of students in each grade in the 2019/2020 academic year, marking the onset of educational disruptions due to COVID-19. We project the competencies these students are likely to have acquired compared to their nominal grade level, providing insights into the impact of these disruptions on student learning. It is important to note that these projections are indicative and do not imply that all students have the competencies of the grade level drawn by each scenario. It is more likely that students have acquired some competencies from different grade levels depending on individual abilities and the extent of informal or remote education received. Moreover, these projections do not capture or address the number of students who dropped out of school due to school interruptions.

The first projection below is premised on the assumption that education resumes immediately because of significant efforts by all stakeholders. In this projection, children and young people will have already missed competencies equivalent of two to three years of schooling, during which those in the early grades would be expected to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills. The other two projections assume that children and young people miss an additional year or two of learning as a result of the inability to continue schooling, whether or not there is a permanent ceasefire. This then equates to missing an equivalent of three to four years of learning basic literacy and numeracy skills. All scenarios take account of COVID-19 as well as the direct impact of the school interruption due to the war in Gaza but are conservative as they do not account for the likely devastating impact of the trauma and hunger on children and they assume that children might have received some online learning during COVID-19. Table 1 predicts varying degrees of competencies

depending on when schooling might resume in Gaza.

To further illustrate the devastating impact of the scenarios, for a Grade 12 student registered to complete Tawjihi^{ix} in 2023, their chance of graduating is likely to be delayed between two to three years if no immediate return to schooling with additional support for lost learning is provided. This risks education loss for a generation of children and young people and undermines the achievement of the education Sustainable Development Goal.

Table 1. Effects on learning competencies of school closures

Projected date of resumption of learning	Probable effects on learning competencies	Compounded effects of war on trauma and additional vulnerabilities	With support of mitigation strategies
Classes resume in September 2024	Students would have lost competencies equivalent of 2 to 3 years of schooling. This implies students in the elementary phase would only be able to achieve very basic literacy and numeracy at the most. Similar effects on learning will be evident at the higher level of the education system – Grade 4 onwards.	The three scenarios in the left-hand column are based solely on the number of learning days lost. Several studies have documented the compounding effects of trauma on student learning and cognitive performance. Given the scale and intensity of the current war, we project that trauma and wellbeing effects will result in at least an additional year of additional learning loss.	With the support of online learning, learning spaces in shelters, accelerated and additional learning support, together with psychosocial support, it is likely that the learning loss effect can be mitigated in the three projected scenarios. A systematic review indicated that while a year of school closures led to an equivalent of 1.1 years of lost learning, the reopening of schools halved this deficit to 0.5 years (Dela Cruz et al., 2024).
Classes resume in September 2025	Students would have lost competencies equivalent of 3 to 4 years of schooling. This implies students in the elementary phase would not be able to achieve the minimum basic literacy and numeracy. Similar effects on learning will be evident at the higher level of the education system – Grade 4 onwards.		
Classes resume in September 2026	Students would have lost competencies equivalent of 4 to 5 years of schooling. This implies students would miss a whole cycle of schooling that is the elementary phase for example (Grade 1-4). Similar effects on learning will be evident at the higher level of the education system – Grade 4 onwards.		

Learning data from UNRWA shows that children and young people experienced significant learning losses over the COVID-19 school closure period (UNRWA, 2022). For example, an Assessment of Learning Outcomes (ALO) conducted in Gaza in late 2021 revealed a decline in average Arabic scores compared to equivalent assessment results from 2016 for children in Grade 5, falling by 37.4 percentage points (from 69.1% to 31.7%). The decline in mathematics scores for Grade 5 students was more modest (for example, 10.8 percentage points for statistics), but starting from a lower base: from 39.6% to 28.8%. As such, only a small proportion of children were acquiring these skills. Under the current circumstances, it is not possible to assess children's learning. However, at a minimum, it can be assumed that children will not have recovered any of the lost learning due to COVID-19, and rather it is highly likely to have deteriorated even further, given schools have been closed for an additional year at least, and children are facing significant trauma and hunger.

The extent of learning loss during COVID-19 in Gaza is comparable to World Bank simulations. These estimated that a seven-month school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic could, in the most pessimistic scenario, have increased learning poverty (children who are unable to read a basic text by age 10) by 10 percentage points in low- and middle-income countries, from 53% to 63% (Azevedo, 2020). Utilising this framework, we extrapolate the potential increase in learning poverty in Gaza due to the protracted duration of school closures experienced, compounded by both COVID-19 and the current war. Based on an estimate of 14 months of school closures over the past 5 years in Gaza (6 months during academic years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021, and 8 months during the academic year 2023/2024), this suggests at least a 20-percentage point increase in learning poverty in Gaza, from an already very low base.

Even the most pessimistic scenario of the World Bank does not consider the severe trauma and hunger that children and young people in Gaza are currently experiencing, which will significantly adversely impact their whole physical, cognitive and emotional wellbeing. Several studies have documented the negative impact of trauma and malnutrition on student learning and its association with poor cognitive performance, which could further complicate the recovery process (Adubasim & Ugwu, 2019; Meister, 2019; Frieze, 2015; Milner et al., 2018).

Immediate restoration of education needed in Gaza

These scenarios illustrate the extent to which educational losses can accumulate if the war persists or if educational recovery efforts are postponed. Rapid recovery efforts are crucial to mitigate these effects, as evidenced by experience in other contexts following the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, in Mexico, students recovered approximately 60% of their learning deficits over 21 months post-reopening, though not reaching pre-pandemic levels (Alasino et al., 2024). In India, students regained about two thirds of their learning loss within six months through a government-led remediation programme (Singh et al., 2024). Additionally, a systematic review indicated that while a year of school closures led to an equivalent of 1.1 years of lost learning, the reopening of schools halved this deficit to 0.5 years (Dela Cruz et al., 2024). These studies underscore the argument of this report that if education is resumed as a priority, some of the 2-5 years of learning lost (as in the projections above) could be offset. Nonetheless, there will still be a learning gap that will need to be addressed, and which may add additional years to schooling (at least 2 years conservatively).

In Gaza, the speed of recovery is likely to be more adversely affected by the compounded effects of COVID-19 and war – associated with hunger, trauma, and previous impact of attacks on the schooling system. However, one certainty remains: the longer the delay in resuming educational activities, the more profound the impact on educational losses will be. Additionally, students' trauma further complicates recovery efforts, potentially impeding their ability to re-engage educationally and achieve expected competencies (Adubasim & Ugwu, 2019; Meister, 2019; Frieze, 2015).

Evidence from countries in the region further highlights that delayed recovery efforts will exacerbate the challenges faced by students. In Lebanon, for example, the failure to address educational disruptions amongst the Lebanese and refugee student population has led to a significant accumulation of learning losses across various subjects, resulting in higher drop-out rates and increased educational inequalities (QITABI, 2020; Chahine et al., 2024; Hammoud & Shuayb, 2024). Interrupted schooling not only hinders students' immediate academic progress but also undermines their long-term prospects, trapping them in a cycle of underachievement and limiting their ability to progress educationally. In Gaza, without timely and effective interventions, similar or even more severe repercussions are likely, threatening the future of an entire generation.

In addition, the economic implications of accumulated learning losses are profound and long-lasting. The World Bank estimates that learning losses in Lebanon will result in a 10% reduction in the future earnings of affected students, translating into a substantial economic loss of up to US\$253 million over their lifetimes (World Bank, 2021). Moreover, each additional day of school closures in Lebanon could lead to approximately US\$3 million in future economic losses. The situation in Syria further reveals the socioeconomic risks, with the delays in investment in education leading to increased school dropout, child marriage, and child labour rates, as well as a loss of human capital, increased unemployment, and lower economic growth (UNICEF, 2021a). The study also reveals that each additional year without adequate education can lead to a 10% decrease in private income and contribute to mental and physical health issues, increased violence, and crime (UNICEF, 2021b). However, the extent to which education affects the economy in Gaza compared to Lebanon and Syria could vary due to the long-lasting blockade imposed since 2007, in addition to recurring conflict. But it is clear the immense impact of the current prolonged school closure will have a considerable impact in the long-term income of individuals, families and the entire Palestinian population in Gaza.

These estimates serve as a stark warning where delaying recovery plans could result in similar or worse long-term educational, social, and economic implications for Gaza. Therefore, immediate and sustained investment in education is crucial to prevent further setbacks to children's education that could significantly increase the vulnerabilities and risks they are facing (see Section 5).

Restoring education now

Despite the immense challenges, efforts to continue education have been undertaken in Gaza in some form. Since November 2023, educational spaces have been established and are predominantly informal and centred around recreational activities, with limited psychosocial counselling services available for children. UNRWA and partners initiated learning activities from 1 August, focusing primarily on recreational engagements with

some basic educational components particularly geared towards foundational learning, along with psychosocial support. As one interviewee noted:

"We started learning again on August 1st, for most it is an hour or two a day. We are trying to bring back most of UNRWA kids and other kids into activities. We are trying to get more space."

The spaces are organised into three main groups based on grades, first to third grade, fourth to sixth grade, and seventh to ninth grade. They include all students, not just UNRWA students, and are open to children inside and outside the shelters. These services began in some of the available school shelters, largely in Central Gaza and Khan Younis, but also in other areas of the strip. Due to constraints, and extremely overcrowded shelters, UNRWA and partners have very limited spaces for learning available. The ability to offer learning spaces in shelters is further impacted by regular military attacks, the frequent issuance of evacuation orders leading to displacement and other factors related to the ongoing war. As one participant described;

"You start to find spaces for education, maybe in shelters, closing half a corridor where they do lessons. Families might agree to leave a room during the day just so children can learn or study in the room. These small things were identified."

This programming is not a long-term solution but is a starting point in efforts to mitigate the massive learning loss and to provide some relief and sense of normalcy for students. Volunteers play a vital role in these efforts, with some running mobile libraries to provide children with books and learning materials.

The Education Cluster has worked to support these efforts by mapping out all temporary learning spaces and coordinating with partners to ensure access to education, even in challenging circumstances. Local organisations have also been involved in providing support, for example through feeding programmes for the children. Currently, multigrade learning spaces are providing basic activities to children, clustering the children in three main grade groups. Some of the shelters are offering learning opportunities to over 1,000 children in 1-hour shifts daily.

Our estimates further emphasise the need for a comprehensive assessment that accurately determines the educational levels and competencies of students in Gaza. A comprehensive assessment is crucial for developing specialised learning programmes with personalised learning plans tailored to students' diverse educational needs, enabling them to recover from educational disruptions. Such an assessment would be crucial, especially since some children could have had more access to learning spaces due to supportive family environments or better socioeconomic conditions, potentially exacerbating existing educational inequities. This was similarly observed during COVID-19, where children with supportive family environments received more educational support (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2021).

Furthermore, given the extremely limited learning opportunities that most children have experienced over the past five years, along with the trauma they have faced, significant disparities in academic competencies within the same classroom are highly anticipated, along with a more general need for a differentiated education approach given their trauma.

To effectively address these challenges, it is essential to provide and train teachers and counsellors (see Section 6) and implement targeted support programmes for literacy and numeracy within schools. These new teaching methodologies to address the educational needs of children in Gaza need to be implemented as soon as possible to ensure that comprehensive support.





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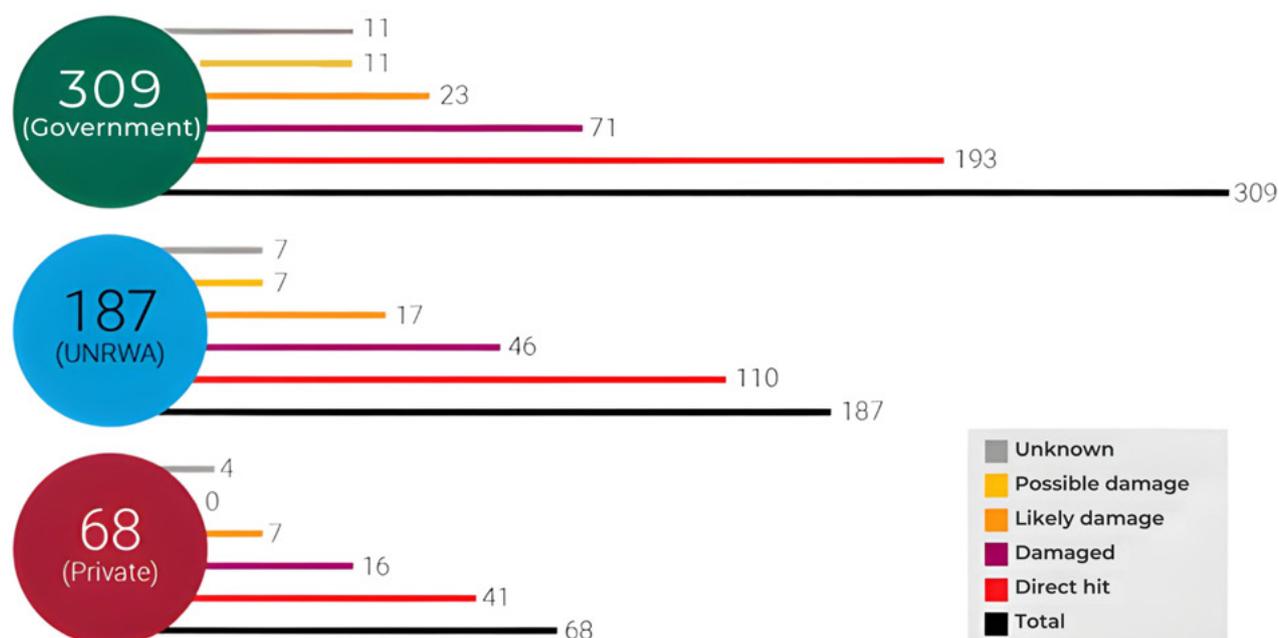
4. Destruction of the physical environment for learning

"We have gone through these [attacks] many times. Each time we lose schools. We try to redirect resources to build or rebuild but we always have a shortage."

Before the current war, Gaza's physical education infrastructure was already under considerable strain. Previous escalations in hostilities have resulted in damage to Gaza's educational infrastructure while reconstruction has been difficult. Due to overcrowding, most UNRWA schools operated double shifts. There were a limited number of schools that provided access and support for learners with disabilities, resulting in high illiteracy rates among people with disabilities (71%), with 43% out of school (Al-Marsad, 2024).

An assessment based on satellite images by the Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster in July 2024 confirms information from the Palestinian Ministry of Education. This found that the educational infrastructure in the Gaza Strip has suffered severe and widespread destruction across all school types, with 92.9% sustaining some level of damage, and 84.6% needing to be fully reconstructed or requiring major rehabilitation to be functional again (Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024b; Figure 2). Such assessments classify the probability of damage to school buildings in Gaza based on the proximity of schools to damage sites identified by UN Satellite Centre, using building footprints. While UNRWA does not have access to all UNRWA installations in Gaza due to the ongoing hostilities and associated movement restrictions, the Agency has been able to verify significant damage and destruction to its schools since 7 October 2023 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Destruction of school buildings since October 2023



Source: Education Cluster, July 2024b.

In the context of large-scale military operations and homes being destroyed, families have had to use school buildings as shelters. UN independent experts have raised the possibility that the outcome of the destruction of Gaza's educational infrastructure, including school buildings, libraries, schools, universities, teachers, and students in Gaza prevents immediate learning opportunities and destroys knowledge for the future, and jeopardise Palestinian identity. There is no such thing as a 'safe space' with school buildings often at best, providing only temporary refuge. As many have observed, no one and nowhere is safe in Gaza^x (Asi et al., 2024). The attacks on these physical spaces have continued to intensify the physical and mental effects on Gazans. From UNRWA engagements on the ground, internally displaced persons (IDPs) have shared their fears of not being safe inside UNRWA schools. As expressed by an IDP sheltering in an UNRWA school:

"From the beginning of the war, we thought this place [UNRWA school] was protected and safe, this is why we came here."

Another IDP sheltering with their family in a UNRWA school noted; *"we came here to a UNRWA installation to be protected and feel safe"*, before describing their experience of not being safe inside the school.

Even after there is a permanent and sustained ceasefire, many residents are likely to continue to seek refuge in school facilities due to the destruction of their homes and other civilian infrastructure (as electricity or water). As such, the return of these buildings to educational use is likely to be further delayed. As interviewees also noted, shelters cannot just be turned back into schools (even for those that have not been destroyed) as the children and teachers would have suffered severe trauma from living in the schools as shelters, including seeing family and friends killed and injured and constant fear of attack, that will be associated with the buildings.

The combination of a considerable increase in children and teachers with disabilities, with a reduction in the number of accessible educational facilities, places even greater pressure on opportunities for these children. A reported 15,394 students and 2,411 teachers have been injured over a ten-month period to August 2024 (OCHA, 2024b). With the continued bombing, including of school facilities where families are currently sheltering, the numbers are expected to rise further, resulting in a huge need for accessible educational facilities and services. These children with disabilities are being denied an opportunity for any form of education currently, as one interviewee expressed:

"The main challenge is the movement of children with disabilities. We provide special transportation; how can we move the children to where we are carrying out the activities. We try not to do it in a shelter or tent since they need an adapted space."

As noted, since 1 August, UNRWA resumed learning opportunities as part of the humanitarian response. During the first weeks, UNRWA managed to mobilise thousands of children with basic recreational, psychosocial and learning opportunities. Despite the efforts, it is necessary to continue promoting more learning spaces in the existing shelters and scale up the learning opportunities as soon as the situation allows. Evidence indicates that access to any learning environment—whether formal, informal, or non-formal—significantly reduces the risk of dropout and enhances learning outcomes for children (Shuayb et al., 2023). To address these challenges, it is imperative to rebuild damaged and destroyed schools and provide diverse learning environments and opportunities. Any learning space and modality is preferable to keeping children out of school. One interviewee explained that:

"We are working with institutions and Palestinian businessmen internally and externally to secure 'Lego' schools. They can be put together in 10 days and last 6-8 years. They cost 130k dollars and host up to 500 [students]."



17 August, 2024 Khan Younis Elementary Co-ed School "A" © 2024 UNRWA



17 August, 2024 Khan Younis Elementary Co-ed School "A" © 2024 UNRWA

5. Increasing children and young people's vulnerabilities, eroding wellbeing

"There is a ton of emptiness and deep sorrow that you can see in children."

The war in Gaza has significantly impacted the physical and mental health of students, with multifaceted consequences extending far beyond loss of learning. This has further exacerbated the vulnerabilities that many children and young people already faced due to the 17-year blockade. The consequences of the current war include, but are not limited to, war-induced disabilities, psychosocial impacts including trauma, stress, anxiety, as well as increased risks of early marriage, and child labour.

Increased trauma and deteriorating wellbeing of children

"This is a full generation of trauma and we would need a full generation to overcome this."

Even before the current war, mental health was strained by the 17-year blockade, recurrent escalation of hostilities, repeat exposure to traumatic events, restricted access to necessary services and opportunities, and a life lived in constant fear and lack of hope (Save the Children, 2022a). Conducting an analysis on the impact of living under protracted crises on children, Save the Children (2022) showed that children in Gaza were experiencing higher levels of emotional distress (on average an increase from 55% to 80% from 2018 to 2022), manifesting in behaviours such as bedwetting (increasing from 53% to 79%) and reactive mutism (increasing from 42% to 59%). UNRWA (2023c) has also reported how more than half of the children in Gaza had already contemplated suicide and three in five were prone to self-harm even before the current war. Moreover, because of the 17-year blockade, perpetual violence, and lack of international support for the existing mental health and psychosocial support,

as well as educational services in Gaza, the various needs of its children were not met (UNICEF, 2023a).

The current war has exacerbated the severe social and mental health repercussions for Gaza's one million children. Students in Gaza are faced not only with the loss of learning and physical learning environments but also with substantial psychological distress, given that all the population in Gaza, including children and youth, have experienced extreme violence and lost friends and family members due to the war. Several studies have examined the negative impact of trauma on students' learning and behaviour and its association with poor cognitive performance (Adubasim & Ugwu, 2019; Meister, 2019; Frieze, 2015). The trauma experienced by these children is expected to drastically affect their learning capabilities and overall mental health, further complicating their educational recovery process. Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children (2024) reported that 73.7% of children were experiencing difficulties in expressing their feelings, with 96.7% of children with disabilities reporting that they suffer from continuous crying and panic attacks.

One interviewee in our study noted how:

"There is a really, really significant impact on children. Many already had PTSD, many of the children have seen deaths in their families, and now we can assume every child in Gaza is affected by different types of mental health and psychological distress because of the constant bombardment, forced displacement, etc."

Though local and international organisations are attempting to provide psychosocial support and recreational activities, these are hampered by the lack of safe spaces and continuous instability related to evacuations and frequent displacements. With continued hostilities and children's heightened vulnerability to fear and trauma, the ongoing war is likely to severely disrupt the lives of young people (World Bank, 2024b). Any educational interventions now need to consider the prolonged period of profound stress and its impact on children's psychosocial wellbeing. The skills children may have employed in the past are no longer practical options for them. Thus, play-based learning and mental health and psychosocial support need to be used to build resilience in children.

The deteriorating healthcare system and lack of hygiene supplies is having a severe impact on children's wellbeing and development. One interviewee noted that diseases have spread as *"in all of Gaza, there is no soap, shampoo or other hygiene products"*, nor is there continued access to water and sanitation. Similarly, many interviewees noted how the war has resulted in the spread of infectious diseases such as hepatitis A, skin diseases such as scabies and chickenpox, as well as an increase in other diseases such as diarrhoea. The potential threat to the lives of children posed by the spread of diseases is now at par with the direct threats to their lives by the war (UNICEF, 2024). Interviewees noted that:

"this (the spread of diseases) will have a severe impact on children's mental health and academic achievements in the long term."

Though local and international organisations are striving to provide support, there are also huge restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities on what items are allowed into Gaza, having significant implications for those suffering from chronic diseases (such as cancer). Access to medication and appropriate diets (celiac for example) is also entirely

restricted. From January to 9 August 2024, around 237,000 children were screened for acute malnutrition. 14,692 were admitted for treatment due to malnutrition, including 1.3% with severe acute malnutrition and 4.8% with moderate acute malnutrition. The situation is particularly extreme in the Northern Gaza Strip, where humanitarian assistance has been cut-off frequently. Further 95% of households are limiting meals and portion sizes, with 64 per cent of households eating only one meal a day (WHO, 2024).

Alarming rises were recorded for several infectious diseases. Non bloody diarrhoea in children under five years old surged by 33 times, and for those aged five years and older it increased by 98 times compared to the figures in 2022. There has been a significant increase in bloody diarrhoea by 22 times, pediculosis by 8 times, and impetigo by four times compared to the same month of 2022. Alarmingly, for the first time in 25 years, polio has resurfaced as a disease in Gaza (WHO, 2024).

Exacerbating marginalisation due to disability

Educational accessibility and provision have been significant issues for children with disabilities. Before the current war, approximately 13% of children aged 5 to 17 experienced at least one functional disability in Occupied Palestinian Territory (UNICEF, 2022), yet only 25% of individuals with disabilities reported that school buildings are adapted to meet their needs. Moreover, there was a lack of accessible public transportation, as noted by Al-Marsad (2017), with 76.4% of persons with disabilities unable to use public transport to commute to school. This lack of accessibility contributed to a high illiteracy rate among persons with disabilities, with 71% being illiterate and 43% of children with disabilities aged 3-17 not enrolled in school (Al-Marsad, 2024).

Challenges faced by children and young people with disabilities have worsened, due to inaccessible shelters, loss of assistive devices and lack of access to essential services (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Since the current war, early estimates report that over 10 children per day, on average, have lost either one or both of their legs.^{xi} However, the full extent of newly-acquired physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities among children remains unknown, considering how severely the health system has been impacted and the extent of ongoing displacement, making it extremely difficult to identify and support those affected.

The situation for children with disabilities has also worsened due to severe restrictions by the Israeli authorities affecting goods and essential supplies permitted to enter Gaza. Many interviewees noted how assistive devices to support children with disabilities have either been lost or damaged during Israeli military strikes, repetitive evacuation orders, or the situation in the shelters. At the time of writing, assistive devices are prevented from entering Gaza and are entirely unavailable in the market and are not allowed in through the borders. This has a debilitating impact on the lives of children with disabilities and will further isolate them from society.

Many more children are expected to develop life-long disabilities with the continuation of the current war. Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children (2024) is one of the only existing organisations focusing on children with disabilities in Gaza since the onset of the current war. It estimates that around 12% of children in Gaza are expected to experience stuttering and other communication-related issues such as chosen silence. Without targeted

support, students with disabilities will fall further behind academically, experience heightened emotional and psychological distress and barriers to societal integration. As an interviewee noted for children with physical disabilities:

"We need to focus on the most vulnerable and have support for innovative solutions for these thousands of new amputee children."

Distinct effects on girls and boys

Of particular concern is the direct and indirect impact of the current war on girls. Over 690,000 menstruating women and adolescent girls in Gaza are facing severe lack of supplies for menstrual hygiene and water, worsening their hygiene and health. This is due to inadequate supplies being allowed into Gaza and the frequent denial of humanitarian aid (UN Women, 2024a). One report notes that 95.3% of girls identified that they cannot use the toilets safely during displacement (Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children, 2024). Global evidence similarly highlights how poor menstrual health and access to hygiene facilities serves as a barrier for girls' education and wellbeing during conflicts – further marginalising them and restricting their access to quality education (UNESCO, 2014). This is compounded by girls facing limited privacy and security in the shelters due to inadequate space and protection mechanisms (UN Women, 2024b) as result of the current war. One interviewee noted how: *"the gendered impacts on girls are enormous with number of suicidal attempts increasing, especially for young females"*.

The disruption due to the war could also put girls at higher risk of early marriage. Global evidence on the adverse effects of war on women highlighted how the rate of early marriage often tends to increase in such regions as a mechanism to ensure girls' physical and financial security (Singh et al., 2022; Save the Children, 2022b). One interviewee noted:

"The rate of early marriage among girls has increased due to losing their homes and families. Later, they lost their husbands and became pregnant teenagers who suffer from various vulnerabilities."

Boys are also considered vulnerable in ways likely to affect their education. Many boys and young men have had to take on roles to support their families during this current war, including working to provide their families with their basic needs. This is likely to serve as a barrier to their return to school as many stay out of school to try to help their families. As one interviewee noted:

"They [boys and young men] are working or engaging in activities they shouldn't be. Education is far from their minds. If I go out early in the morning [...], you see a lot of young boys, in particular, moving water, food [...] trying to help their families survive... We are going to miss out on a lot of young boys and young men getting back into school for some time as they try to make sure they're helping their family meet their basic needs every day."

In times of conflict, rates of boys turning to hazardous work, such as selling fuel, to support themselves and their families increase exponentially. Many boys engage in activities such as collecting waste to sell as scrap metal, leaving themselves more exposed to landmines and other unexploded devices (Save the Children, 2022b).

Heightened risks for children and young people

There are a variety of ways in which children and young people are facing heightened risks in the context of the current war, such as child labour and exposure to safety hazards. These risks are aggravated for those who have lost family members and/or have been separated from their families.

There has been a steady increase in the number of children and young people who have lost family members due to the escalations prior to the current war. As reported by the Palestinian Orphans Home (2023), the number of orphans^{xiii} had already surpassed 26,000 by the year 2023. Since the onset of the current war, the loss of one or both parents has left numerous children without their immediate family for support. One interviewee stated that the problem facing many of Gaza's children today is that they do not know where their parents are, whether they have been killed or are under rubble, or displaced to another location. In the context of severe communication difficulties and frequent displacement, with very short evacuation orders, there is limited information on the numbers of children and young people who are orphaned or separated from their families. In April 2024, it was estimated that 19,000 children had been left orphaned since October 2023 (UN Women, 2024a). In addition, UNICEF estimates there are a total of 17,000 children in Gaza who have been separated from their families and are currently unaccompanied by caregivers, with an additional 20,000 children unaccounted for (UNICEF, 2024). An interviewee relayed how:

"We know the case of one family where the father had to travel outside of Gaza for his child's medical treatment while the other children had to be left inside unaccompanied."

A survey conducted by the International Rescue Committee in April 2024 found that 41% of families in Gaza have been caring for children who were not their own since October 2023. This is a rate more than eight times higher than typical emergency estimates of between 3-5% in other contexts (International Rescue Committee, 2024) and is likely to have risen even further. Though children with family networks might be taken care of by extended family, those without extended family networks might be left alone – with older siblings often undertaking adult responsibilities well beyond their age, such as caring for younger siblings and looking for essential resources and services. As an interviewee expressed:

"In Palestinian culture, the family-based care network is strong hence those with extended family still have some support while children without a family network face increasing protection risks and risks of injury alone."

Global evidence on unaccompanied children in other contexts has shown how these children are more vulnerable to threats such as child labour, and risks of abuse and neglect, as well as risks of child marriage as mentioned above (UNICEF, 2021c). Even before the current war, evidence of child labour in Gaza existed due to the economic strain on families, especially as a way of survival for families where parents were killed. Around 6.6% of children were involved in child labour, with higher rates in some regions, such as North Gaza, reaching 11.7% (UNICEF, 2021c). The current war has intensified these economic pressures on families forcing many families to rely on child labour to survive in the context of the severe blockade.

Many children who have lost family members or are unaccompanied due to being

separated during displacement are forced to support themselves and their siblings. As one interviewee said:

"We have been hearing that students/our children are trying to take action that would help them survive, such as selling water and goods and food. We are seeing labour at a lower age than we used to see before, such as four years old".

Reports indicate that children have been forced to undertake activities to survive, such as begging, selling goods, collecting paper and wood, and standing in queues for accessing water and food (UNICEF, 2024). Children who are unaccompanied are also exposed to safety hazards due to being alone considering the prevalence of unexploded devices in different areas of Gaza.

Effects on aspirations and feelings of neglect

Children's dreams and aspirations, closely tied to education, are particularly impacted by the current war. Interviewees noted how some children are simply focusing on surviving and have curtailed all their hopes and dreams for their future. As one interviewee noted:

"Many of our students have restricted their dreams, they say our dream is... to live for another day."

In addition, multiple interviewees noted how an important aspect of their aspirations for the future is associated with the Tawjihi examination^{xiii} which might be considered *"an entry into adulthood"*. In the past few months, as Tawjihi came closer, young people were reported to be experiencing anxiety, extreme stress and depression. One interviewee relayed:

"There was a student crying constantly especially after Tawjihi scores come out in West Bank and Jordan. She was sad about losing her opportunity when she was expecting to be one of the highest scores in Palestine and stressed how her sense of self was being eroded."

Additionally, for children, the loss of their homes, schools, playgrounds, toys, and friends represents the erosion of a protective social fabric and belonging in the community. As an interviewee expressed: *"children's role models are gone, their teachers, coaches, singers, etc. all killed"*. This will have a profound impact on their social identity and sense of belonging as well as behaviour towards the community. Multiple interviewees reported an increase in aggression, particularly among boys, especially due to insufficient supplies and lack of humanitarian assistance, bullying, lack of guidance/principles taught in schools and most importantly, neglect. This is also perpetuated by the fact that many parents and caregivers are finding it difficult to cope with the situation, compounding the stress experienced by the children.

Children are struggling to deal with the demeaning conditions, which is negatively affecting their ability to learn. One interviewee noted how:

"Children are reluctant to attend informal learning sessions since the war has meant that they do not have clothes, shoes or water and soap to wash their faces which makes them feel inadequate."

They are lacking these necessities both due to frequent displacement resulting in them having to leave belongings behind, as well as lack of availability or increased prices in the market. This affects their wellbeing in general, as well as their education. As one interviewee stated:

"The rashes and skin conditions and lice affect dignity. It also affects love for life, the children wonder: what kind of life am I living?"

The children of Gaza are voicing feelings of abandonment by the international community. Interviewees often noted how children increasingly question the values around human rights, diversity and equality purported by the international community and the United Nations. As one interviewee noted:

"... we [international agencies] invest many of our resources in teaching children human rights, conflict resolution, and tolerance. Students are asking our teachers everywhere about the reality of those human rights. [They feel that] they are killed just for being Gazans."

The interviewees voiced their concerns over asking children to have faith in these values considering the continuation of the war, yet they also emphasised that despite the questioning, children still hope and wait for support from the international community and an end to their suffering.

Children and young people, along with all the Gazan population, have been brutalised, lost their homes and valued possessions, and have seen the destruction of support networks. Anger and resentment are justifiable emotional responses. Some interviewees noted that education could be important for supporting children and young people in processing the physical and psychological destruction. It is also vital for rebuilding the bonds of social cohesion of families and communities. It is also crucial for a sense of stability even during the current devastating situation. Its potential to achieve this is needed now and in the future.



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6. Teachers, counsellors, and teaching on the frontline

“We need to care for the wellbeing of the teachers themselves. We can’t expect teachers to provide educational services when they don’t have hygiene kits and food and shelter themselves.”

The ongoing war in Gaza since October 2023 has impacted teachers and other education personnel. This includes the loss of teachers and other education personnel; physical and wellbeing effects on teachers as they continue to work while traumatised; and teacher capacity and need to support the learning of traumatised children and youth.

Before October 2023, there were a total of 22,564 teachers in Gaza (Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024a). This included 9,349 UNRWA teachers, comprised of 5,983 female teachers and 3,366 male teachers (UNRWA, 2023), as well as 800 school counsellors. There was a total of approximately 17,582 staff in the public education system, which included 11,937 teachers (Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024c). On 7 October, as teachers across both systems were approximately a month into their semesters, all teaching activities stopped.

Before October 2023, Gaza had already been experiencing 17 years of blockade and escalations. This strain on the education system added stress on teachers as they worked double shifts to handle overcrowding in classrooms (Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024a). Additionally, there was already a shortage of teachers across the education system in Gaza. This includes a shortage of 956 teachers and administrative staff in Gaza’s public schools. Only 6,247 of the 11,937 teachers in the public system received their monthly salaries regularly before October 2023, which negatively influenced educational programming (Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024c).

Multiple effects of the ongoing war on teachers and counsellors

“Counsellors are counsellors but also victims at the same time. Some of our colleagues have been [killed] and lost all their families.”

Death, displacement and maiming

“Lots of [the teachers] travelled [due to displacement] and lots were killed. This has negative effects on the educational activities.”

The immense loss of life in Gaza has directly impacted teachers and counsellors. As of August 2024, 411 teachers have been killed in Gaza (OCHA, 2024b). This is likely to be an underestimate given teachers have been displaced multiple times, along with the rest of the population of Gaza, so keeping track accurately is extremely challenging. The current war in Gaza has also led to the largest loss of life for staff in the history of the United Nations. As of 12 September 2024, 220 UNRWA staff (including teachers) have been killed in Gaza since the beginning of the current war in October (UNRWA, 2024b). Over 200 NGO staff have been killed in the span of 7 months – a number higher than the number of NGO staff killed globally in any year during the past two decades (Dawkins & Spagat, 2024). The number of injured teachers is similarly difficult to assess due to displacement and difficulties in communication but is estimated to be at least 2,411 by August 2024 (OCHA, 2024b).

The physical health of teachers is also suffering in the same ways as the general adult population, with limited access to medical services and medications and the spread of diseases. Approximately 60% of medications needed are not available in Gaza, according to an interviewee. Teachers and counsellors face an additional vulnerability in their exposure to children, as they become at risk of infection themselves and then carry the burden of worrying about spreading infection. Respondents noted that the scale of the ongoing war in Gaza is more than likely to cause greater disability and more adverse mental wellbeing effects. The exact numbers are not available due to issues of communication and lack of internet access.

An interviewee shared that there is not a single teacher who has not lost a part of their family. Family ties are suffering in other ways as well, as staff are sometimes separated from their families, and so they reside in different parts of Gaza and are not able to easily communicate with their families. Teachers who are parents are also experiencing the same concerns that other parents are experiencing in terms of their children's futures. The additional challenge is that teachers and school counsellors are supporting and guiding children while suffering their own losses and their own trauma.

As of July 2024, up to 1.9 million people, of a total of 2.2 million, in Gaza were internally displaced (UNRWA, 2024a). This number is expected to have increased since then due to the increasing attacks and military operations since July, with many people being displaced at least nine times, according to interviewees. This displacement has made it difficult to identify where teachers are. The displacement of most staff from the north to the south also made planning for services in the north particularly difficult. Repeated displacements have also taken a mental and emotional toll on teachers, as with the population more

generally. Although exact numbers are not available, some teachers have left Gaza, and the number of teachers leaving Gaza is expected to increase if the borders open. This will affect the number of teachers available in the system once schools re-open.

Wellbeing of teachers and counsellors

"I don't know anyone in Gaza, regardless of teacher or student, who was not severely affected at the personal level and family level and financially and psychosocially and on a health level."

School closures, displacements, and attacks on educational institutions have also had an impact on the morale of teachers because they have lost an aspect of their professional identity. One interviewee shared:

"There is no profession now as we knew it before the war. People have been in different [non-teaching] roles [such as] as shelter managers ... or they are just sitting there doing nothing."

Further, previous escalations coupled with the 17 years of blockade had influenced the psychosocial wellbeing of teachers before October 2023 (Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024c), but the traumatic impacts of this current war in Gaza are unprecedented and immense. Experiencing multiple displacements and living in overcrowded areas, with limited bathrooms and showers, a lack of privacy, and spreading diseases, additionally harms the psychosocial wellbeing of teachers (Shelter Cluster Palestine & Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024). Schools have become shelters, which has changed the way teachers and students look at their schools. Teachers sheltering inside schools live in fear of death or injury with increased attacks on schools. This has implications for the rebuilding of educational spaces, as teachers, students, and caregivers alike will have trauma associated with schools they sheltered and were attacked in.

"I naturally feel a loss of motivation and passion, and I am unable to cope with the pressures, stress, and constant anxiety about my family and the children I work with."

Teachers and counsellors struggle in the current war in Gaza, as their jobs involve listening to students', teachers', and other people's concerns, and they develop secondary trauma while experiencing the losses of their own colleagues, families, and homes. Counsellors try to support each other, but they themselves need support so that they can continue to support their communities.

Teachers are disillusioned and disappointed in the lack of action and support internationally:

"We talk about the right to live and the right to education. All these values or concepts have been shaken by the severe and brutal attacks they have seen. Just finding the right words to support teachers becomes a challenge for anybody external to them."

The reality of frontline educators' commitment and work in a war zone is that they have to deal with the effect of the ongoing war in Gaza as they support learning:

“Ceasefire is the key for success for any activity in Gaza and mainly education... The children have seen that the international community will sit idly by as they’re killed for being Gazan or Palestinian for nearly a year, and this has left them with questions about the values that schools hope to instil around humanitarian principles that teachers will have to navigate.”

Educator work as existence and transformation

“Some teachers are dealing with the informal learning and others are managing operations in shelters and for IDPs outside the shelters.”

For many teachers and counsellors, their sense of social responsibility has driven them toward continuing to provide services throughout this war, despite experiencing the same trauma and challenges of the war as the rest of the population of Gaza. This commitment continues while living in intolerable conditions and having witnessed close family, colleagues, and friends being killed. Their dedication underscores teachers' and counsellors' resilience and efforts at keeping education hope alive and working towards transformation. Together with counsellors, teachers have been playing other key child protection roles as well. An interviewee recounted how *“female teachers ... were able to identify unaccompanied children to care for in a way that social workers could not.”* This was a result of caregivers not sharing information with social workers because of fear of the children being taken away from them.

“Some dove into their commitment to their community to try to find a way out of this situation. So, they are involved in different initiatives to support the community.”

Almost from the very beginning, of the current war in Gaza, UNRWA school counsellors and counsellor assistants were mobilised, among other UNRWA staff, including teachers, to provide psychosocial support in shelters. UNRWA enabled counsellors and counsellor assistants to support their own communities in the shelters where they were also sheltering. Most of the shelter managers are also school principals or deputy principals, a testament to how education staff contributed to the humanitarian response in different roles and areas.

Teachers and counsellors have been leading the learning programme offered by UNRWA, as described in Section 3. Teachers and counsellors in these programmes have been offering recreational activities, focused on games and drawing, including some basic learning activities. Teachers and counsellors collaborate with families and communities to utilise any possible space on the shelters for learning purposes notwithstanding the continued dislocations and dangers associated with the war.

No less important is the protection function that education provides during times of conflict, helping to reduce children's vulnerabilities. This is a no less compelling argument for why opportunities for education and learning must be prioritised as part of the frontline humanitarian response in Gaza. Existing learning programmes in Gaza allow teachers and counsellors to identify vulnerabilities and needs of children and young people. Furthermore, interviewees shared that the provision of informal learning activities and focusing on literacy and numeracy skills keeps children off the streets, which protects them from major protection risks, including exploitation. Education has long been

recognised as an important tool for child protection. Action for the Rights of Children (ARC) – an initiative by Save the Children, UNHCR, UNICEF, and OHCHR for rights-based training – states, “Education is often seen as a vital source of personal and emotional support to children affected by their experiences of war and displacement, apart from its primary sense of informing” (ARC, 2000). Teachers and counsellors recognise that these efforts are important but are limited given the scale of the need. One interviewee shared the following:

“Linking education and protection is critical for the recovery of children in Gaza.”

Along with teachers, counsellors have been frontline workers, providing a vital service and support even while schools have been closed:

“Their contribution is phenomenal as they try to reach out to students and talk to the community and to mothers and calm them. They lead sessions with the [minimal] resources they can find and do so creatively. They try to inject hope and bring a little joy into children’s lives ... whenever any materials get into Gaza, they are a good ... because of how counsellors will use them.”

The motivation for continuing work during a war is driven by a strong sense of social responsibility. While continuing with this work for teachers and counsellors is hugely challenging under the circumstances, it provides them with some relief and “a temporary escape from the horrors of the war,” as one interviewee stated.

Barriers to professional work

“The teachers themselves are the people who need the most support and assistance.”

“Since October 7, all educational materials and stationery have been rejected by the Israelis. We need to lift restrictions on needed materials and required stationery as soon as possible.”

UNRWA teachers, who are being paid, have faced difficulties in accessing their salaries due to several challenges, including bank closures, fees, and the lack of supply of currency. One interviewee shared:

“I am currently paying huge sums of money for the rent of the place I am displaced to, in addition to my inability to receive the monthly salary.”

Like the rest of the population, even this pay is not enough to sustain their lives and to support their families and dependents as prices have increased in Gaza. In the current war in Gaza, educational materials are not entering Gaza, making it difficult for supporting teaching and learning. Teachers are therefore required to innovate how to teach without adequate resources or support.

The work of teachers and counsellors in the current context is described by some respondents as an education ‘Band-Aid’ and life support. The Education Cluster’s Flash Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory states “Under the risk of bombs, children

are unable to learn, and teachers are unable to teach" (Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024a).

Interviewees raised their concern that the inability to secure education resources that support meaningful teaching and learning in the context of the ongoing war undermines the basic right to education and may result in the erasure of memory, identity, and belonging. It also denies children in Gaza the protection that opportunities for education provide in conflict settings.

Meeting teacher and education personnel needs

"All the [education] staff are working, but they are all tired. Enough is enough."

Enabling and empowering teachers and counsellors and providing them with psychosocial support

"We need to care for the wellbeing of the teachers themselves. We can't expect teachers to provide educational services when they don't have hygiene kits and food and shelter themselves."

Sommers (2002) states: "More than during peacetime, education during and soon after emergencies centers on teachers." Sharifan and Kennedy (2019) state that teacher training in crisis situations is necessary to increase teachers' resilience and promote a sense of purpose and belonging. Sommers (2002) notes that teachers who are present and able to respond can allow for children's education to continue in contexts where materials, supplies, buildings, and curricula are not available.

Across the interviews, it was recognised that there will be a dire need for capacity-building efforts to prepare teachers and counsellors to work in the current ongoing war context as well as what will inevitably be a very difficult post-war situation if and when a permanent ceasefire is agreed. This includes training which empowers teachers, in collaboration with counsellors and social protection staff, in supporting children facing trauma, addressing disability and inclusion in the classroom, providing referral pathways for child protection cases, identifying mental health and psychosocial support cases, and providing psychological first aid (Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, 2024c). The need for training and capacity building is captured in the following quote from an interviewee:

"Capacity building is needed to address needs related to emerging disability. Teachers are not regularly trained to address traumatised students."

Specifically, teacher training should incorporate mental health and psychosocial support activities into teaching as well as focus on work with children who have experienced prolonged, acute trauma, many of whom now have various disabilities, including amputated limbs. This approach also requires *"ensuring that teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify protection risks and refer them [children]"*, as described by an interviewee.

Teachers will need support with online teaching and learning, should this become necessary. However, online modalities of education are not effective particularly in a context where there is no or limited electricity and internet access as well as for addressing trauma. A remote approach is being used by the Palestinian Authority in 2024 for students outside of Gaza to learn online, and to take their national Tawjihi exams:

"...[Wherever] a student from Gaza flees, to Egypt, Russia, Philippines, we have opened our online West Bank system to host online students to finish their previous year. We have about 20,000 students going through the system. We did the Tawjihi for 1,400 students... There was a Cabinet Resolution to allow students in Gaza to not have to sit for all 8 exams at once."

All discussions of a return to education must include support for teachers and counsellors and prioritise their mental health. Interviewees shared that *"teachers themselves are the people who need support and assistance."* This includes substantial long-term psychosocial and other support.

Increasing numbers of, and allocating teachers and counsellors

"We need additional staff. Additional counsellors to effectively function while we restore work. We need more teachers... We need exceptional numbers to catch up and respond to needs."

There will be a need to accommodate a larger cohort of students than in previous years, given the amount of time lost out of school. If students who were supposed to complete the first grade this year were unable to, they will have to enter the first grade next year with the new cohort of first-grade students, putting strain on the system. Those who were unable to complete the Tawjihi will also need to be accommodated.

Additionally, the war in Gaza has impacted some areas more than others. Interviewees spoke about the context of north Gaza where there are no teachers, even though there are potential learning spaces:

"Until the war ends, we will not be able to teach in this area."

In this context, UNRWA and partners would need to find alternative creative solutions to providing education, including hiring new teachers or identifying community-based solutions.

The dispersal of teachers across the Gaza Strip would, once a permanent ceasefire is secured, require attention to how to distribute teachers across all areas of Gaza and where they are needed. Potential movement restrictions inside Gaza will bring additional challenges and limitations to education services.

Holistic teaching and education to respond to the war effects

Many key stakeholders interviewed for this report emphasised the need for a change in curriculum and educational practice in Gaza. One interviewee shared that, *"linking education and protection is critical for the recovery of children in Gaza."* Interviewees

shared that a holistic approach to education is needed, incorporating mental health, nutrition, and other needs:

"I wish that the education sector will consider the mental health situation of the children in Gaza and their capacity to learn [...] in the long term. All will need to consider the long period of profound stress and its impact on the children's brains. Children need to build resilience. The schedule will need more sports or interactive activities."

Providing teaching and learning materials and resources as part of the immediate humanitarian and longer-term development aid response is crucial. Teaching and learning materials and resources should be sensitive to the traumatic experiences of the learners. For instance, given the levels of hunger, high prices, and unavailability of produce on the Gazan market at present, using food examples to teach numeracy, such as "Mohammad buys 3 tomatoes", could trigger trauma in contexts of food insecurity. It is key that Palestinian teachers are involved in conversations around these materials and resources to ensure their sensitivity to learner needs and teacher capacity. The following quote captures the difficulties in supplying the needed materials and resources for teaching and learning:

"UNRWA said that it is going to work on self-learning cards, which need printing to reach the maximum number of children. This is a big challenge for UNRWA. Even if someone wants to support printing, there are no printers in Gaza."

This section highlights teachers' and counsellors' experiences and needs during the current war in Gaza. First, it speaks to the ongoing commitment and dedication of all teachers and counsellors to education notwithstanding the deprivation, killing, and hardships they endure. Second, the steadfastness of teachers and counsellors as professionals speaks against the erasure of identity and displacement. Third, restrictions on the delivery of teaching and learning material in Gaza impede teachers' ability to effectively teach. There have been several instances of complete destruction and severe damage of schools in Gaza (see Section 4). Finally, this section highlights the immense suffering teachers and counsellors have endured physically and mentally. The killings, the displacement, the de-professionalisation, and the daily realities of life under war have taken a tremendous toll on the ability of teachers and counsellors to engage meaningfully in education now and will adversely affect reconstruction efforts.



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7. Insufficient international financing for education

"Education is the first to be impacted and the last to be restored."

This is not "business as usual"

The main priorities identified in the Flash Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory 2024 (OCHA 2024a) include ensuring there are protective spaces for all school-aged children in Gaza, mental health services and psychosocial support and targeted support for children with disabilities (see Figure 3). These are consistent with the needs found in global reports on Gaza and voices from the ground from our interviews, as highlighted throughout this report. The constantly changing situation in the context of mass and multiple displacement of the population within Gaza, and bombing and destruction of schools and other infrastructure (as detailed in other parts of this report), has meant an initial needs assessment appropriately reflecting immediate and ongoing priorities has been extremely challenging since October 2023, suggesting the requests probably fail to represent the true scale of need. A comprehensive and structural needs assessment of education facilities would only be possible to carry out once conditions allow.

Figure 3: The needs reflected in the education sector appeal for Gaza reflect there is no “business as usual”



Main activities needed

Providing children, youth, caregivers and teachers with:

- recreational activities
- emergency learning kits
- mental health and psychosocial support

Conduct awareness sessions on risks associated with damaged buildings.

Establish temporary learning spaces in/around IDP shelters equipped with WASH facilities.

Source: Adapted from information from OCHA (2024a).

Funding requests have increased exponentially, but education has not kept pace

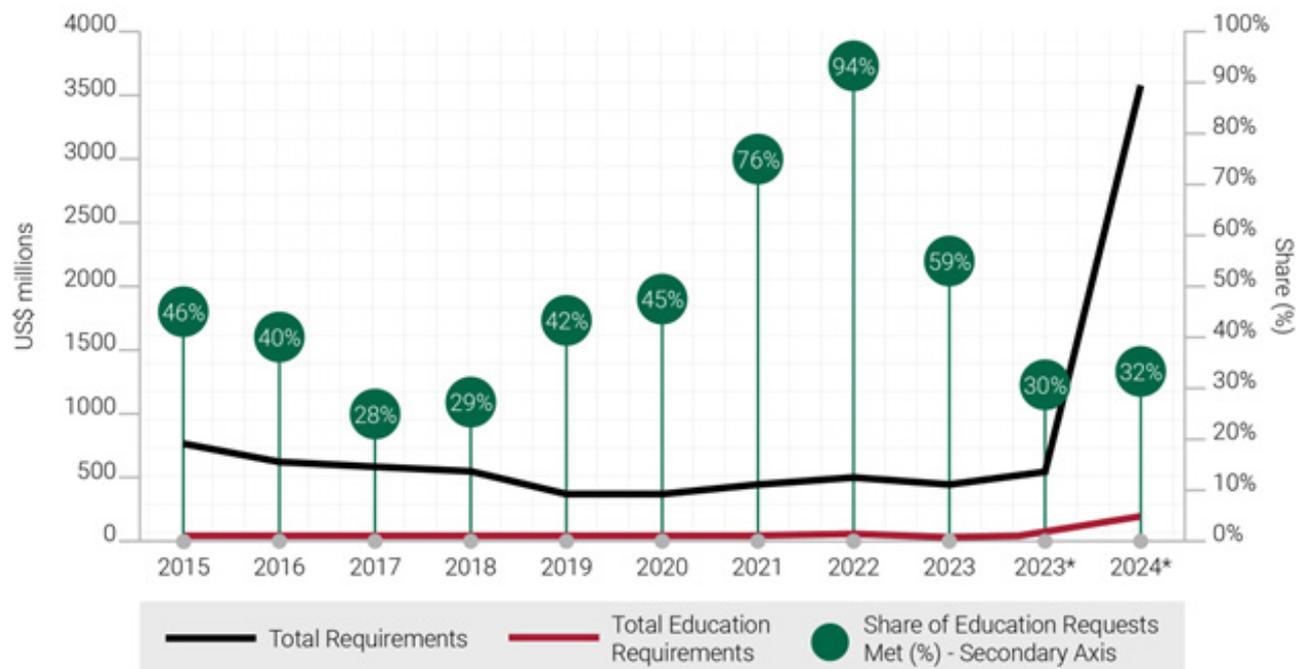
The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has launched a humanitarian appeal to support the Occupied Palestinian Territory every year since 2003. While education has always featured as part of the response plan, it has represented an extremely small amount of the total funds requested.

In the current phase of the war in Gaza, the US\$3.42 billion flash appeal^{xiv} launched to support Palestinians is completely unprecedented in comparison to previous years (Figure 4). Prior to October 2023, education typically made up around 7% of total requests. The scale of the funding requests overall has increased exponentially by nine times between 2023 and 2024. However, education’s share has not kept pace, falling from around 7% to 5%. Food, health and shelter represent half of the appeal, amounting to around half of the total requested. While the needs of these sectors are understandably extremely high, the very limited attention to education is a cause for concern.^{xv}

Implementing agencies on the ground in Gaza interviewed for this report revealed that the education sector has faced difficulties in articulating its needs in financial terms. This is in part because the ongoing attacks and displacement make it impossible to do an accurate assessment of need. Interviewees also noted that there was some caution in putting in a request for a higher amount of funding, as education has not to date been included in the “lifesaving” plans by humanitarian actors, and so there are fears that larger amounts would be ignored. At most, therefore, the US\$0.18 billion being requested is likely to be a

floor rather than the ceiling of the financial resources needed.

Figure 4: Current humanitarian needs in Occupied Palestinian Territory are unprecedented in terms of funding needs



Source: Financial Tracking System (2024). Accessed August 2024.

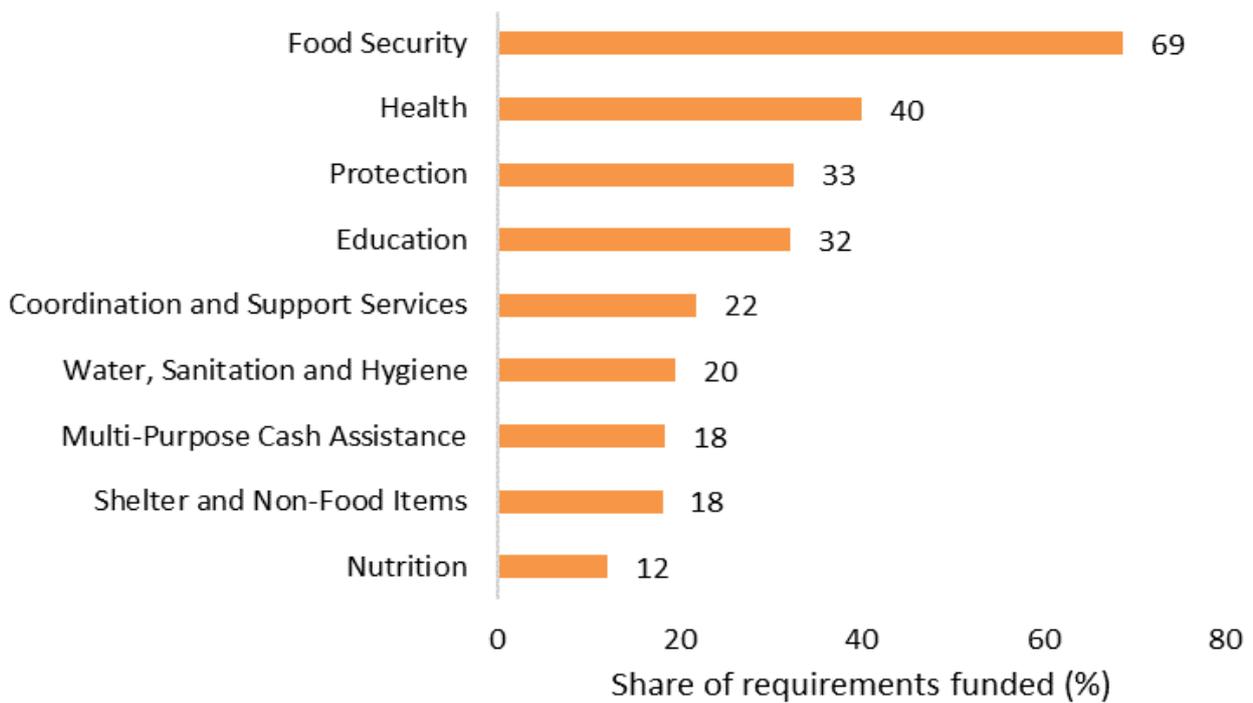
A drop in the share of funding to UNRWA compared to past appeals

Given that UNRWA is the largest service provider of education and health services alongside the government, it has typically been the largest recipient of funds pledged by donors to the humanitarian response to address needs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In 2023, for example, before the onset of the current war, UNRWA received 55% of all funds pledged to the education sector needs contained within the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan. The share of funds for education in response to the 2024 Flash Appeal fell to 42%.

Education funding suffers from a double disadvantage

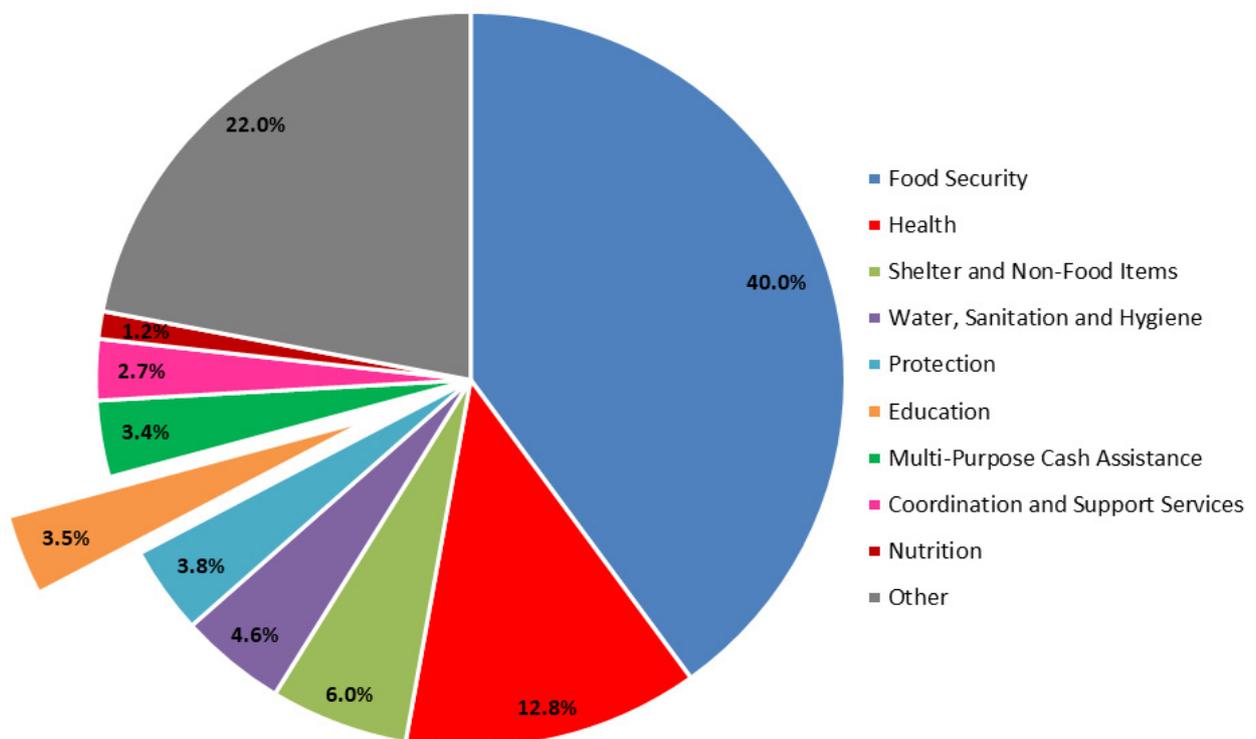
Education funding suffers from a double disadvantage of an extremely small share of requests, and an even smaller share that gets funded. As of August 2024, less than half of the amount requested for the Flash Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory has been funded (US\$1.6 billion of the US\$3.42 billion). However, there are large differences between sectors. While more than two thirds (69%) of the larger amounts requested for food security has been funded, the equivalent for education is just one third (32%) (Figure 5). The lower proportion of the education sector requirements being funded means it has received just 3.5% of the total funds provided for the 2024 Flash Appeal (Figure 6). Education, simply put, is not seen as lifesaving in the humanitarian response.

Figure 5: Only one third of education sector requests met



Source: Financial Tracking System (2024). Accessed August 2024.

Figure 6: The education sector currently only receives 3.5% of funding from the Flash Appeal



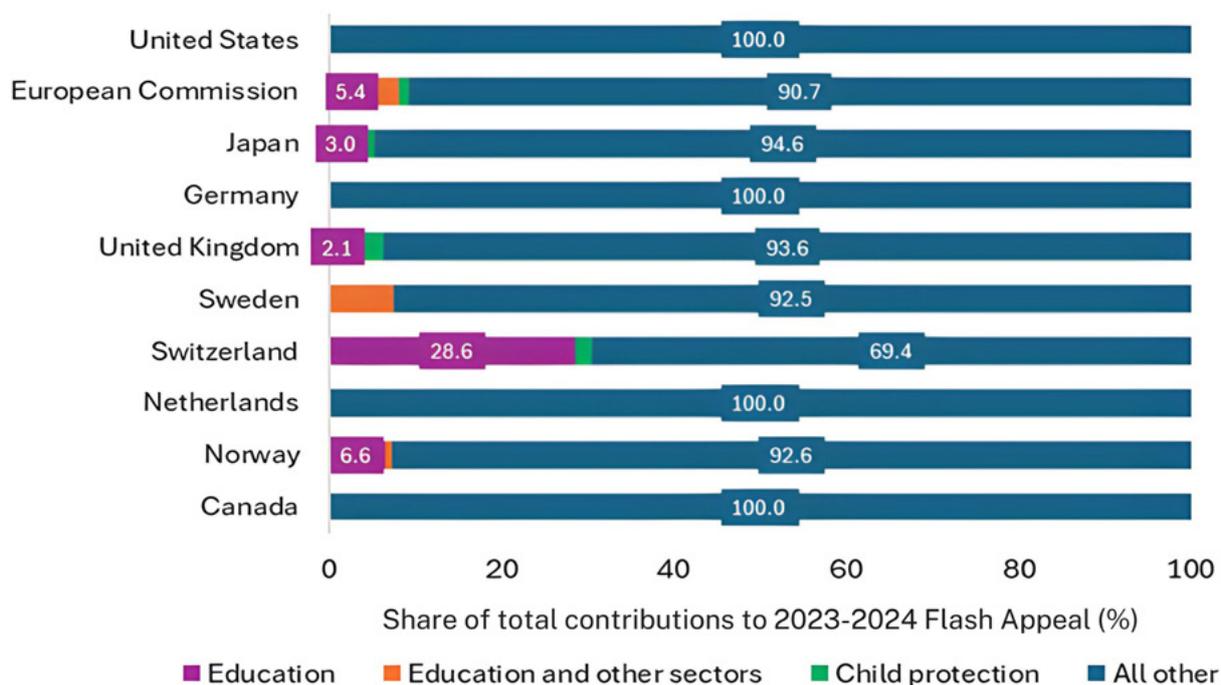
Source: Financial Tracking System (2024). Accessed August 2024.

The largest donors are neglecting the educational needs of Palestinian children

Education is not a priority in the 2024 Flash Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory for many of the top 10 donors to humanitarian appeals. Amongst the top 10 donors to global humanitarian appeals, Switzerland (28.6%), the European Commission (5.4%) and Norway (6.6%) contributed the largest shares to education for the 2024 Flash Appeal (Figure 7). Switzerland and the European Commission are also the largest contributors to the 2024 Education Cluster appeal requirements in absolute terms, contributing 21.1% and 15.5% of the total funding the sector has received to date. Switzerland has contributed all of its education funding to UNRWA, which amounts to half of the total that the UNRWA has received in funding from the Education Cluster (US\$12.1 of the US\$23.7 million). Notably absent are some of the largest aid donors, including the United States of America, Germany, the Netherlands and Canada (Figure 7).

Child protection, which is vitally complementary to education and desperately needed in the context of the trauma children are currently experiencing, is all but invisible in the funding portfolios of most donors. It represents only 0.8% of the funding of the top 10 donors to humanitarian appeals (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Share of education in the 2024 Flash Appeal of the Occupied Palestinian Territory



Source: Financial Tracking System (2024). Accessed August 2024.

Note: Figure includes the top 10 donors to global humanitarian appeals. Ordered according to the size of total contributions to global humanitarian appeals in 2024, starting with the largest.

Global funds for education have identified Gaza as a priority but more funding is needed

“Now as the situation unfolds in Gaza, I would imagine more support will need to be explored because what we have committed is not enough. ... We need to see what to do for the future, but with this unclarity on a ceasefire and no clear idea about how things will unfold, it's very difficult to get the donors to agree or to commit to anything [...] concrete or substantial. Everybody is waiting, which is also very sad because the needs are great, but the political will behind these commitments is lagging behind.”

The two main global funds for education – Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education – have responded to the current phase of forced displacement and destruction of the education sector in Gaza. Education Cannot Wait already had a programme for Gaza and the West Bank and was able to respond with agility in disbursing money after the onset of the current war. It has disbursed US\$12 million in funds through its First Emergency Response window, including US\$2 million recently announced at the beginning of August 2024. This implies that Education Cannot Wait is the third largest donor in volume terms, after Switzerland and the European Union.^{xvi} These funds are intended to help support the mental health and psychosocial services and protective learning opportunities for crisis-affected children including through support to UNRWA, as well as support to UNICEF as Education Cluster lead.

The European Commission Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) department has also played a key role in providing funds to education, pledging US\$8.8 million in commitments to the Flash Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory. These funds have been directed to support the work of UNICEF, UNRWA, World Vision (Germany), Norwegian Refugee Council and Humanity & Inclusion.

In June 2020, the Global Partnership for Education Board approved the establishment of a dedicated sub-account which was set up exclusively for the purposes of facilitating activities in the West Bank and Gaza (Global Partnership for Education, 2021), aiming to allocate US\$15 million in funding, as part of the multiplayer funds. This has so far attracted some from donors and foundations, although gaps remain. However, none of this funding had reached Gaza at the time of writing.

The World Bank – the third largest education donor globally in 2022 – has pledged US\$35 million to support the delivery of food and water, and healthcare services in Gaza. However, none of this funding is indicated to support the education sector (World Bank, 2024a). UNESCO has also set up a special extrabudgetary fund intended to support education for the reconstruction of Gaza.

The United States is the sixth largest global education donor and the largest contributor to the 2024 Flash Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory in volume. For past humanitarian appeals for the Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster, the funding allocated by the United States has been entirely through UNRWA.^{xvii} In response to the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (which was responding to pre-October 2023 needs), it directed 45.3% of all funds pledged for the education sector. In June 2024, the US Department of State announced US\$340 million for the basic assistance and medium-term support to Palestine in Gaza, West Bank and the region. Education is included in the sectors to be funded with this amount, but the amount is not specified (USAID, 2024).

The United Kingdom has pledged over £100 million in aid funding to the Occupied Palestinian Territory over 2023/2024, of which £70 million is additional aid since October 2023. Of this aid, 80% is identified to be spent on addressing humanitarian needs, or to provide health, education, or protection services for Palestinian refugees (House of Commons, 2024).^{xviii} Other large education donors such as Germany (ranked the largest globally in 2022) did not at the time of writing this report appear to have pledged anything specifically for education in Gaza, based on information available.

While Arab donors have traditionally supported education in Gaza, concerns were raised in interviews that they have not been as forthcoming during the current war, although efforts are being made by global funds to reach them for financial support. Attempts are also being made to encourage the private sector to provide support, although this has not been forthcoming yet. As one interviewee noted:

"I think the world views are changing, and we see now a lot of people who are becoming more vocal, and this includes also private sector leadership. There are private sector leaders who see it from a humanitarian point of view. ... I think as the months pass and the weeks pass, I have wishful thinking that maybe more of the private sector leaders will say, "We have to do something. We have to step up." This is too big to be ignored by a very wealthy private sector around the world. I hope that these people will also step up their funding."

All efforts by humanitarian agencies or the private sector must centre Gazan voices and needs as well as their critical role in any recovery. And it is crucial that the efforts of the private sector are regulated and support the right to education.

Implementing partners are coordinating through the Education Cluster against the odds

The Education Cluster, led by UNICEF and Save the Children, plays a key role in coordinating activities of partners seeking to support education in Gaza. The challenges of coordinating activities on the ground were mentioned by several of the stakeholders interviewed due to the highly challenging circumstances, compounded by the huge level of need, means that coordination mechanisms are extremely difficult. Coordination challenges were compounded by communication structures being negatively affected by the ongoing war which resulted in communication blackouts. While there are coordination challenges the reality on the ground is that there are very few initiatives providing education support with all education actors struggling to offer meaningful support.

UNRWA was mentioned by several interviewees as both having the institutional expertise in dealing with challenges faced, as well as knowledge of what is possible in providing education services in these extreme circumstances. According to one stakeholder, UNRWA *"has a massive role in sustaining education services, and of course other services."*

As well as the challenging conditions in getting aid to where it is needed in Gaza, a further difficulty is the increase in the number of smaller local implementing partners on the ground who are having to coordinate the response to the humanitarian response plan.

Despite all the challenges faced, international and national partners are working against the odds to coordinate their activities, and to learn from each other on how best to provide

education in any way possible. However, as many noted, the situation changes day by day, and so attempts at planning ahead collectively are often thwarted.

Future financing for the education sector

At a minimum, the global community must meet the needs of the education sector in Gaza by funding the US\$0.18 billion requested by the sector within the Flash Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory 2024, as first step. Based on knowledge from stakeholders on the ground, the unprecedented scale of the destruction in Gaza, and the reality of education being seen to compete alongside other sectors which are seen as more “lifesaving”, this figure is likely to be a huge underestimate of true needs.

As the previous sections have set out, funds will be needed to address an array of challenges. These include rebuilding the vast majority of schools. New teachers will need to be recruited to replace those who have been killed, left displaced or left Gaza, with all teachers and counsellors, needing extensive training in dealing with the psychosocial and physical needs of the children left traumatised and permanently disabled by the current war, as well as in new pedagogical approaches, accelerate learning approaches, among other areas. Funds to adequately support the children who have been orphaned and the increasing number with disabilities will be required. This is in addition to supporting children who are orphans and with disabilities from before October 2023.

Education is likely to have an expanded role to play in meeting the needs of other sectors in Gaza, as we have already witnessed over the last 10 months. Centring education as part of a humanitarian response given the crucial role it plays for children and families, as well as in recognition of the mutual support needed with other sectors, should be reflected in the funding priorities of the donor community. At the same time, education cannot operate without long-term housing solutions, access to health, WASH and nutrition – key sectors to enable the education services.



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8. Acting now for restoring rights and hope

“Children in Gaza are experiencing hardship and still they remain positive, and they are hopeful every time there’s talk of a ceasefire, you can see it in the children. You can see it in the communities, you know, like the hope that they bring with them.”

This report has highlighted the impact of the current war in Gaza on the education system, on children and young people, and on teachers. If nothing changes now, the impact of the war on education is likely to be devastating for the future of all Palestinians living in the Gaza strip. Across all the evidence and information presented, including from interviews with those involved on the frontline, **there is an overwhelming consensus and unremitting call for a permanent and sustained ceasefire. Efforts for rebuilding the education system require an environment without daily bombings, military occupation, blockade, restricted movement, prolonged displacement, and killing and injury. However, children and young people and communities cannot wait for a permanent ceasefire. They must have access to safe educational spaces and learning activities now as a protective mechanism for their wellbeing, an affirmation of their rights, to maintain a sense of normalcy amidst the war, and to provide hope and confidence for the future.**

A phased approach to restoring and rebuilding education is required, that meets immediate needs, whilst also planning for medium- and long-term recovery, for all children and young people who are experiencing multiple vulnerabilities. As such, the report offers the following plan that highlights the need for immediate and short-term actions to embed education activities as part of humanitarian responses that need to start now, as well as planning for education reconstruction in Gaza based on a permanent and sustained ceasefire. These actions need to be supported by meaningful and effective international actions, while vitally centring Palestinian perspectives.

i. Actions for restoring education now

“Now as the situation unfolds in Gaza, I would imagine more support will need to be explored because what we have committed is not enough and that was already 10 months ago.... everyone is waiting and I don't think the people on the ground have a lot of time to wait.”

Key actions to restore education that need to be intensified now include:

- **Psychosocial support** for children and young people through recreational activities and trauma counselling.
- **Foundational learning** at a minimum for all children and young people.
- **Support for disability needs** to children and young people, teachers and counsellors, including ensuring access to necessary assistive devices.
- **Safe learning spaces**, protected in line with international humanitarian law.
- **Appropriate and relevant support** for teachers and counsellors to enable them to engage learners with psychosocial support and foundational learning.
- **Support for teachers' and counsellor's own needs and wellbeing**, including support for their basic needs such as shelter, food, livelihood support, psychosocial and counselling support.
- **Reestablishing a child protection system** to enable effective referral of children needing specialist support.

ii. Actions for rebuilding the education system

“[There is a need to] start building the education system because the war affected the system as a whole immensely. Policies and system need to be worked on. This is important for long term”.

Actions for planning to rebuild the education system need to start as soon as possible, including:

Delivering relevant, quality education

- **A supportive learning programme** that recognises the multiple vulnerabilities children face due to the effects of the current war.
- **Accredited learning programmes** for children and young people to return to school, paying particular attention to those who are most vulnerable.
- **Relevant teaching and learning materials and resources** for recovery and reconstruction.
- **New modalities for learning**, including appropriate technology that can be adopted in relevant ways to support children and young people who have missed out on education.

- **Support disability needs of children and young people**, taking account of the large number of various types of impairment due to the war, ensuring they do not face discrimination.
- **Build schools**, starting as soon as possible with semi-permanent structures that can be constructed quickly, while planning for fully functioning permanent education infrastructure as soon as possible. These need to be built to meet the needs of all children and young people, ensuring accessibility.
- **Rebuild other civilian infrastructure to support education**, including housing, health facilities, and other facilities such as running water, medicines, electricity, and internet.
- **Adopt a multisectoral approach to education provision** that incorporates psychosocial learning and trauma counselling and fosters a wider enabling learning environment, including school feeding, health schemes and WASH facilities.

Enabling and empowering teachers and counsellors

- **Increase the supply of teachers and counsellors** based on an assessment of the numbers needed to replace those lost due to killing, displacement, and leaving Gaza, and taking account of the even greater needs of children and young people.
- **Provide continuous professional development** for new and existing teachers and counsellors, recognising the need for them to support a diverse, traumatised and vulnerable student population.
- **Continue to support the needs and wellbeing of teachers and counsellors** and ensure those who have been injured and with disabilities receive the support they need.

iii. Actions for meaningful and effective international commitment

"... member states, donors, and partners ... have to start thinking out of the box. We need creative ideas of how to rebuild the education system and how to support teachers and provide them with capacity building. How to work in not normal education settings. We need to collaborate to form committees to stay in contact daily to rebuild the education system. Coordination and collaboration are a main milestone for restoring."

- **Ensure international humanitarian law is upheld immediately**, including stopping the attacks on schools and other education facilities; and stopping the killing, injury and other forms of violence on children, young people, teachers, counsellors and humanitarian workers.
- **Lift the humanitarian blockade**, ensuring immediate access to basic learning provisions, including stationery, textbooks, school bags, desks, and uniforms, as well as to assistive devices for those who have been injured or have specific needs.
- **Increase education funding immediately**, recognising the interconnection between

education and other humanitarian and development priorities, such as health, nutrition, shelter and in particular, child protection. At a minimum, international donors should meet the Flash Appeal targets for education and child protection.

- **Enhance coordination between international agencies and INGOs** to ensure that support for education and protection are connected and aligned with the needs of the Gazan population and the Palestinian population at large.
- **Recognise UNRWA as a key provider of education and services for the Palestinian population**, with the necessary staff, infrastructure, and systems to continue to play a key role in education reconstruction – in partnership with the Occupied Palestinian Territory authorities and other national and international organisations working within Gaza. Support for UNRWA, including funding, is key to education reconstruction immediately and post-ceasefire.

iv. Actions for centring Palestinian perspectives

“If any of the international organisations should focus on anything it should be based on Gazan’s perspectives on what they think is the priority.”

All education reconstruction efforts must centre the voices of Palestinian communities in Gaza, ensuring their meaningful engagement so their experiences and needs guide the restoration and rebuilding of education now and in the future.

- **Engage children, young people, teachers, counsellors, caregivers and their communities** as well as local civil society in any planning now and in the future.
- **Support a comprehensive education needs assessment** led by Palestinians as soon as feasible, to ensure relevant and timely reconstruction that is fully funded without delay.
- **Ensure any recovery plan of Gaza is linked to a wider Palestinian education reconstruction approach** for the entire Occupied Palestinian Territory, in alignment with the Conflict Recovery Framework.

Realising this call for action requires political will, financial commitment, and concrete actions by all international actors, stakeholders and partners to deliver the right to equitable and quality education as agreed in the Sustainable Development Goals. Anything less in the context of the ongoing attacks on Palestinian education risks killing hope for the future generations of young people in this region. Our collective future depends on what is done now, with urgency.

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Endnotes

- i Quote from Dr Samah Jabr, Chair of the Ministry of Health in Palestine and Psychiatrist.
- ii All quotes in the report are from interviews undertaken for this report, unless otherwise noted.
- iii It is important to note that education in the West Bank is also affected by the effects of occupation and escalations. Given the intensity of the current war, this report focuses on Gaza.
- iv https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/PEIC_BIICL_international_law_handbook_2020_en.pdf
- v A/RES/64/290
- vi S/RES/2601 (2021)
- vii See <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/>. The grave violation of “attacks on schools and hospitals” is defined as “the targeting of schools or medical facilities that cause the total or partial destruction of such facilities” (see Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism’s manual. Annex 2: International Legal Foundations and Standards). In his 2024 annual report on CAAC, the UN Secretary-General listed Israeli armed and security forces, as well as Palestinian armed groups, as parties that commit grave violations against children, including, in Israel’s case, the grave violation of “attacks on schools and hospitals”.
- viii In this report we primarily focus on children and young people in Grades 1-9, but we do discuss children beyond Grade 9 as well and make reference to the effect on university students and teachers in training.
- ix Tawjihi is the General Secondary Education Certificate Examination in Palestine.
- x <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>
- xi <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/gaza-more-10-children-day-lose-limb-three-months-brutal-conflict>
- xii The Palestinians Orphan Home defines orphans as any child who has lost one or both parents.
- xiii Tawjihi is the General Secondary Education Certificate Examination in Jordan and Palestine.
- xiv US\$3.42 billion relates to the 12-month period in 2024. However, official public documentation for the 2024 Flash Appeal refers to the April-December 2024 period which calls for US\$2.82 billion (OCHA, 2024a).
- xv The larger requirements for food security, shelter and non-food items, health, and water, sanitation and hygiene sectors, compared to the education sector, is also in part due to the differences in numbers targeted. The 2024 Flash Appeal Education Cluster targets approximately 0.8 million school-aged children for support, compared to 2.4 million food-insecure people and 2.7 million people who need support from the health cluster. The majority of school-aged children targeted for support are situated in the Gaza Strip (0.7 million), with the remaining 0.1 million being in the West Bank (OCHA, 2024a).
- xvi European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department.
- xvii The United States suspended funding to UNRWA between 2018-2021 under President Donald Trump and during those years it did not allocate any aid to the Education Cluster through the Appeal.
- xviii In July 2024, the UK government pledged £21 million to UNRWA to undertake “lifesaving work in Gaza and the provision of basic services in the region.” It specifies this will focus on emergency food, shelter and “other support” without specifying funds specifically to support education.

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