

## CHILDREN OF THE GAZA CRISIS: Education Fact Sheet

24 February 2009

More than a month on from the unilateral ceasefires that ended the Israeli offensive in Gaza on 18 January 2009, Gazan children face many difficulties in continuing their education.

While most children have returned to schools, with attendance reported at 80 percent for UNRWA schools and 89 percent for Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) schools, some children still are not attending class because of displacement, poverty, fear or injury. Children and teaching staff continue to be emotionally affected by their experiences, and many of them have lost family, friends and homes. In addition, teachers and other education staff were in short supply even before the crisis as a result of a teacher strike.

Many schools and kindergartens are damaged and some have been destroyed, forcing Gaza's already overcrowded schools to run more shifts, accept more students and set up temporary classrooms in laboratories, multipurpose rooms and even in tents. Much-needed supplies — such as paper and textbooks as well as construction materials for repairs — have not been permitted to enter Gaza. Continued efforts need to be made to ensure that Gaza's 688 schools (346 government schools, 28 private schools and 214 UNRWA schools), which serve 441,452 students ([UNRWA](#) and [MEHE](#)), can provide the standard of education and support these children deserve.

### Damage to schools

Serious damage to schools has a direct impact on education and child safety in Gaza. Currently, many students study in classrooms without doors and windows, or in buildings with entire school wings in rubble. This situation cannot easily be rectified as construction materials have not been permitted to enter the territory.

- At least 66 schools were damaged or destroyed by bombardment. (Al Mezan)
- Unexploded ordinance continues to pose a threat to children in and on their way to school. On 9 February, mine action teams removed and destroyed white phosphorus wedges discovered by pupils in a school. ([OCHA](#))
- According to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 7 out of its 346 schools have been destroyed. The 3,911 students from the destroyed schools have been transferred to other schools, which will now have to operate a double shift if they did not do so before. (MEHE)
- Another 29 MEHE schools have been severely damaged. These schools are still operating and serve 18,825 students, who are taking classes in damaged classrooms, computer laboratories, multipurpose rooms and tents.
- Good quality, licensed kindergartens were scarce in Gaza before the offensive, which severely damaged eight kindergartens and partially damaged another 54. (MEHE)
- At the peak of displacement, UNRWA was accommodating almost 51,000 people, among them approximately 28,560 children, in 44 schools across Gaza ([OCHA](#)). These schools also sustained considerable wear and tear on classrooms, sanitation facilities and furniture as a result of the hundreds of people residing within them.

- Many schools do not have adequate drinking water ([OCHA](#)). Even before the most recent crisis and the accompanying breakdown of water and sanitation services, unhygienic conditions in many schools exposed children to infections ([UNICEF](#)).

### **Quality of Education**

Before the most recent crisis, Gaza's schools were overcrowded, understaffed and undersupplied as a result of the Israeli blockade and of the factional split between Fatah and Hamas. There were significant concerns about academic performance in all schools, as well as reports from children of high levels of violence. Now, these problems are compounded by psychological distress in children and teachers, as well as the damage to schools and loss of materials.

- In the first term of the 2008/2009 school year, approximately 80 percent of 16,000 Gaza sixth graders failed standardized exams in math, science, English and Arabic ([UNICEF](#)).
- Before the conflict, approximately 85 percent of UNRWA run schools in the Gaza Strip operated double shifts in order to accommodate the number of children ([UNICEF](#)).
- Violence in schools is an ongoing concern – in the past, 34.3 percent of mothers surveyed indicated that their children had suffered from violence from a teacher ([UNICEF](#)).
- Only a very restricted list of items is being allowed into Gaza, which seriously affects the ability of schools to provide a high standard of education to children and rebuild. The import of paper and supplies for printing textbooks were not permitted ([UNRWA](#)). On 8 February, five trucks containing 130 pallets of student folders supplied by UNICEF were refused entry ([OCHA](#)).
- Early childhood is considered one of the most important phases of human development. In Gaza, 230 licensed preschools in Gaza, which serve approximately 23,574 children, as well as unlicensed schools provide programs of varying quality. ([MEHE](#))

### **Vulnerable children**

Every child in Gaza has been affected by the recent Israeli offensive. Some children, however, are more vulnerable than others, and it will be especially important to ensure that these children are in school — notably children with disabilities, displaced children and girls (who are particularly vulnerable to drop-out and early marriage).

- A preliminary assessment indicated that, in 45 surveyed non-refugee localities in Gaza, 71,657 people, including around 40,128 children, were staying with host families ([OCHA](#)). Many displaced children are likely to have lost their clothes, books, schoolbags and other materials that, due to the blockade, are hard to replace and affect their ability to participate at school.
- Even before the military operation, an estimated 10 percent of the population had moderate or severe impairments. It is estimated that up to half of people injured, including 430 children, may suffer lifelong impairment, exacerbated by the inability of rehabilitation workers to provide early intervention. ([OCHA](#))
- Loss of care and protection of parents or primary caregivers, disruptions to daily life including school and play activities, and loss of adequate nutrition can mean that children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to psychological distress. WHO estimates that 25,000 to 50,000 people — including some 14,000 to 28,000 children — will need some form of psychological intervention to support their recovery. ([WHO](#))

- According to MEHE, 164 students and 12 teachers from Palestinian Authority schools were killed during the three weeks of the war on Gaza; 98 of these students are from north Gaza. Moreover, 454 students and 5 teachers were injured. Of these, around 60 students are still suffering from injuries and are attending school with difficulty, and a further 60 are not attending school due to their injuries. (MEHE)

### **Recommendations**

- *Teachers at all levels need to be trained in child-friendly teaching practices to strengthen children's psychosocial well-being.*
- *Unhindered humanitarian access must be a priority, and borders need to be opened to allow in urgently needed reconstruction materials and school supplies.*
- *More funds need to be made available for the response and for increased (a year or more) grant periods.*
- *Humanitarian agencies must be allowed to coordinate and provide assistance to relevant education providers and administrators in Gaza.*

### **Education Case Study #2 – 24 February 2009**

#### **Background on the Education Project**

In response to the humanitarian emergency in Gaza, Save the Children has launched a number of educational programs including a three-month project to increase access and improve the quality of 10 kindergartens in Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahia and Jabalia (all in the heavy-hit governorate of North Gaza).

To increase children's access to early childhood education programs, Save the Children is working to ensure that kindergartens have enough teachers and staff. The organization is setting up afternoon shifts in some existing kindergartens for children whose schools were destroyed by the fighting.

Save the Children also is working to enhance the skills of kindergarten workers, providing advice and training so that they can best work with children facing emotional or other issues related to the crisis. This includes organizing recreational activities for kindergarten-age children.

Additionally, Save the Children is providing partner kindergartens with toy kits and stationery. Facilities that were damaged during the offensive are receiving plastic sheeting to replace broken windows. Two kindergartens that suffered damage to water tanks will be supplied with replacement tanks.

Save the Children also is supporting workshops, conducted twice a week, with the parents of children attending these kindergartens to help them deal with their children in times of crisis. This project is expected to benefit 1,355 children, in addition to the 1,744 children who benefitted from the distribution of the recreational kits.

#### **The Case Study #2 - Jenin**

Jenin, named for the West Bank refugee camp besieged by violence in 2002, is a young resident of Beit Hanoun in North Gaza. She lives with her parents, brother and two sisters, and attends Atfal Beit Hanoun Kindergarten. Jenin, 5, saw the violence firsthand during the recent hostilities in Gaza.

"When the planes attacked, I used to run to my parents' room. I slept many days on my parents' bed," she says. "And I keep crying."

Jenin's kindergarten is one of many in Gaza receiving support, including toys, dolls and materials, from Save the Children. She enjoys playing with dolls and has named one of her favorites Fulla.

"I love the dolls so much. And after we got the toys, the kindergarten started to be much better because we now have other things to do besides drawing and playing on the swings. I take the doll home with me. I love Fulla," says Jenin.

At school, Jenin is occupied with the concerns of young girls anywhere.

"In the future, please bring us more dolls like Fulla. And also you *have to* bring hair clips for the dolls, new shoes and clothes, because we want to change their appearance," she says. "I'm so happy in the kindergarten because of the toys you brought us. I keep playing with Fulla."

Jenin's father works as taxi driver, and her mother now works in the home. Jenin wants to be a doctor when she grows up.

Save the Children is working with 10 kindergartens in North Gaza to improve access for displaced and conflict-affected children like Jenin. Through provision of toys and materials, teacher training and afternoon kindergarten sessions, more children have access to programs designed for their age and specifically for children in emergencies.



Jenin, 5, holds her doll (Fulla) at Atfal Beit Hanoun Kindergarten that is located in Beit Hanoun Town north of Gaza. Jenin's doll was presented to her from Save the Children Alliance as part of Education Programme to enhance the Early Childhood Education, which is one of the Gaza Emergency Response activities.