



FACT SHEET:
January 6 2009

Children of the Gaza Crisis

Save the Children is calling for a peaceful solution to the current crisis that endangers the lives of nearly every child in Gaza, and the lives of Israeli children in areas subject to attacks. Save the Children is calling for a cessation of hostilities by all parties including air and ground assaults from Israel and rocket attacks from Gaza. The agency is also seeking free access for humanitarian assistance to allow aid agencies to provide much-needed relief to vulnerable children and so that children and their families can access essential services. Save the Children has reached some 10,000 people, including 5,000 children, in the first 10 days of the crisis, and we continue to strive to meet the needs of Gaza's vulnerable children and families.

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

General

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

Child fatalities to date

- At least 89 children have been killed as a result of the Gaza conflict since it began 10 days ago. ([Al Mezan](#))

Displacement:

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

- Asma Elementary School — a clearly marked UNRWA facility functioning as a shelter for displaced people—was struck by a missile 6 January, killing three people. The shelter had recently opened to receive fleeing families from Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza. (UNRWA)

- Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights estimates that 2,210 families (or more than 14,000¹ people including approximately 8,000 children) have been displaced since the conflict began. ([Al Mezan](#))
- An estimated 5,000 people including 2,800 children, are currently residing in 11 UNRWA shelters for displaced people. This number is quickly increasing. ([OCHA](#))
- In Beit Lahiya, 15,000 people including approximately 8,400 children are at risk of being displaced by sewage flooding from the wastewater treatment lagoon ([OCHA](#)). In addition to the health risks posed by effluent overflow, the sewage level is currently rising quickly due to a lack of fuel to power waste pumps. Should the level continue to rise at its current rate, the lake will be close to overflowing within the next week. ([OCHA](#))

Access to water and electricity

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

- An estimated 1 million people, including 560,000 children, are currently living without water or power. ([OCHA](#))
- Gaza, North Gaza, Middle Area and Khan Yunis (four of the region's five governorates) are experiencing nearly complete blackouts, This leaves an estimated 527,637 people, including approximately 295,477² children, without power. ([OCHA](#))
- Temperatures at night have been in the 40s Fahrenheit. Families without electricity or means to heat their home may see an increased risk for hypothermia, which occurs when the body's temperature drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Children — especially newborns who must be kept warm to survive, underweight babies and malnourished children — are especially vulnerable. (http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/first_aid/procedures_index/hypothermiachild.shtml)

Education

Fifteen schools have suffered damage from airstrikes and related bombardment. Of these, four received direct hits. Of note:

- Eight UNRWA students were killed and another 18 injured while waiting for UN buses. ([OCHA](#))
- Military operation began at 11:30 a.m. on 27 December 2008, when many students were leaving or coming to school and when many others were sitting

¹ Estimated using the figure of an average of 6.5 persons per household in Gaza. ([PCBS](#))

² Estimated using population figures for governorate according to the PCBS 2007 census ([PCBS](#)), disaggregated for children using the overall percentage of children in Gaza (56%) from the same census. NB: currently can't find source for 56%.

for exams. Some students were injured when school windows shattered. ([OCHA](#))

- The final exams of the current semester were disrupted and have been postponed because of the ongoing conflict, which started on the first day of final exams. ([OCHA](#))
- Gaza's 346 government schools, 28 private schools and 214 UNRWA schools are closed, affecting around 441,452 students. ([UNRWA](#)) and ([MoE](#))
- There are reports of the closure of all Israeli schools within 20 kilometers of the Gaza Strip. ([Israel National News](#))
- Three schools participating in the Protective Sphere project were partially damaged by air strikes. All are in the northern area of Gaza.
- The American School was almost completely destroyed by shelling, killing the 21-year-old guard; 3 to 5 other schools were also damaged. ([OCHA](#))
- 13 UNRWA schools were damaged 31 December 2008. ([OCHA](#))

Health Care Infrastructure

Lack of access to health care remains critical for children and pregnant women, as movement inside Gaza is extremely dangerous. To date, four hospitals and three clinics have been damaged by shelling. Of these, three hospitals have taken direct hits³. In addition:

- The existing referral system through the Erez crossing point for 700 – 1,000 patients with chronic illnesses in Gaza has been disrupted. ([OCHA](#))
- Patients (including infants and children) are standing in very long queues in front of the dispensing windows at UNRWA Primary Health Care Facilities (Save the Children sources).
- Thirty infants in the neonatal care unit at Shifa hospital, which is currently relying on back-up generators, are surviving with the help of lifesaving machines. However, the facility's generators are in danger of failing. ([OCHA](#))
- The Children's Hospital in Gaza City was lightly damaged due to the bombardment of a nearby site. (al Mezan)
- On 4 January, an ambulance from Al Awda hospital in northern Gaza was shelled, killing a paramedic and seriously injuring three other people. ([OCHA](#)) That same day, a guided missile hit an ambulance east of Gaza city, killing three people. ([al Mezan](#)).
- The main premises of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program were partially damaged by the shelling of a neighboring site. ([GCHMP](#))
- The main premises of the Union of Health Care Committees in Gaza City were hit, damaging three mobile clinics and a vehicle. ([OCHA](#))

³ Telephone information from Al Mezan.

Save the Children Case Study

Saleem, 6, was at school taking exams when the air strikes began 27 December 2008.

Saleem's story

"I finished the exam at around 10 in the morning and I started to leave my classroom when, suddenly, I heard a large explosion near the school. My teacher and another teacher dived onto the floor, and I started to be really scared. My classroom is on the second floor. I was afraid to go to the stairs until a teacher came and took all the students to the ground floor.

"Usually my mother comes to pick me up or sends me a taxi. I couldn't find a taxi so I stayed at the school gate, hearing explosions and watching people running away. I felt that I couldn't do anything but stand there. I waited there a while, I don't know how long. Then I saw my mum running to the school to pick me up. We walked home together, about 2.5 kilometres. On the way, there were a lot of explosions everywhere. I heard explosions from the right and left, and I was really scared. My mum tried to ask me how the exam went, but I had forgotten all about that. I just looked around, looking at the flames and smoke coming from the buildings.

"I was really eager to take my exams before, because they were my first-ever final exams. But now I hate exams. I hate school. I hate going to school, whether for classes or for exams. I threw my school bag in the bathroom because I don't want to see it. I don't ever want to go back to school.

"What is going on is something that I don't understand. I don't know what is happening and why this is happening. I feel really cold as my mother and father keep opening the windows of the home so the windows don't smash with the bombs. I feel cold. I keep sneezing all day. When I ask my mother to close the window, they say it's for my own benefit and they're sorry. I've had no electricity for three days. We have no milk, and no dairy products. There is other food though, at the moment. We have vegetables, but we can't get fruit in the market anymore, just oranges.

"My message is to anyone who will listen – just tell me why and what for."