



THE GAZA BLOCKADE: CHILDREN AND EDUCATION FACT SHEET

THE NUMBERS: More than half the population of Gaza – 780,578, or 53% – is under the age of 18¹.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION: There are 640 schools in Gaza – 383 government schools, 221 UNRWA schools and 36 private schools, which together serve a total of 441,452 students².

The inability of university and post-graduate level students to travel to pursue academic studies in specialized fields is stifling the intellectual advancement of young adults in Gaza. Between July and September 2008, only 70 students managed to exit Gaza via Erez while hundreds more remained trapped owing to a newly instated diplomatic escort requirement mandated by Israeli authorities.

More than 1,000 Gazan students apply to universities around the world each year but as there is no official body or channel to coordinate their requests or exits, it is difficult to know how many students want to study abroad this coming year.³

OVERCROWDING: Around 88% of UNRWA schools and 82% of government schools operate on a shift system to accommodate the high number of students. Blockade restrictions have made it difficult to invest in building new schools or repair damaged schools.

In north Gaza, 9,000 students from 15 damaged schools were accommodated in 73 schools in the same area. 4,000 of them were squeezed in two schools. Some 1,200 secondary students in governmental schools in north Gaza run the risk of not being accommodated in the 2009/2010 school year⁴.

DECLINING ACHIEVEMENT: In governmental schools, school attendance and performance have declined as a result of ageing education infrastructure, overcrowding, and frequent disruptions caused by military operations.⁵ In the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year, only 20% of 16,000 sixth graders in Gaza passed standardized exams in Math, Science, English and Arabic.⁶

¹ Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, 2009. Total population in Gaza is 1,486,816.

² [UNRWA](#) and Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE)

³ Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, “Obstacle Course: Students Denied Exit from Gaza,” July 2009.

⁴ Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2009

⁵ Save the Children UK, 2008 Child Rights Annual Review.

⁶ MoEHE

IMPACT OF ISRAELI OFFENSIVE:

Infrastructure: Operation Cast Lead had devastating consequences for the education system already weakened as a result of the blockade. During the military offensive, at least 280 schools and kindergartens were damaged/ severely damaged, including 18 schools were destroyed (8 government, 2 private and 8 Kindergartens). Six of the destroyed government schools are in North Gaza alone, affecting almost 9,000 students who had to relocate to other schools.⁷

Six university buildings were destroyed, and 16 were damaged.

Teachers and Students: According to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), 164 students and 12 teachers from its schools were killed during the Israeli military offensive; 98 of the students killed were from north Gaza. A further 454 students and 5 teachers were injured. A total of 86 children and 3 teachers who attend UNRWA schools were killed, and a further 402 students and 14 teachers were injured. Schoolchildren, thousands of whom lost family members and/or their homes, are still suffering from trauma and anxiety and are in need of psycho-social support and recreational play activities.

Displacement: At the peak of the offensive, almost 51,000 individuals, among them approximately 28,560 children, had sought refuge in 44 UNRWA schools across Gaza⁸, causing considerable wear and tear on classrooms, sanitation facilities and furniture.

MATERIALS TO RECONSTRUCT: According to Ministry of Education and Higher Education, it needs to build 105 new schools to cater for yearly increase in student population. Construction materials needed includes items such as 25,000 tons of iron bars, 40,000 tons of cement.

BRAIN FOOD: Around one-fifth of school children are iodine deficient.⁹ The prevalence of anaemia among children 9 - 12 months old of age is 61.6%; and prevalence among pregnant women is around 29%,¹⁰ and 22% of children 12 - 59 months old lack Vitamin A.¹¹

⁷ UNICEF, UNRWA, MOEHE

⁸ OCHA

⁹ Nutrition Department / MoH / PNA, 2007

¹⁰ Nutrition Department / MoH / PNA; Nutrition Surveillance System Report, 2007

¹¹ MoH / PNA and MARAM Project, 2004