

EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK IN GAZA

The announcement of an agreed pause in hostilities between the Government of Israel and Hamas is long overdue relief after 15 months of relentless war. The war has inflicted unprecedented and potentially irreversible harm on Palestinian children, with consequences that threaten not only their individual futures but the very fabric of Palestinian society for generations to come. **To safeguard these children's futures and prevent further irreparable damage, urgent and comprehensive action from the international community, including the UK Government is needed.**

The impact of the current war in Gaza is compounded by over 76 years of Israel's occupation, which the International Court of Justice [advisory opinion](#) found to be unlawful, along with 17 years of blockade and recurrent conflict.

UNRWA is the biggest education service provider in Gaza (and the West Bank). **We recommend a further increase in UK aid to UNRWA to meet basic humanitarian needs. The UK must insist that UNRWA can play its role, considering threats on the cessation of its activities from the Government of Israel.** Any interruption in UNRWA activities at this crucial point during the temporary ceasefire would cause a catastrophic gap in education assistance. The new [International Development Committee report](#) confirms that as a UN member state, Israel is bound by its obligations under the UN Charter to provide the UN with every assistance in any action taken in accordance with the Charter. Asking UNRWA to cease operations constitutes direct obstruction by Israel, of UNRWA in the performance of their mandate established under several UN General Assembly resolutions since 1949.

The UK is a significant supporter of multilateral funding for education through Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). ECW rapidly scaled up its funding in Gaza in November 2023 in response to the escalation. The oPt is eligible for a US\$15 million GPE Multiplier grant, and we welcome the UK's allocation of some of its investment in GPE for use in the oPt.

Key statistics:

- **Since 7 October 2023, 12,241 students and 503 educational staff have been killed.** 19,619 students and 2,603 have been teachers injured, [as of 14 January 2025](#).
- In September 2024, [the number of out of school children in Gaza increased to 658,000](#) due to new grade 1 students unable to begin the new school year and students not able to graduate.
- [100% of school buildings](#) in North Gaza governorate have been either directly hit or damaged. **96% of all school buildings across the whole of Gaza have been damaged or destroyed.**
- Presently, only 105,700 children, or [16% of the total school-age population](#) (*Education Cluster Temporary Learning Spaces Mapping, Nov 2024*), **have access to some form of learning in Gaza.**

The impact of the conflict on education:

- **Lost learning:** From 2019 to August 2024, children have lost at least 14 months of schooling, [equivalent to about two academic years](#). This is due to closures related to COVID-19, the escalation in May 2021, and the current war. As a result, "learning poverty", i.e. the proportion of children unable to read a basic text by age 10, has increased by at least 20 percentage points. This is already from a very low base. Learning loss will be compounded if teachers do not receive professional development, including support to traumatised children.
- **Increased children with disabilities:** The use of explosive weapons in Gaza in 2024 condemned [an average of 475 children each month – or 15 children a day – to potentially lifelong disabilities](#), including severely injured limbs and hearing impairments. Lifesaving learning programmes for children – including learning how to keep safe from unexploded ordnance – must rapidly be expanded in Gaza, alongside the provision of assistive devices.
- **Rising malnutrition impacts ability to learn:** Gaza now has the [highest rates](#) of child malnutrition globally. Malnutrition profoundly impacts children's cognitive development, affecting emotional and behavioural regulation. [Stunting](#) in childhood is [linked](#) to an average loss of 0.7

grades in schooling and a 7-month delay in starting school. This educational disadvantage compounds over time, affecting future opportunities.

- **Increased needs for mental health support:** Parents, teachers, caregivers, and mental health professionals have [reported](#) a dramatic deterioration in children's mental health, manifesting in severe emotional distress, behavioural changes, and cognitive impacts. [Research](#) has found that Palestinian children exposed to war trauma show deficits in attention, concentration, and memory functions, which can affect [academic performance](#) and future life outcomes. Teachers' mental health and wellbeing has also been severely impacted.

Education in emergencies is a lifesaving sector and must be prioritised:

- **Yet in the oPt the education sector received just [38% of the necessary resources in the 2024 UN Appeal](#). This is much less than other sectors.** Funding is needed to provide protection in a safe space and lifesaving learning, which is the age appropriate, delivery of survival-skills such as how to keep safe in the presence of unexploded ordnance. It also provides access to other lifesaving sectors such as water and sanitation, school feeding, vaccinations, mental health and psycho-social support, health and protection referrals.
- The Education Cluster and UNRWA are coordinating the education response in Gaza, working with partners such as Save the Children. **Organisations are prepared to scale up this support, but this requires unimpeded humanitarian access throughout Gaza.**
- **ECW, which the UK invests in, has shown it is possible to provide rapid and flexible funding for Gaza, but given the scale of the crisis, more funding is urgently required.**

Recommendations for the UK Government:

- Take action to ensure that all actors fully respect and implement their commitments under the recent pause in the conflict and their obligations under international law to end the suffering of children, teachers and their families. The temporary pause must be leveraged into a definitive ceasefire – the only way towards providing children with peace, protection, and fulfilment of their rights.
- Urge the Government of Israel to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration.
- Use diplomatic and political measures to oppose the proposed Israeli anti-UNRWA legislation.
- Increase UK aid to UNRWA for the provision of education.
- Support the Education Section of the [2025 oPt UN Flash Appeal](#) and the forthcoming Education Sector Ceasefire Plan – with funding for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of damaged educational facilities, teacher training, psychosocial and disability support for learners and teachers, non-formal education options, and safe, inclusive learning environments with increased teachers and counsellors.
- Ensure Palestinian voices are centred in the recovery process now and in future. Link the recovery plans with the wider Palestinian education reconstruction approach (including in the West Bank), in alignment with the Conflict Recovery Framework.

Written Parliamentary Questions

- To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he last had discussions with his Israeli counterpart on international humanitarian law and the protection of education in Gaza and West Bank.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much Official Development Assistance (ODA) his Department has provided to the education sector in the occupied Palestinian territories since October 2023 and what is planned for 2025-2026.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what actions he will take to support the rebuilding of the education system in Gaza, including funding and other support for UNRWA's education programme.

Further resources:

- [Palestinian Education Under Attack in Gaza: Restoration, Recovery, Rights and Responsibilities in and through Education](#) (University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education, Centre for Lebanese Studies, UNRWA)
- [Missing Futures: The Urgent Need To Protect Gaza's Children Safeguard Their Futures](#) (Save the Children)