

UNRWA: Over 625,000 school-aged children in Gaza experiencing severe psychological trauma



Palestinian children mourn relatives killed in Israeli strikes on the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on September 17, 2024, (Photo by AFP)

Geneva, September 26 (RHC)-- The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) has reported that over 625,000 school-aged children in Gaza are enduring severe trauma while residing amidst the destruction.

Philippe Lazzarini, the head of UNRWA, in a post on X platform on Wednesday said that Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have endured terrible losses since the beginning of the Israeli aggression on Gaza nearly a year ago.

“While nearly 625,000 deeply traumatized girls and boys are out of school and living in the rubble in Gaza, many children in the West Bank suffer from escalating violence that disrupts their lives and education,” Lazzarini wrote.

UNRWA raised concerns that nearly a year into the aggression, there has been a troubling rise in malnutrition, disease, and mortality rates. Even prior to the outbreak of war in Gaza, many families were already facing difficulties in providing adequate nutrition for their young children as they prepared for their first year of school, the UN agency added.

Moreover, a report published by UNRWA on Wednesday warned that the ongoing war in Gaza will set children and young people’s education back by up to five years, potentially leading to a lost generation of Palestinian youth who are permanently traumatized.

“Children have seen that the international community will sit idly by as they are killed. This has left them with questions about values that schools and learning aim to instill around humanitarian principles that teachers will have to navigate,” the report wrote.

Since August, UNRWA has been offering educational services in shelters, benefiting approximately 8,000 children.

However, the report emphasizes that significant additional efforts are required to address the substantial learning losses, which were already exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, previous Israeli military actions, and the ongoing conflict.

A recent analysis reveals that only 3.5 percent of the aid allocated for Gaza has been directed towards education, despite an urgent appeal from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Satellite imagery reviewed by the Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster reveals that more than 90 percent of schools have sustained damage, with many deemed irreparable.

The Israeli regime in recent months has systematically attacked civic infrastructure, including schools and hospitals.

Ted Chaiban, UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director for Humanitarian Action, also raised alarms last week about a "lost generation" of children in Gaza and the West Bank, highlighting their significant gaps in education and the severe trauma they have faced over recent months.

“I advocated for protecting children, improved security measures, and standard operating procedures for humanitarian personnel and facilitating the movement of separated unaccompanied children,” he said.

Palestinian officials say 36 children have already died of malnutrition since the Israeli genocide started, while the lives of 3,500 children are at risk due to the regime's systematic starvation policy.

According to OCHA, by August 2024, Israeli aggression has killed over 10,600 children and 400 teachers, with injuries affecting more than 15,300 students and 2,400 educators.

Additionally, hundreds of thousands of families in Gaza have been forced to flee their homes and are currently residing in inadequate tents and makeshift shelters. Israel has killed nearly 41,495 Palestinians and wounded 96,006 in Gaza since October 2023.

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