



Scholasticide: Israel's deliberate and systematic destruction of the Palestinian education system in Gaza

September 2024

1. Introduction

Over the past ten months of Israel's genocidal military campaign in Gaza, at least 40,534 Palestinians have been killed and another 93,778 wounded, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health's update from 28 August 2024. Another 10,000 Palestinians are still missing, likely dead beneath the rubble.

All available evidence indicates that Israeli forces and authorities have deliberately and repeatedly targeted critical infrastructure essential to sustain Palestinian life in Gaza. This includes water plants and wells, sewage systems, paved roads, electricity grids, and farmlands, as well as public facilities such as hospitals and schools. These actions are intended to create conditions of life designed to bring about the physical destruction of the Palestinian population of Gaza, either in whole or in part, and are tantamount to genocidal acts as defined under Article 2(c) of the [1948 Genocide Convention](#). The plausibility of Israel's committing genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza has been recognized by the International Court of Justice as early as [26 January 2024](#).

As part of its genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, Israel has systematically pursued the wholesale destruction of the Palestinian education system. The term '[scholasticide](#)'—firstly used by Palestinian academic Karma Nabulsi during Israel's 2009 war on Gaza—describes the deliberate and systematic assault on educational institutions. According to the [Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education](#), since 7 October 2023, Israel's genocidal military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 10,490 school and university students and inflicted injuries on another 16,700. More than [500 school teachers and university educators](#) have also been killed.

Israel's genocidal campaign has forced 625,000 school-aged students in Gaza to miss an entire academic year of education, with no prospect of resuming any time soon. For over ten months, students in Gaza have been unable to attend school, and hundreds of school buildings have been deliberately targeted and destroyed by the Israeli military. All schools, universities, or training centers in Gaza have remained closed since the beginning of the ongoing genocide. Most school buildings have turned into shelters housing hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons. Israel's relentless assault on Gaza's educational infrastructure has resulted in the complete disruption of schooling, leaving a whole generation of Palestinians without access to education.



2. Systematic Destruction of Schools and Higher Education Facilities

2.1 Schools

At the beginning of the [2023-2024 academic year](#), there were 803 schools in Gaza, housed in 550 buildings and serving approximately 625,000 students. Due to overpopulation and a shortage of facilities, exacerbated by Israel's 17-year-old blockade and closure, many of these schools operated in double or triple shifts. Schools in Gaza are categorized as follows:

Type of school	No of schools	Enrolled students	Teachers
Public Schools	448	305,000	12,000
UNRWA Schools	288	300,000 ¹	9,300
Private Schools	67	21,000	1,300
Total	803	625,000	22,600

As for the pre-school system, at the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year, there were 620 private kindergartens across Gaza, with 68,392 children and 3,427 educators. The [Palestinian Ministry of Education](#) also established a preschool division within public schools and, as of the 2022-2023 academic year, there were 14 public kindergartens with 403 enrolled children in Gaza.

As of 10 July 2024, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) [reported](#) that two-thirds of its schools—188 out of 288—had been subjected to Israeli attacks, including 76 schools that were directly targeted. Similarly, Israeli airstrikes have hit public schools, resulting in the destruction of 285 out of 448 public schools. In other words, Israeli attacks have destroyed about two-thirds of the public schools in Gaza.

Level of destruction	Number of UNRWA educational buildings
Direct targeting	76
Severe damage	42
Moderate damage	34
Mild damage	12
Unknown	24
Total	188

¹ In an interview with Al Mezan, Farid Abu Athra, the Chief of UNRWA's Education Program in Gaza, reported that 298,135 students are enrolled in UNRWA's schools, while another 1,865 students are participating in UNRWA's vocational training programs.



2.2 Higher education

According to the [Palestinian Ministry of Education](#), Gaza is home to 19 higher education institutions, serving around 88,000 students and employing 5,100 staff members. Amjad Barhoum, Palestine's Minister of Education, [reported](#) that during the ongoing genocide, more than 80 percent of the buildings at these institutions have been destroyed by the Israeli military, as detailed below:

Educational institution	Number of affected buildings	
	Destroyed	Damaged
The Islamic University of Gaza	10	7
Al-Azhar University of Gaza	5	18
Israa University	3	0
Al-Aqsa University	1	7
University of Palestine	4	0
Gaza University	1	4
Al-Quds Open University	2	3
Palestine Technical College	0	4
University College of Science and Technology	0	6
University College of Applied Sciences	0	2
UNRWA vocational colleges	1	0
Palestine College of Nursing	0	1
Gaza Community College for Tourist and Applied Studies	0	1
Faculty of Dawah and Fundamentals of Religion	1	1
Palestine College for Science and Technology	0	1
Al-Zaytouna University College	3	0
Dar Al-Kalima University Training Center	1	0
Media Center - An-Najah University	1	0
Total	33	55

Israel's systematic destruction of educational facilities, vital infrastructure, and homes has not only disrupted the academic year but also cast a shadow over the prospects of thousands of students in Gaza. Rehabilitating these buildings—the majority of which have also been seriously damaged—will be a lengthy and challenging process, further straining the already overburdened educational infrastructure. In an interview with Al Mezan, Mr. Farid Abu Athra, the Chief of UNRWA's Education Program in Gaza, also pointed out that the educational losses experienced by Palestinians students in Gaza over the past ten months cannot be redeemed. This disruption will significantly impact their academic achievement and personal development, increasing the likelihood of dropout, child labor, or early marriage.



3. Struggling for Education Amidst Genocide

3.1. Attempts to resume learning

Israel's genocidal campaign has forced 625,000 school-aged students in Gaza to miss an entire academic year of education, with no prospect of resuming any time soon. Initiatives to restore education, either face-to-face or remotely, were launched by some individuals and civil society organizations, along with the support of displaced families. Despite these efforts, all attempts proved futile in light of continuous Israeli bombardments. Families repeatedly moved in search of safety, leading to the loss of homes and educational materials.

The Palestinian Ministry of Education has worked on enabling Gaza students to access remote learning channels. According to the spokesperson of the Palestinian Ministry of Education, approximately, 15,000 students who had been in or moved to Egypt were able to access remote learning channels. However, it remains virtually impossible for students in Gaza to access online education without a stable internet connection or means to charge their devices. Additionally, they often find themselves in turmoil, trying to help their families in their daily pursuit of food and water.

A fifth-grade student who attended an UNRWA school told Al Mezan: "My daily routine involves standing in line for many hours to get water for my family and then carrying it back to our tent. I also search for firewood and help my mother make cookies, which I sell to help meet our needs. **I used to keep my books with me, hoping to return to school one day. However, I lost them while constantly moving from one place to another.**"

On 29 July 2024, the Palestinian Ministry of Education published the results of the *tawjihi* exam for high school students in the West Bank and Jerusalem. The *tawjihi* is the final year exam that determines university admission for Palestinian students and is a significant milestone event for Palestinians. However, Israel's genocidal campaign has deprived 39,000 final-year students in Gaza of this crucial milestone. Notably, approximately 1,320 students took their exams in Egypt and 24 other countries through their respective Palestinian embassies.

Adham Dawoud, a high school senior from Khan Younis, told Al Mezan: "My whole life turned upside down. Instead of pursuing my dream to study interior design, now I work day and night to provide for my family's necessities. I feel as if I were an insignificant person with nothing to aspire to except the end of this war."

The Palestinian Ministry of Education also activated the option for Gaza students to enroll in universities in the West Bank and attend classes online. About 20,000 students enrolled in the second semester, while about 57,000 students enrolled in the summer semester. These numbers, though substantial, are but a fraction



of the 80,000 students enrolled in higher education institutions across Gaza. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that those who are enrolled in online courses will be able to continue their studies successfully due to the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza.

4. The Indirect Effects of Israel's Genocide on Gaza's Education System

Israel's chronic blockade of the Gaza Strip—characterized by frequent bans on the entry of fuel, water, and humanitarian aid—and use of starvation as a weapon have catastrophic psychological and physical effects on schoolchildren that will undoubtedly impair their ability to go back to learning. Children who have lost one or both of their parents, had a limb or more amputated, suffered a life-altering injury, or witnessed the destruction of their houses and belongings are particularly vulnerable. It is currently estimated that more than [816,000 children](#) in Gaza need psychological assistance.

The story of eight-year-old Mohammed Wael Yousef Hamdan is an example of the profound emotional damage inflicted on children. On 28 December 2023, the Israeli military issued evacuation orders to various areas in the Khan Younis Governorate. When Israeli airstrikes on the area intensified, Mohammed's family fled to Rafah. On their way, an airstrike hit the road. Witnessing the sudden bombardment, Mohammed suffered a seizure and was admitted to the intensive care unit at Gaza European Hospital in Khan Younis for ten days. Doctors diagnosed his case as 'temporary amnesia and loss of speech'. He was then referred to Bir El-Abd Central Hospital, in Egypt, for further treatment. Eventually, he was diagnosed with epilepsy at Ain Shams Hospital in Cairo. Mohammed will need long-term psychological therapy to recover.

The [United Nations Children's Fund \(UNICEF\)](#) reported at least 19,000 children have been separated from their parents since October. These are more susceptible to mental health issues like anxiety, loss of appetite, insomnia, and panic attacks every time they hear explosions. According to UNICEF reports before the war, more than 500,000 children in Gaza were already in need of psychosocial support services. In light of the current circumstances, [UNICEF](#) estimates that almost every child in Gaza now needs such services—i.e., over a million children.

Families in Gaza are struggling to keep their children safe amid the repeated bombings. In numerous incidents, children ended up under the rubble of their destroyed houses. More than [9,000 children have been injured](#), with many left to struggle with the pain of losing a limb or more. Layan Ali Musa Abu al-Atta, 13, told Al Mezan: "I live in a family of ten. We fled our home in al-Shujaeyya when the Israeli military ordered the area to evacuate to the south of Wadi Gaza and took shelter in a school in Deir al-Balah. There, we installed a plastic tent. On 2 December 2023, I was standing by the tent when an Israeli airstrike suddenly hit



the neighboring Anas Bin Malek Mosque. My right leg was wounded, and I was transported to Al Aqsa Hospital via a UNRWA car. I underwent surgery and platinum fixations were used. My health deteriorated further due to gangrene, so I was referred to a hospital in Egypt almost a week later. The doctors could not save my leg and had to amputate it above the knee. The injury also left me paralyzed in the lower half of my body. I'm still undergoing treatment, but I do not know how I'm supposed to go back to school. My life is ruined."

UNRWA Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini, [noted](#): "Education is also a priority in Gaza, where every second person is a child. Palestinians value education highly – it has been the only investment from which they could not be dispossessed. More than 625,000 deeply traumatized children are out of school. Half went to UNRWA schools before the war. Today, they spend their days scavenging in the rubble and waiting to collect water in blistering heat. They are at risk of violence and exploitation, including recruitment by armed groups. If we fail to bring them back to learning, we will lose an entire generation and sow the seeds of hatred, resentment, and future conflict."

5. Conclusions

The evidence at our disposal points to deliberate and repeated attacks by Israeli forces against Palestinian educational facilities in Gaza, with the aim to disrupt learning for as long as possible. School and university students, teachers, and academics are systematically killed, injured, or detained. Al Mezan stresses that education is a basic human right that works to raise people out of poverty, level inequalities and ensure sustainable development. Israel's actions constitute not only genocidal acts but also grave violations of international human rights law—particularly the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights—and international humanitarian law.

Al Mezan calls on the international community to take swift and decisive action to halt the ongoing genocide in Gaza, including by enforcing an immediate, unconditional ceasefire. We urge the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to promptly investigate and prosecute the orchestrators and perpetrators of genocidal acts in Gaza within the Israeli government and military, including the wholesale destruction of the Palestinian education system.