



Fact Sheet: The Effects of Israel's Genocidal Siege and Starvation on Gaza's Children, Pregnant Women, and Nursing Mothers

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Introduction

For more than a year and a half, Israel has intentionally carried out actions against the Palestinian population of Gaza that amount to acts of genocide, particularly through a range of policies aimed at depriving them of food and water. Since 2 March 2025, Israeli authorities have imposed an unprecedented and devastating siege on Gaza, deliberately obstructing the entry of humanitarian aid, including food, fuel, and cooking gas. At the same time, Israeli bombardments have systematically targeted the agricultural and industrial sectors, crippling local production and making food even more scarce. Large agricultural lands in Rafah, as well as in eastern and northern Gaza—areas now under full Israeli control—have been razed to the ground and destroyed. As a result, nowadays, more than two million Palestinians in Gaza rely entirely on humanitarian food aid.

According to the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP), approximately 116,000 metric tons of food aid—"enough to feed one million people for up to four months"—remain stuck outside Gaza's crossings, only a short drive away from where it is needed. On 31 March 2025, all 25 [WFP-supported bakeries](#) in Gaza have closed as wheat flour and cooking fuel ran out. Market supplies have dwindled, and food prices have skyrocketed. As a result, food insecurity and malnutrition have reached record levels. Significant numbers of people rely on community kitchens serving limited meals such as lentils, beans, and pasta. At the same time, as documented by Al Mezan, the Israeli military has [intensified](#) targeted attacks on these vital community kitchens.

"We are waiting for the crossing to reopen so that milk and food can be brought in," said a grandmother caring for her malnourished infant granddaughter. "[She] is now experiencing breathing difficulties, severe vomiting, and extreme frailty. I fear we may lose her at any moment." Since the onset of the ongoing genocide, at least 52 Palestinian children have died as a result of malnutrition. As the Israeli government not only continues to block humanitarian aid but has also [approved](#) plans to escalate military operations in Gaza, tens of thousands more Palestinian children now face the same fate. In testimony to Al Mezan, a mother of four expressed the unbearable fear that now defines her daily life: "If this continues, my children will lose their ability to move, hear, and see. I don't want to lose my children like I lost their father. They're all I have left in this life."



This fact sheet provides an overview of the devastating impact of Israel's ongoing siege and genocidal policies on the nutritional health of Palestinian children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers in Gaza. Drawing on firsthand testimonies and medical reports, it exposes the severity of the man-made famine in Gaza and underscores the urgent need for international accountability and humanitarian intervention.

The findings demonstrate that Israeli authorities are employing starvation as a weapon of war. Al Mezan also affirms that the intentional denial of food, water, and humanitarian aid, the systematic destruction of agricultural lands, and the targeting of relief operations constitute genocidal acts as defined under Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the Genocide Convention).

Nutritional Conditions of Children, Pregnant Women, and Nursing Mothers

According to the [Nutrition Cluster in the State of Palestine](#) (Nutrition Cluster), a coordinated mechanism led by UNICEF, in Gaza, there are currently 60,041 Palestinian children under the age of five and 16,492 pregnant and breastfeeding women in urgent need of treatment for acute malnutrition. The Palestinian Ministry of Health told Al Mezan that around 60,000 children aged 0–14 already receiving primary healthcare are also suffering from acute malnutrition, and that around 50,000 pregnant and nursing women are experiencing nutritional deficiencies and are in urgent need of vitamins and proteins.¹

Israel's total siege and closure of crossings led to a sharp increase in the number of malnourished children in need of medical treatment. However, local healthcare facilities and units specializing in malnutrition care are facing severe shortages of nutritional supplements. During an interview conducted on 28 April 2025, Dr. Rana Zuaiter, Head of the Therapeutic Nutrition Department at Al-Awda Hospital in Al-Nuseirat Refugee Camp, told Al Mezan:

“The hospital receives between 180 and 240 cases daily of children, nursing mothers, and pregnant women suffering from moderate to severe malnutrition. During the ceasefire, these cases had constituted approximately 16% of all hospital admissions, but that number has surged to around 60%. Some patients require intensive care and overnight hospitalization. The continued closure of the crossings has caused a severe shortage of essential nutritional supplements for children.”

The [Nutrition Cluster](#) estimated that around 290,678 Palestinian children and 149,843 pregnant women and nursing mothers are currently in desperate need of nutritional and micronutrient supplements. The health of nursing women continues to decline due to the

¹ Interview with Eng. Zaher Al-Wahidi, Head of the Health Information Unit at the Ministry of Health, conducted on 24 April 2025.

economic collapse and food scarcity, which directly affects their babies, many of whom now suffer from inadequate breast milk supply, as their mothers have endured prolonged periods of malnutrition.

A displaced mother from Al-Shuja'iyya neighborhood in eastern Gaza City, now sheltering in western Gaza City, told Al Mezan:

“My daughter Amal, who is 18 months old, was diagnosed with malnutrition at Al-Rimal Clinic, because I, too, am malnourished. She relies entirely on breastfeeding, but I don't have access to any nutritious food. The markets are completely empty: no eggs, no meat, no fruit, not even vegetables. What little food is available is too expensive. UNICEF provided us with nutritional supplements, but they're not enough. They've become my only meals – breakfast and dinner, rather than supplements to meals.”

The growing malnutrition crisis is now compounded by the reemergence of poliovirus, with viral particles still being detected in Gaza. As reported by the [Palestinian Ministry of Health](#), the continued ban on polio vaccine imports now places over 602,000 Palestinian children at risk of lifelong disabilities, threatening to undo months of public health efforts.

Effects of Malnutrition on Children, Pregnant Women, and Nursing Mothers

Fifty-two Palestinian children have died because of malnutrition and dehydration during the ongoing genocide, 95% of them under the age of one.² Children under the age of 10 remain particularly vulnerable due to the prolonged lack of access to a balanced and adequate diet. The miscarriage rate in Gaza has risen by 300%, and premature births have increased by 25%.³ As a result, 55-60% of babies are now born prematurely, compared to just 30-35% before the current genocide.⁴

Malnutrition has had a particularly severe impact on pregnant women, exacerbated by the lack of nutritional supplements, poor hygiene conditions, and limited access to safe drinking water.⁵ These factors have contributed to serious complications in newborns, whose birth weights now range between 1.5 and 2.5 kilograms, significantly below the healthy average of 2.5 to 3.5 kilograms.⁶ M.D., a Palestinian mother who recently gave

² Interview with Eng. Zaher Al-Wahidi, Head of the Health Information Unit at the Ministry of Health, conducted on 24 April 2025.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dr. Ahmed Al-Farra, Head of Pediatrics and Obstetrics at Nasser Hospital, video publish by media outlet Falasteen on 25 April 2025, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Psb_IzSb_0I

⁵ To learn more about Gaza's water and waste crisis, see: Al Mezan, “Israel's Systematic Destruction and Siege Turn Gaza's Waste Crisis Into a Health and Environmental Threat”, 1 May 2025, available at: <https://mezan.org/en/post/46696>; Al Mezan, “Fact Sheet: Gaza's Deepening Water Crisis Amid the Ongoing Genocide”, April 2025, available at: <https://mezan.org/en/post/46688>.

⁶ Interview with Dr. Ahmed Al-Farra, Head of Pediatrics and Obstetrics at Nasser Hospital, conducted on 24 April 2025.

birth and requested anonymity out of fear for her life and the safety of her family, told Al Mezan:

“I gave birth in the general delivery room instead of the specialized unit because my injuries prevented my being transferred. The pain was unbearable. I experienced heavy bleeding after birth, and my baby weighed only 2.2 kg. She still suffers from severe jaundice, but the doctors couldn’t even determine its severity because the necessary test is unavailable.”

Children are suffering from a deficient diet, lacking protein-rich foods, meat, fruits, and vegetables. As a result, 80–90% of children are now experiencing anemia.⁷ Another mother, N.H., also requested anonymity due to safety concerns. She told Al Mezan:

“Doctors found that my three-year-old child suffers from malnutrition. I went to the clinic to get nutritional supplements to address some of the deficiencies, but the child refuses to take them. He cries constantly, asking for eggs, but they’re not available. The market has very little food, and items like meat, chicken, and fruit are completely unavailable. Adults like us have started suffering from fatigue and mental fog due to poor nutrition. We barely manage one meal a day, usually lentils or pasta. We’re deprived of almost all other kinds of food.”

Malnutrition has also contributed to a sharp increase in respiratory illnesses, with reported cases rising from just 2 to 240 per month during the last quarter of 2024.⁸ Diseases such as diarrhea, skin infections, and pneumonia have become increasingly widespread, particularly among children. Dr. Al-Farra, Head of Pediatrics and Obstetrics at Nasser Hospital, also told Al Mezan that, before the ongoing genocide, only one case of pneumonia was typically seen every 200 children every two years. However, since the onset of the genocide, Nasser Hospital alone has recorded 30 cases. In 24 of these cases, half of the lungs had to be surgically removed, while the remaining six children died.⁹

A mother of four, identified as K.A., shared her experience with Al Mezan but asked to remain anonymous for safety reasons. She said:

“I have four children. My husband was killed at the beginning of 2024. After the collapse of the ceasefire agreement on 18 March 2025, I was forced to flee from the North Gaza Governorate to the Al-Safatawi area in Gaza City, starting the nightmare of displacement all over again. I couldn’t meet my children’s needs for

⁷ Interview with Dr. Ahmed Al-Farra, Head of Pediatrics and Obstetrics at Nasser Hospital, conducted on 24 April 2025.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.



proper food, clean water, or essential medical care. They became weak, lethargic, and unable to play or run. They have also developed skin diseases. One medical organization referred me for a check-up. The doctor told me that my 10-year-old son, Mohammed, suffers from malnutrition and needs food rich in proteins and vitamins. He advised me to stop feeding him food with preservatives. His skin has developed fungal infections. Even though I bought him medicine, his condition has not improved. His weight continues to drop and is now less than it should be at his age. I look for flour to feed my children, but what's available smells bad, is riddled with weevils, and is overpriced. If this continues, my children will lose their ability to move, hear, and see. I don't want to lose my children like I lost their father. They're all I have left in this life."

Data shared by the Ministry of Health with Al Mezan indicate that 90% of children in Gaza under five years old have suffered from at least one infectious disease, with 70% affected by diarrhea. There has also been a rise in congenital abnormalities, with 172 cases recorded at Nasser Medical Complex during June, July, and August 2024. Of these, 20% resulted in death.¹⁰

How Malnutrition Affects Children's Growth and Development

Children exposed to prolonged malnutrition face lasting consequences that profoundly affect their physical, cognitive, behavioral, and psychological development. In many cases, these impacts are irreversible or require years of intensive recovery and care.

In an interview with Al Mezan, Dr. Ahmed Al-Farra, Head of Pediatrics and Obstetrics at Nasser Hospital, guided us through the severe and lasting effects of prolonged malnutrition on children and identified the main impacts as follows:

- **Delayed physical growth:** Chronic malnutrition can result in short stature or stunted growth. In many cases, this delay is irreversible if nutrition improves later in life. Affected children frequently suffer from underdeveloped muscles and bones, which can limit their physical strength and overall mobility.

Another mother, J.M., reported her experience and asked to remain partially anonymous for her safety. She stated: "I noticed swelling in my daughter's foot, and by the next day, it had spread to her legs and face. I took her to the European Gaza Hospital, and after undergoing tests, she was transferred to Nasser Medical Complex. The doctors told us she had severe malnutrition, which caused complications and compromised her body's ability to absorb water. [...] There are several other children in the ward receiving treatment for malnutrition. I'm deeply

¹⁰ Unpublished information shared with Al Mezan by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.



worried that malnutrition will affect my children's growth and jeopardize their future."

- **Cognitive development delays:** A deficiency in key nutrients such as iron, zinc, and Omega-3 fatty acids can impair brain development, resulting in delayed language acquisition and cognitive skill development.
- **Chronic health conditions:** Malnutrition can lead to enduring health issues, including chronic anemia, weakened immune systems, and a higher susceptibility to infectious diseases. These conditions also increase the risk of developing non-communicable diseases later in life, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Another woman, identified as F.H., stated: "On 15 July 2024, my daughter gave birth to a baby girl while we were displaced in southern Gaza. Initially, the baby was healthy. However, due to a lack of nutritious food and clean water, my daughter became extremely weak, which impacted her ability to breastfeed. The baby developed heart muscle weakness and severe weight loss. With the lack of eggs, milk, and baby formula, due to the border closure, her condition worsened. Doctors at Al-Durra Hospital, in east Gaza City, diagnosed her with malnutrition and anaemia, requiring special food and formula that are unavailable. After Al-Durra Hospital was evacuated, she was transferred to Al-Rantisi Hospital, also in Gaza City, but this did not bring any improvement, as there was no available treatment there. We are waiting for the crossing to reopen so that milk and food can be brought in. My granddaughter is now experiencing breathing difficulties, severe vomiting, and extreme frailty. I fear we may lose her at any moment."

- **Weakened immunity and increased infections:** Children suffering from prolonged malnutrition are more vulnerable to infections such as chronic diarrhea and pneumonia. Even after their nutritional intake improves, their immune systems may remain compromised.
- **Behavioral and psychological disorders:** Malnutrition can contribute to psychological and behavioral issues in children, including anxiety, depression, and poor social interaction. The mental stress caused by food insecurity can lead to long-lasting mental health issues.
- **Hindered overall development:** Children affected by malnutrition often struggle to reach their full potential in terms of health, education, and future productivity.



Legal Findings

The intentional deprivation of food, water, and humanitarian aid; the systematic destruction of agricultural lands and industrial infrastructure; and the direct targeting of community kitchens, humanitarian workers, and food and water storage facilities constitute genocidal acts as defined in Article II of the Genocide Convention, carried out with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Palestinian population in Gaza. These acts include:

- **The killing of members of the group** through starvation, as evidenced by the deaths of at least 52 Palestinian children from malnutrition and dehydration, 95% of whom were under the age of one;
- **Causing serious bodily and mental harm**, as evidenced by the widespread suffering caused by prolonged starvation, the sharp increase in health conditions, and the psychological trauma reported among Palestinian children and mothers;
- **The deliberate infliction of conditions of life intended to bring about the group's physical destruction**, either in whole or in part, including through the ongoing total siege, the forced displacement of most of the population, the destruction of agricultural lands all across Gaza, and the complete blockade of essential resources necessary to support human life, such as food, water, and medical aid;
- **Measures intended to prevent births within the group**, as evidenced by the 300% rise in the miscarriage rate.

These actions also amount to the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare, as defined in Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), for which the ICC has already sought arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

Al Mezan calls for expanding the grounds for which arrest warrants are sought to include acts of genocide, as defined in Article 6 of the Rome Statute, and for such warrants to also include the current Israeli Defense Minister, Israel Katz, as well as the senior leadership of the Israeli military, beginning with the head of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), Major-General Ghassan Alian.



Conclusion

In light of the above, it is evident that the various starvation tactics employed by Israeli authorities are having a direct and devastating impact on Palestinian children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers. The continued use of these tactics places the lives of thousands of Palestinian children in immediate danger. For those who will survive, the long-term physical and psychological damage will last a lifetime.

As the occupying power, Israel has explicit obligations under international law to ensure the protection of Gaza's civilian population. In this regard, international humanitarian law requires—at a bare minimum—that Israel ensures, to the fullest extent of the means available to it, that the basic needs of Gaza's population are met. Specifically, it must guarantee the supply of food, medical supplies, and other essential goods necessary to ensure the population can live under adequate material conditions, as stipulated in Article 55 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The international community must cease absolving Israel of its responsibilities as an occupying power. Al Mezan urges the international community to demand Israeli authorities immediately and permanently open all Gaza's crossings and ensure the flow of aid and resources. Gaza must also be opened for the free movement of people, particularly medical patients and the wounded who require immediate, life-saving treatment otherwise unavailable due to Israel's wholesale destruction of Gaza's healthcare system.

What is urgently needed now are not more expressions of concern, but concrete actions: targeted sanctions on Israeli officials and institutions responsible for grave violations of international law; the revision and suspension of diplomatic and economic relations with Israel, including EU-Israel Association Agreement; and a comprehensive two-way arms embargo to stop supplying Israel with the weapons used to kill and maim Palestinians. The implementation of International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrants must follow without delay, excuse, or exception.