



Research Report

UNICEF

*Enhancing food security for children
in Gaza*

*Merijn Brinksma
(Head Chair)*



Introduction

Since the end of 2023, food security among children in the Gaza Strip has reduced drastically and, by 2025, has hit catastrophic levels. The cause of this issue is the fact that there is constant war between Hamas and the State of Israel. On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a mass attack, and the response by the Israeli army was severe and accompanied by even more blockades of the Gaza Strip. The constant shutting down of crossing points, fuel and goods restrictions, and widespread destruction of infrastructure have caused a great inconvenience to the residents of the Gaza Strip in accessing food, clean water, and medicine. One of the most vulnerable groups in this is the children.

Gaza crisis may be regarded as multiple dimensional. It consists of various factors, acute life-threatening lack of food and infant formula but, also, of the programs which are interrupted and which are involved with the vaccinations and growth monitoring. And hyperinflation, unemployment, unpayable food prices, should not be overlooked.

Definitions of Key Terms

Food Security:

When all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their needs for an active and healthy lifestyle.

Acute Malnutrition (Wasting):

Rapid weight loss or failure to gain weight resulting in a low weight-for-height ratio; often life-threatening in children.

Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM):

Results from insufficient energy (kilocalories), fat, protein and/or other nutrients (vitamins and minerals, etc.) to cover individual needs. SAM is frequently associated with medical complications due to metabolic disturbances and compromised immunity.

Community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM):

Identifies and treats cases of uncomplicated malnutrition primarily on an outpatient basis.

Cases are often identified by caregivers, who screen children by measuring their mid-upper-arm circumference (MUAC).

Humanitarian Access:

The ability of humanitarian actors to reach populations in need safely and without interference.

Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA):

a type of humanitarian aid where cash or vouchers are given to people affected by crises. Unlike material assistance, such as food or blankets, it allows people to buy goods and services for themselves, based on their own needs and preferences.

WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene):

A sector in development cooperation, or within local governments, that provides water, sanitation, and hygiene services to communities

General overview

This section delves deeper into the root causes, mechanisms, consequences, statistics, and previous research findings regarding food security for children in the Gaza Strip.

Roots of the problem:

A combination of structural factors and conflict and humanitarian factors determine the situation in Gaza.

Since the end of 2023, extensive military actions have destroyed essential areas of infrastructure in Gaza: bakeries, greenhouses, wells, water treatment plants and roads. To provide an example, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and its satellite-monitoring partner UNOSAT discovered that as of April 2025 only 4.6 percent of cropland was still available to cultivate, and 71.2 percent of the greenhouses and 82.8 percent of the agricultural wells were destroyed (FAO & UNOSAT, 2025).

Border crossings and supply lines have been closed or reduced to a crawl (especially since 2 March 2025 when numerous deliveries have been blocked). This hides food, fuel, cooking gas, agricultural inputs and humanitarian aid in the territory. Indicatively, on 16–29 March

2025, the quantity of food commodities stuck outside of Gaza stood at more than 89,000 metric tons (OCHA, 2025a).

Closure of crossings and destruction of the energy grid have pushed fuel and cooking-gas prices highly up. Cooking gas prices have been reported to have increased dramatically since October 2023, as of March 2025 (OCHA, 2025b). This has a serious impact on the preparation of food by households, relying on bakeries, the operation of water pumps, and the preservation of perishable goods.

As the infrastructure has been damaged, movement has been limited, there has been large displacement, and incredible loss of jobs has resulted in many families losing income.

Markets are vacant, prices are skyrocketing, and financial services are limited. According to one of the reports by OCHA, by the end of March 2025, there were only a few stocks of foodstuffs in some of the shops, and families had already to resort to adding macaroni to the flour to make ends meet (OCHA, 2025a).

Preparation and storage of food require the use of water, power and sanitation, which have also been seriously damaged. Limited water supply raises the chances of diseases that consequently deteriorate the nutritional status (UNICEF, 2025a).

Consequences and effects for the children:

According to UN agencies, more than 470,000 people in Gaza are facing “catastrophic hunger”, with children under five and pregnant/breastfeeding women especially at risk. In August 2025, famine was formally confirmed in parts of Gaza (WFP, 2025a).

Malnutrition weakens immune systems, especially those of children, making them much more vulnerable to infections. Reports stated that there is a possibility that around 57 children died by malnutrition, though this is probably an underestimate and could range much higher. Besides that, around 71,000 children under five are projected to be malnourished in the last 11 months (UNICEF, 2025b).

We talked earlier about the destruction of the infrastructure, but what does that mean for the children? With schools damaged, many children moved somewhere else. This means that school feeding programmes have also stopped existing (UNICEF, 2025b).

One of the most severe and long-term consequences of the crisis in Gaza is about dietary diversity. According to UNICEF and WFP, more than 90% of the children only consume one or two food groups daily; this usually sums up to bread, rice, or lentils as there is no other food

in the region. The combination of the disappearance of proteins, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and the absolute destruction of the farmland made it impossible to import or produce locally any food. In the more northern parts of the Gaza Strip, where restrictions are the most severe, many families sadly survive for days at a time on only bread and tea, which is simply impossible for a human being. Prices for baby formula have increased to around \$100 per container. When the salary of an average Palestinian is around \$300–\$500, and taking into account that this has dropped significantly since the attacks, it is impossible to buy (OCHA, 2025c).

And the biggest impactful factor is the long-term development of the child. Early malnutrition has consequences that will hold up their entire lives. Think about the increased risk of chronic diseases. Examples are soft bones from vitamin D deficiency, blindness from vitamin A deficiency, and stunted growth from protein-energy undernutrition (UNICEF, 2025c).

Previous studies and discoveries.

A number of publications (WHO EMRO, nutrition cluster bulletins) reveal that more than 90 percent of the population of Gaza is experiencing acute food insecurity with children and women being disproportionately impacted.¹

A study has indicated that nutrition-WASH programmes (therapeutic feeding in conjunction with safe water and sanitation) prove to be much more effective during such crises.

OCHA and other reports on monitoring indicate that the transfer between ceasefires and the revival of hostilities is associated with the significant decrease in access to food, the results of service delivery and nutritional screening.²

Aid agencies agree that the time to avert mass child mortality and developmental impacts of aid is rapidly disappearing unless access to large-scale assistance is made immediately.

¹ <https://www.emro.who.int/emhj-volume-31-2025/volume-31-issue-4/integrating-emergency-nutrition-into-unrwas-humanitarian-response-in-gaza.html>

² (Gaza Humanitarian Response Update | 2 - 15 March 2025 | United Nations Office For The Coordination Of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2025)

Major parties involved

Israel:

Controls many of the entry points into Gaza and hence movement of goods, such as food and fuel. Humanitarian access is highly dependent on its security policies and restrictions.

Palestinian Authorities (Hamas and the Palestinian Authority):

Control the domestic government of Gaza and the West Bank, respectively. Domestic factions make it difficult to coordinate the aid and manage food systems.

Egypt:

Blocks the crossing at Rafah, the sole non-Israeli entry point into Gaza. The policies of Egypt in terms of border control have a great impact on the flows of humanitarian.

United States: One of the main donors of the humanitarian activities and important political player that interferes with Israeli security policy and UN resolutions.

Qatar and European Union (EU):

Key funders of UNRWA, WFP and infrastructure reconstruction of Gaza. Food assistance and livelihood programs are directly dependent on their funding.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
2007	Israel and Egypt impose a blockade on Gaza after Hamas takes control. Food imports become tightly restricted.
2014	Major conflict damages agricultural land and food storage infrastructure.
2021– 2022	COVID-19 pandemic worsens unemployment and food insecurity.
Oct 2023	Renewed large-scale conflict; infrastructure destruction disrupts all supply lines.

Date	Event
Early 2024	Humanitarian convoys begin limited entry under UN coordination.
Mid-2025	UNICEF and WFP warn that Gaza faces imminent famine conditions for children.

Previous attempts to solve the issue:

Luckily in this case there has been multiple attempts to solve the issue, sadly not always succeeding in the way expected.

From January to September 2024, UNRWA conducted 87 551 MUAC screenings in 5 governorate areas and detected 6398 cases of malnutrition, who were followed up for treatment (Figure 1). The number of children reached through acute malnutrition screening activities peaked in September 2024, with 18 240 children aged 6–59 months screened across Gaza Strip. This marks a significant increase compared to the 722 children aged 6–23 months screened during the piloting phase in Rafah in January 2024. This increase reflects UNRWA's expanded coverage of nutrition services during the reported period. UNRWA covered approximately 28.2% of the nutrition cluster target of the 311 000 children aged 6–59 months³ (Alkhamash et al., 2025)

Since the ceasefire, WFP has reached 1 million people across the Gaza Strip with family food packages, against a target of 1.6 million. With supplies limited, each family received a reduced ration of one package with enough food for 10 days.

It was the first round of regular food package distributions since April. WFP currently has 44 food distribution points active across Gaza, against a target of 145.

An estimated 700,000 people receive fresh bread daily, supplied through 17 WFP-supported bakeries nine in south and central Gaza and eight in the north. WFP's goal is to get 25 bakeries up and running.

³ Alkhamash, H., Najjar, S. A., Tabaza, A., Horino, M., Chen, J., Jaffal, R., Jadba, G. A., & Seita, A. (2025). Integrating emergency nutrition into UNRWA's humanitarian response in Gaza. *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, 31(4), 274–280. <https://doi.org/10.26719/2025.31.4.274>

Nearly 200,000 people received emergency digital cash payments in October, enabling them to purchase food and essential goods from local markets. This was 100% of the monthly target.

More than 150,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls, as well as children under 5, received vital nutrition supplements in October. This is almost half of WFP's target.

Nutritious snacks such as date bars and High-Energy Biscuits have reached 70,000 schoolchildren at 84 temporary learning sites run by partners. The monthly target is 120,000. WFP continues to lead on logistics support for the broader humanitarian system, as well as helping to provide emergency telecommunications and coordination for the food security sector for maximum reach with partners.⁴

Sadly these efforts are not enough.

Possible solutions

Make sure complete and unhindered humanitarian access.

Open border crossings, ensure movement of food, fuel and medical nutrition and ensure supplies are handed out by neutral humanitarian actors. There should be water pumps, sanitation and health services.

Increase prevention and treatment nutrition.

Increase screening of young children (6-59 months), screening on MUAC, early referral of children with acute malnutrition into treatment centers, and therapeutic food (RUTF) and micronutrients which can be administered immediately. Promote safe infant feeding and breastfeeding.

Markets that are under cash and voucher programmes.

⁴ *One million people in Gaza receive WFP food parcels.* (2025, November 4). World Food Program USA. <https://wfpusa.org/news/one-million-people-gaza-receive-wfp-food-parcels/>

Financial assistance would revive buying power in localities with running markets and would boost domestic trade. The market reviews, price checks, and inflation insurances are needed.

Revive local food supply chains and production.

Invest in small scale agriculture, rooftop or home gardens, reviving bakeries, distribution of seeds, maintaining irrigation and providing energy to food processing. This enhances the long-term sustainability.

Combined WASH and nutrition programs.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene are essential in nutrition. Provide water pump fuel, hygiene packs, infant and child food preparations, and nutrition and WASH programs.

Further Readings

- IPC Global Initiative. (2025, August). *Gaza Strip: Famine confirmed in Gaza Governorate, projected to expand | 1 July - 30 September 2025* [Special Snapshot]. https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2025-08/IPC_Gaza_Strip_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Malnutrition_July_Sept2025_Special_Snapshot.pdf
- UNICEF. (2025, August 22). *Famine confirmed for first time in Gaza*. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/famine-confirmed-first-time-gaza>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2025, July 27). *Malnutrition rates reach alarming levels in Gaza, WHO warns*. <https://www.who.int/news/item/27-07-2025-malnutrition-rates-reach-alarming-levels-in-gaza-who-warns>
- Horino, M., Zaqqout, R., Habash, R., Albaik, S., Abed, Y., Al-Jadba, G., West, K. P., & Seita, A. (2024). Food insecurity, dietary inadequacy, and malnutrition in the Gaza Strip: a cross-sectional nutritional assessment of refugee children entering the first grade of UNRWA schools and their households before the conflict of 2023–24. *The Lancet Global Health*, 12(11), e1871–e1880. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2214-109x\(24\)00320-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2214-109x(24)00320-6)

Bibliography

- FAO & UNOSAT. (2025). *Gaza Strip agricultural damage assessment: April 2025 update*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <https://www.fao.org>
- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2025a). *Gaza humanitarian response update | 2–15 March 2025*. United Nations. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/gaza-humanitarian-response-update-2-15-march-2025>
- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2025b). *Fuel and energy crisis in Gaza: Situation overview*. United Nations. <https://www.ochaopt.org>
- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2025c). *Gaza market monitoring report*. United Nations. <https://www.ochaopt.org>
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). (2025a). *Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) crisis in Gaza*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org>
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). (2025b). *Nutrition and child health in Gaza: Situation overview*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org>
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). (2025c). *The impact of malnutrition on child development in Gaza*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org>
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) & World Food Programme (WFP). (2025). *Joint child nutrition report: Gaza Strip*. United Nations. <https://www.wfp.org>
- World Food Programme (WFP). (2025a). *Famine declared in parts of Gaza*. WFP. <https://www.wfp.org>
- World Food Programme (WFP). (2025b). *Food security assessment for the Gaza Strip*. WFP. <https://www.wfp.org>
- Alkhamash, H., Najjar, S. A., Tabaza, A., Horino, M., Chen, J., Jaffal, R., Jadba, G. A., & Seita, A. (2025). Integrating emergency nutrition into UNRWA’s humanitarian response in Gaza. *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, 31(4), 274–280. <https://doi.org/10.26719/2025.31.4.274>

UNICEF Research Report

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF USA). (2025, October 24). *UNICEF delivers lifesaving supplies and cash transfers to families in Gaza*. <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/unicef-delivers-lifesaving-supplies-and-cash-transfers-families-gaza>

Key statistics:

World Health Organization: WHO. (2025, 22 augustus). Famine confirmed for first time in Gaza. WHO. <https://www.who.int/news/item/22-08-2025-famine-confirmed-for-first-time-in-gaza>

M.I. (2025, 12 augustus). FAO: Gaza's agricultural infrastructure continues to deteriorate at alarming rate - Question of Palestine. Question Of Palestine. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/fao-press-release-26jul25/>

Gaza Humanitarian Response Update | 30 March - 12 April 2025 | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory. (2025, 15 april). United Nations Office For The Coordination Of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/gaza-humanitarian-response-update-30-march-12-april-2025>