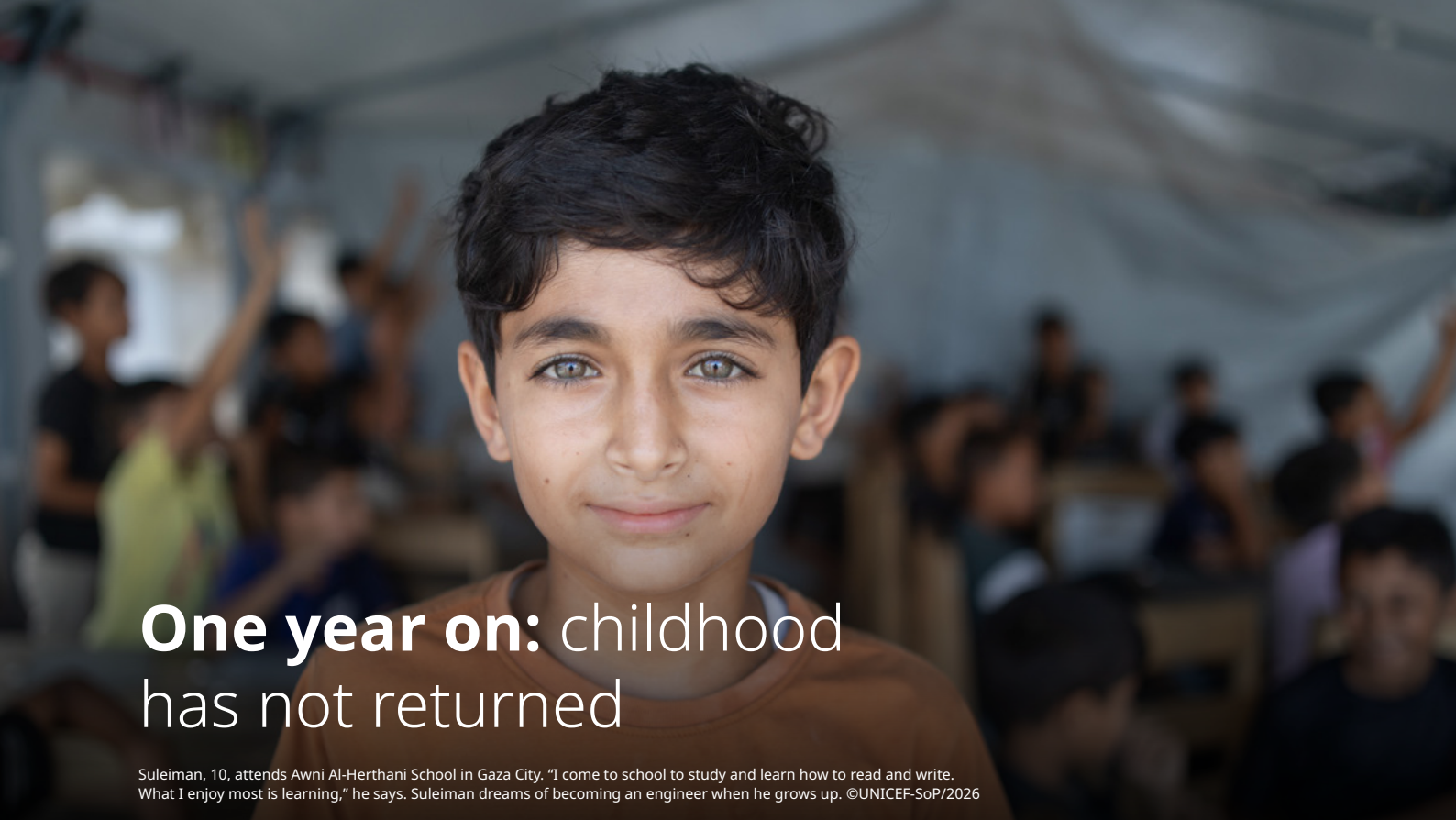


UNICEF State of Palestine

# Hope amid the Pain: Palestinian Children in the Gaza Strip One Year after the Ceasefire

"Every day, I help my mother collect water." Haya, 7 years old from Gaza City, like many other children across the Gaza Strip, joins the daily struggle to collect water, affecting their time to learn and play or simply be a child. ©UNICEF/SoP/2026



# One year on: childhood has not returned

Suleiman, 10, attends Awni Al-Herthani School in Gaza City. "I come to school to study and learn how to read and write. What I enjoy most is learning," he says. Suleiman dreams of becoming an engineer when he grows up. ©UNICEF-SoP/2026

## **One year since the ceasefire, childhood in Gaza is still defined by survival.**

More than 340 children have been reported killed, and over 600 others injured, many suffering life-altering injuries. Violence, displacement and loss continue to shape everyday childhood.

## **The so-called "Yellow Line" marks the edge of current Israeli physical presence.**

Nearly half of the children reported killed since the start of the ceasefire have lost their lives in areas near the line. Its gradual expansion continues to forcibly displace families while the absence of clear demarcation on the ground puts children at grave risk.

**The ceasefire increased access for humanitarian action, but it has not yet delivered the safety, stability and recovery Palestinian children require, including under the ceasefire agreement.**

**A school should be somewhere a child is safe enough to learn, play and build a future. In Gaza, parents and caregivers still fear that a child may not make it to the classroom or back home.**

In July 2026, Khalid completed one of the biggest milestones of his young life: passing his Tawjihi, the Palestinian end of high school exams. He prepared for them at a UNICEF-supported learning centre in southern Gaza, while holding on to his hopes for the future. On his way to the market to buy sweets to celebrate, he was killed in an air strike. Khalid had turned 18 just four days earlier. More than 21,700 children reported killed during the war never reached that milestone.

Beyond the direct harm, some 800,000 children remain displaced, many with no home to return to. Families are living in tents, overcrowded areas or damaged buildings, surrounded by rubble and accumulated solid waste. Some 60,000 of these children are living without one or both parents killed during the war, or since the ceasefire.

For Palestinian children in Gaza, the rights to safe water, sanitation, health care, education, protection and play remain far from fully realized. Put simply, **children have suffered too much already.**

## Mouaid: longing for a normal childhood, studying maths and playing volleyball

On a late August 2026 evening, 12-year-old Mouaid was playing volleyball with friends as the sun was setting. Then there was an attack. Shrapnel lodged in the back of his head. **"I don't know where it came from. If I had heard it, I would have run,"** was the first thing he told his mother, Sibreen. Doctors removed the shrapnel, but Mouaid continues to experience problems with his sight and hearing.

**"His mental health has been impacted. He's very sensitive to sound. It's the trauma I think, not actually physical,"** says Sibreen.

Before he was injured, Mouaid walked 20 minutes each day to attend a UNICEF-supported learning centre. Now, he faces a long recovery before he can return. **"I want to be an accountant when I'm older, I love to study maths at school,"** he says.



For Mouaid, recovery means being able to learn and play again

Mouaid, 12, recovers at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City after shrapnel struck him following an attack while he was playing volleyball with his friends. ©UNICEF-SoP/2026

## One year on: the scale of the impact on children

**+ 340** children

reported killed since the ceasefire

**1.7** million

people, including 800,000 children, remain displaced

**10,000** children

estimated to have suffered life altering injuries due to the war



### Education

- Nearly 98% of school buildings damaged
- 200,000 children out of 700,000 school-aged children remain outside any form of structured learning



### Water and sanitation

- 74% of households rely on trucked water
- 63% of people accessing less than 6 litres of drinking water per day
- 900,000+ people exposed to accumulated waste in residential areas



### Health and nutrition

- 48% of primary health care centres remain operational
- Thousands of children awaiting urgent medical evacuation
- One in eight children under five affected by stunting



### Child protection

- 60,000 children lost one or both parents
- 9 in 10 children consulted need psychosocial support

**Together, these figures show not only the scale of the humanitarian crisis, but the lasting effects of conflict, displacement, and loss on Palestinian children's lives and futures one year since the ceasefire.**

## Yet amid the pain, children continue to hold on to hope.

Across Gaza, Palestinian children are still dreaming and planning for a better future.

The ceasefire has not delivered the safety every child has a right to, but improved access has enabled UNICEF and partners to expand lifesaving support and begin restoring some of the services children depend on.



A group of children pose together on the staircase of a damaged building in the Gaza Strip, sharing a moment of happiness amid the destruction surrounding them. ©UNICEF-SoP/2026

# Delivering critical support: towards restoring the systems children need

Across the Gaza Strip, water, sanitation, health and education systems are decimated. Restoring these Palestinian public services is the most sustainable way to improve children's lives.



## Water and sanitation: restoring a basic right

**UNICEF leads the water, sanitation and hygiene response in Gaza** and, with partners, provides access to safe water for more than 1.2 million people while supporting sanitation services, wastewater management and solid-waste removal. Alongside emergency delivery, **UNICEF is rehabilitating damaged WASH facilities and local water systems**, including wells that bring water closer to where displaced families are living.



## Health: keeping essential care within reach

Over the past year, **UNICEF and partners expanded primary health-care services, delivered medical supplies and equipment, and supported neonatal and paediatric care across Gaza**. In total, 852,000 people, including 530,000 children, received primary health-care services, while 24 fixed routine immunization sites were rehabilitated. This support has helped keep care within reach for children, including specialized support for premature babies, in an environment where mothers' health has also been severely affected.



## Nutrition: treating malnutrition, protecting development

Since the ceasefire, **UNICEF and partners have screened over 300,000 children aged 6-59 months for malnutrition** and treated nearly 47,400 for acute malnutrition. **UNICEF has also piloted its first nutrition programme for children over five**, responding to heightened risks of stunting and developmental delays in an age group too often overlooked.



## Protection and healing

**UNICEF and partners expanded community-based mental health and psychosocial support**, reaching nearly 245,000 children, adolescents and caregivers, while around 9,100 children received individualised case management. To respond to acute trauma, this scaled-up response was critical - and **through play, creative activities and family and community support, children have spaces to express what they feel, reconnect with others and begin to heal**.

## Helping children to be children again

**Every child in Gaza has lived through extreme stress and virtually the entire one million child population requires some form of mental health and psychosocial support.**

“Children are still in survival mode,” says Rania Sammour, UNICEF Child Protection Officer in Gaza.

“Most struggle to concentrate, to retain information and learn. The impact of poor mental health can also affect physical wellbeing, which is why it’s so important to help children to heal today and lay the foundation for better outcomes in the future,” explains Rania.

UNICEF’s ‘Play to Heal’ programme provides structured activities to give children a safe way to release tension and aggression, practice emotional regulation and rebuild concentration. Child-focused play is paired with parent and caregiver programmes to reduce domestic stress and burnout, strengthening the family environment.

The activities also serve as an entry point for identifying and referring children with severe or persistent functional impairments to specialized mental health and protection services tailored to their individual needs.

**“It’s extremely motivating and rewarding to see children gradually opening up and reclaiming their childhoods, even after the first sessions,”** says Rania.

Children participate in UNICEF-supported Play to Heal activities in Gaza City. Engaging in role-playing games and creative techniques that help them express their feelings, process their experiences, and strengthen their emotional well-being. ©UNICEF-SoP/2026





## **Social protection:** supporting families to meet essential needs with dignity

Targeted cash **assistance reached 381,000 people, including 200,000 children**, helping families meet basic needs and support children's wellbeing. Cash-for-work and incentive programmes also supported 17,700 people, including Palestinian health workers, teachers and solid-waste workers. These frontline workers continued to provide essential public services for their communities, while the programmes provided vital income for their families.

Zainab lives with her family in a tent in the park next to where their home once stood. Her family received UNICEF cash assistance which helps Zainab support their wellbeing.

**“Good nutrition is extremely important for children. Before receiving the cash assistance, we could not afford nutritious food. With this support, we were able to buy some fruit and vegetables. My children are very bright and do well at school.”**



Zainab, a mother from Beach Camp in Gaza City, uses cash assistance to buy nutritious foods and other items for her children. ©UNICEF/SoP/2026



Eid, 11-year-old, "I like coming to school because I can study, learn and gain knowledge. I also enjoy being here because I can see my friends. My old school was inside a building, but now I study in a tent. I hope my school will be beautiful again and no longer damaged." ©UNICEF-SoP/2026

## A pathway back to childhood and toward recovery

For children in Gaza, **education is more than a classroom**. UNICEF's learning programme is one of the main ways to reach children with an **integrated package** of learning, protection, psychosocial support, health, nutrition and social services.

Education and recreation supplies began entering the Gaza Strip in February 2026. Since then, UNICEF and partners have expanded the number of learning spaces in school grounds and other areas, begun rehabilitating classrooms and schools, and supported the teaching and administrative structures needed to restore learning.

Around 700,000 children have not had formal education in three years. Since the ceasefire, **UNICEF has provided more than 360,000 children with learning in over 200 centres**. These spaces are not a substitute for school buildings. But for a few hours each day, they give children somewhere to learn, meet friends, play and access other services that help restore a sense of safety and routine.

**Children are reclaiming pieces of their childhood:** a lesson, a game, a conversation with a friend, an adult who listens. That is why children continue to attend, through the heat of summer and the cold of winter, even when learning takes place in a tent.

Mohammed, 8-year-old, told us **"I like coming to school because I can study and play. When I grow up, I want to become a doctor."**

Education is not something to return to once recovery begins. **It is foundational for recovery**. And although nine hours of learning a week in temporary centres can provide vital continuity, Palestinian children need the chance to return to formal, safe and quality education.

## UNICEF response since the ceasefire

### Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)



**1.2** million

million people received water through trucking services



**32** water facilities

rehabilitated, improving access to water for 228,000 people



**9** kilometres

of sewage networks rehabilitated, improving sanitation for 600,000 people



**20,918** m<sup>3</sup>

of solid waste removed

### Health and Nutrition



**852,000**

people, including 530,000 children, received primary health-care services



**24**

fixed childhood routine immunization sites rehabilitated



**300,000**

children aged 6-59 months, screened for malnutrition



Nearly **47,400**

children aged 6-59 months, received acute malnutrition treatment

### Education



**360,000**

children returned to learning across more than 200 UNICEF learning centres



Over **413,000**

educational kits distributed covering 300,000 children



More than **19,100**

adolescents engaged in drama, animation and life-skills activities



**121** classrooms

rehabilitated

### Child and Social Protection



Nearly **245,000**

adolescents and caregivers received mental health and psychosocial support and some 9,100 children individualized case management services



**394,000**

children and caregivers received explosive ordnance risk education



**381,000**

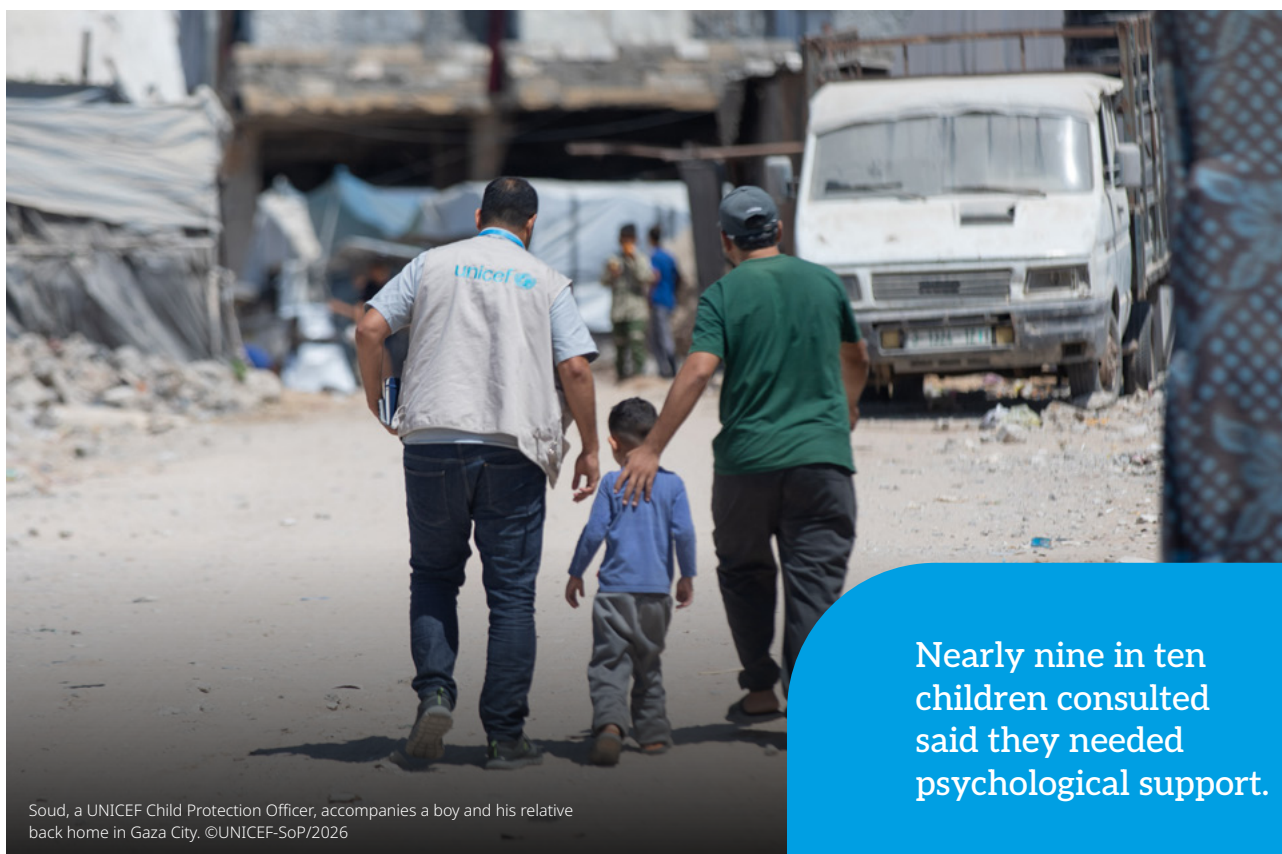
people including 200,000 children, received targeted cash assistance

## Survival is not recovery: the long road back to childhood

**Three years of protracted crisis have reshaped childhood for Palestinian children in Gaza. Homes have been destroyed, families repeatedly displaced, and children have lost parents, grandparents, siblings and friends. For many, fear and uncertainty have become part of everyday life.**

**One year into the fragile ceasefire**, the deeper consequences for children's longer-term development, learning, physical health and emotional wellbeing are becoming clearer. Families and children are trying to live with experiences too heavy for anyone, let alone a child, to carry. **Nearly nine in ten children consulted said they needed psychological support**, with sleep problems, bedwetting, withdrawal and aggressive behaviour among the signs of distress reported by families and frontline workers.

There has been real progress in reaching vulnerable children over the past year. Sustaining and expanding that support is essential. Recovery will require immediate care, but also years of reliable protection, rehabilitation and mental health services.



Nearly nine in ten children consulted said they needed psychological support.

**More than 335,000 young children are estimated to be at risk of developmental delays** following the collapse of early childhood services. Growing numbers of children are living with conflict-related injuries, newly acquired disabilities and long-term rehabilitation needs. **For them, the end of immediate medical treatment is not the end of recovery.** Sustained rehabilitation, assistive technology and psychosocial support will determine whether children can return to learning, participate in community life and reach their full potential.

## Meral: drawing the future she still wants

Nine-year-old Meral lost her left leg when her family's home was hit. That night, she also lost her mother and grandmother. **"I was sleeping next to my mother,"** she says. **"When I woke up, I found myself alone."**

Today, Meral lives with her father in their damaged home, where access to water and power supply remains limited. Before the war, she loved going to school, playing with friends and drawing. Meral hopes to receive a prosthetic limb that would help her move more independently and return to some of the activities she once enjoyed.

Meral still draws. **Her notebook is filled with hearts, houses and suns: pictures of the life she misses, and of the future she still hopes for.**



Meral, 9, stands in front of the rubble of her home in Nuseirat, Gaza Strip. She dreams of receiving a prosthetic limb so she can move more independently.  
©UNICEF-SoP/2026/Eyad Elbaba

**"I want to be like other children," she says.**  
**"I want to play, learn and live safely."**

Families across Gaza are exhausted. Livelihoods are limited, caregiving needs have grown, and **children are increasingly carrying adult burdens**: fetching water, caring for relatives, working instead of learning. At the same time, the social systems families rely on remain dangerously fragile.



Humanitarian assistance has kept children alive, but today too many children still depend on temporary solutions.

Two girls look out from the doorway of makeshift home in the Gaza Strip.  
©UNICEF-SoP/2026

## Lifesaving progress, fragile gains

Following the Integrated Food Security Classification (IPC) confirmation of famine in the Gaza Governorate in August 2025, UNICEF and partners rapidly scaled up the food and nutrition response and treated more than 100,000 children for acute malnutrition in one year. Famine was effectively pushed back as the response expanded, restrictions on nutrition supplies and food items eased, and the ceasefire created an environment in which children could be reached with the support they needed.

**That progress is fragile. Acute malnutrition rates have fallen, but only one in three children under the age of two is currently achieving minimum dietary diversity.**

UNICEF's nutrition **SMART survey** results from June 2026 revealed a **significant prevalence of chronic malnutrition, affecting one in eight children under five**. Stunting is of particular concern, as it can lead to irreversible physical, cognitive, and developmental consequences throughout a child's life.

Nutrition tells the story of the wider response in Gaza. Coordinated humanitarian action can achieve critical gains when access improves, but those gains remain fragile while children continue to live without the systems, basic services and living conditions needed for lasting recovery.

**Lasting outcomes will depend on stronger, functioning systems across health, nutrition, water, sanitation, education and social protection, not on temporary emergency solutions alone.**

## Reaching children despite constraints

**Humanitarian agencies in the Gaza Strip are responding in one of the world's most constrained operating environments.**

Although the ceasefire agreement enabled the entry of a broader range of humanitarian supplies, the commitment to full aid and rehabilitation continues to be constrained by Israeli restrictions affecting access and the delivery of equipment and supplies. So-called “dual use” items, including cement, solar panels, tools and repair materials needed for rehabilitation of critical infrastructure continue to be denied.

Re-electrification efforts remain stalled, leaving hospitals, wastewater treatment plants, and desalination plants dependent on generators. As a result, UNICEF has sourced second-hand generators locally and worked with teams in Gaza to repair and adapt them using the spare parts available, keeping critical WASH and health facilities operating.

This is one of the clearest achievements of the past year: **UNICEF resources and coordination, combined with the expertise and ingenuity of Palestinian frontline workers, have kept essential services functioning for hundreds of thousands of people.**

UNICEF, partners and local communities have begun rehabilitating classrooms, health facilities and local water systems to the extent possible. This included for example the establishment of smaller water wells, bringing water closer to families, reducing the time children spend collecting it and providing a safer, more sustainable and dignified alternative to water trucking.



A boy rides his bicycle past a UNICEF-rehabilitated water well in the Al-Zaytoon area of Gaza City. ©UNICEF-SoP/2026

UNICEF resources and coordination, combined with the expertise and ingenuity of Palestinian frontline workers, have kept essential services functioning for hundreds of thousands of people.

## A critical water lifeline restored through coordination, innovation, and local solutions

When essential supplies are not allowed in, but the needs remain immense, **creativity and innovative practices become the lifeline that sustains service delivery.**

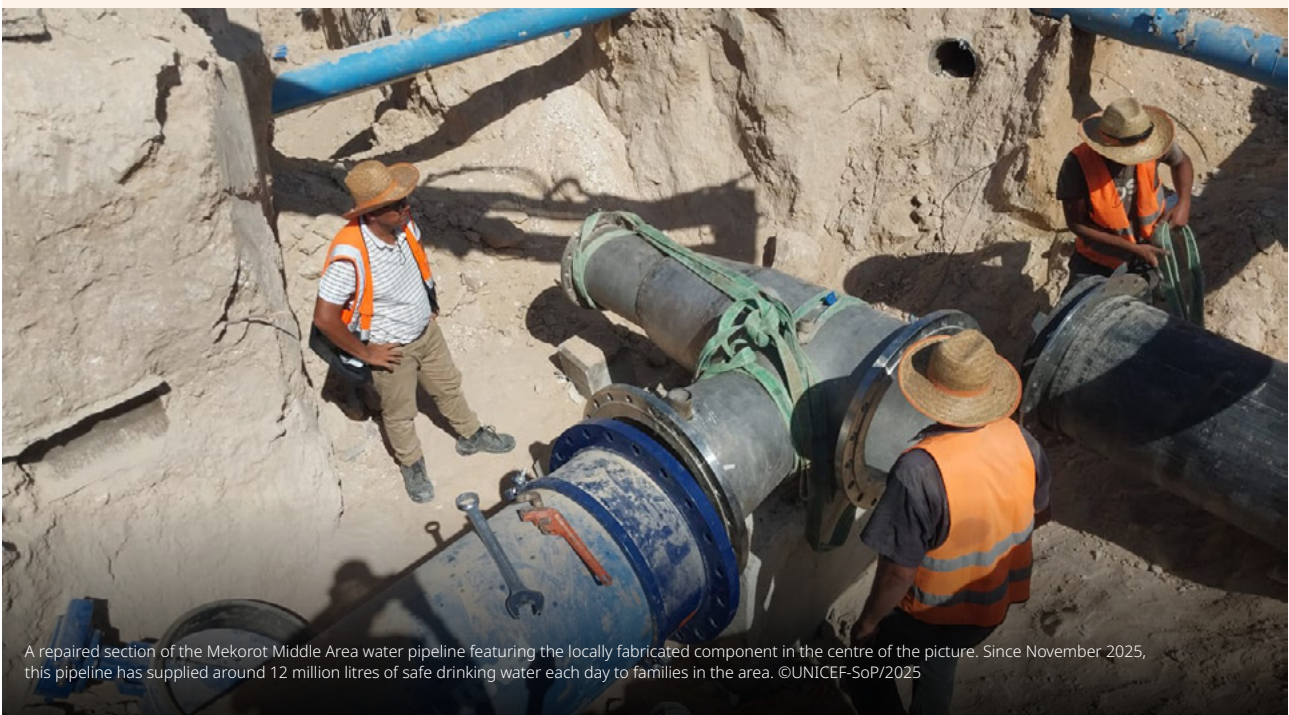
“We need to constantly adapt to be able to deliver in Gaza, **it is about being creative with very little, to be able to still show up for children despite all the damage and restrictions,**” says Mohanad, UNICEF WASH Officer.

For more than six months, the Mekorot Middle Area water pipeline was out of service because of extensive damage, access restrictions and the lack of a critical component to conduct repairs. A further delay would have prolonged water disruption for 500,000 people. UNICEF and its Palestinian local partners developed an alternative: fabricate the missing component inside Gaza.

During a brief window of access, WASH teams completed the repairs and restored the pipeline. Since November 2025, the water pipeline has supplied around 12 million litres of safe drinking water each day to communities across the Middle Area.

**“This was our only option,”** says Mohanad. **“There is so much innovation happening here in Gaza, and coordination between UNICEF and partners, that is helping us save lives.”**

In September 2026, UNICEF was able to bring repair kits for the Mekorot water pipeline into Gaza for the first time since the start of the war. The supplies were part of a package of priority water and wastewater rehabilitation projects developed with local partners, donors and coordinated with the Israeli authorities. **The local workaround kept water flowing;** the repair kits now allow more durable work to begin. The Mekorot repairs are the first of seven planned projects, and further rehabilitation needs to be urgently enabled and implemented under the ceasefire plan.



A repaired section of the Mekorot Middle Area water pipeline featuring the locally fabricated component in the centre of the picture. Since November 2025, this pipeline has supplied around 12 million litres of safe drinking water each day to families in the area. ©UNICEF-SoP/2025

## UNICEF's lifesaving supply operation in the Gaza Strip

In 2026 alone, UNICEF facilitated the entry of more than 1,800 truckloads, carrying up to 41,000 pallets of humanitarian cargo. Critical supplies supporting interventions across WASH, nutrition, health, education, child protection and social services were delivered through a network of nearly 200 partners.

However, supply operations faced major constraints, including the return of approximately 32 per cent of trucks without offloading, shortages of fuel, engine oil and lubricants affecting logistics operations in Gaza, and high cost of in-country logistics activities. Since the ceasefire announcement, UNICEF warehouses and supplies have continued to be damaged and destroyed by attacks across the Gaza Strip.



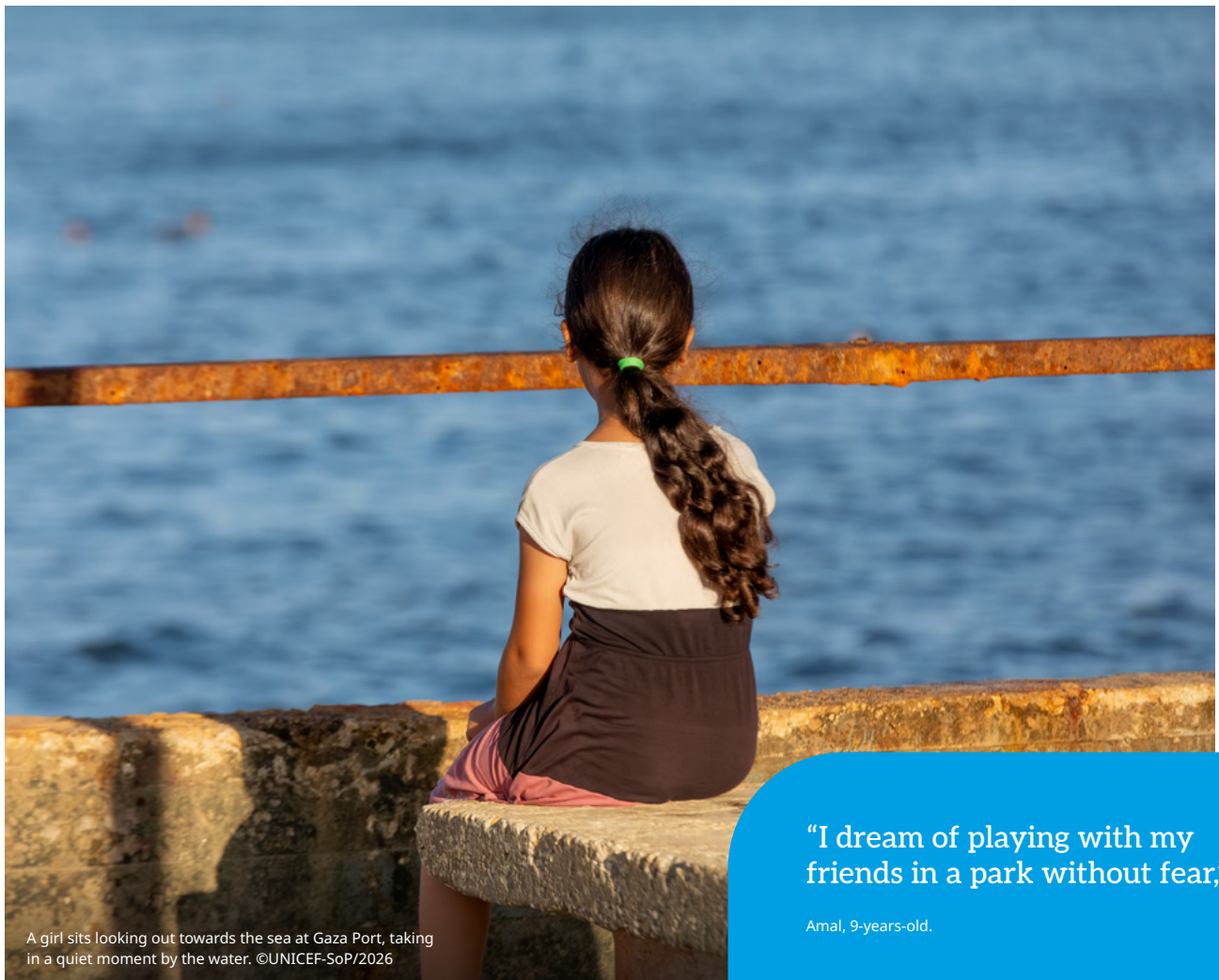
UNICEF's warehouse in Gaza City contains essential supplies ready to be delivered as humanitarian assistance to children and families across the Gaza Strip.  
©UNICEF/SoP/2026

## Investing in a Gaza that children want

**“If you ask me about the Gaza I want; I want Gaza back better. Not white and black: I want it full of colours. I want it full of flowers”**

Huda, 16-years-old.

What Palestinian children in Gaza are asking for is not extraordinary. **They want what every child has a right to:** a real classroom, health care when they need it, safe and reliable water, a home, a place to play, and people who can help them heal. They want to learn, spend time with friends and family, and imagine a future that is larger than survival.



A girl sits looking out towards the sea at Gaza Port, taking in a quiet moment by the water. ©UNICEF-SoP/2026

**“I dream of playing with my friends in a park without fear,”**

Amal, 9-years-old.

**The progress made since the ceasefire is real. It is also fragile.** Continuing violence, restrictions affecting humanitarian operations, shrinking civilian space and ongoing insecurity continue to put children at risk and threaten gains across every sector. Costly emergency operations also absorb resources that could otherwise help restore more sustainable services.

**Rebuilding Gaza is not only about restoring infrastructure. It is about restoring childhood itself.** For Palestinian children, real progress depends on creating the conditions for a child-centred recovery, restoring essential services at scale and implementing the commitments made under the ceasefire plan.

# What children need now

- 1 Safety and protection, wherever they are in Gaza, across the State of Palestine or Israel**

Parties to the conflict uphold the terms of the ceasefire and UNSC Resolution 2803 and their obligations under international humanitarian law.
- 2 Humanitarian assistance that can bridge from survival to recovery**

Parties to the conflict provide access and protect humanitarians to enable assistance for communities wherever they are.

Donors and partners commit to providing flexible and sustained resources to protect and improve services and children's lives.
- 3 Restoration of critical services and systems for lasting recovery**

As per the ceasefire plan, Israel enables the large-scale entry of the materials, equipment, and technical supplies needed to rehabilitate critical infrastructure and restore essential services. This includes the re-electrification of Gaza to reduce the need for costly emergency power solutions.
- 4 Children's voices at the centre of recovery**

Put Palestinian children at the centre of recovery and invest in their healing, learning and futures. Recovery is about more than rehabilitating facilities, delivering supplies or restoring services. It is about children returning to school, spending time with friends and family, playing safely, receiving health care when they need it, and regaining a sense of stability and everyday life. This is what meaningful recovery should look like for the next generation of Palestinian children.



A group of children play inside a truck, finding a moment of happiness in Gaza City. ©UNICEF-SoP/2026

"I imagine the Gaza I will live in when I grow up to have green spaces and buildings instead of tents, with schools, hospitals, and amusement parks. I want to have a home that protects me from rodents, the cold of winter, and the heat of summer, and keeps me safe from insects. I want to be with my family in my room, on my bed."

Sami, 14 years old

# for every child,

Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

That's why UNICEF is there.

For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In more than 190 countries and territories.

Reaching the hardest to reach.

The furthest from help.

The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.

#### **Note of thanks to our partners**

UNICEF extends its appreciation to our donors and partners worldwide. Your sustained commitment has been instrumental in enabling UNICEF and its partners to deliver life-saving assistance to children and families, restore critical services, and respond to urgent needs at scale amid an exceptionally challenging operating environment.

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for every child