

PEACE AND SECURITY

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Palestinian Perspectives on the
Reconstruction of Gaza

Nuha Bashir
October 2024



The education system in Gaza has been devastated, especially since 2023. Schools have been used as shelters, with many damaged or destroyed, leaving students without education for almost a year.



Rebuilding Gaza's education system demands a multifaceted approach, focusing on infrastructure, psychological support, digital learning, curriculum reform and teacher training.



Sustainable solutions should prioritise not just physical rebuilding but also student well-being, inclusive education and the integration of technology. A comprehensive education recovery plan is vital to create a resilient system that supports Gaza's future development.

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The ongoing Israeli war on Gaza has resulted in significant human and infrastructure damage to the education sector, destroying schools, universities and technical institutes, and causing the deaths of numerous teachers and students. Schools have been used as shelters, with many damaged or destroyed, leaving students without education for months. Psychological trauma from the conflict also hinders learning, requiring immediate intervention and support.



Education for Palestinians serves as a critical tool for survival, empowerment and long-term development. It is thus a crucial building block towards a more stable and prosperous future. Building on evidence-based insights, the paper offers actionable policy recommendations to guide decision-makers in rebuilding and enhancing the educational landscape in Gaza.



Rebuilding Gaza's education system demands a multifaceted approach, focusing on infrastructure, psychological support, digital learning, curriculum reform and teacher training. Collaboration between government, NGOs and international organisations is essential for success. Sustainable solutions should prioritise not just physical rebuilding but also student well-being, inclusive education and the integration of technology. A comprehensive education recovery plan backed by sustainable funding and monitoring is vital to create a resilient system that supports Gaza's future development.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

<https://palestine.fes.de/topics/palestinian-perspectives-on-the-reconstruction-of-gaza>

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In cooperation with:



Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for International
and Security Affairs

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1

BACKGROUND

Since the Nakba in 1948, Palestinians have faced displacement, exile, and dispossession, which sparked an educational revolution, making them one of the most skilled and educated societies globally. The Nakba has deeply influenced the focus on education, which is seen as a vital means of preserving identity, asserting rights and striving for socio-economic advancement amid ongoing challenges. Palestinians stand out as one of the most educated populations in the Middle East. Despite enduring substantial challenges, students in Gaza have consistently demonstrated top academic performance within the Palestinian territories (Reliefweb 2024).

The Gaza Strip, a densely populated region, has experienced recurrent military aggressions that have severely impacted its social, economic and educational infrastructures. The ongoing Israeli war on Gaza has resulted in significant human and infrastructural damage to the education sector, destroying schools, universities and technical institutes, and causing the deaths of numerous teachers and students. This appears to be an attempt to punish Gaza by depriving its inhabitants of educational opportunities and future preparation. Israeli attacks on educational institutes in Gaza have not only 'disrupted immediate educational activities but also eroded the foundation for sustained societal growth and development' (Al Jazeera 2024a).

The ongoing Israeli war on Gaza has further exacerbated the challenges, creating an urgent need for comprehensive reconstruction efforts. Education is a critical sector for Gaza's long-term stability and development, and its restoration is essential for fostering resilience, peace and economic growth. This paper aims to provide a thorough analysis of the current educational challenges in Gaza, propose evidence-based solutions, and offer actionable policy recommendations for effective reconstruction.

2

ASSESSMENT OF THE WAR'S IMPACT ON EDUCATION

A 17-year blockade and periodic wars in Gaza had significantly damaged an already fragile education system, straining facilities, disrupting education and negatively impacting the well-being of children and teachers. Before October 2023, Gaza's K-12 education system served 625,000 students and 22,564 teachers across 813 schools in 563 buildings, with 63 per cent of schools sharing facilities and operating on a 'double-shift' schedule (Reliefweb 2024). Since 7 October 2023, Gaza has been gripped by unprecedented violence and mass displacement, leaving students without access to education for 10 months (as of August 2024). Evacuation orders, movement restrictions, civilian casualties and the killing of teachers, educators, academics and students have worsened the situation. Many schools now serve as shelters for displaced families, exposing children to harsh living conditions that make learning impossible. In addition to material challenges, the psychological trauma these children endure further hinders their education.

According to an assessment shared by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in late July 2024, more than 76 per cent of schools in Gaza require 'full reconstruction or major rehabilitation' in order to become functional again following Israel's months-long onslaught (OCHA,

2024a). The Israeli military's actions have disrupted the education and safety of all students and teachers in Gaza (Education Cluster, 2024). The hostilities have killed more than 10,000 children in Gaza. As of 27 February, UNOCHA estimated that the Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip had killed 5,379 students and 255 educators and injured another 8,888 students and 891 teachers (ibid.).

A large number of school structures in Gaza were being used as shelters for internally displaced persons; these schools were either directly hit or damaged (Reliefweb, 2024). The governorates of Gaza North, Gaza City and Khan Younis were hit hardest, accounting for three-quarters of all damaged schools at the time. Some schools, though not completely destroyed, have been stripped of furniture and textbooks, with desperate individuals burning them due to fuel shortages.

Based on satellite imagery collected in May 2024, the Education Cluster assessment highlights a 'continuous spike in the direct targeting of schools' in the besieged and bombarded territory. The Education Cluster conducted an assessment in April/ May 2024 to update and better understand the extent of the damage to school buildings, relying

Table 1
Damage by type of school buildings

Probability of damage (school buildings)		Damage by type of school			Total
		Government	UNRWA	Private	
Direct hit	At least one school building has been directly hit and at least one damaged school structure has been identified within school premises	162	76	36	274
Damaged	At least one damaged site has been identified within 30m of the school buildings. This could indicate severe damage to school structures	76	42	16	134
Likely damaged	At least one damaged site has been identified within 30–70m of the school buildings. This could indicate moderate damage to school structures	32	34	9	75
Unknown	School buildings with no reported damage sites within 100m . This could indicate that school structures have not sustained damage	37	36	7	80
Total		307	188	68	563

Note: Derived from the latest education cluster assessment report (Verification of damages to schools based on proximity to damaged sites Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territory, 25 April 2024).

on the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT) data (Education Cluster 2024). The assessment found that 274 school buildings had been hit directly since 7 October 2023, which represents 48.7 per cent of total school buildings in Gaza. (The assessment's statistical table (1) is shown on page 3).

The assessment revealed that government schools represent the largest share, with 307 schools accounting for 54.5 per cent of total school buildings. UNRWA schools follow with 188 schools, comprising 33.4 per cent, while private schools make up the remaining 68 schools, which is 12.1 per cent of the total. Furthermore, different reports shed light on the distressing revelation that schools are being utilised for military purposes by Israeli forces, including detention, interrogation centres, and military bases. Table 1 provides data on the probability of damage to school buildings based on their type (government, UNRWA, private) and proximity to identified damage sites.

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, schools are considered civilian objects and should be protected from attacks. However, within a 10-day period in August 2024, five schools in Gaza City were targeted, killing more than 179 people and inflicting hundreds of injuries. Israeli forces have increasingly targeted schools serving as shelters for thousands of war-displaced individuals (Al Jazeera, 2024b).

According to the most recent assessment of school damage by the Education Cluster (OCHA 2024b), which relies on satellite imagery collected on 6 July, 85 per cent of school buildings (477 out of 564) were directly hit (344) or damaged (133). These include 264 public schools, 156 UNRWA schools and 57 private schools.

Not just schools have been exposed to the brunt of the Israeli attacks. The Israeli attacks have been even more devastating for Gaza's higher education system, destroying or damaging all 12 of Gaza's universities. Israeli forces have also killed hundreds of academics. Higher education centres, including universities, have been completely paralysed. Universities and colleges have reported damage to campuses, laboratories and libraries, hindering their ability to provide quality education. Israel's actions have inflicted three main types of losses on Gaza's education sector. First is the physical destruction in which bombings have destroyed all twelve of Gaza's higher education institutions (Arab Center Washington, 2024). Second, losses due the killing of educators were reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Education. According to the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, many academics, including three university presidents, have also been targeted, resulting in thousands of student casualties. Third, destruction of culture and heritage sites in which the assault has damaged or looted museums, libraries and archives, destroying priceless historical documents and artefacts.

The Palestinian higher education institutions in Gaza have been directly targeted by Israel during the war, resulting in the comprehensive destruction of 12 out of Gaza's 19 higher education institutions (WAFA 2023). The destruction has

included four out of six major universities in Gaza and killed, as of 13 February, more than 450 academic and administrative university staff (Shams, 2023). That number includes three university presidents, seven deans and 64 professors.¹ On 11 October 2023, the Islamic University was destroyed by Israeli aircraft. The headquarters of Al-Azhar University has been destroyed in Gaza city and its branch in the Mughraqa area. On 7 December, Al-Israa University was destroyed and used as an operations and detention centre by Israel. On 16 December, two main buildings of Al-Aqsa University were entirely destroyed, alongside the partial destruction of the others. Likewise, several buildings of Al-Quds Open University were partially destroyed, including the Gaza branch and the North Branch (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2024). The war has also led to a brain drain, with many skilled professionals and academics leaving Gaza in search of safer environments.

An article published on the Arab Center Washington DC's website (Arab Center Washington 2024) discusses Israel's Gaza war that has systematically and deliberately targeted the education sector with the aim of displacement and marginalisation. The term 'scholasticide', coined by Karma Nabulsi, an Oxford University scholar, describes the deliberate destruction of educational infrastructure. This term gained prominence during Israel's 2008–2009 invasion of Gaza. Today, researchers argue that the Israeli army's current attacks on educational institutions in Palestine exemplify scholasticide, continuing a long-standing pattern of deliberate assaults on knowledge creation and cultural heritage as part of colonial occupation policies to deter Palestinian resistance. The ongoing war since 7 October is the most destructive in terms of damage and loss, particularly to the education sector.

¹ For an updated list of the names of professors and academics killed in Israel's military campaign in the Gaza Strip, see the official Ministry of Education page on Facebook.

3

MAPPING ONGOING EFFORTS AND EXPANDING SUPPORT

The recovery of the education sector in Gaza is not only a matter of rebuilding physical infrastructure but also involves addressing psychological impacts on students and teachers, ensuring access to quality education, and integrating innovative educational practices. As for ongoing efforts, several international organisations, NGOs and local entities are actively involved in efforts to rehabilitate the education sector in Gaza. These efforts can be categorised into various domains. The following is a snapshot.

INGO AND NGO COLLABORATION

Several international organisations and NGOs are already involved in the reconstruction of Gaza's education sector. Enhancing coordination among these entities can maximise the impact of their efforts. Creating a centralised database to track progress, share resources and avoid duplication of efforts is recommended.

For example, Anera, the Tamer Institute for Community Education, the Culture and Free Thought Association and many others are implementing a rapid response to education in Gaza, addressing urgent educational needs. In overcrowded accommodation, the lack of structured education and psychosocial services is harming children's social and mental well-being. Observing these adverse effects, NGOs (together with their donors) have prioritised timely child protection interventions, including psychosocial support services. They have implemented psychosocial and educational programmes in schools and shelters, led by trained professionals, involving hundreds of activities, benefiting thousands of children through arts, storytelling, music and games. Different NGOs and donors remain committed to long-term educational recovery in Gaza. For example, recognising the trauma and routine disruption faced by children, Anera aims to rebuild and repair schools and support educators.

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AND EDUCATIONAL TENTS

Educational tents have been set up in various areas of the Gaza Strip to help at least to keep children's minds active and engaged. This support is aimed at rebuilding the children's dreams that the Israeli war on Gaza has attempted to shatter. Many activists and teachers exert amazing ef-

forts, including creating learning spaces and offering year-round support to children. Generally, the establishment of educational tents symbolises more than shelter; it represents a commitment to creating spaces of growth and learning for children in displacement areas.

EGYPTIAN TEACHERS' INITIATIVE OFFERING DISTANCE LEARNING FOR PALESTINIAN STUDENTS

A group of Egyptian teachers and volunteers has set up educational platforms for distance learning for Palestinian students, given the destruction of schools and educational institutions in the Gaza Strip. Such initiatives and platforms rely on teaching Palestinian curricula through social media platforms and special educational platforms prepared by specialised teachers at all grade levels, from kindergarten to secondary. Whatever the usefulness of such initiatives, efforts are focused on salvaging what is possible.

REMOTE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS FROM GAZA IN EGYPT

The Palestinian Embassy in Egypt has made efforts to acquire temporary residence permits for people arriving from Gaza during the war. The Embassy estimates that more than 100,000 Gazans have crossed into Egypt, where they lack the papers they need to enrol their children in schools, open businesses or bank accounts, travel, or access health insurance. Temporary residence permits would ease conditions for them. Also, the Palestinian Ministry of Education in Ramallah, in collaboration with the Palestinian Embassy in Cairo, other Palestinian representation offices in Europe and West Bank teachers (who volunteer to provide remote education to Gaza students) have developed an online platform to ensure that 15,000 students of different grades (according to the Palestinian Minister of Education) do not miss the scholastic year.

In summer 2024, 800 students from the Gaza Strip registered for the high school exam (Thanaweya Aamma) in Egypt, facilitated by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and the Palestinian Embassy in Cairo. This emphasised the Palestinian Ministry and Embassy's commitment to supporting Gaza students and ensuring their right to education despite the challenges posed by the war.

4

PRIORITIES BEYOND INFRASTRUCTURE

While rebuilding physical infrastructure is a crucial step in the recovery of the education sector in Gaza Strip, it is equally important to address the broader needs that ensure a comprehensive educational experience: holistic student support, continuous teacher development, curriculum enhancement, and active community involvement. Integrating technology and promoting inclusive education are also vital to creating a resilient and adaptive education system. These priorities aim to foster an environment in which students can thrive academically, socially and emotionally, despite the challenges they face.

RESUMING AND ENSURING HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION

With the displacement of 1.9 million of Gaza's 2.3 million inhabitants, safety remains elusive as schools acting as shelters face constant threats of bombing, siege, sniper fire and explosions. Amidst the chaos of war, temporary education initiatives provide potential opportunities for children to continue their studies and maintain a sense of normalcy. At the same time, education does not receive enough attention due to the pressing health, shelter and food security needs. As of 2 March 2024, the educational response faced a considerable shortfall in funding, having received less than 15 per cent of the necessary resources (Reliefweb 2024).

In the aftermath of the prolonged Israeli war on Gaza and devastation, the resumption and assurance of high-quality education in Gaza are imperative for fostering a resilient and progressive society. Education stands as a cornerstone of personal and communal development, playing a crucial role in equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills they need for socio-economic advancement and stability. Despite the significant challenges posed by infrastructural damage, resource scarcity and psychological trauma, strategic efforts aimed at rebuilding education systems and enhancing the quality of instruction are essential. Restoring the education sector in the Strip is a multifaceted process that must start as soon as major violence subsides. This entails not only the physical reconstruction of schools and universities, but also the implementation of comprehensive support systems for students and educators. By prioritising high-quality education, Gaza can pave the way

towards a brighter future, enabling its young people to overcome adversity and contribute meaningfully to their community and beyond.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Reforming and updating the curriculum to reflect the current needs and aspirations of Gaza's young people is essential. This includes incorporating peace education, critical thinking and life skills into the curriculum. Collaboration with international educational experts can help in developing a modern and relevant curriculum. Also, advocacy efforts defending against Israeli demands concerning the removal of 'Palestinian national symbols' from educational materials are essential.

TEACHER TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Investing in teacher training and professional development is crucial for improving the quality of education. Providing ongoing training opportunities, including in-service training and professional development workshops, can equip teachers with the skills they need to effectively address the challenges of post-conflict education.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Ensuring that education in Gaza is inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with disabilities, is a priority. This requires building accessible infrastructure, providing specialised training for teachers, and developing tailored educational programmes for students with special needs.

PROPOSED MEASURES AND KEY ACTORS

To be able to learn, students need to be in a safe space. Most students in Gaza at the moment have brains that are 'functioning under trauma. Younger children could develop lifelong cognitive disabilities from malnutrition, while teenagers are likely to feel anger at the injustice they have suf-

ferred', said a child psychiatrist from international medical charity Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans Frontières) (Al Jazeera 2024a).

GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES

The Palestinian government authorities play a critical role in leading the reconstruction efforts. They should prioritise reconstructing the education sector in the Gaza Strip in their policy agendas, allocate sufficient resources and establish clear frameworks for collaboration with international partners and NGOs.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND DONORS

International organisations such as UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank, along with international donors, should (continue to) provide financial and technical support for the reconstruction of Gaza's education sector. Their involvement is crucial for ensuring that reconstruction efforts are comprehensive and sustainable. Also, donors should be supporting the safeguarding of the Palestinian curricula against Israeli attempts to erase the Palestinian identity from Palestinian school textbooks.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND NGOS

Civil society organisations and NGOs are essential partners in the reconstruction of the education sector. They can provide on-the-ground support, mobilise community participation, and advocate for the rights and needs of students and educators. In this regard, there are a number of active national and local organisations, for example, the Tamer Institute for Community Education, the Creative Teacher Center, the Qattan Center, the MAAN Development Center, the Culture and Free Thought Association, the Tawoon Organisation and other locally active organisations.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Schools, universities and vocational training centres should actively participate in the reconstruction efforts. They should focus on creating safe and supportive learning environments, developing innovative educational programmes and fostering collaboration with other educational institutions locally and internationally.

5

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A comprehensive approach/strategy is essential to advancing the recovery and reconstruction of the education sector. The following are the most important policy recommendations.

ESTABLISH A COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION RECONSTRUCTION PLAN

Develop a comprehensive reconstruction plan for the education sector that includes short-, medium- and long-term goals. This plan should be developed in consultation with all stakeholders, including government authorities, international organisations, NGOs and local communities. One aspect of the comprehensive plan would be a strong connection between the education sectors in both parts of the State of Palestine. This would be easier at the level of higher education as exemplified by a number of initiatives of the University of Al Najah and Birzeit University, supporting the Gazan university students. Both Al Najah University and Birzeit University announced the start of online teaching for more than 3,000 students from Gaza universities in the first phase of the 'Hand in Hand Rebuilding Hope' initiative, in collaboration with the Mediterranean Universities Union and the Palestinian Students Scholarship Fund.

SECURE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Ensure sustainable funding for the reconstruction of the education sector by diversifying funding sources. This includes seeking support from donors, leveraging partnerships and exploring innovative financing mechanisms, such as education initiative funds, for example, by collaborating with businesspeople, national banks (such as the Bank of Palestine) and a number of Arab funds.

STRENGTHEN MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Implement robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the progress of reconstruction efforts. Regular assessments should be conducted to ensure that objectives are being met, and adjustments should be made as needed based on feedback and changing circumstances.

PROMOTE RESILIENCE AND PREPAREDNESS

Build resilience and preparedness into the education system to mitigate the impact of future military aggression. This includes developing contingency plans, investing in digital learning infrastructure, and training educators and students in emergency preparedness.

FOSTER REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Encourage regional and international collaboration to share best practices, access technical expertise and mobilise resources for the reconstruction of Gaza's education sector. Participation in international educational networks and forums can facilitate knowledge exchange and capacity-building. For example, building partnerships between Palestinian and international universities and ministries of education and higher education (including by having regional and international guest academics and professors). This would be very important due to the losses of academics and infrastructure in the education sector.

6

CONCLUSION

Education for Palestinians serves as a critical tool for survival, empowerment and long-term development, offering a pathway to a more stable and prosperous future. The United Nations estimate that after the violence stops, reconstruction of Gaza's cities will take years and billions of dollars. Different reports underscore the critical need for an immediate ceasefire and sustainable solutions to rebuild Gaza's education infrastructure and safeguard the future of its children.

The reconstruction of the education sector in the Gaza Strip will be a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires coordinated efforts from all stakeholders. By addressing the immediate needs for infrastructure rebuilding, providing psychological support, investing in digital learning, and prioritising curriculum development and teacher training, Gaza can rebuild a resilient and high-quality education system. The policy recommendations outlined in this paper provide a roadmap for guiding these efforts and ensuring that education becomes a cornerstone of Gaza's recovery and future development. Through sustained commitment and collaboration, the education sector in Gaza can emerge stronger and better equipped to support the aspirations of its young people.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

»Palestinian Perspectives on the Reconstruction of Gaza« is a joint project carried out by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. The papers published within the framework of this project focus on Palestinian needs and priorities with regard to a range of topics linked to early recovery and reconstruction of Gaza after the 2023/2024 war.

In this context, they do not regard the Gaza Strip as a separate entity, but as part of the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967. They also hold that all approaches, be they short or long term, should be compatible with the principle of Palestinian self-determination. The objective is to highlight key insights from Palestinian experiences and expertise and introduce them into the international debate. Papers cover aspects such as security arrangements, governance, the role of women and urban planning for recovery and reconstruction. They reflect the author's views only.

Editorial team: Usama Antar, Friederike Stolleis and Konstantin Witschel (FES), Muriel Asseburg (SWP), Omar Shaban (PalThink)

IMPRINT

Published by:
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e. V.
Godesberger Allee 149
53175 Bonn
Germany
Email: info@fes.de

Issuing Department:
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Department for Middle East and North Africa | Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsibility for content and editing:
Elisabeth Braune, Head of Department
for Middle East and North Africa

Contact/Order: info.nahost@fes.de

Copyediting: James Patterson
Design: pertext | www.pertext.de

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ISBN 978-3-98628-596-8

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