



مركز الميزان لحقوق الإنسان  
AL MEZAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



Photo: Ibrahim Reida

# **Fact Sheet on Obstacles to Accessing Education in the Gaza Strip**

## **August 2021**

**Israel's attacks on civilians  
and civilian objects**

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**Israel's unlawful closure and  
blockade of Gaza**

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**The effects of violations on  
children and their  
surrounding environment (**  
family, home, school)

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**Causes of school irregularity  
or dropout from the  
perspective of children and  
their parents**

## Introduction

This fact sheet serves as an executive summary of a report by Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (Al Mezan) on the obstacles to children's access to education in a number of primary and preparatory schools in the Gaza Strip during the 2021 school year. The task of conducting interviews and collecting information was assumed by a team of researchers who underwent training, supervision, and guidance in advance by Al Mezan. The research targeted a sample of 668 children from all governorates (including 55 children with disabilities, 261 girls, and 407 boys). The data collected was subject to audit and analysis by Al Mezan's staff.

The report attempts to research the underlying causes of obstacles that hinder access to education, which lead children or make them vulnerable to school dropout or irregular attendance. According to the interviews, multiple factors pertaining to the economic situation, security, and social conditions were identified as such. The report also highlights the link between the children's surrounding environment and the enjoyment of fundamental rights, and likewise its impact on their access to education.

The fact sheet presents the report's main findings, including figures and recommendations, with the aim of helping relevant stakeholders make an informed decision about the phenomenon with a view to an adequate intervention.

## Obstacles to Accessing Education in the Gaza Strip

Education is a fundamental human right and a vital cornerstone to the realization of all other human rights given their interdependent and inalienable nature. It is also a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized individuals can contribute to the sustainable development of their societies.

According to the report's findings, some of the obstacles hindering children's access to education in the Gaza Strip arise from violations that not only undermine the full spectrum of children's rights but also adversely affects their surrounding environment (family, home, school), as follows:

## Targeting Civilians and Civilian Objects

Palestinian children, particularly in the Gaza Strip, fall victims to an array of grave violations perpetrated by Israeli forces and, to a lesser extent, Palestinian actors. Breaching the protection entitled to children under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, these violations are not limited to direct targeting leading to the children's death or injury, but also extend to any harm inflicted on their guardians, homes, schools, and hospitals as it puts enjoyment of their basic needs in jeopardy.

According to Al Mezan's visits, the majority of the target group have been either directly or indirectly affected by such violations. Specifically, 195 children (including 21 with disabilities, 81 girls, and 114 boys) have been subjected to direct violations. Further, 153 children (including 12 with disabilities, 69 girls, and 74 boys) were subjected to more than one violation.

Alarmingly, 185 children (of them 19 with disabilities, 77 girls, and 108 boys) from the target group testified that the violations they endured were perpetrated by Israeli forces, whereas ten



children (two with disabilities, four girls, and six boys) were subjected to violations arising from internal events.

In addition, 94 Palestinian families were recorded to have been directly subjected to violations by the Israeli forces, while fifteen others endured violations that took place due to internal events.



Al Mezan's report comes against the backdrop of Israel's May 2021 Operation Guardian of the walls (Also known as *Hares Alaswar* in Arabic) and the ongoing efforts of human rights organizations to document the damages it inflicted on residential buildings and education institutions in the Gaza Strip. As background, Israel's military conduct throughout the 11-day offensive in May, led to the killing of 261 Palestinians including 67 children and 41 women, and the injury of 1,981 others, including 643 children. Israel's airstrikes also led to the large-scale destruction of vital infrastructure and severe damages of houses and schools.<sup>1</sup>

The effects of violations on the children and their surrounding environment (family, home, school):



## Children

- A total of 195 children were subjected to a violation, including 21 children with disabilities, 81 girls and 114 boys.
- 185 of them were subjected to violations by the Israeli forces while the other ten were subjected to violations in internal events.
- The number of children who were subjected to more than one violation is 153, including 12 children with disabilities, 69 girls, and 84 boys.
- 150 children were subjected to a violation at home, while 99 others were in the neighborhood.
- Seven other children were violated at school and seven others in other areas such as the perimeter fence during the Great March of Return protests.
- The violations led to the injury of 22 children, including two with disabilities, three girls and 17 boys. The injuries rendered three of the children (one girl and two boys) disabled.

<sup>1</sup>Article 1 common to the four Geneva Conventions reads as follows: "The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances". Accordingly, Israel has an obligation to ensure respect of these Conventions as well as principles of the international humanitarian law.





## Family

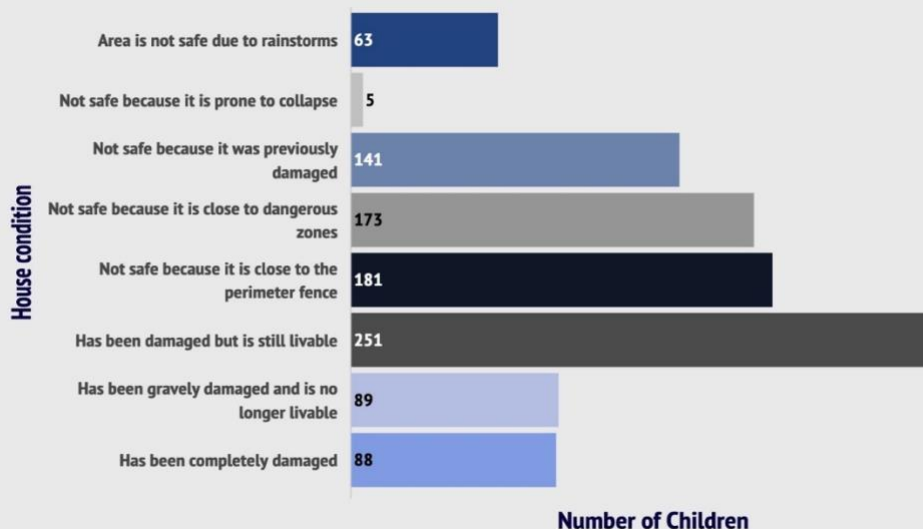
- 109 of the children's families endured a violation (these families include 10 disabled members, 50 females, and 59 males).
- 94 of the children's families endured violations perpetrated by the Israeli forces.
- 15 families were subjected to violations as a result of internal events.
- One member in the families of four children from the research sample was killed.
- At least one member in the families of 80 children was injured.
- At least one member in the families of 18 children was arrested.

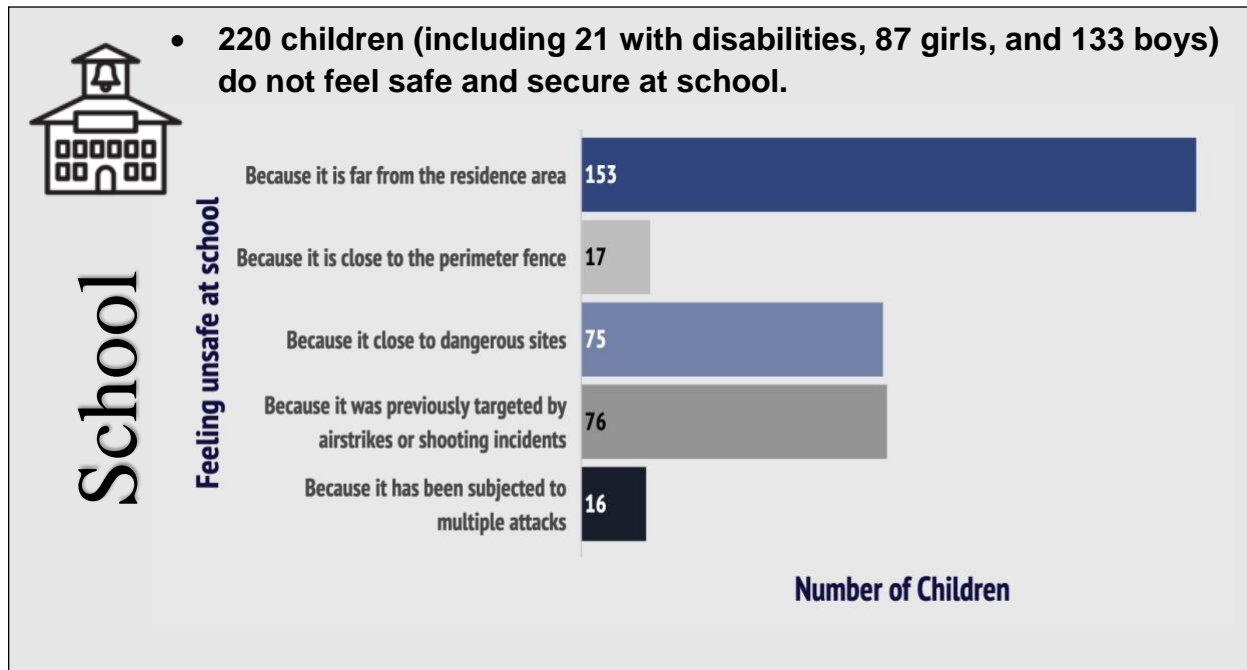
The interviews conducted with the families of the children show that particular aspect add to their vulnerability. As such, 46 children have lost one or both parents, 23 children are separated from one or both parents, 231 children have a legal guardian who suffers from a chronic disease, and 33 others have a legal guardian who suffers from a disability.



## Home

- **326 children (including 23 with disabilities, 120 girls, and 206 boys) do not feel safe in their residence area.**





The education sector in the Gaza Strip is repeatedly subjected to both limited and full-scale military assaults by Israel, resulting in material losses due to attacks deliberately targeting educational institutions or nearby premises. Al Mezan's documentation shows that 186 schools (136 governmental/public schools, 13 private schools, and 37 UNRWA Schools) endured damages during Israel's Operation Guardian of the Walls. Further, 63 UNRWA schools endured minor damages while being used as shelters for displaced families throughout the offensive.<sup>2</sup>

### Israel's closure on the Gaza Strip

For over 14 years, Israel has maintained a comprehensive land, sea, and air blockade and closure over the Gaza Strip. Rooted in severe restrictions on the freedom of movement of both people and goods, the closure has devastated Gaza's economy and impeded the population's access to basic services. The ensuing deterioration in the humanitarian situation directly affects children's enjoyment of the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to food, and the right to an adequate environment, thus ultimately jeopardizing their right to life.

Through the policy, cultural rights, notably the right to education, are dramatically undermined and essential services, including health, WASH, environmental and electricity services, are collapsing. School efficiency is particularly affected by the protracted electricity crisis arising from years of Israel's fluctuating ban on the entry of fuel to Gaza, with devastating effects on student performance and the provision of school services. The loss of access to electricity for prolonged periods of time has made it difficult for students in all levels to study, review their classes, and do their homework both in online and face-to-face schooling systems.

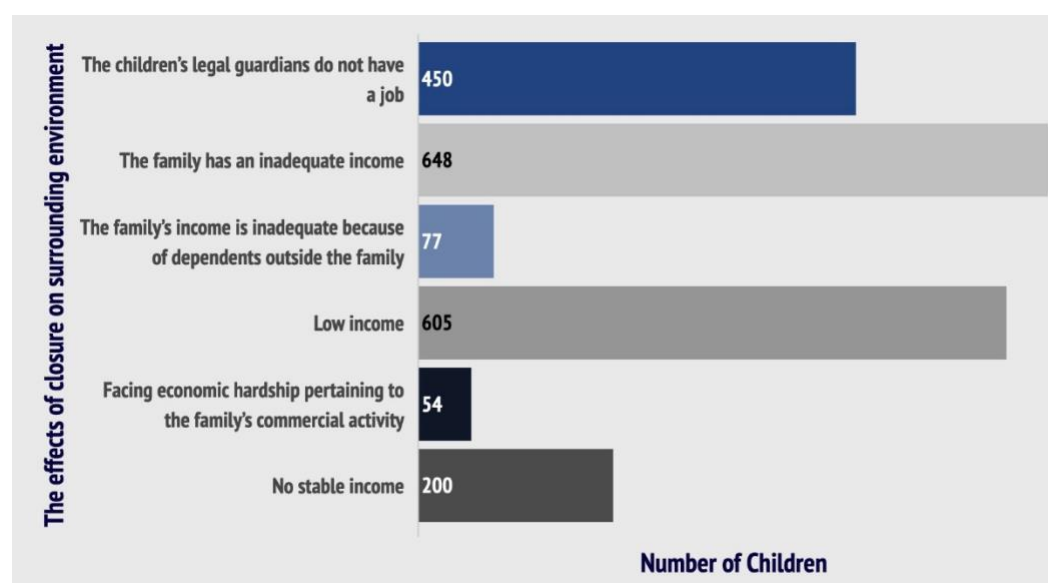
<sup>2</sup> See Education Cluster Report on Damage in Educational Facilities Gaza Strip (July 2021); available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/education-cluster-report-damage-educational-facilities-gaza>





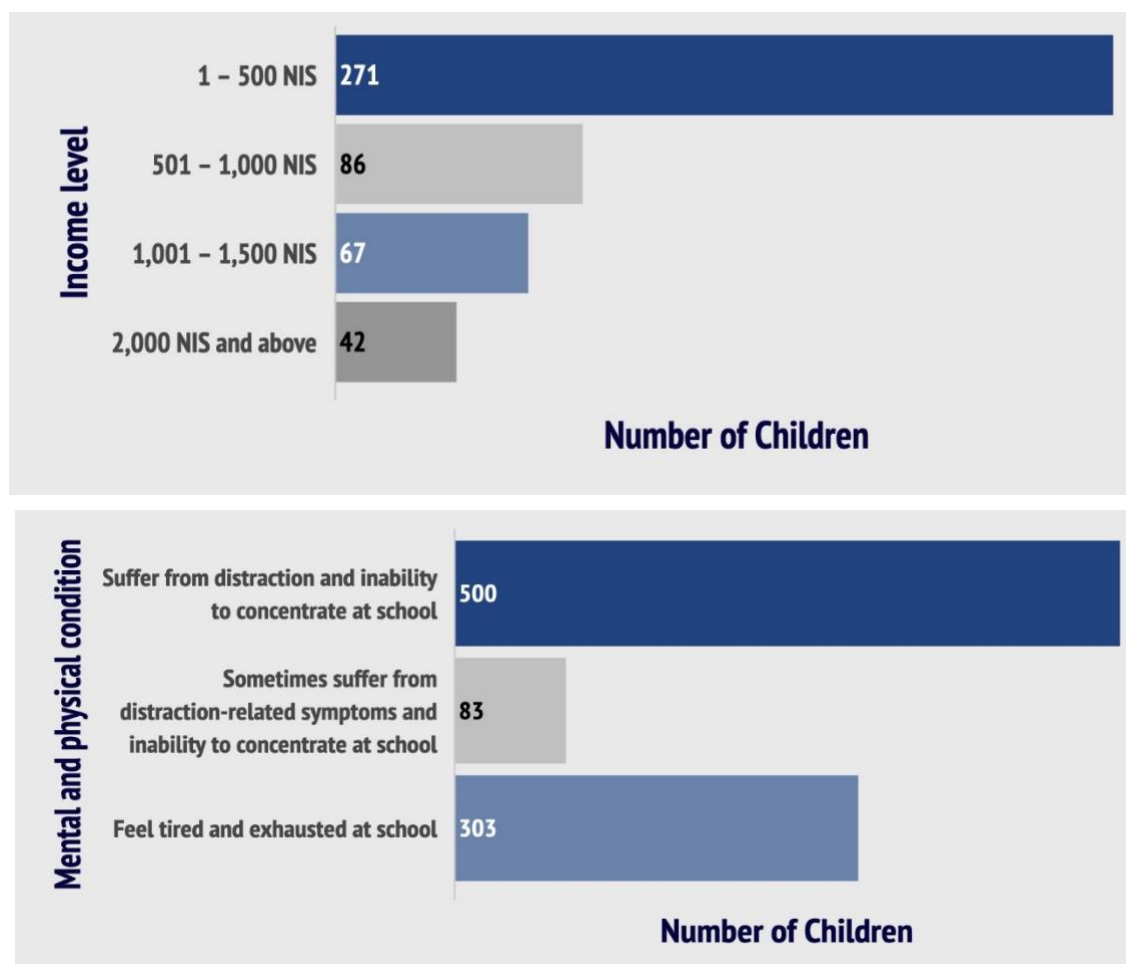
Overcrowding is another barrier to school efficiency in Gaza's schools and the overall enjoyment of relevant human rights. The use of the two-shift system has continued to handle the high density across classrooms in Gaza's schools. In the 2020-2021 academic year, Student per Class rate reached 41.20 at UNRWA schools, 39.56 at governmental schools, and 21.65 at private schools<sup>3</sup>. This high-density rate has reportedly created a number of problems for teachers including their inability to pay adequate attention to individual differences and struggling students.

With the sudden shift to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a massive digital gap between the Gaza Strip and the outer world emerged, a direct result of Israel's control over the Palestinian frequency spectrum. The Israeli authorities also control the import of technologies and devices needed to update the internet services in Gaza. This weakened the ability of many families to keep up with tech trends in education and switch to online methods. In addition, many families cannot afford to buy or own some smart devices.



<sup>3</sup> Annual Statistical Book for General Education in Gaza Governorates 2020/2021, available at <https://www.mohe.ps/home/2021/03/29/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%83%d8%aa%d8%a7%d8%a8-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d8%ad%d8%b5%d8%a7%d8%a6%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%86%d9%88%d9%8a-%d9%84%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%8a%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%a7%d9%85-202/>





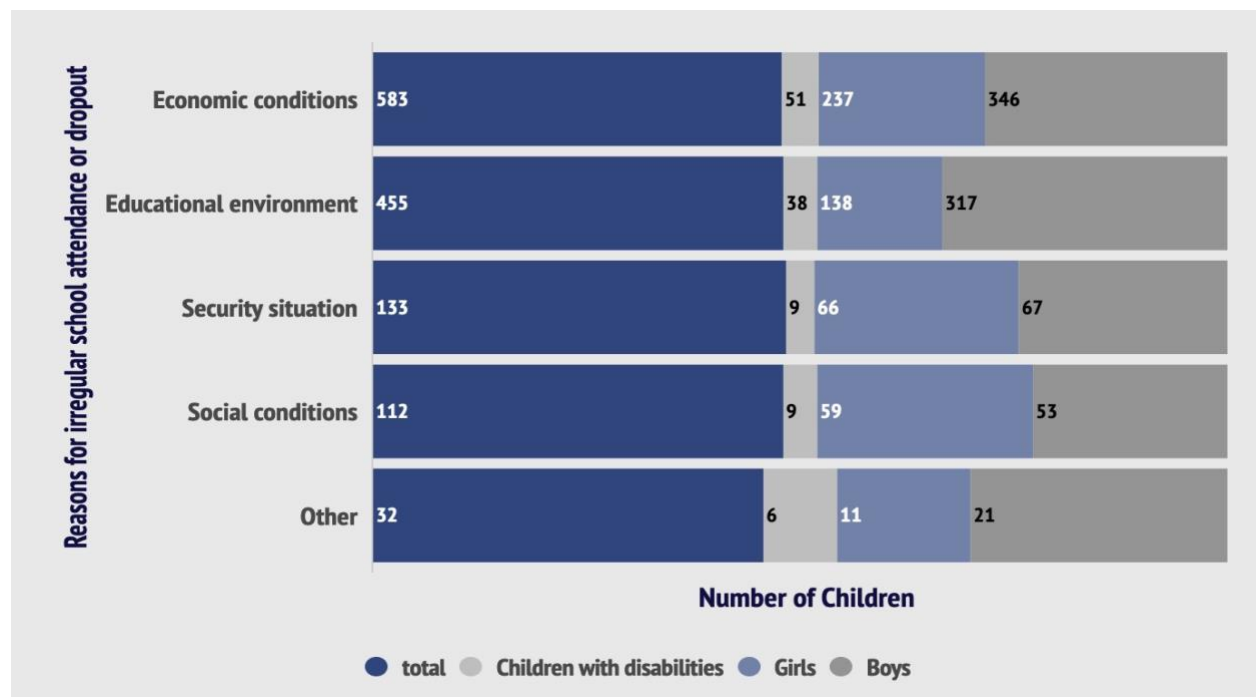
### **Reasons for school irregularity or dropout from the perspective of children and their parents**

During the interviews, children were asked to identify the most influential reasons for school dropout from a list that was later divided into four categories: economic, social, security-related, and reasons relevant to the educational environment.

As perceived by the children, economic conditions had the most influence on their ability to stay in school; the educational environment ranked second, while the reasons related to the security situation ranked third.







## Recommendations

Al Mezan is gravely concerned about the continued human rights violations against Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip particularly those arising from Israel's systematic use of excessive force and enactment of collective punishment policies. Al Mezan recalls that children's right to life is not limited to the formal interdiction against intentionally causing the death or injury of a child. The right also implies the need to safeguard children's access to healthcare, education, and other fundamental services that are conducive to a life in dignity.

**To this end, AL Mezan put forth a number of recommendations and calls for action, summarized as follows:**

### • The international community

- Must take effective action to end Israeli violations against Palestinian children and ensure respect of relevant international treaties especially the Fourth Geneva Convention and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Mitigate the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip by putting forth plans and strategies as well as mobilizing resources aiming at the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights.
- End Israel's closure and blockade of the Gaza Strip and implement programs addressing the high poverty and unemployment rates.
- Mobilize fund and support to the UNRWA for a better response to the deteriorating living conditions in the Gaza Strip.



**United Nations specialized agencies; particularly United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)**

Foster protection and assistance for Palestinian children and their families in light of Gaza's high food insecurity and aid dependency rates.

• **Civil society organizations**

Promote cooperation with relevant international bodies with a view to promoting children's rights and resolving obstacles that hinder their access to education, while simultaneously providing relief to marginalized families and individuals.

• **Palestinian National Authority**

Strengthen programs and initiatives targeting social problems, including poverty, malnutrition, child labor, and inadequate housing, that undermine children's enjoyment of fundamental rights.

• **Competent Palestinian authorities**

- Increase allocation of funds for sectors concerned with children such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Development.
- Set clear and binding protocols of how governmental bodies should interact with children-related issues, especially in light of the pandemic measures.

• **The Palestinian Ministry of Education**

- Prepare protection and intervention programs for students who are at risk of school dropout and irregular attendance.
- Cooperate with civil society organizations to support children who fall under this category.



Al Mezan Center for Human Rights is an independent, non-partisan and non-governmental human rights organization established in 1999. Al Mezan is dedicated to protecting and advancing the respect of human rights, with a focus on economic, social, and cultural rights, supporting victims of violations of international law through legal initiatives, and enhancing democracy, community and citizen participation, and respect for the rule of law in Gaza as part of occupied Palestine.

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