



Safe water is running out in the Gaza Strip, with lethal risks for children.

In the Gaza Strip, the recent escalation of conflict has exacerbated humanitarian needs for more than 2.2 million people, over 50 per cent of whom are children. The area is grappling with critical shortages in water directly affecting its people, especially children.

The Gaza Strip power plant, crucial for power generation and water purification, has ceased operations due to fuel shortages. Gaza's water facilities, including the UNICEF–EU supported desalination facility, which supplies water to 75,000 residents and has the potential to reach 250,000, are now running at a minimal capacity due to the halting of electricity supply and fuel constraints.

The dire state of water in the Gaza Strip

In a region already grappling with acute water scarcity, the ongoing conflict has intensified the strain on water systems. Water supply to the Gaza Strip is divided among three main sources. First, the Short-Term Low Volume (STLV) seawater desalination plants, including three plants located in Gaza, Middle and Southern areas of the Strip, provide around seven per cent of the water needs. Second, water supply from Israel, through three connections, provides 13 per cent of the water needs. Last, more than 300 publicly- and privately-operated boreholes with small desalination units meet the remaining water needs. Prior to the conflict, 97 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip was connected to piped water, and the water infrastructure produced and distributed more than 115 million cubic metres of water.

With the recent conflict, water production capacity has plummeted to just five per cent of its normal output. While water wells in areas such as Khan Younis, and Rafah are still operational, the overall water production has critically declined due to fuel shortages, damaged infrastructure, and the ongoing security situation. Families and children are relying on just three litres of water per person per day for drinking, cooking, and hygiene – a figure significantly below the Sphere emergency threshold of 15 litres per person per day. Bottled water, once available and reasonably affordable, has become scarce and costly, and many families have resorted to using non-potable water sources. Water shortages also impede sanitation services, which are already strained due to damaged sewage systems, deteriorating infrastructure and limited staff.

These dire water and sanitation conditions are potentially life-threatening for children. Water scarcity and unsafe sanitation elevates the risk of disease, especially chronic diarrhoea among children. Drinking water from brackish agricultural wells also exposes communities to harmful chemicals and high saline content, particularly threatening to the health of vulnerable groups like newborns, children, and women. Medical teams have already noted a rise in cases of acute respiratory disorders and diarrhoea among children under five. Additionally, the lack of menstrual hygiene supplies has forced girls and women to adopt potentially unsafe practices. Adding to these concerns is the discharge of untreated sewage into the Mediterranean Sea, creating both environmental and public health hazards.

An urgent plea to the global community

UNICEF's immediate priority is to provide life-saving drinking water to the entire population of the Gaza Strip through all available sources and means. While bottled water and water trucking remain viable options to meet immediate needs, these solutions can only help a fraction of the affected people and do not constitute a sustained response. The best option for safeguarding children and their families is delivering water through the existing system and continuing to produce water through water sources, including desalination plants. Restoring these systems and facilities will require critical repairs and support.

To meet the urgent needs of children and civilians, UNICEF calls for the following measures:

Ensure uninterrupted water and fuel supplies: Prioritize the immediate allocation of fuel to critical water production, treatment and sewage treatment centres.

Open access points: All access crossings into the Gaza Strip must be opened for safe, sustained, and unimpeded access of humanitarian aid, including water, food, medical supplies and fuel.

Protect civilian infrastructure: Respect and protect civilian infrastructure such as shelters and schools, and health, electric, water and sanitation facilities, to prevent loss of civilian and children's lives, outbreaks of diseases, and to provide care to the sick and wounded.

Reinstate regional support: Urgently resume and sustain the Mekorot water supply line from Israel to the Gaza Strip and ensure power or fuel availability to the three Gaza desalination plants and critical WASH facilities.

UNICEF's WASH response to the Gaza Strip crisis

UNICEF has been leading efforts in close coordination with 68 partners under the WASH Cluster, providing both immediate relief and long-term support to the Gaza Strip, including:

- **177,000 litres of fuel**, resulting in the production of clean water for drinking and domestic needs benefiting an estimated 1 million people in the Deir Al Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah areas, including more than 560,000 children. Fuel has been used in the two operational desalination plants and critical water wells for the production and distribution of clean water through CMWU water trucks.
- **333,000 litres of bottled water** addressing the needs of 66,000 people, including 34,250 children in designated UNRWA shelters..
- **17 cubic metres of water treatment reagents** to produce water at the UNICEF-supported desalination plant in the Gaza Strip.
- **Essential WASH components** (fittings, pipes, etc.) for rapid repair initiatives.
- **7,418 emergency family kits** distributed in shelters benefiting about 44,400 people, of whom more than 50 per cent are children.
- **4,000 water containers and 12 water tanks**, together with chlorine tablets for water purification, have entered through Rafah Crossing and have been distributed in designated shelters
- **Cleaning services in shelters** benefitting more than 26,000 people, including more than 13,000 children.
- **Humanitarian cash support**, including hygiene items, for 1,000 of the most vulnerable households.

UNICEF is also partnering with UNICEF Egypt Country Office to maximize outreach and response efficiency. Efforts underway include:

- **45,000 packages of bottled water** for 270,000 people.
- **2,150 dignity kits** designed to assist at least 12,000 individuals.
- **Four mobile latrines.**
- **Water quality chemicals** for a month-long operation of the desalination plant, aiming to serve more than 75,000 individuals.
- **Provision of supplies** including recreational kits, tents and blankets.
- **Four emergency medicine kits and 25 consumable kits**, for the medical needs of an estimated 195,000 individuals for one month.

We need your help, urgently. UNICEF seeks US\$50 million for WASH initiatives in the Gaza Strip. This will support emergency fuel provisions, sustain critical WASH facilities, facilitate urgent infrastructure repairs, distribute hygiene kits to impacted families, and bolster leadership within the UNICEF-led WASH Cluster.