



A young boy carrying food in Gaza © GAGE 2026

Young people's nutrition and food insecurity during the war on Gaza: longitudinal evidence from GAGE

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Introduction

Since the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023, Israel has carried out actions that amount to genocide. It has systematically destroyed the Gaza Strip, killed tens of thousands of people, and deliberately deprived Gaza's population of life-saving humanitarian aid (Amnesty International, 2024; HRW, 2024; Asem, 2025; B'Tselem, 2025; Forensic Architecture, 2025; UN, 2025). The blocking of aid resulted in a famine between 22 August 2025 and 19 December 2025. By August 2025, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) estimated that the complete population of Gaza was experiencing 'high levels of acute food insecurity', with almost 1 in 3 people (32%) in danger of reaching catastrophic levels (phase 5) in September 2025 (IPC, 2025). Although the ceasefire in place since 10 October 2025 has brought some relief to young people in Gaza, humanitarian aid continues to be obstructed, and hundreds of Palestinians have been killed because of Israeli hostilities (OHCHR, 2026).

This brief explores the impacts of the blockade of humanitarian aid and the destruction of Gaza's food system (agricultural land and imports) on young people's nutrition and food insecurity amidst the war on Gaza. The evidence presented here aims to inform the post-ceasefire humanitarian response, paying particular attention to the impacts of the blockade and war on nutrition and food security (HRW, 2024; Forensic Architecture, 2025; UN, 2025). The brief draws on two rounds of data collection (2024 and 2025) with more than 1,000 young people undertaken by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) longitudinal research programme. The brief concludes by discussing the implications of the GAGE findings for the post-ceasefire humanitarian response.

Methods

The brief is based on longitudinal mixed-methods data collected in August and September 2024 (Round 1) and October and November 2025 (Round 2) (shortly after the ceasefire of 3 October 2025) to assess young people's experiences and perceptions of the conflict and to show changes over time. The research sample was proportionately sampled across all five governorates of Gaza: Rafah; North of Gaza; Gaza; Khan Younis; Middle Area. In Round 1, we collected data with 1,011 young people (526 females and 485 males aged 10–24 years). For Round 2, we surveyed 1,380 young people (837 females and 543 males) (Annexes: Table 1). Throughout this brief, age groups are referred to as follows: 'young adolescents' or 'boys/girls' for those aged 10-14 years, 'older adolescents' or 'older boys/girls' for those aged 15-19, and 'young adults' or 'young men/women' for those aged 20-25. Collectively, all three groups are referred to as 'young people'. We were able to reach 76% of the original sample and applied the same sampling selection approach to select replacements. In order to better understand the challenges facing some of the most disadvantaged young people, we purposely oversampled married adolescents (aged 15-19), young people with disabilities, and, for Round 2, included an additional sample of orphaned children to reflect the experiences of the many orphaned adolescents (aged 10-19) in Gaza as a result of the war (Annexes: Table 1). We use survey weights in analysis of Round 2 data. Although this brief primarily focuses on data from Round 2 (n=1,380), changes over time are examined using the panel of young people who took part in both rounds (n=772) (Annexes Table 2). This data is presented in Box 2, page 7.

Food insecurity was measured at both the individual and household level using two validated tools: the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS; Coates et al., 2007) and the Reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI; UNHCR, 2025).

Applying a sequenced mixed-methods approach, qualitative data for Round 1 was collected after the survey, from November to December 2024, with 100 young people (56 females and 44 males). The team also conducted 24 key informant interviews with service providers and community leaders. Round 2 interviews included in-depth individual interviews (IDIs) with 86 young people (44 females and 42 males), 10 focus group discussions (81 young people), 30 IDIs with caregivers (20 mothers and 10 fathers), and 24 key informant interviews with service providers and community leaders. The qualitative pool was selected from the larger quantitative sample, again deliberately oversampling the most disadvantaged individuals in order to capture the voices of those at risk of being 'left behind'. Table 3 in the annexes provides more details about the qualitative sample.

Ethical clearance for the research was granted by the Helsinki Committee (PHRC/HC/1245/24), the Gaza Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, and the ODI Global Ethics Committee (ODI R025002). All procedures strictly followed international ethical guidelines, including the principles of informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Written consent was obtained from participants aged 18 years and above, while those under 18 provided verbal assent in addition to consent from their caregivers.



A woman cooking in Gaza © GAGE 2026

GAGE findings on the impact of the war on young people’s nutrition

Food insecurity

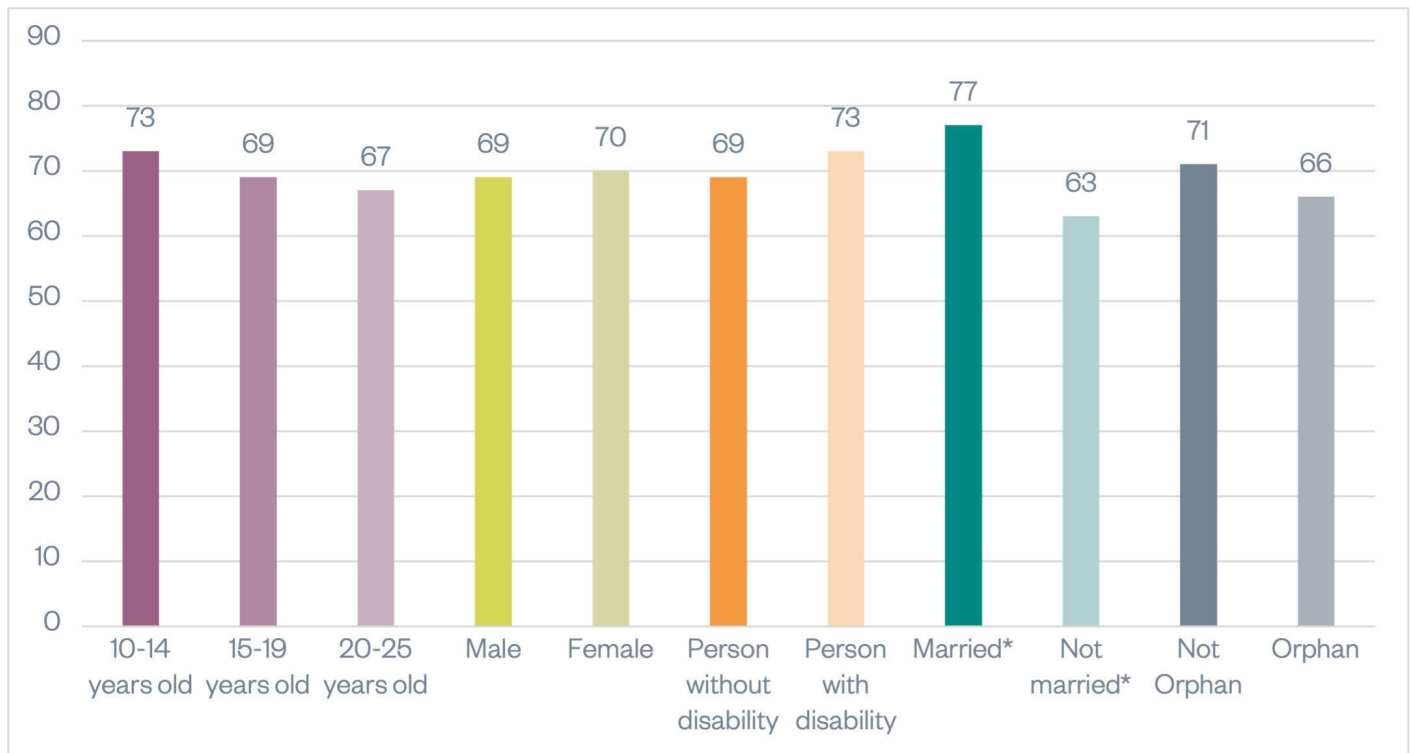
Levels of food insecurity in 2025 are extremely concerning, with girls and young women being disproportionately affected.

7 in 10 of young people (70%) reported feeling hungry more than once in the past four weeks (see Figure 1), which puts them in the category of extremely food insecure according to the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS). The Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI), which measures household food insecurity through five food-based coping behaviours, tells a similar story: nearly 9 in 10 households (89%) in the sample met the threshold for moderate-to-severe food insecurity (see Figure 2), and more than 1 in 3 (39%) were classified as experiencing catastrophic food insecurity.

Married adolescent girls were overrepresented on the HFIAS scale (77% versus 63% non-married girls), while girls and young women were more likely to fall into the catastrophic category (rCSI); 42% versus 35% of boys and young men.

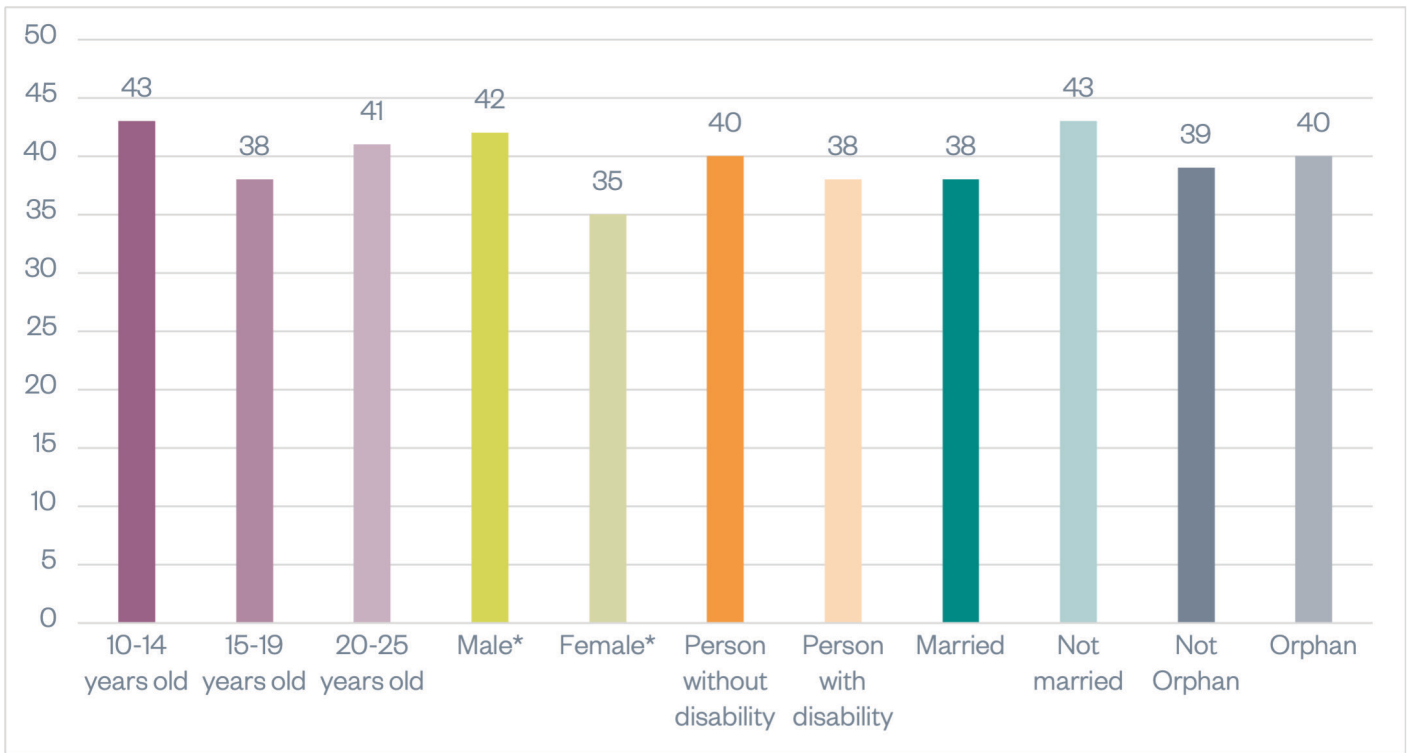
Young people’s testimonies highlight the depth of food insecurity they are facing. A 16-year-old boy from the north reflected, ‘Gaza had everything. Today, there is nothing in it,’ capturing the radical deterioration in access to food and basic goods. Another 16 year old boy described the physical impact of hunger, explaining that ‘my weight was 55 kg and dropped to 42 kg. We developed malnutrition.’ A 22-year-old young man similarly reported that there was ‘no food at all,’ recalling that ‘last winter, we managed on wild herbs and such,’ while an 18-year-old pregnant mother described having to give scarce food to her child instead of eating it herself: ‘For example, two bananas – the child keeps crying. Should I eat it or leave it for the child?’ Together, these accounts show how families who once met their needs independently have now been forced into extreme deprivation, difficult trade offs, and reliance on inadequate and uncertain supplies.

Figure 1: Percentage of young people who reported experiencing hunger in the past four weeks because there’s not enough food to eat



The percentages above are based on the full sample of young people (n=1,380); categories noted with an asterisk (*) demonstrate statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level.

Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who scored high (crisis/emergency and/or catastrophic level) on the Reduced Coping Strategies Index



The percentages above are based on the full sample of young people (n=1,380); categories noted with an asterisk (*) demonstrate statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level.



Access to food

Food access was the most commonly reported challenge among young people during the war, with 89% identifying it as the most pressing concern. Most participants reported that the situation worsened as the war progressed, driven by hyperinflation, the blockade of humanitarian aid and the destruction of Gaza's agricultural sector.

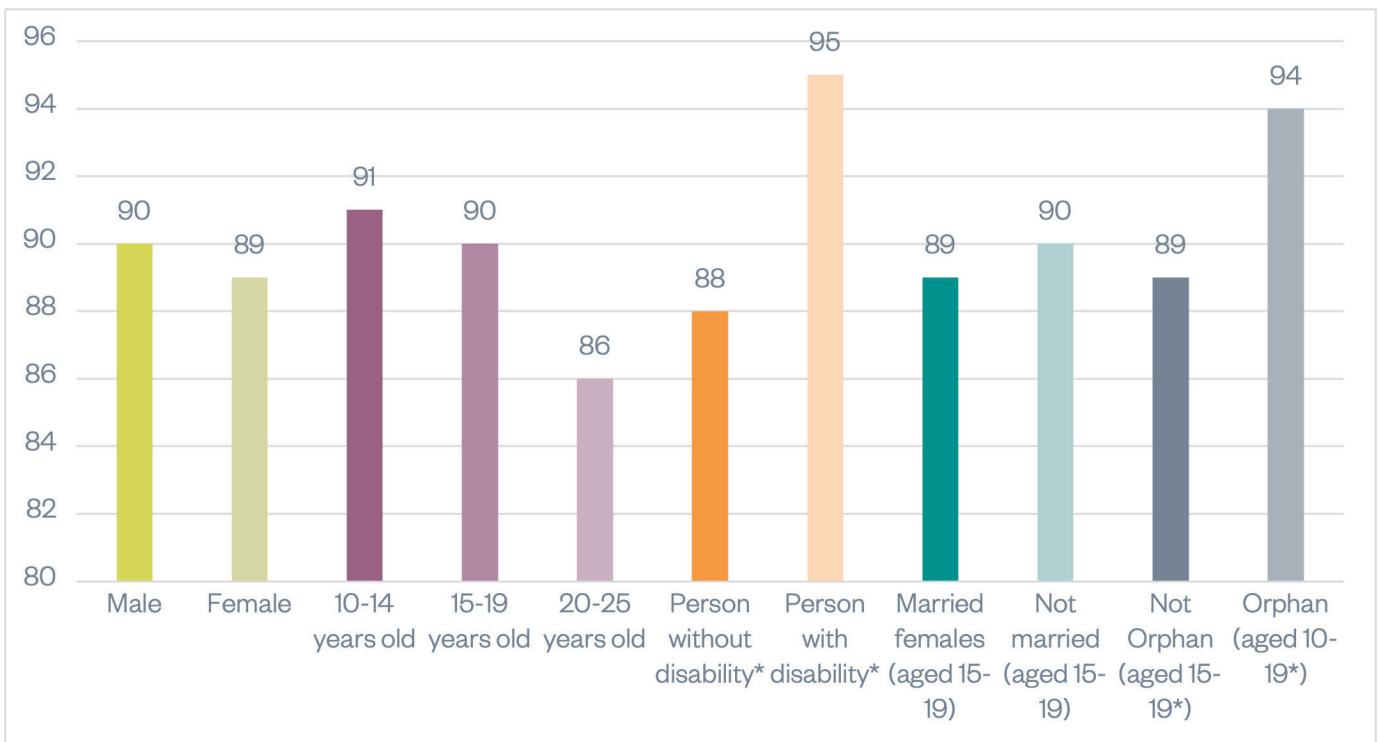
On average, respondents ate two meals on the day prior to the survey; 1 in 5 (21%) had eaten only one. Nearly all participants (89%) reported that food availability had deteriorated compared to before the war.

The main barriers to accessing food were:

- high prices (79%)
- lack of cash (73%)
- unfair distribution (46%)
- loss of income (42%)
- looting or theft (37%)
- food shortage in the market (27%)
- lack of safety at aid distribution points (22%).

The burden was not shared equally. Young people with disabilities and those who were orphaned were the most likely to report food as their primary challenge (95% and 94% respectively; see Figure 3). Married adolescents and those who were not orphaned were also more likely to report experiencing hunger in the past four weeks.

Figure 3: Reported experiencing lack of food as a key challenge and difficulty that has been faced since the beginning of the war



The percentages above are based on the full sample of young people (n=1,380); categories noted with an asterisk (*) demonstrate statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level.

Box 1: The specific needs of young people with disabilities and orphaned youth

Young people with disabilities and those who were orphaned were especially likely to report lack of food as their main challenge during the war, and both groups faced particularly high risks of food insecurity compared to their peers.

Before the war, many young people with disabilities relied on a sophisticated care and aid system, supporting people with food, health services, and social assistance benefits. Due to the war, this system collapsed, and it became extremely difficult for local organisations to locate people with specific needs. A 24-year-old woman with a physical disability reported: *'I kept looking for institutions that match my situation, but it was useless – I didn't benefit or receive anything... not even once.'* A 20-year-old young man who lost his leg during the war described the days during the famine in al-Jabalia camp where days would pass without food, except for *'the peels of clementines and oranges.'* The lack of food also affected some young people with disabilities more, as they are reliant on medicine or still need to recover from traumatic injury. A 17-year-old girl, with a serious leg wound and dislocated hip that required medicine and care explained her situation during the famine: *'Honestly, I would get a lot of stomach issues – diarrhoea, things like that. My stomach is the sensitive type; anything affects it.'* Taking medicine during this time was a struggle, due to the limited availability.

Food assistance

The most commonly received forms of food assistance were flour and canned food. While fresh vegetables were considered essential by all who received them, only half of respondents reported accessing this type of support. Girls and young women – particularly those who were married – had worse access across all types of food assistance.

- **In-kind food assistance (mainly flour):** 88% reported receiving in-kind food assistance, and 99% considered it essential. The main providers were international humanitarian organisations including UNICEF and WFP (63%), UNRWA (60%), and NGOs, CBOs and religious institutions alongside the Ministry of Social Development (33% each).
- **Food vouchers for canned food:** 72% reported receiving food vouchers for canned food, with 90% considering this support essential. The main providers were international humanitarian organisations including UNICEF and WFP (74%), UNRWA (46%), the Ministry of Social Development (27%), and NGOs, CBOs and religious institutions (21%).
- **Food vouchers for fresh vegetables:** Just over half of respondents (51%) reported receiving food vouchers for fresh vegetables – and 100% considered this support essential, reflecting the near-total absence of fresh produce through other means. The main providers were NGOs, CBOs and religious institutions (37%), the Ministry of Social Development (33%), UNRWA (23%), and international humanitarian organisations (22%).

Young people's accounts show that food assistance is often scarce, dangerous to access and unequal. A 22-year-old married man from the north, the family breadwinner, described having *'nothing to eat,'* recalling that at the local mosque *'they distributed bread, and I didn't get any... people fought over a loaf of bread.'* A 17-year-old girl in the north said her family survives *'just depending on associations or whatever my mother gets,'* with no other income source. Access to aid is also gendered and shaped by social norm restrictions on girls' and women's mobility within the community: a 22-year-old woman from the north noted that *'boys can access aid trucks, take large quantities, and sell them for profit. Girls cannot do that.'* Boys, on the other hand, are exposed to extreme risks and discomfort when collecting food, as an 18-year-old boy reported: *'We used to go out as a group at 2:00 AM to wait in a queue. I mean to secure bread for all. I mean for the girls, for the male guys and for all families.'* For some, collecting aid has meant taking life-threatening risks; a 20-year-old man with a war-related leg amputation reported going into dangerous areas near Beit Hanoun to obtain *'food that was left behind by the Israeli army'* while an 18-year-old married woman from the north worried about the unpredictability of support: *'today we have [food] – tomorrow, where are we supposed to get it from?'*

Box 2: Changes over time in young people's risk of food insecurity between 2024 and 2025

Panel data from 772 young people interviewed across both rounds (Round 1, August–September 2024 and Round 2, October–November 2025), points to a worrying deterioration in food security, with levels reaching a critical new high and the current support is highly precarious. Notably, UNRWA's role in providing in-kind food assistance (flour) and food vouchers (canned food) has declined since Round 1, with international humanitarian organisations (UNICEF and WFP) no longer able to fill the gap.

Catastrophic food insecurity rose by 7 percentage points between rounds, from 62% in Round 1 to 69% in Round 2. This is a deeply alarming shift, with nearly seven in ten young people now falling into the most severe category. At the same time, the share reporting lack of food as a key challenge rose sharply – from 63% in Round 1 to 88% in Round 2, a 25-percentage point increase, which further underscores the rapid collapse in food access and highlights the urgent need for a scaled-up humanitarian response.

The in-depth interviews were conducted later than the surveys, and the effects of the 'ceasefire' were more visible. Young people reported some improvements in access to food, for instance a 12-year-old boy described how they 'eat chicken and kebab, for example'; however, prices are still 'expensive.'

Policy and programming implications

During the war in Gaza, young people and their families have been effectively denied their right to food security and adequate nutrition. To redress this, it is vital that the international community continues to press for the end of the illegal occupation of Gaza and the blockade and ensures that humanitarian aid and agricultural resources can enter the Strip. Specific materials are needed for the reconstruction of Gaza's agricultural system, and fuel is needed to operate machinery and the transportation sector. There is also an urgent need for the complete withdrawal of the Israeli military, as its presence precludes the possibility of rebuilding Gaza's agricultural production.

To fulfil Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 – to end hunger, achieve food security and promote sustainable agriculture – our findings suggest that the new administration of Gaza, humanitarian agencies and potential donors should prioritise delivery of humanitarian aid into the Strip and the reconstruction of Gaza's agriculture in a sequenced approach, as follows:

Short-term priorities:

- **Aid needs to enter the Gaza Strip immediately**, targeting children, young adolescents, females, orphaned children and young people with disabilities. In addition to nutritious supplements (including Plumpy'Nut), more fresh products (vegetables, meat) need to enter the Gaza Strip.
- **The role of UNRWA and NGOs in delivering essential food aid is evident** from the data. The defamation of these organisations by the State of Israel through false accusations needs to end immediately. These organisations have long-standing experience in Gaza and cannot be replaced.
- **Food is a fundamental right for all Palestinians in Gaza**, and aid should never be conditional or expose people to danger (as occurred at the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation distribution points, where at least 1,400 people were killed while seeking food (UN, 2025)).

Longer-term priorities

- **Support Gaza's municipalities to restore the agricultural sector.** As most land and irrigation systems have been destroyed or occupied by the Israeli military, serious efforts are needed to rebuild Gaza's farms and greenhouses to enable the population to improve food security.
- **Support farmers with inputs, credit and financial risk protection.** Establish programmes to provide seeds, tools, livestock and fertiliser, alongside Halal finance incentives (e.g. credit). Introduce risk-sharing mechanisms to protect smallholders from shocks.
- **Restore and expand the Palestinian National Cash Transfer programme:** This proven programme can support the most vulnerable households to meet their food security needs, prioritising households with young people with disabilities in particular.



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An adolescent girl cooking in Gaza © GAGE 2026

Annex: Further information on the research sample

Table 1: Round 1 and 2 participants survey

Round 1 (n=1,011)		
Variable	Number	Percentage
Age		
10-14 years	307	30
15-19 years	392	39
20-24 years	312	31
Mode 18 SD 4	.Mean age 17	Median 17
Gender of participant		
Male	485	48
Female	526	52
Current place of living by governorate		
North of Gaza	142	14
Gaza	225	.23
Middle area	280	28
Khan Younis	213	21
Rafah	151	15
Current place of living (North or South of the Gaza Strip as divided by the Israeli occupation)		
North of Gaza (Gaza City and north)	367	.36
South of Gaza (middle and south)	644	64
Refugee status		
Refugees	332	33
Non-refugees	679	67
Current marital status		
Married	181	18
Not married	830	82
Mean age at marriage	17 years	
Having any type of disability		
Yes	123	12.2
No	888	88

Round 2 (n=1,380)		
Age		
10–14 years	289	21
15–19 years	762	55
20–24 years	329	24
Mode 17 SD 3.527	.Mean age 17	Median 17
Gender of participant		
Male	543	39
Female	837	61
Current place of living by governorate		
North of Gaza	45	3.3
Gaza	332	24
Middle area	514	.37
Khan Younis	487	35
Rafah	2	0.1
Place of residence (North or South of the Gaza Strip as divided by the Israeli occupation)		
North of Gaza (Gaza City and north)	377	27
South of Gaza (middle and south)	1,003	73
Refugee status		
Non-refugees	390	28
Refugees	990	72
Orphan status		
Orphaned	214	16
Not orphaned	1,166	84
Current marital status		
Not married	929	67
Married	451	33
Mean age at marriage	17.02 years	
Child marriage, among those ever married (n=433)		
Yes	333	76.9
No	100	23.1
Having a disability		
Yes	209	15
No	1,171	85

Table 2: Panel data, participants

Panel data during Round 1 (N=772)		
Variable	Number	Percentage
Age		
10–14 years	176	23
15–19 years	334	43
20–24 years	262	34
Gender of participant		
Male	365	47
Female	407	53
Current marital status		
Not married	600	78
Married	172	22
Having any type of disability		
Yes	114	15
No	658	85

Table 3: In-depth interviews sample with young people and their caregivers from Round 1 and 2

Categories	Girls/ young women	Boys/ young men	Young people subtotal	Mothers of adolescents	Fathers of adolescents	Parent subtotals	Total individual interviews
ROUND 1							
Young people	32	24	56				56
Married young people	12	8	20				20
Young people with disabilities	12	12	24				24
Total	56	44	100				100
ROUND 2							
Young people	18	18	36	10	10	20	56
Married young people	8	8	16				16
Orphans	6	4	10				10
Young people with disabilities	12	12	24	10		10	34
Total	44	42	86	20	10	30	116