

Policy Brief

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Young people's access to education and learning 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). Given the unprecedented level of violence inflicted on civilians, an often-overlooked dimension of the conflict is its impact on education. The complete destruction of Gaza's sophisticated education infrastructure has been coined 'scholasticide', as the Israeli army has systematically targeted educational facilities and damaged or destroyed more than 97% of Gaza's schools (OHCHR, 2024; UNICEF, 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). There is also significant uncertainty surrounding future plans for the Gaza Strip, which would fall under the oversight of the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, appointed by US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace.

This brief explores how the destruction of Gaza's education system is impacting young people. It aims to inform the post-ceasefire humanitarian response, paying particular attention to the impacts of the war on education (HRW, 2024; Forensic Architecture, 2025; UN, 2025). It draws on two rounds of data collection (in the third and fourth quarters of 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 GAGE's findings for the post-ceasefire humanitarian response, with a view to ensuring that all young Gazans have access to quality education in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.

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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 1, page 7.

Applying a sequenced mixed-methods approach, qualitative data for Round 1 was collected after the survey, in November and 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.



Young people in Gaza © GAGE 2026

GAGE findings on the impacts of the war on young people's education

Barriers to education:

Before the war, 4 in 5 of young people (80%) in the sample were in education, with near-universal attendance under the age of 19. Married adolescents were less likely to be enrolled (87% versus 96%). Less than 1 in 10 of the participants (7%) were enrolled in university.

The war brought education to a near-standstill. 6 in 10 young people (61%) reported that there were no accessible educational services in their area of residence, and many identified the absence of education as one of the most significant challenges they faced (next to lack of food, water and shelter). The main barriers to education were:

- lack of reliable internet connection (21%);
- struggling to do anything under the current conditions (20%);
- lack of access to a device (16%);
- security concerns (13%).

Qualitative data illustrates the compounding nature of these barriers in respondents' own words. Many reported that physical infrastructure had collapsed entirely. A 16-year-old girl noted that: *'The schools became shelters. Nothing remained in Gaza as it used to be'* and further described how her school had been bulldozed by the Israeli army and many teachers had been killed: *'Many of my teachers were killed, everything is gone.'* Overcrowded conditions during repeated displacements made studying nearly impossible even for those who tried, with the same girl recounting studying in a tent shared with extended family: *'There was no privacy, no place to study, it was always noisy because of the children.'* In order to light a fire, they used her schoolbooks and *'burnt them in the kitchen'*, as *'there wasn't any wood'*. A 19-year-old young woman described the difficulties she faced when trying to study:

I used to sit and study, but the shelters were chaotic in the morning due to displacement. I couldn't study... I had planned a timetable and used to wake up at 2 am, while it is peaceful and everyone is sleeping. But there is no light. I used a mobile torch, but this drove me mad as there weren't many mobiles during that period.

Psychological distress and the sudden survival mode young people found themselves in further eroded their ability to engage with education, as a 16-year-old girl described: *'The psychological situation didn't allow me to study or open books. We were living in tents.'* In a similar vein, a 22-year-old married young man, who dropped out of school in 10th grade but aspires to return, explained: *'There was no food so we couldn't get up to read and study.'* Economic hardship created additional inequalities, with an 18-year-old young

man with a war-related injury observing that *'only the ones who were able to afford such high fees were able to learn... Before the war, we used to plan for our education. Currently, we try to find a way just to survive.'* For older students, the consequences extended into higher education. A 21-year-old female university student reflected, *'I lost a year at university... I reached a point where I was supposed to have finished... I'm very upset about the lost year, but it wasn't in my hands.'*

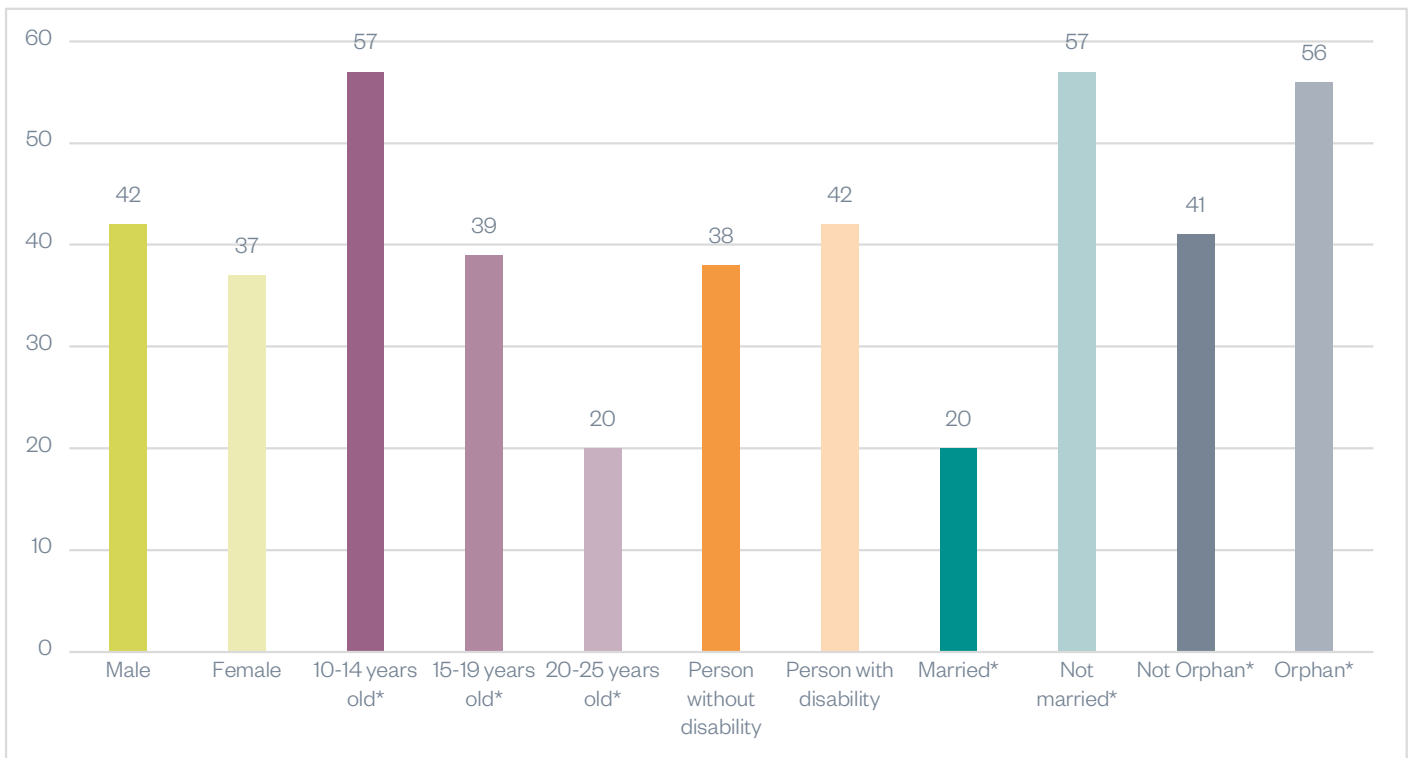
Opportunities for education:

These challenges notwithstanding, during the Round 2 surveys, almost 2 in 5 of respondents (37%) reported joining some form of schooling during the hostilities, especially younger adolescents, unmarried respondents and orphaned children (see Figure 1). Among those who did, learning took place across a range of formats. The most commonly reported are listed below, with virtual modes more prevalent than physical ones (68% versus 40%):

- almost 1 in 3 (32%) attended educational sessions in tents;
- 61% joined e-learning sessions organised by a school or university;
- 7% attended classes at a regular school.

The qualitative interviews indicated that some respondents pursued online learning through WhatsApp groups or platforms set up by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), such as iSchool (a learning platform for children in the Middle East and North Africa region) or makeshift learning spaces. An 18-year-old male respondent described going to *'many places like hospitals, streets, points with internet, just to get a grade'*, adding: *'I went anywhere, as long as I could succeed and get a grade, and not lose my education despite the war, despite the pain, despite the bombing.'* Where in-person sessions did take place, quality was often severely compromised: classes held under tarpaulin with no walls, overcrowded tents, and the absence of regular teachers meant that some respondents attended only briefly before dropping out. A 16-year-old female respondent with a hearing impairment attended for just two days before stopping, explaining, *'I need a school where I can learn and understand well.'* In addition, due to the continuous evacuation orders, young people were constantly on the move.

Figure 1: Ever in education during 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.

A small minority of programmes included content on coping with the circumstances of war – but among those who received it, it was almost universally valued. Close to 1 in 10 (9%) of those who joined an educational programme reported receiving content like this, yet 86% of them found it useful. Qualitative interviews highlighted that this included disaster-related preparedness and response. A 16-year-old girl described benefiting from guidance on responding to shelling and displacement (provided by a visiting organisation), noting that: ‘I didn’t know how to deal with situations – like, if a place gets bombed and there is a fire, where should I go?’

Support for education

Families played a central role in keeping young people learning during the war. More than 4 in 5 respondents (83%) received some form of educational support from their families, especially young adolescents reported family support (90%). This support took many forms:

- providing a device with internet access (61%);
- purchasing books or learning materials (47%);
- helping with schoolwork (43%);
- providing a space to study at home (41%);
- providing homeschooling (34%).

By contrast, tools from the Ministry of Education, such as TV or radio-based classes, reached very few young people (2%).

Qualitative accounts echoed the role of family encouragement in sustaining young people’s engagement with education during the war. A 16-year-old girl credited her cousins and mother for motivating her to continue, explaining: ‘My mother would tell me, “Look, they’re studying, and the situation is the same for us and for them. What do you think about studying?”’, adding that watching Tawjihi [high school graduation] celebration videos also motivated her. Similarly, a 17-year-old girl described her mother as her main source of encouragement during her exams, noting that the sense that ‘everyone is like me’ made the situation feel more bearable. Where formal schooling was unavailable, some families turned to informal religious learning; a 16-year-old girl described spending her time memorising the Quran at her mother’s encouragement in the absence of any school to attend. Not all respondents experienced such support, however. A 20-year-old young man reported receiving no encouragement from either family or teachers to continue his education given familial economic survival pressures, reflecting simply: ‘I was done.’

Online educational tools

Although online learning was the primary mechanism through which young people were able to continue their studies, access to the internet was severely limited. Only 1 in 7 respondents (15%) could get online at least once a day, with many able to do so only rarely – if at all. Males were nearly twice as likely as females to have daily internet access (21% versus 12%), and unmarried girls had better access than married girls (8% versus 15%). The main barriers to internet access were:

- devices being too expensive (43%);
- no signal (22%);
- war damage to infrastructure (7%);
- data being too expensive (5%).

Disrupted connectivity and lack of devices were also recurring obstacles recounted in the qualitative interviews. As one 16-year-old girl explained, *'There was online learning, but our situation wasn't stable... The internet was also not sufficient. There was no signal – you had to move from place to place so the internet would work.'* Similarly, an 18-year-old male noted simply, *'School was online. I didn't have a phone, so I didn't study.'* A 16-year-old boy similarly noted that *'Even if we wanted to study online, devices weren't available, and there was no internet... My phone didn't have internet.'*

For those attempting to sit formal examinations online, connectivity failures were particularly consequential; one 19-year-old young woman in her final year of secondary school described how, after months of disrupted studying due to being displaced multiple times, registration for exams was electronic but *'there was no internet'*. A 22-year-old woman pursuing the Tawjihi (General Secondary Education Certificate Examination) noted that online exams were *'very difficult, very difficult'* due to not having a phone, resulting in a lower score than she might otherwise have achieved. Even where internet access was occasionally available, the broader conditions of war undermined its usefulness. As one 18-year-old young man put it, *'No schools, no learning points, no internet, no safe place to study.'*

Academic aspirations

Despite everything, most young people held on to their educational ambitions. Before the war, 8 in 10 respondents (79%) had aspired to enrol in university. During the war, this remained largely stable, with most young people continuing to aspire to obtain at least a university degree (bachelor/master/doctorate) if the war would end (73%). Aspirations were highest among young adolescents (aged 10-14), boys and young men, unmarried adolescents, and orphaned adolescents (Figure 2). Still, nearly two-thirds (62%) reported that their educational ambitions had decreased as a result

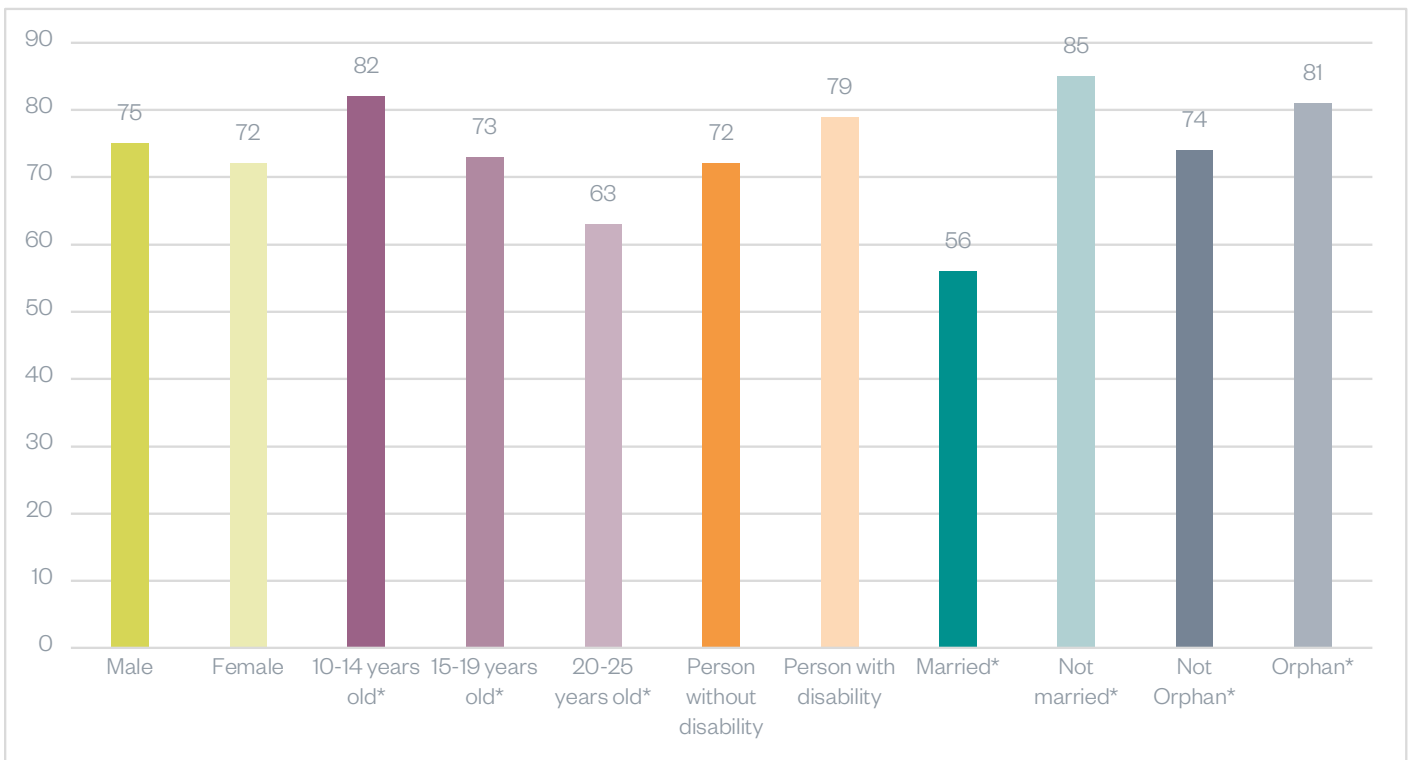
of the war – three times the share who said their ambitions had increased (20%).

Qualitative accounts provide a more complex and sobering picture of the aspirations of young Palestinians in Gaza. Although some maintained or even deepened their educational ambitions, others described a profound erosion of hope. A married 22-year-old young man articulated this starkly: *'Why should I study, and for whom?'*, listing the successive wars he had lived through since birth before concluding, *'There is a possibility that next year a war will come and I will die in it.'* Another 18-year-old young man with a war-acquired vision disability similarly described losing his ambition to become a religion teacher, explaining: *'I can't see any hope of studying currently... I just want to survive with the basics.'* A 16-year-old girl who had previously wanted to become a doctor had abandoned that goal, citing the collapse of schooling and new caregiving responsibilities she had had to take on for younger siblings. She described wanting to leave Gaza entirely, reflecting: *'Here, if someone dreams and thinks and aspires too much, in the blink of an eye everything can disappear... There are no dreams.'*

For others, the question of returning to education had become dependent on circumstances entirely outside their control. A 15-year-old girl underscored that: *'I lost hope in continuing my education'*, adding that any return depended on whether schools reopened, while in a group discussion among orphaned boys (aged 15–18 years), one boy who had previously studied hard to become a doctor said: *'I don't have any ambitions now. My father was martyred, and I'm now solely responsible for the household.'*

Nevertheless, for some young people, aspirations had not disappeared, but the war changed the direction. A 24-year-old woman shifted her ambition from a career in multimedia to basic education for practical reasons, explaining that *'programming requires a lot of time, internet, electricity... There was no electricity.'* An 18-year-old young man reported that his aspirations had shifted after witnessing the critical work of healthcare workers during the war, which inspired him to pursue nursing alongside journalism. He noted that a first aid course he completed during the war *'gave me strength and determination to continue'*. Others held on to their pre-war ambitions despite everything. A 16-year-old boy stated firmly that his goal of studying programming had not changed: *'It hasn't changed because I'm determined to study and achieve my dream.'* A 21-year-old female university student expressed a similar motivation, insisting she must finish her bachelor's degree: *'I must continue... so I can feel I've reached a new stage of achievement and I'm not still standing in the same place.'*

Figure 2: Aspiration to obtain at least a university degree



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: Changes in education between 2024 and 2025

Using panel data involving 772 young people who were interviewed at both rounds of data collection (Round 1, August–September 2024 and Round 2, October–November 2025), changes over time highlight significant differences in the supply and uptake of educational activities.

The reported presence of educational services more than doubled between rounds, from 16% to 39%. This had a clear effect on participation: just 4% reported joining educational activities since the start of the war in Round 1, rising to 11% by Round 2. The increase was sharpest among older adolescents aged 15–19, whose participation grew from 2% to 15%.

In terms of educational aspirations, in Round 1, more than 1 in 4 respondents (28%) said that the war had increased their educational ambitions; but by Round 2, this had fallen to 19%. The share of respondents who reported no change in their ambitions rose from 15% to 23%.

Throughout both rounds, the majority reported a decrease in educational ambitions since the war (57% in Round 1 and 58% in Round 2). This reported decline was especially pronounced among young adolescents and young people with disabilities, both groups seeing a 15-percentage point increase in reported decreased ambition.

Imagining a post-conflict Gaza

Young people were clear that education must be central to any recovery. More than half (53%) identified education as the most urgent issue affecting them and their families, and in need of immediate intervention. 2 in 5 (42%) said that improving education should be the top infrastructure and services priority to enhance their living conditions. Qualitative accounts reflect both the urgency of this need and the concrete forms of support respondents felt were most critical. Basic materials and connectivity featured prominently: a 16-year-old boy called for stationery and internet access as immediate priorities, while expressing a clear preference for face-to-face learning: *'When I don't understand, I can go to the teacher. Online, I can't, and the internet doesn't help.'* For others, the barriers ran deeper. A 19-year-old young woman identified stable housing as the most pressing prerequisite for any return to education, noting that the loss of her father and his income had left her financially unable to continue at university. For young people with disabilities, targeted support was essential: one 24-year-old woman with a physical disability stated she was specifically looking for *'scholarships that suit people with disabilities and universities abroad that would accept me'*.



Policy and programming implications

Since the war on Gaza began, young people and their families have been effectively denied their right to education. Ending the illegal occupation of Gaza and the blockade, and a complete withdrawal of Israeli soldiers, are essential so that young people and their families can start to rebuild their lives. In order to fulfil SDG 4 and achieve inclusive and equitable education for all, the new administration of Gaza, humanitarian agencies and potential donors should prioritise the following:

Short-term priorities:

- **Capitalise on young people's high educational aspirations:** Despite the devastating effects of the war, young people continue to report consistently high aspirations to pursue higher education. Humanitarian agencies should capitalise on these largely unchanged ambitions, including through the provision of education catch-up programmes. They should also ensure that content about how to cope with the psycho-emotional toll of the war is expanded and available to all young people so that they are able to resume their educational journeys.
- **Accelerate efforts to provide temporary learning options:** Given the very high level of school enrolment prior to the war, the hybrid (in-person and online) education options currently available must be scaled up. Particular attention should be paid to older adolescents and married respondents, to support their return to learning, include increasing access to online platforms and expanding accessible and affordable internet connectivity.
- **Rebuild Gaza's internet infrastructure:** Given the high levels of engagement in e-learning, it is critical to fully restore Gaza's internet connectivity and ensure that the most disadvantaged young people have access to devices so that they can continue their education while Gaza's schools and universities are rebuilt.
- **Provide extracurricular content on survival skills:** Include tailored content about managing the specific challenges of the post-ceasefire environment, including how to purify water, treat open wounds, appropriate conduct when encountering Israeli soldiers amidst the occupation, and how to follow evacuation orders properly.
- **Incorporate psychosocial, stress release and resilience sessions within educational activities:** Ensure these are embedded across all learning settings, both in-person and online.
- **Support learning centres/tents with needed resources:** Provide stationery, reliable internet, electricity and educational materials to ensure functional learning environments.

- **Complement in-person schooling with online educational tuition platforms:** Draw on lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic to develop learning approaches.

Longer-term priorities:

- **Rebuild Gaza's education system:** Map available education services and human resources and conduct assessments/audits to identify gaps in service provision that need to be urgently addressed during the recovery period.
- **Prioritise rebuilding Gaza's schools and universities:** Equip them with the needed resources, libraries, computers, laboratories and learning resources.
- **Support continuity school and university operations through supporting remote teaching:** Provide resources for remote teaching and establish temporary sites with essential educational resources to continue learning during the rebuilding process.
- **Restore education infrastructure:** Rebuild Gaza's education facilities and accommodate the internally displaced people currently living at former schools and universities.
- **Provide psychosocial support to teachers and students:** Invest in counselling services located within schools to support the wellbeing of both educators and learners.
- **Integrate life skills into the curriculum:** Embed social cohesion, resilience, positive coping and life skills across all levels of the education system.
- **Invest in a comprehensive social protection package for young people:** Include a cash-for-education component, alongside referral pathways to integrated services (remedial education, health, psychosocial, recreational and justice services) at one-stop centres.

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Students learning in a tent 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 governorates		
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
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
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	
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



Shelters in Gaza © GAGE 2026

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