

At least 60,000 children malnourished in Gaza as Israel keeps blocking aid



Displaced Palestinians collect donated food in Khan Younis
Palestinians, including children, hold metal pots and pans as they gather to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen, in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip [File: Haitham Imad/EPA-EFE]

Gaza City, April 9 (RHC)-- At least 60,000 children in the Gaza Strip are “at risk of serious health complications due to malnutrition” as food supplies dwindle amid Israel’s blockade of aid, according to the enclave’s Ministry of Health. came on Wednesday, a day after United Nations chief Antonio Guterres rejected a new Israeli proposal to control aid deliveries in Gaza, saying it risks “further controlling and callously limiting aid down to the last calorie and grain of flour”.

The Health Ministry warned that “the lack of adequate nutrition and drinking water will compound health challenges, with the continued ban on vaccinations for children, especially polio vaccinations”.

No aid has been delivered to the enclave of 2.3 million people since March 2 as Israel continues to seal vital border crossings, barring the entry of everything from food to medical supplies and fuel. This has forced the closure of 21 nutrition centres, disrupting care for about 350 children already severely malnourished, according to the United Nations.

Last month, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) also warned that hundreds of thousands of people in Gaza are at risk of severe hunger and malnutrition as an expansion of Israeli military activity severely disrupts food assistance operations.

“WFP and partners from the food security sector have been unable to bring new food supplies into Gaza for more than three weeks,” the organisation said in a statement, adding that its remaining food stocks would support operations for a maximum of two weeks.

Israel has repeatedly used food and international humanitarian aid as a tool of collective pressure against Palestinian people over 18 months of its devastating war on the Gaza Strip, which has killed more than 50,000 people, according to the Health Ministry.

COGAT, an Israeli military unit responsible for civilian matters in the occupied Palestinian territory, last week met representatives from UN agencies and international aid groups and proposed “a structured monitoring and aid entry mechanism” for Gaza, claiming that aid was being diverted away from civilians by Hamas.

But Jonathan Whittall, a senior UN aid official for Gaza and the occupied West Bank, said last week there was no evidence of aid being diverted.

The military halted the flow of water from Israeli company Mekorot to the Gaza Strip last week, effectively cutting off 70 percent of the Palestinian enclave’s total water supply.

Hosni Mehanna, a spokesman for Gaza municipality, said the disconnection affects the main pipeline located in the Shujayea neighbourhood in eastern Gaza City, where Israeli forces have been conducting a military assault since Thursday.

“The reasons behind the interruption remain unclear, but we are coordinating with international organisations to inspect whether the pipeline was damaged due to the heavy Israeli bombardment in the area,” Mehanna said. “Regardless of the cause, the consequences are dire. If the flow of water from Mekorot is not restored soon, Gaza will face a full-blown water crisis,” he said.



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