

ONE YEAR OF WAR ON GAZA, WHAT IS NEXT?



Introduction

Posting the question, “What’s next for Gaza?” brings with it a deep sense of fear: fear for the children, women, the elderly, and innocent civilians enduring the devastating impact of an unprecedented war within the borders of the Gaza strip. It is a question that compels us to ask: How many more lives will be lost? How many will be injured, face amputations, or suffer war-related diseases? How long will this suffering last? How far will the conflict and its health-related implications spread geographically?

This question may trigger fears, but these should not deter us from taking on the responsibility to support those who need us most. On the contrary, pondering this question should motivate us more than ever to remain steadfast in offering help in the face of such destruction. “What’s next for Gaza?” should be a tagline to a motto underscoring renewed collective commitment among the global health community to work together, to create context-focused solutions, to support community resilience, and to

amplify the call for peace. “What’s next for Gaza?” should guide our focus on reducing suffering and meeting urgent health needs.

As we mark this sad anniversary, we look forward to increasing our support for those facing all aspects of devastation. As we mark a year of suffering, we still look forward to ensuring our actions reflect a deep commitment to humanity in the face of such devastation.

Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour,
Executive Director of EMPHNET

Situational Overview of the Gaza Strip and Lebanon

It has been over a year since the inhumane war erupted in the Gaza Strip. The relentless and brutal bombardment by the Israeli army continues, alongside longstanding restrictions on the entry of goods, trade, and humanitarian aid. **Over six percent of the population has been killed or injured, with at least 10,000 people still trapped under the rubble** (Source: United Nations). The consequences of this war on public health are severe, with rising morbidity, hunger, and poverty at the forefront of these consequences. Attacks have inflicted widespread damage on Gaza’s infrastructure, including hospitals, homes, and schools, making response and recovery efforts extremely challenging.

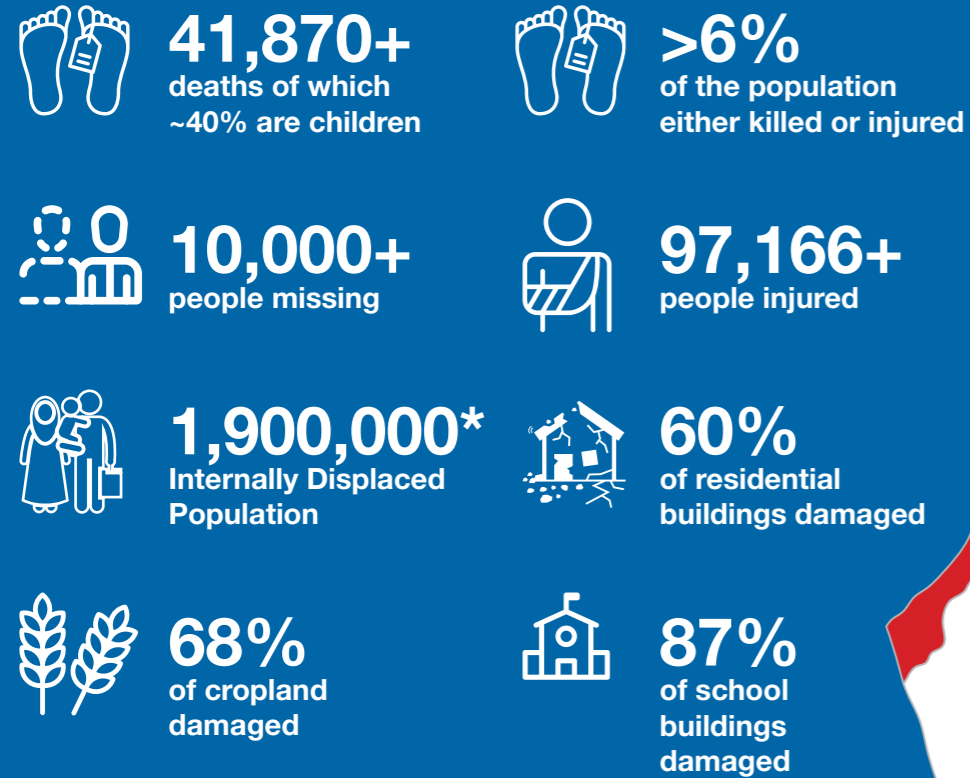
The conflict has also spilled over into Lebanon, causing devastating impacts on health, wellbeing, and the society. Innocent lives have been lost, and the ongoing hostilities have further worsened Lebanon’s already dire economic situation. **The conflict has deepened the country’s humanitarian crisis, disrupting essential services such as healthcare and education**, leaving vulnerable populations in even more precarious conditions.



Distressing activities conducted by EMPHNET, Khanyounis, Gaza, September 2024

Gaza: Health Status

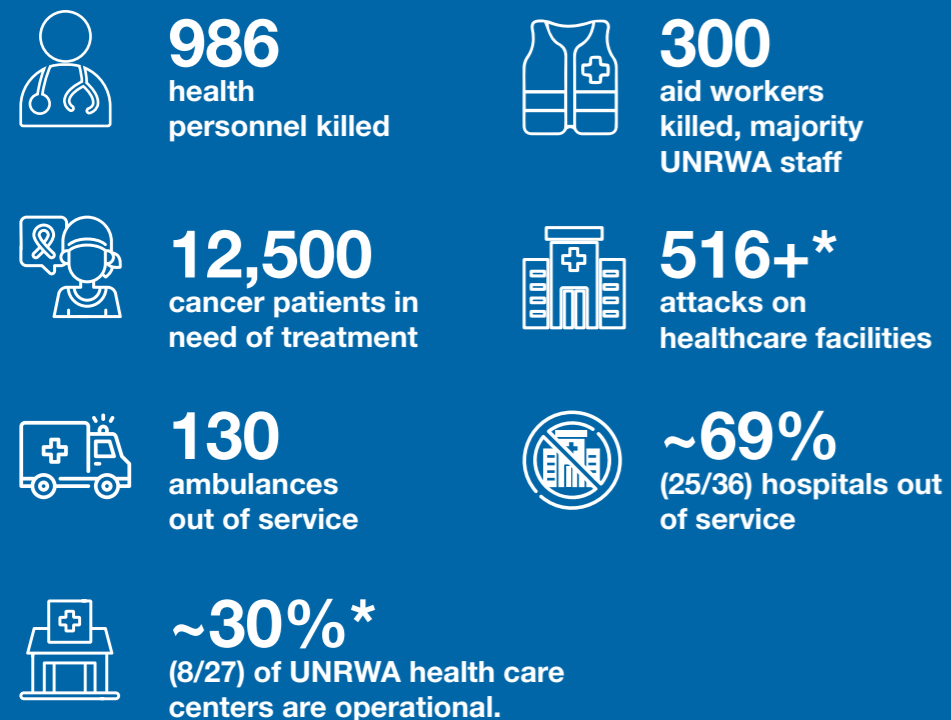
October 7, 2023 – October 3, 2024



*Statistic valid until October 3, 2024.
(Source: Palestinian MoH, UNRWA)

Gaza: Impact of War on Health Care

October 7, 2023 – October 4, 2024



*Statistic valid until October 4, 2024.
(Source: WHO, OCHA, UNRWA)

Gaza: Impact of War on Media:

October 7, 2023 – October 4, 2024



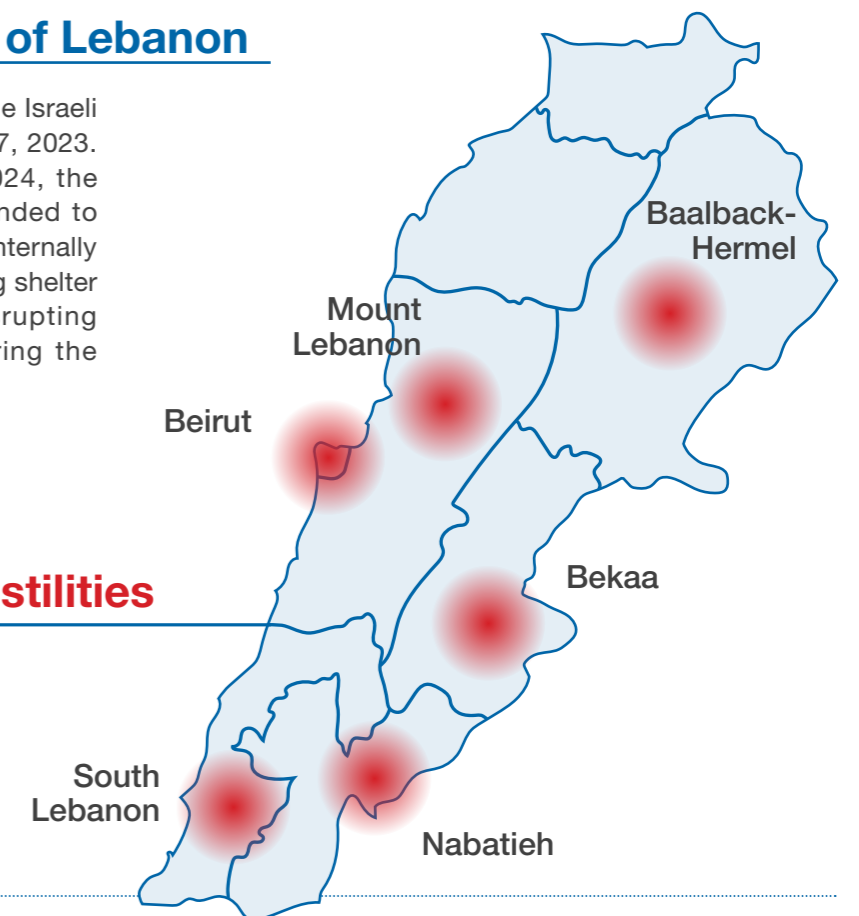
(Source: International
Federation of Journalists, IFJ)



Situational Overview of Lebanon

Lebanon has been in conflict with the Israeli army since the attacks on October 7, 2023. However, since September 28, 2024, the attacks have intensified and expanded to reach the capital city, Beirut. Many internally displaced persons (IDPs) are seeking shelter in schools, which is severely disrupting the education system and hindering the continuation of classes.

Areas Affected by Hostilities



Lebanon: Health Status

October 8, 2023 – October 8, 2024

1,974 deaths, of which ~20% are children and women

9,384 people injured

1.2 million internally displaced people

235,000* primarily Syrians and Lebanese have crossed borders into Syria.

(Lebanese MoPH, Amel)

*Information is reported from September 30, 2024, until October 4, 2024.

Lebanon: Impact of War on Healthcare

October 8, 2023 – October 8, 2024

73 health personnel killed

74 health personnel injured

18 attacks on health centers

5 hospitals evacuated

(Source: WHO, IOM)

Highlights from the Field

Several partners are extending support to the population of the Gaza Strip during this critical and sensitive time. The Health Authority, United Nations agencies, humanitarian organizations, and national agencies, are working to deliver humanitarian aid and healthcare services to those in need. Their efforts include raising awareness, deploying experts, conducting vaccination campaigns, providing healthcare services, installing water treatment plants, and equipping hospitals and water facilities with solar panel units.

Similarly, partners, such as the Lebanese MoPH, WHO, UNRWA, and UNICEF are responding to the humanitarian situation and health emergency in Lebanon.

Between the time period of October 8, 2023 – October 8, 2024

90% or more decrease in number of trucks entering the Gaza Strip

86% of the trucks carried food items



11% transported non-food items

2% carried medical supplies

2% contained mixed supplies

(Source: WHO, UNRWA, EMPHNET)

However, these efforts are made amidst challenges caused by the security situation in Gaza. The Israeli Army restricts access to humanitarian aid and medical supplies entering the Strip and it limits the mobility of health teams and service providers. Despite the ongoing support, the resources allocated to meet the health and humanitarian needs in Gaza and Lebanon fall far short of what is needed. Humanitarian organizations have suffered the loss of their employees and incurred damage to their infrastructure, significantly hindering their ability to provide essential humanitarian, healthcare, and social support.

“Humanitarian workers tirelessly protect vulnerable populations, but their health challenges often go unnoticed. It’s crucial to better understand their physical and mental health needs so they receive the support and care they deserve in return.” Dr Mohannad Al Nsour, The Executive Director of EMPHNET

The Situation of IDPs in UNRWA’s Shelters

September 30 - October 3, 2024



1,285 families sheltering in UNRWA shelters

4,250 people sheltering in UNRWA’s shelters (~47% males, ~53% females)

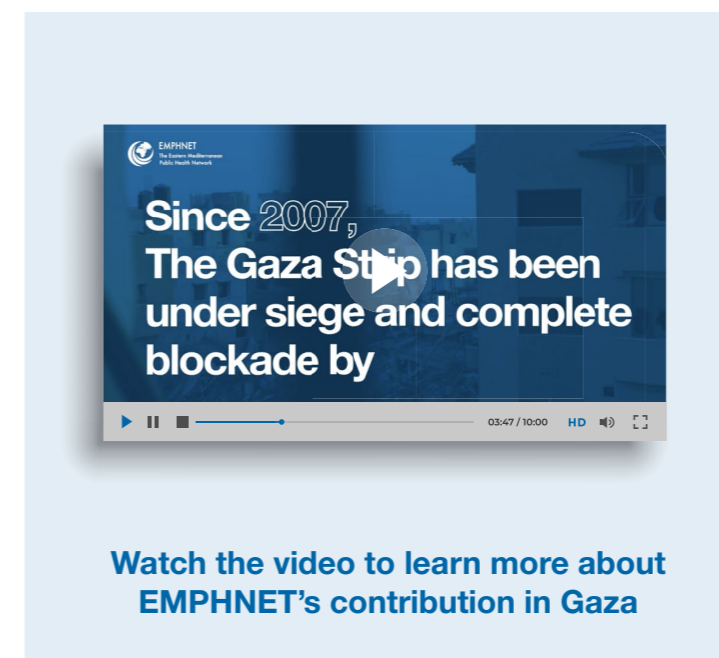
82% increase in IDPs in UNRWA’s shelters recorded between September 30 and October 3

(Source: UNRWA)

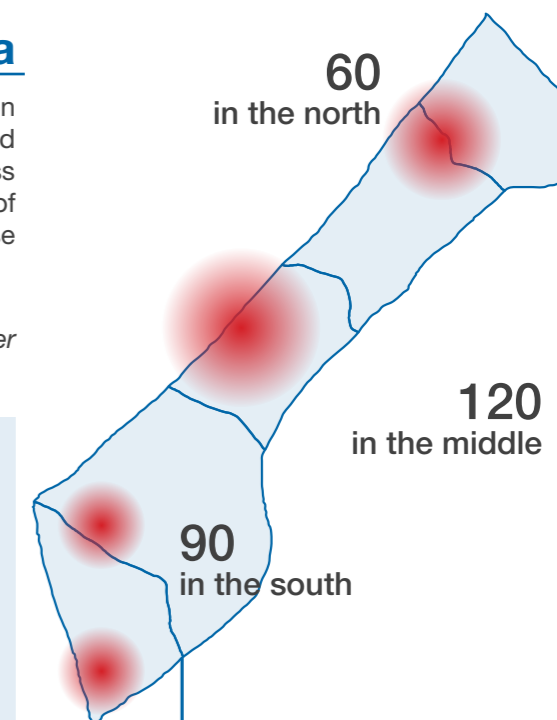
EMPHNET’s Contribution in Gaza

EMPHNET has established its Community Health Champion Program (ChampNet) with a network of 270 trained community health workers, distributed in various areas across the Gaza Strip. Their work is set to overcome the challenge of accessibility and support public health emergency response activities in the Strip.

ChampNet supports EMPHNET’s activities and it assists other partners to implement their health interventions.



Watch the video to learn more about EMPHNET’s contribution in Gaza



60 in the north

120 in the middle

90 in the south

270 trained community health workers

Distribution of ChampNet’s network across the Gaza Strip

Activities of the Emergency Health Champion Program in Gaza

- Health awareness
- Post campaign monitoring
- Child protection and psychosocial support
- Community mobilization
- Nutrition
- Vaccination
- Counseling on breastfeeding

The Find and Treat Campaign

A successful example of such interventions that include community members is the “Find and Treat Campaign.” This is a public health initiative led by UNICEF and the International Medical Corps (IMC). This initiative aims to identify malnourished children under five years of age as well as pregnant and lactating women (PLW) through mass screening using the Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) method. ChampNet’s community health workers supported the implementation of this campaign through screening the targeted population and distributing nutritional supplements provided by IMC.



Find and Treat Campaign, Beit Lahia, Gaza, August 2024

Polio Vaccination Campaign

Following the detection of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) in environmental samples in July 2024, and in a 10-month-old child in August 2024, the Palestinian Ministry of Health, WHO, UNICEF, and UNRWA organized a mass vaccination campaign aimed at immunizing all children under ten using the novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (nOPV2). The first round of the campaign ran from September 1 to September 12, 2024, leading to the successful vaccination of around 560,000 children. EMPHNET’s, through its ChampNet, played various roles in different stages of the campaign, including:

- Capacity building for vaccination teams
- Social mobilization
- Vaccination
- Administrative tasks and registration of vaccinated children
- Post-campaign monitoring

“The response to the polio threat in the Gaza Strip demands innovative approaches that place communities at the heart of every intervention.”

Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour,
Executive Director of EMPHNET



Polio Campaign, South of Gaza, September 2024

Consequences of War and the Anticipated Public Health impacts

The war in the Gaza Strip has escalated and spread into neighboring regions, including Lebanon. **A cessation of hostilities is essential for restoring stability and security in the Region**, and to prevent the further spread of violence. Many lives of civilians, health care personnel, journalists, and media workers have been lost in this war. According to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres,

“Gaza has become one of the most dangerous places for healthcare personnel.”

In the Gaza Strip, there has been a re-emergence of previously eliminated diseases, such as poliomyelitis, which had been eliminated for 25 years there. Prior to the war, the Gaza Strip maintained a high level of routine immunization, historically reaching up to 95% of the targeted population. This resurgence is occurring among an extremely vulnerable population suffering from weakened immune systems and malnutrition, placing thousands of lives at risk. According to the Integrated Food Security and Phase Classification (IPC) **almost the entire population in the Gaza Strip (96% n=2.15M) is facing high levels of acute food insecurity**. Despite numerous operational challenges, including inaccessibility, instability, and political pressures, partners were able to plan and rapidly implement a mass vaccination campaign against poliomyelitis. The swift response is expected to avert a high rate of poliomyelitis cases in the Gaza Strip and to control the disease transmission chain. However, for the campaign to be effective and build immunity against the disease, it must achieve a high reach. Therefore, the post-campaign monitoring will assess the efficacy and reach while identifying any gaps that must be addressed.

Currently, the Gaza Strip is largely inaccessible, with no services available in some regions. Trusted and trained community members can support the implementation of essential health and humanitarian services, in collaboration with national and international health authorities. Community-Based Initiatives and Interventions are extremely crucial in war affected regions. Trusted Community Health Workers and Volunteers can make a significant impact by building resilience and adaptability to the dynamic nature of emergencies and facilitating recovery postwar.

Before the war began, Lebanon’s Ministry of Public

Health (MoPH), in collaboration with EMPHNET, worked to strengthen the country’s surveillance system by establishing the Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) for public health practitioners. This program focuses on identifying, detecting, reporting, and responding to disease outbreaks and other public health threats. **FETPs and similar interventions are crucial during these challenging times**, as they have proven effective and efficient in operating under difficult conditions. Additionally, EMPHNET supported the MoPH in its efforts to strengthen its Community Based Surveillance (CBS), by engaging and building the capacity of local Non-Governmental Agencies (NGOs) in surveillance concepts. **It is recommended to strengthen Event Based Surveillance (EBS) in light of limited resources for the timely detection of emerging diseases.**

The mass displacement of civilians in both the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, coupled with limited access to clean water and humanitarian aid, is creating a breeding ground for infectious diseases. According to UNRWA, **the Gaza Strip has reported more than a million cases of infectious diseases since October 7, 2023**, including diarrheal diseases, respiratory infections, skin infections, and jaundice. Similarly, internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Lebanon are settling in informal settlements, which lack adequate living conditions. If the war continues, more people will be displaced, and they will be forced to live in increasingly unsuitable environments, further exacerbating the public health crisis.

Prior to the war in Lebanon, the country’s economy was already struggling and Lebanon houses one of the largest refugee populations in the world. The mass movement of the population, including humanitarian staff, has temporarily halted operations in vulnerable areas. For example, UNRWA was forced to suspend its activities in the Tyre area due to the displacement of its staff amid the security situation.

A multifaceted approach is needed to support the large number of refugees, focusing on the provision of humanitarian aid, including food, as well as ensuring the continuity of comprehensive service delivery across sectors such as healthcare, education, and social protection.

Furthermore, the consequences of war are affecting the continuum of care among patients with chronic

diseases in both regions. The Gaza Strip lacks a referral mechanism, and is suffering extreme shortages in medical supplies and services, leaving thousands of cancer patients, dialysis patients, pregnant women and those suffering from other chronic diseases including mental health issues without the necessary care. The Al-Sadaqa Turkish Palestinian Hospital, the only facility in the Gaza Strip

catering specifically to cancer patients, was bombed on October 30, 2023, rendering it out of service.

“My Husband suffers from cancer of the bladder. We have been suffering since the war started. We suffer due to lack of treatment and medication” A female refugee from northern Gaza.

Conclusion

Several partners are on the ground providing humanitarian and medical assistance to the Gaza Strip and Lebanon. However, these efforts are merely a drop in the ocean amidst the current needs. The Israeli Army is continuously violating the International Humanitarian Law, leading to catastrophic health issues, including thousands of civilian casualties, particularly among women and children. Targeted and systematic attacks on healthcare personnel, facilities, ambulances, residential areas, recreational spaces, and essential infrastructure, including water and sewage treatment plants are carried out, without repercussions.

The international community and partners must work to stop this war and allocate the required resources to meet the urgent needs of the people in Gaza and Lebanon and to ensure the better rebuilding of their health systems.



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