

# Over 20,000 children estimated to be lost, disappeared, detained, buried under the rubble or in mass graves

Monday 24 June 2024, by [Save the Children](#) (Date first published: 24 June 2024).

**GAZA, 24 June 2024 - Up to 21,000 [1] children are estimated to be missing in the chaos of the war in Gaza, many trapped beneath rubble, detained, buried in unmarked graves, or lost from their families, said Save the Children. The agency's child protection teams are reporting that the latest displacements caused by the offensive in Rafah have separated more children and further increased the strain on families and communities caring for them.**

It is almost impossible to collect and verify information under the current conditions in Gaza, but at least 17,000 children are believed to [be unaccompanied and separated](#) and approximately 4,000 children are likely missing under the rubble [2], with an unknown number also in [mass graves](#). Others have been forcibly 'disappeared', including an unknown number [detained and transferred](#) out of Gaza, their whereabouts unknown to their families amidst [reports of ill-treatment and torture](#).

Meanwhile, the aid agency's child protection teams warn of urgent action needed to protect separated and unaccompanied children - action that is severely undermined by the deteriorating security situation.

A Save the Children Child Protection Specialist in Gaza said:

*"Every day we find more unaccompanied children and every day it is harder to support them. We work through partners to identify separated and unaccompanied children and trace their families, but there are no safe facilities for them - there is no safe place in Gaza. Besides, reuniting them with family members is difficult when ongoing hostilities restrict our access to communities, and constantly force families to move.*

*"Neighbours and extended family members who have taken in lone children are struggling to meet their basic needs, such as shelter, food, and water. Many are with strangers - or completely alone - increasing the risk of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect."*

Mass casualties were reported following the latest attacks by Israeli forces in Rafah. After one attack, [UN experts said](#) that reports emerged of 'people trapped inside burning plastic tents' and 'burnt alive', and the Gaza Ministry of Health reported 'bodies burned beyond recognition'. Save the Children warned that confirming identification of a body by the next of kin is almost impossible when whole families have been wiped out and entry restrictions mean the equipment and experts needed cannot get in.

According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, [more than 14,000 children](#) have been killed since 7 October, roughly half of whom have not yet been fully identified, partially due to their bodies being harmed beyond recognition [3]. Children are also among those recently found in mass graves, [according to](#)

[UN experts](#), with many showing signs of torture and summary executions, as well as potential [instances of people buried alive](#).

At least 33 Israeli children have been killed since October, while it is unclear if any children are among those still being held hostage in Gaza. As of 9 June, [around 250 Palestinian children](#) from the West Bank are missing in the Israeli military detention system, their families unable to physically confirm their whereabouts and wellbeing due to additional restrictions on visits introduced since October.

The UN has received numerous reports of mass detentions, [ill-treatment and enforced disappearance](#) of possibly thousands of people, including children.

Save the Children's Regional Director for the Middle East, Jeremy Stoner, said:

*"Families are tortured by the uncertainty of the whereabouts of their loved ones. No parent should have to dig through rubble or mass graves to try and find their child's body. No child should be alone, unprotected in a war zone. No child should be detained or held hostage.*

*"Children who are missing but living are vulnerable, face grave protection risks and must be found. They must be protected and reunited with their families. For the children who have been killed, their deaths must be formally marked, their families informed, burial rites respected, and accountability sought. As many have pointed out, Gaza has become a graveyard for children, with thousands of others missing, their fates unknown. There must be an independent investigation and those responsible must be held accountable. We desperately need a ceasefire to find and support the missing children who have survived, and to prevent more families from being destroyed."*

Save the Children are calling on the UK Government to do everything in their power to protect children's lives, and immediately halt the transfer of weapons, parts, and ammunition to Israel and Palestinian armed groups.

Save the Children has been providing essential services and support to Palestinian children since 1953. Save the Children teams in Gaza work with local partners to identify and support unaccompanied children. This includes providing individual child protection case management, cash for caregivers looking after separated children, psychosocial support, and community monitoring and engagement. Save the Children also provides access to services such as child friendly spaces and nutrition and health support.

-ENDS-

Notes

[1] Save the Children estimates approximately 21,000 children are missing in Gaza. This includes [17,000 unaccompanied and separated children](#), and 4,000 children buried under the rubble [see 2 below].

[2] The UN estimates that [10,000 people](#) are believed buried under the rubble in Gaza, and also estimates that [40% of casualties](#) in Gaza are children. Save the Children estimates this would amount to approximately 4,000 children buried under the rubble in Gaza.

[3] According to latest figures from the Ministry of Health in Gaza, more than 14,100 children have been killed in Gaza since 7 October, of whom 7,779 have been identified. This means that while the identities of some 7,797 children who have been killed in the conflict are known, approximately half of the total number of children killed (6,303) have not yet been identified. The Ministry of Health

says the documentation process of fully identifying details of the casualties is ongoing

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**P.S.**

Save the Children. 24 June 2024:

<https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/over-20000-children-estimated-to-be-lost-in-gaza>