

# **LESS THAN SEVEN PER CENT OF PRE- CONFLICT WATER LEVELS AVAILABLE TO RAFAH AND NORTH GAZA, WORSENING A HEALTH CATASTROPHE**

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***Nearly 1,700 kilometres of water and sanitation networks have been destroyed***

***Big-ticket repairs of networks urgently needed but Israel baulks in approving supplies***

The resumption of aid into Gaza, including fuel to operate undamaged water and sanitation facilities along with water trucking, has improved the amount of water available to people in some parts of Gaza. But the picture remains extremely bleak and dangerously critical, especially in the North Gaza and Rafah governorates, warned Oxfam today.

Fifteen months of Israel's military assault has destroyed 1,675 kilometres of water and sanitation networks. In the North Gaza and Rafah governorates, which have suffered the most destruction, less than seven per cent of pre-conflict water levels is available to people, heightening the spread of waterborne diseases. Just 5.7 litres per person, per day is available, barely enough for one toilet flush.

As fragile ceasefire negotiations hang in the balance, any renewed violence or disruption to fuel and the already inadequate aid would trigger a full-scale public health disaster.

**Clémence Lagouardat, Oxfam's Humanitarian Coordinator in Gaza said:**

"Now that the bombs have stopped, we have only just begun to grasp the sheer scale of destruction to Gaza's water and sanitation infrastructure. Most vital water and sanitation networks have been entirely lost or paralyzed, which is creating catastrophic hygiene and health conditions.

"Our staff and partners have told how people are stopping them in the streets asking for water, and that parents are not drinking to save water for their children. It is heartbreaking to hear about children having to walk for miles for a single jerrycan of water."

In the North Gaza governorate, almost all water wells have been destroyed by the Israeli military. Over 700,000 people have returned to find entire neighbourhoods wiped out. For the few whose homes remain standing, water is non-existent due to the destruction of rooftop storage tanks.

In Rafah, over 90 per cent of water wells and reservoirs have been partially or completely damaged, and water production is less than five per cent of its capacity before the conflict. Only two out of 35 wells are currently operational.

Despite efforts to resume water production since the ceasefire, the destruction of Gaza's water pipelines means that 60 per cent of water is leaking into the ground rather than reaching people.

**Oxfam and partners' initial assessment after the ceasefire found:**

More than 80 per cent of water and sanitation infrastructure across the Gaza Strip has been partially or entirely destroyed, including all six major wastewater treatment plants.

85 per cent of the sewage pumping stations (73 out of 84) and networks have been destroyed. Some have been repaired but urgently require fuel to operate.

85 per cent of small desalination plants (85 out of 103) have been partially damaged or completely destroyed.

67 per cent of the 368 municipal wells have been destroyed. Most of the private small wells cannot function due to lack of fuel or generators.

The lack of safe water, combined with untreated sewage overflowing in the streets has triggered an explosion of waterborne and infectious diseases. According to the World Health Organization, 88 per cent of environmental samples surveyed across Gaza were found contaminated with polio, signalling an imminent risk of outbreak. Infectious diseases including acute watery diarrhoea and respiratory infections - now the leading causes of death – are also surging, with 46,000 cases, mostly children, being reported each week.

Chickenpox and skin diseases such scabies and impetigo are also spreading rapidly, particularly among displaced populations in the

Northern Gaza Governorate, where water shortages are most severe.

Meanwhile, with no waste collection and transport for over 15 months, more than 2,000 tonnes of garbage has been piling up in the streets every day. This toxic combination of open sewage, uncollected waste and contaminated water is creating a perfect storm for a deadly disease outbreak.

**Lagouardat said:** “Despite the increase in aid since the ceasefire, Israel continues to severely impair critical items needed to begin repairing the massive structural damage from its airstrikes. This includes desperately needed pipes for repairing water and sanitation networks, equipment like generators to operate wells.”

Oxfam’s own 85 tonne-shipment of water pipes, fittings and water tanks - worth over \$480,000 - had been held up for over six months because it was deemed as dual-use and too oversized to enter. Israeli authorities only finally approved the shipment this week, although it has still yet to enter.

**Lagouardat said:** “Hundreds of thousands of displaced people across the Gaza Strip have had to resort to digging makeshift cesspits next to their tents. This daily discharge of approximately 130,000 cubic meters - the equivalent of 52 Olympic pools - of untreated sewage is contaminating the Mediterranean Sea and Gaza’s only aquifer.

“Rebuilding water and sanitation is vital for Gaza to have a path to normalcy after 15 months of horror. The ceasefire must hold, and fuel and aid must flow so that Palestinians can rebuild their lives. Lasting peace for Palestinians and Israelis can only come through a permanent ceasefire and a just solution.”

**Ends**

**Notes to editor**

Oxfam has recent photos and footage of water and sanitation destruction in Gaza and can be downloaded [HERE](#) (valid until 14 May 25)

According to the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) as of February 2025, a total of 1,675 km out of 4,800 km of Gaza’s water and sanitation networks have been partially or entirely destroyed since October 2023. This includes 350km in North Gaza, 495km in

Gaza City, 240 Km in the Middle area, 350km in Khan Younis, and 240km in Rafah respectively.

Approximately 1,035 km of water and sanitation pipelines have been destroyed. Data on water and sanitation destruction is based on the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) Rapid Damage Assessment Report, January 2025.

Data on cost of infrastructure repair is based on Gaza Municipality Planning and Investment Unit report of December 31, 2024.

According to Oxfam's [\*\*Water War Crimes\*\*](#) report, the Gaza population had access to **82.7 litres per person per day** before 7 October 2023. Currently Rafah has less than five per cent of that amount; and North Gaza governorates have less than seven per cent of that amount, or 5.7 litres per person per day.

According to the 10 Feb 2025 Water and Sanitation Cluster report: only two (out of 35) wells in Rafah are currently operational.

Acute watery diarrhoea (AWD) in children under five years old was reported to be 13,179 cases. This accounts for approximately 54 per cent of the total registered cases of AWD. Also, 21 out of 24 Polio environmental surveyed samples across Gaza (88 per cent) were positive. Source: Polio Global Eradication Initiative (WHO & UN) on 1 Feb 2025

[\*\*UNOSAT latest data\*\*](#) collected on 1 December 2024 identified 60,368 destroyed structures, 20,050 severely damaged structures, 56,292 moderately damaged structures, and 34,102 possibly damaged structures for a total of 170,812 structures. The governorates of North Gaza and Rafah have experienced the highest rise in damage compared to the 6 September 2024 analysis, with around 3,138 new structures damaged in North Gaza and around 3,054 in Rafah. Within North Gaza, Jabalya municipality had the highest number of newly damaged structures, totalling 1,339.