

ORPHAN SPONSORSHIP IN GAZA



BE A
LIFELINE
FOR GAZA'S
ORPHANS

Gaza's orphans: Fearful and grieving, but not without hope

Gaza has suffered almost two years of relentless Israeli bombardment, which continues to devastate the lives of everyone who calls the enclave home. Amid unimaginable suffering, perhaps no group is more vulnerable than Gaza's children.

Since October 2023, more than 19,000 children have been killed and tens of thousands more wounded – many of whom have been left with life-changing injuries. We are heartbroken to report that among the dead are 175 children and young people* who received support from Islamic Relief's Orphan Sponsorship Programme.

Every day, Palestinian children and their families face violence, starvation, water scarcity, displacement, and threats to their very existence.

Particularly at risk are the growing number of orphaned children who, having lost either one or both of their parents, are grappling with another cruel layer of uncertainty – dire conditions made even worse by the loss of their parents' comfort and support.

Many orphans and their families are living in overcrowded shelters or makeshift tents that offer little protection from the summer heat and winter cold. Disruptions to children's education are also having an impact that will be long lasting, while the emotional toll of the daily atrocities is enormous. Children are struggling with grief, fear and uncertainty about the future.

Islamic Relief has been working tirelessly to massively upscale our Orphan Sponsorship Programme in Gaza to support as many children as we possibly can. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, the number of children enrolled has almost tripled and currently stands at over 21,000.

Now, we are appealing to our donors once more, to help find sponsors for the more than 7,000 children on our waitlist. This report details how your support can make a tangible difference to children and their families in Gaza today. The situation may feel hopeless, but, with your help, Islamic Relief can reach more families in desperate need. Be a lifeline to Gaza's orphans. Palestinian children need you now.

*As well as children currently enrolled, this figure includes individuals over the age of 18, who had been enrolled on the Orphan Sponsorship Programme as children.





THE SITUATION IN GAZA

More than

220,000

Palestinians in Gaza have been killed or injured

More than

50%

of hospitals have completely ceased to function

Just over

10%

of water and infrastructure remains undamaged

92%

of homes have been damaged or destroyed

1 in 3

people are not eating for days at a time

90%

of Gaza's population has become displaced, often multiple times

In Islamic tradition, an orphan is usually a child who has no father. The child will remain an orphan until the age of maturity/understanding. Islamic Relief's Orphan Sponsorship Programme supports children who have lost one or both of their parents.

Sources: OCHA, WFP, UNRWA, IRDINA

'Inshallah, I will find a sponsor so I can work on myself and my dreams'

Rama, 16, is an orphaned child waiting to be matched with a sponsor. Like so many children in Gaza, her world has completely changed since October 2023.

In September last year, Rama's father and four of her siblings were killed when their home in Gaza City was bombed. Rama lost one of her legs and suffered third degree burns in the attack.

"Tala was 17 years old, Ahmed was 15 years old, Abdul Kareem was nine years old, and the youngest, Maraam, was two-and-a-half years old," the children's mother, Fadia, who also lost a leg in the blast, recalls.

The family is now just Fadia, Rama, two other daughters and three sons. The survivors have suffered psychological trauma and life-altering injuries.

"I was injured and came out from under the rubble," Rama says, adding that the family had to stay in hospital for almost two weeks. "There was a lack of medication... it was very hard for us to get treatments, so our wounds took longer to heal. We had no food or drink, so we suffered a lot."

For Fadia, who is struggling to get by with an ill-fitting prosthetic, meeting her children's needs is extremely challenging. Rama's burns require intensive dermatological treatment.

"My daughter needs to see a doctor almost weekly," Fadia says. "Honestly, her condition is taking its toll. I go to bed crying for her and wake up crying for her."

Fouad, Rama's 12-year-old brother, was thrown onto the roof of a neighbour's home by the force of the blast. Emergency surgery saved his leg from amputation, but he has problems with his spine and knee that require physiotherapy. Fouad helps his mother out by fetching water, but he can't walk far or carry heavy loads. Like Rama, Fouad is waiting to be matched with a sponsor.



Now living in a tent without any source of income, the family are struggling to make ends meet, while grieving their loved ones and coping with their own injuries. The children miss school, and Fadia feels hopeless at times.

"The situation is very difficult, and I don't know how to sort it out," she says. "There are days when we can't find food. Sometimes, we have only a cup of bitter tea to keep going. If good people give us food, we have something to eat, if no one gives us anything, we don't eat. The situation is very difficult."

Sponsorship won't heal the family's physical and emotional scars, but we can help ease their burden, providing money that they can use to buy food and seek much-needed medical care. As they struggle to keep surviving and piece their lives back together, Rama still dreams of her future. With your support, we can help her get there.

"Now I am struggling a lot with education. All my friends are carrying on with their studies, but in my current condition, I cannot go to the temporary education tents - the roads in Gaza are not suitable for my wheelchair.

"I don't have a mobile and we have no internet. My academic level has dropped from before, I'm not able to maintain it. I used to memorise the Qur'an, and I learned many chapters. Now I'm unable to keep up with learning. I'm sad when I think about how I used to be and how I am now.

"My ambition was to become a translator and learn a lot of languages. Insha'Allah, we find a sponsor for me so I can work on myself and achieve my dreams."

Waiting for you

More than 7,000 orphaned children are in our system, waiting to be matched with sponsors. Without a ceasefire and an end to Israel's blockade, this number will continue to rise.

Our staff and partners have been working tirelessly to identify and register children in need of sponsorship. We have several registration points in Gaza, with follow up conversations conducted over the phone to keep families and our colleagues safe.

Your support can help give children and their families the funds to buy what they need most. Turn to the next page for more information on the ways you can make a difference to the lives of orphans in Gaza now.



IN NUMBERS: THE ORPHAN SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME IN GAZA

21,084

orphaned children currently enrolled on our Orphan Sponsorship Programme

7,375

children in our system waiting to be matched with sponsors

7,200

children enrolled on the Orphan Sponsorship Programme before October 2023

175

sponsored children* killed since October 2023

* As well as children currently enrolled, this figure includes individuals over the age of 18, who had been enrolled on the Orphan Sponsorship Programme as children.

Three ways to support Gaza's orphans

Islamic Relief has been supporting orphaned children in Gaza enrolled on our Orphan Sponsorship Programme through one-to-one sponsorship. While retaining this lifeline, to reach as many children as possible with vital support we have now introduced two more ways our donors can support vulnerable children in Gaza.

Here, we break down the different ways you can be a lifeline to Gaza's orphans:



1

Support a child through one-to-one sponsorship

Through one-to-one sponsorship, each donor is matched with a specific child who they support through a monthly stipend. The payment was previously earmarked to cover costs associated with the child's healthcare and education but, amid the ongoing crisis in Gaza, families now have full flexibility to use the money as they wish, meaning they can buy what they most need, whenever goods are available.

Donors receive updates on the child's welfare and how they are progressing in their education. In the current context in Gaza, we aim to provide these updates annually, but the frequency can vary.



Sponsor multiple children from the same family

The ongoing bombardment of Gaza has sadly often orphaned multiple children within the same family. Many of our donors have expressed their kind wish to sponsor more than one child from the same family, which is now possible.

Multiple child sponsorship allows donors to do more to alleviate the suffering of one family by supporting up to three children.

As with one-to-one sponsorship, families receive a monthly stipend for each sponsored child, with the flexibility to use funds to buy what they most need, when available.

Donate to the Gaza General Orphans Fund

Donations to the Gaza General Orphans Fund are pooled together to support orphans in need of extra care, assist their guardians, and provide financial support to those in greatest need.

This is not a direct, one-to-one sponsorship. Instead, your donations go towards providing critical care and support to orphaned children enrolled on our Orphan Sponsorship Programme.

Examples of how funds have been used in the past include covering healthcare costs that exceeded the monthly stipend provided by the Orphan Sponsorship Programme and supporting an orphan whose sponsor had been unable to continue giving.

You can choose to donate regularly to the Gaza General Orphans Fund or pay what you can as a one-off donation. Every penny generously given helps ease the burdens of families struggling to survive.

Expanding our programme to meet desperate needs

We have massively expanded the scale of our Orphan Sponsorship Programme in Gaza since October 2023.

Prior to the current crisis, 7,200 children were enrolled on the programme. Today, this number sits at 21,084, with thousands more registered and awaiting sponsors.

Having been operating in Gaza since 1999, the programme was well-established and so could be rapidly scaled up to help meet the huge increase in need.

Previously, the Orphan Sponsorship Programme provided the families of enrolled children with a monthly stipend, which could be used to cover costs associated with the child's education and healthcare.

Now, we have expanded what the stipend can be used for, giving families the flexibility to use the money to meet their most pressing needs, such as buying food.

Gaza's economy has almost completely collapsed, with banks closed and inflation at sky-high levels. The stipend families receive through the Orphan Sponsorship Programme goes directly and securely into their accounts, bypassing high commission rates charged by money lenders and removing any danger to the families from having to venture out to collect funds in person.



‘I used to dream of being a teacher, now I just dream of an end to the war’

Obaida and his siblings have been living with their grandmother and aunt since their mother remarried and abandoned her children. Having fled home, the family are now living in a camp for displaced people.

“I used to dream of becoming a teacher, but our lives have changed so much,” says Obaida. “We’re living in an endless nightmare as our home was destroyed in the blink of an eye, and we had to run away and leave everything behind – our dreams, our memories. We had nothing with us, not even my Qur’an.

“That night, the bombing was intense. Alhamdulillah, if we had left even a little later, we could have been dead under the rubble. We are living in a tent provided by a charity now.”

No longer living the everyday life of a schoolboy, Obaida’s days are now dominated by fetching supplies for the family.

“In the morning, I go to fetch water for our daily chores and needs. I also fill containers with water for drinking, and help my grandmother buy what we need, like canned food, which has become a staple for us. I also gather firewood so we can cook over an open fire. In the evening, I read the Qur’an to my grandmother. I had completed reciting the Qur’an before this war.”

Obaida struggles to sleep at night from fear of bombs, and insects getting into the tent. The camp is littered with rubbish, which makes the hygiene situation worse, and barking dogs are always nearby. Obaida says the trip to the bathroom is too long and frightening to make alone at night. Bathing is also a challenge and has added to the spread of disease throughout the camp.

All of this has left Obaida feeling frightened and unsafe, but the Orphan Sponsorship Programme is providing some respite.

“We have been able to buy everything using the sponsorship money from Islamic Relief: blankets, food, kitchen utensils, clothes. Everything was expensive, but, as my grandmother says, we had no choice but to buy it.

“I dream of the end of the war and of living in safety and peace. I dream of being able to enjoy fresh fruit and vegetables again.”



Answering your questions

Many of our donors are extremely keen to support people in desperate need in Gaza. While the scale and the duration of the crisis can leave observers feeling hopeless at times, orphan sponsorship is a lifeline to families in Gaza, putting money directly into the hands of those who need it most.

Here, we answer some of the questions our teams most commonly receive:

What is Islamic Relief doing to support orphaned children in Gaza?

We are supporting more than 21,000 orphaned children in Gaza with an unconditional monthly stipend through our Orphan Sponsorship Programme. This means we do not place any restrictions on how families choose to spend their money, trusting that they know best how to meet their most urgent needs. Wherever possible, we also ensure families with orphaned children are included in our seasonal distributions, receiving Ramadan and qurbani food parcels, Eid gifts, and winter survival items.

These families come from all over Gaza, including North Gaza, Gaza City, Rafah, the Middle Area and Khan Younis – but almost all are now forcibly displaced. Israel has declared over 86 per cent of Gaza as off limits to Palestinians, so most people now live in severely overcrowded pockets of western Gaza and the Middle Area.

Is the Orphan Sponsorship Programme a safe and reliable way to support people in need?

The Orphan Sponsorship Programme is the most reliable way Islamic Relief can provide support to people in Gaza in the current dangerous and changeable situation.

Electronic transfers enable us to get your donations directly into the accounts of the families of orphaned children, despite bank closures and bypassing the high fees charged by informal money lenders. It also avoids placing families and our staff and partners in further danger as they do not have to make an additional journey to physically collect the funds.

How do families actually receive the money I've donated?

We use the UN World Food Programme's payment system to get your donations to families. It sends families a code via SMS, or through a mobile app, which they can use to withdraw cash or make electronic payments at supermarkets registered to the system.

The system allows Islamic Relief to see which families have redeemed their codes, and has become a helpful tool

with checking in on the welfare of families enrolled in the programme.

Without a reliable electricity supply, people in Gaza have had to find other ways to keep their phones and other devices charged, with a heavy reliance on solar power.

What can the stipend be used for?

Prior to October 2023, families could use the monthly stipend to cover costs associated with the child's education and healthcare. We have since expanded this so the money is unconditional, meaning families can use the money to pay for whatever they need most. In 2023, we also introduced a new pricing model, meaning most families' stipend is now larger.

With so much scarcity, is anything available to buy in Gaza?

While the blockade has created severe shortages of most basic items and inflation has skyrocketed, this does not mean there is nothing at all in Gaza's markets.

In reality, the availability of items and their prices change day to day. Our staff have described an exhausting routine of heading out first thing each morning to see what basic items might be available.

The situation is extremely difficult, especially as many people have lost their livelihoods and banks are closed. Families receiving a monthly stipend through our Orphan Sponsorship Programme can rely on having that money to spend, whenever the items they need are available.

The situation has improved slightly of late, with some commercial goods now entering Gaza. More items are available, and prices have slightly reduced, though they remain very high in comparison to pre-October 2023.

How do you keep track of sponsored orphans who have become displaced?

Almost 90 per cent of Gaza's population has become displaced, often multiple times. In this situation, our staff and partners are doing their utmost to check in with families enrolled on our

Orphan Sponsorship Programme as much as possible.

We stay in contact with families by phone and through WhatsApp groups. Our team is also in regular contact with the guardians of orphaned children to check that they have redeemed their monthly stipend via our payment system. If families have not redeemed their stipend and are uncontactable, our staff reach out to their families and neighbours for more information.

What happens if a child sponsored by the programme is killed?

Tragically, 175 children and young people enrolled on our Orphan Sponsorship Programme have been killed since October 2023. This number includes people over the age of 18, who were enrolled on the Orphan Sponsorship Programme as children.

If a sponsored child is killed in Gaza, we continue to support the family to avoid adding to their hardship. With the sponsor's agreement, we commit to a period of continued support through sponsorship.

I'm sponsoring a child in another country already, how is the programme in Gaza different?

Regardless of where they live, orphaned children are vulnerable and in need of support, but those enduring life in Gaza right now face a mountain of additional challenges.

To help orphaned children and their guardians cope, we have made the monthly stipend they receive unconditional, meaning it can be used to buy whatever they need most at any given time.

This is different to other countries and territories, where the monthly stipend can generally only be used to cover costs associated with education and healthcare.

Will I receive updates on the child I've sponsored?

Yes, donors will receive updates on the child they've sponsored. It is our aim to provide annual updates, but the

situation on the ground has meant that there can be delays in gathering this information and sharing it with donors.

How will my sponsorship support the child after the current crisis ends?

Children enrolled in our Orphan Sponsorship Programme generally receive support until the age of 18. While sponsoring a child in Gaza now is vital to supporting their survival by allowing families to purchase basics like food, beyond the current crisis, the money can be used to help children build brighter futures.

This might look like new school uniforms for children returning to school, textbooks for university students, or vital rehabilitative care to help children who have sustained injuries improve their quality of life.

We urge sponsors and those considering sponsorship to make a lasting commitment to a child in need.

What else is Islamic Relief doing to support Palestinians in Gaza?

Islamic Relief has been supporting vulnerable people in Gaza for decades, and throughout the current crisis. Israel's assault has turned Gaza into the most dangerous place in the world to deliver aid, targeting and displacing humanitarian workers. Despite the huge challenges, our staff and partners are doing everything they can to keep providing aid.

At the moment, as well as through our Orphan Sponsorship Programme, we are providing cash assistance as part of the UK's Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) and providing maternal healthcare. The latter includes scans, medication, and the delivery of babies, including through surgery.

We are also continuing to support people through emergency distributions, when possible. Distributions delivered since the crisis began include hot meals, water and hygiene kits.

'I miss school, my teachers, my studies... everything'



Leen was living in Khan Younis with her family when their lives were suddenly turned upside down.

"We were at home when the house next to ours was bombed," says Leen. "There was only 50 metres between us and the explosion. We were terrified."

The next day, Leen and her family left Khan Younis, walking halfway to Rafah before finding a bus to take them the rest of the way.

"We set up a tent, a bathroom and a simple kitchen. All my dreams and memories of our own home were shattered.

"The thing I miss most is my father's clothes... I miss school, my teachers, my studies, everything. We were happy in our home and had everything we needed.

"We were happy there. But thank God, we managed to set up a tent here."

Now, Leen spends her days reading the Qur'an and helping her mother. The only clothes she has are two pairs of pyjamas. It's the same for her mother and siblings. The family's situation is unrecognisable from life before, but the money they receive through the Orphan Sponsorship Programme is helping to ease their burden.

"I thank Islamic Relief for sponsoring me," Leen says.

