

MODULE 6: MEMORY & COMMEMORATION

LESSON ONE: COMMEMORATING FAMINES

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will look at the commemoration of famines in communities across the world, using comparison study to establish similarities and differences in collective memory. This lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- >> The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)
- >> The Spanish Hunger Years (1939-52)
- >> The Finnish Great Hunger Years (1866-68)
- >> The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)
- >> The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)
- >> The Highland Potato Famine (1846-56)

LESSON INTENTIONS

- Understand how memory has been used in different communities to acknowledge and give meaning to famines.
- Discuss similarities in language and imagery in commemoration, and why famine memory is seen as more important in some countries.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- Be able to describe the role of famines in collective memory and how memory is used by different stakeholders.
- Describe the reasons why famine memory is more important in some societies than others.

INTRODUCTION

CASE STUDY

Famines can have a devastating effect on entire communities and populations. Throughout history famine has shaped national stories and identities, prompted large-scale migrations and population shifts, and caused the death and displacement of innocent people in significant numbers.

Because famine has been such a powerful force, and because it is seen as something that particularly impacts the poorest and most vulnerable in society over an prolonged period of suffering, commemoration and memorialisation of famine can be both an important part of a nation or region' history and identity, and a potent political act.

HOW AND WHY WE REMEMBER

Around the world, famines are commemorated in different ways by different communities, and sometimes not really formally commemorated at all. The ways in which these events are remembered now can reveal something about the society today and how its history has been recorded, and by whom.





USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- > Global Famine Case Studies
- > Online Heritages of Hunger Repository
- > Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- > Hyperlocal memorial Finland
- > Gendered commemoration, Dutch Hunger Winter
- > Irish online commemoration exhibition from the perspective of Northern Irish Unionists
- > Commemorative artwork about the Leningrad Blockade
- A poem commemorating the Potato Blight in the Netherlands in 1845





Holodomor Memorial to Victims of the Ukrainian Famine-Genocide of 1932–1933, Washington DC.
- Image Credit 2

The Holodomor, a man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933, has been commemorated in various meaningful ways to honour the millions who perished.

In Ukraine, a national remembrance day is observed annually on the fourth Saturday of November, with ceremonies and moments of silence.

Globally, memorials and monuments have been erected in cities such as Kyiv (Ukraine), Washington D.C. (United States), and Edmonton (Canada) to acknowledge the tragedy and educate future generations. Additionally, museums and exhibitions offer historical insights and personal stories about the famine. These commemorative efforts aim to preserve the memory of the Holodomor and promote awareness of its impact and the atrocities of the Stalin regime worldwide.

The Holodomor Memorial, Washington In 2011, after an international competition, Ukrainian-American architect Larysa Kurylas' design was chosen for the Holodomor Memorial. The six-foot-tall bronze sculpture rests on a slightly raised granite plinth. There is a granite bench that allows visitors to sit and contemplate the event.

Kurylas' describes her design of a wheat field as "dynamic." "It changes from high relief on the left edge to deep negative relief on the right, reflecting the transition from a record harvest to a horrible deficit." As the wheat recedes the words "Holodomor 1932-1933" emerges out of the wall in greater and greater relief.





THE FINNISH HUNGER YEARS (1866-68)



Death's Walk by Magnus Enckell -Image Credit 3

The Finnish Famine of 1866-1868, one of the last major famines in Europe, is commemorated through historical research and cultural remembrance. In Finland, public awareness is primarily maintained via academic studies and a number of monuments erected by local communities that were affected by famine.

For a long time the hunger years were not part of museum exhibitions. The Finnish independence movement had long framed the famine as a sign of the endurance of the Finnish people in times of hardships, but it was not given further significance in national narratives.

More recently, however, attention has been drawn to the failure of Johan Vilhelm Snelman's government to look adequately after the starving population.

The travelling exhibition Nälkä! (2029-20) reflects on broader themes of social justice and humanitarian responses to the 1866-68 crisis. And in 2024 the Wertas Labour Museum incorporated a new panel on the hunger years in its exhibition on the history of the working class from the 19th century to the present day.



- Image Credit 4



THE **SPANISH HUNGER YEARS** (1939-52)

CASE STUDY

The Spanish Famine, particularly the hardships endured during the post-civil war period from 1939 to the early 1950s, is commemorated through various cultural and educational initiatives.

However, this has only happened relatively recently, with the passing of the 'Democratic Memory Law' in 2022 to ensure that the legacies of General Franco's dictatorship were publicly examined and commemorated.

Since then exhibitions such as 'La Hambruna Silenciada' (The Silenced Famine), and educational programmes have highlighted the challenges and resilience of those affected by the famine, promoting awareness among younger generations. Commemorations often include documentaries and books that delve into personal narratives and historical analyses, preserving memories of the years of severe austerity.

Additionally, local events and discussions honour the hardship endured by communities, ensuring that the impact of the famine remains a part of Spain's collective memory, fostering empathy and historical understanding.



Poster, La Hambruna Silenciada. - Image Credit 5



CASE STUDY

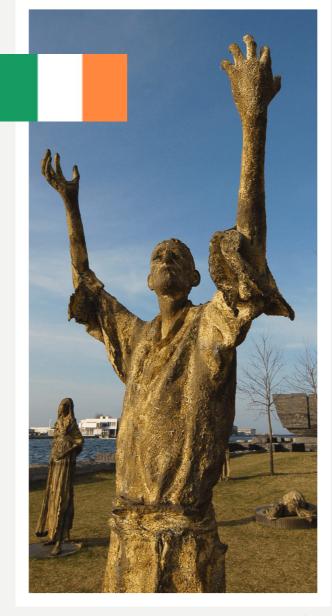
THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

The Great Irish Famine (1845–1852) is widely commemorated in both Ireland and internationally.

Commemorations of the Irish Famine are observed through various means, reflecting on the tragedy's impact on Ireland and the global Irish diaspora. Monuments and memorials are erected worldwide, including the National Famine Memorial in County Mayo and sculptures in Dublin and New York City.

Annual remembrance events are held, such as Ireland's National Famine Commemoration Day - held on the third Sunday in May each year, which includes wreath-laying ceremonies, prayers, and educational activities.

Significantly, these commemorations make connections to ongoing global crises, drawing analogies and parallels.



- Image Credit 6

For example, during the 2020 Famine commemoration at St Stephen's Green in Dublin, Minister Josepha Madigan compared the bravery of the doctors and nurses who risked their own lives by looking after famine victims with contagious diseases with the heroism of medical staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. And in 2024 Minister Simon Harris referred to Ireland's famine past in order to criticise food blockades in Gaza.

Museums and cultural institutions in Ireland regularly host exhibitions to educate the public about the famine's history. Additionally, there is a National Famine museum in the Irish village of Strokestown. Literature, music, and films frequently explore the famine's themes, ensuring the memory and lessons endure across generations.

Great Famine heritage is also inherently transnational. Because of Ireland's many diasporic communities that are rooted in Famine emigration history, there are also many monuments in Australia, Britain, the US and Canada, amongst others. One example is Rowan Gillespie's "Arrival", a group of statues which can be found at Toronto's waterfront.



Image: 9 year old boy, Amsterdam 1944 - Image Credit 7



THE DUTCH HUNGER WINTER (1944-45)

The Dutch Famine, known as the "Hunger Winter," occurred during 1944-1945 in Nazi-occupied Netherlands, leading to severe food shortages and thousands of deaths.

Commemorations emphasise the resilience and suffering endured by the Dutch people. Each year, on May 4th, the Netherlands observes National Remembrance Day to honour victims of war, including those from the famine. A nationally broadcast ceremony features two minutes of silence at 8 PM, speeches, and wreath-laying.

It must be noted, however, that the Holocaust and the Dutch Resistance take up a dominant position in Dutch memories of WWII, with the famine relegated behind them in importance, which probably explains why there is no national famine monument in the Netherlands.



The case studies above show us that how we remember and commemorate famine is very often a political decision that can see the importance of famine commemoration change over time.

Where the suffering has been imposed by an external force or nation, the suffering of famine can be celebrated as a kind of national martyrdom and evidence of national oppression.

Where famine has been the result of internal issues or power, or part of a wider conquest that has succeeded, then commemoration is generally more nuanced - with notions of suffering reduced; commemoration being localised rather than taking place at the national level; other causal factors for the famine highlighted; or even an absence of official commemoration entirely.





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HYPERLOCAL COMMEMORATIONS

Hyperlocal famine commemoration refers to very specific, localised memorials or remembrances of famine events. While many famine commemorations tend to be national or regional in scale, there are indeed examples of more localised commemorations.

Here are a few instances:



DOOLOUGH VALLEY, IRELAND

This site in County Mayo holds an annual famine walk to commemorate a specific tragic event during the Great Famine. In 1849, several hundred starving people walked through the valley to seek aid, with many dying along the way. The walk retraces their steps as a form of remembrance.

- Image Credit 8

POINT OF SLEAT, ISLE OF SKYE, SCOTLAND

There's a small stone memorial here commemorating the local victims of the Highland Potato Famine (1846–1856). It's a very specific, localised remembrance in a remote area where many inhabitants fell victim to starvation. Monuments to the Highland Potato famine are local initiatives, and its bleak history has not been integrated in the narratives presented by national museums, in the Lowlands.



- Image Credit 9



HOLODOMOR MEMORIALS IN UKRAINIAN VILLAGES

While the Holodomor (1932-1933) is commemorated nationally in Ukraine, many small villages have their own local memorials, often listing names of local victims or featuring symbols specific to that community's experience.

- Image Credit 10



These hyperlocal commemorations often provide a more intimate and personal connection to historical famine events. They allow communities to remember their specific losses and experiences, which might be overlooked in larger, more generalised memorials. Such commemorations can play an important role in preserving local history and fostering community identity.



GENDERED COMMEMORATIONS

Gendered famine commemoration is an important aspect of remembering historical famines, as it highlights the different experiences and impacts of famines on men and women. The role of women in famine has often been portrayed as one of victimhood, designed to provoke a heightened sense of empathy or outrage from audiences.



ROWAN GILLESPIE'S MIGRANT SCULPTURES" IN TORONTO

This memorial to migrants from the Great Irish Famine features sculptures of emaciated men, women, and children. Notably, it includes a sculpture of a pregnant woman, highlighting the particular vulnerability of expectant mothers during the famine.

- Image Credit 11



"THE IRISH FAMINE MEMORIAL" IN SYDNEY AUSTRALIA:

This artistic installation by Hossein and Angela Valamanesh pays homage to the young women who came from the workhouses of Ireland to Australia between 1848 and 1850 on a special emigration scheme which saw over 4000 young Irish women sent to Australia to flee the famine.

- Image Credit 12



HOLODOMOR VICTIMS' MEMORIAL IN KYIV, UKRAINE:

While not exclusively gendered, this large memorial includes a statue of a young girl holding five stalks of grain. These refer to a notorious decree from 1932 that made the possession of food that was considered state property a crime punishable by long imprisonment or death.

- Image Credit 13



"MOTHER OF THE OCCUPATION PERIOD" IN ATHENS, GREECE

This bronze statue, made by Costas Valsamis (1908-2003), commemorates the many deaths from starvation during the years of the Occupation in Athens (1941-44). The emaciated woman, collapsed as a result of starvation, is unable to suckle her infant. Here the mother figure symbolises the want of the entire population.

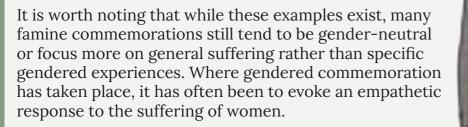


These gendered commemorations serve several important purposes:

- 1. They highlight the different ways famines affected men and women.
- 3. They bring attention to specific vulnerabilities, such as those of pregnant women or nursing mothers.

2. They often emphasise the role of women in caring for families during crises.

4. They can challenge traditional historical narratives that may have overlooked women's experiences.



LEARNING EXERCISE

Look up the gendered memorials listed above. When you see the images do you feel that they help to serve the purposes outlined here? Say why you think each memorial does, or does not, serve these purposes.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, famine memory can be a significant element in contemporary politics, either by its presence or its absence. Looking at how a particular famine is commemorated today invariably tells us at least as much about the contemporary politics of that place as it does about the actual history of the famine.







INTERACTIVE TIMELINE

Create a digital timeline using a tool like TimelineJS, where students add events, images, and short descriptions of different famine commemorations around the world.



MEMORY BOX

Students create a physical "memory box" containing items that represent different aspects of a famine and its commemoration. They can present these to the class, explaining the significance of each item.

VIRTUAL MUSEUM

- Image Credit 15

Use Google Slides or a similar tool to have students create a virtual museum exhibit about a specific famine and its commemoration. They can include images, text, and even embedded videos.



ROLE-PLAY DEBATE

Organise a classroom debate where students take on roles of different stakeholders (e.g., government officials, survivors, historians) discussing how a particular famine should be commemorated.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Have students design a social media campaign to raise awareness about a historical famine and its modernday commemoration. They can create mock posts for platforms like Instagram or Twitter.



FAMINE MEMORIAL DESIGN

In small groups, students design and create a scale model or detailed drawing of a famine memorial, explaining the symbolism and choices in their design.







Image Credit 1

Ron Cogswell

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/ File:2018-05-02 The Famine Memorial Dublin %28Ireland%29 May 2018.jpg

Image Credit 2

Max Herz, 2015

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Holodomor_Genocide_Memorial#/ media/File:Field_of_Wheat_(memorial). jpg

Image Credit 3

Magnus Enckell, 1896 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/

File:Magnus Enckell Death%27s walk 1896.jpg

Image Credit 4

Biblioteca Nacional de España 1937 https://images.theconversation.com/files/492604/original/file-20221031-7897-pzv3r7.jpg?ixlib=rb-4.1.0&rect=168%2C161%2C3878%2C2816&q=45&auto=format&w=926&fit=clip

Image Credit 5

Miguel Angel del Arco, 2022 https://contemporanea.ugr.es/ informacion/noticias/exposicionitinerante

Image Credit 6

Matthew Tsui, Jesse Boles, Trevor Kai 2007

https://kmai.com/images/2019/02/sm/ Ireland_park_2-1@2x.png

Image Credit 7

Unknown 1944

https://www.verzetsmuseum.org/media/dossiers/nederland_in_juni_44_mei_45/ondervoede_jongen.jpg

Image Credit 8

Felix O, 2009

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doolough_ Tragedy#/media/File:Doolough.jpg

Image Credit 9

Heather and the Highlands, 2024 https://www.heatherandthehighlands.com/post/point-of-sleat-walk-isle-of-skye

Image Credit 10

Holodomor Monuments Project https://www.holodomor-monuments.org/sumy.html#lg=1&slide=24

Image Credit 11

Benson Kua, 2009

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Rowan_Gillespie#/media/File:The_ Pregnant_Woman.jpg

Image Credit 12

Phillips/Pilkington Architects 2013 https://phillipspilkington.com.au/ images/project-sliders/culturalsliders/an-gorta-mor-memorial-tothe-great-irish-famine/98106-Irish-Womens-Memorial-1.jpg

Image Credit 13

Holodomor Museum, 2022 https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/ wp-content/uploads/2019/09/123-1. jpg

Image Credit 14

Matthew Tsui, Jesse Boles, Trevor Kai 2007

https://kmai.com/images/2019/02/sm/Ireland_park_2-1@2x.png

Image Credit 15

Половко Сергей Николаевич https://shorturl.at/KYD1A





LESSON TWO: CONTEMPORARY CRISES

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore contemporary and ongoing famine issues in Gaza and Sub-Saharan Africa, including drawing comparisons between historic crises and the ongoing significance of famine memory in the public consciousness. The lesson will also explore the role of heritage projects in commemorating and marking the past. This lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- The Gaza Famine (2023-Present)
- >> Contemporary Famine in Sub-Saharan Africa
- The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33) >>
- The Spanish Hunger Years (1939-52) >>
- The Finnish Hunger Years (1866-68)
- The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)
- The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)
- The Highland Potato Famine (1846-56)

LESSON INTENTIONS

- To discuss connections between contemporary and historic famines.
- Understand the importance of ongoing commemoration in different parts of the world.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- Describe the common language and imagery that recurs in famine memory and heritage across societies.
- Understand and make connections between historic famines and recent instances of food crisis.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Global Famine Case Studies Online Heritages of Hunger Repository Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition



- Image Credit 1

INTRODUCTION

Famine isn't history.

In the twenty-first century, where food production is heavily mechanised, globalised and highly efficient, famine is still a significant issue in many parts of the world.



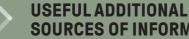
Image Credit 4

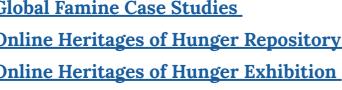
- Image Credit 2



- Image Credit 3

Across the world over thirty million people are either experiencing famine or at risk of famine, despite the abundance and over-supply of food in many parts of the globe. These people are largely in sub-Saharan Africa, but famine is also found elsewhere.







CASE STUDY

GAZA

Image: Destruction in Gaza
- Image Credit 5



The ongoing famine in Gaza is primarily a result of the Israel-Hamas conflict that escalated in October 2023. The immediate causes include:

Blockade and restricted aid

Israel's tight control over borders has severely limited food and supplies entering Gaza.

Infrastructure destruction

Bombing has damaged water systems, farms, and food distribution networks.

Displacement

Many Gazans have been forced from their homes, disrupting food access and livelihoods. The effects of this famine are severe:

- Widespread malnutrition, particularly affecting children and vulnerable populations.
- Increased mortality rates due to starvation and related illnesses.
- Societal breakdown as people struggle to secure basic necessities.
- Long-term health consequences for survivors, including stunted growth in children.
- Potential for increased conflict and desperation among the population.

This situation has sparked international concern and calls for immediate humanitarian intervention.

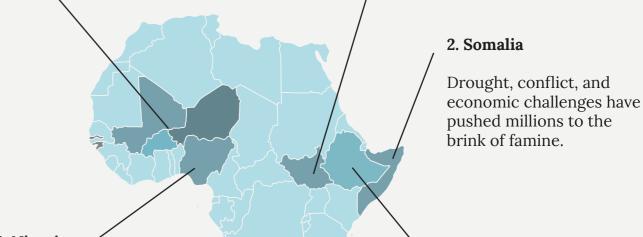
5. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

The Sahel region is experiencing a food crisis exacerbated by conflict and climate change.

1. South Sudan

Ongoing conflict and climate shocks have led to widespread hunger, with some regions experiencing famine-like conditions.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



4. Nigeria

The northeast region faces severe food insecurity due to ongoing insurgency and climate change impacts.

3. Ethiopia

The Tigray region and surrounding areas are experiencing acute food shortages due to conflict and environmental factors.

These crises are characterised by high rates of malnutrition, particularly among children, displaced populations, and rural communities. International aid efforts are ongoing, but challenges in access and funding persist. Some of these situations display the characteristics of earlier famines through time and others underline the fact that while the specific issues may change, and technology has revolutionised food supply chains and production – famine is now almost always inexcusable, preventable, and addressable if the will exists at the national or international level.

As history has shown, famine remains an issue of access to food rather than an absolute shortage of food.



LEARNING FROM THE PAST

The existence of contemporary famine underlines the importance of learning from and being informed by the past experience of famine around the world. There are many parallels between the contemporary experience of famine and previous famine experiences.

CAUSES OF FAMINE PAST AND PRESENT

PAST

- > Crop Failures
- Limited Transportation
- **Colonialism**
- > Market Failures
- > Political Ideologies
- **Warfare**

PRESENT

- > Climate Change
- > Conflict And War
- > Economic
 Instability
- PopulationDisplacement
- > Poverty
- > Political Instability

Understanding the causes of famine is crucial for prevention and mitigation.

In 2024 Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Simon Harris illustrated the parallels between past and present famines in Ireland and Gaza, highlighting the political nature, and preventability of the situation in Gaza today.

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'The Famine left an indelible mark, shaping who we are and guiding our commitments to justice – as well as our determination to help those in the greatest of need.

As a nation, it is repellent to our psyche to witness famine unfolding in Gaza as a tool of war. Israel needs to step back and ensure the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid. This is the clear demand of Ireland, the international community and international law.'

 $\frac{https://www.gov.ie/en/speech/cd9e0-speech-by-taoiseach-simon-harris-at-the-national-famine-commemoration-edgeworthstown-county-longford-on-sunday-19-may-2024/$



LEARNING EXERCISE

This learning exercise compares historical famines with current food crises.



Working in pairs, students will research **one historical famine** (e.g., Irish Potato Famine, Ukrainian Holodomor; Dutch Hunger Winter etc) and **one current crisis** (e.g., Gaza, Yemen, South Sudan etc), analysing causes, impacts, and relief efforts.



Students then **analyse** similarities, differences, and lessons learned between their chosen events.



Finally, each pair **prepares a 5-minute presentation** to the class, followed by a brief Q&A. Several pairs are selected to present their findings, depending on the time available.



- Image Credit 6

The lesson concludes with a **class discussion** on common themes and reflections on preventing food crises.

FAMINE RELIEF

There is a developed global network of famine relief agencies and interventions that work to alleviate the effects of famine and suffering around the world, and a wider awareness of the issue of famine than there has ever been before, but the problem persists in spite of their efforts to demonstrate that famine can be prevented and remedied.



- Image Credit 7

You can learn more about some of the different famine relief agencies and their work in Module Four.

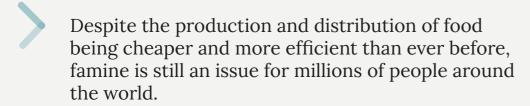


CONCLUSION

Famine has been a feature of human existence throughout history. We need food and nutrition to survive, so controlling production and access to food has always been a position of power and influence that has been open to pressure and abuse and vulnerable to environmental and political forces.



Image: Famine is likely to remain an issue in the future - Image Credit 8







OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS





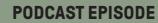
DATA VISUALIZATION

Using tools like Canva or Piktochart, have students create infographics comparing historical famines with current food crises, highlighting similarities and differences.



FAMINE RELIEF SIMULATION

Set up a classroom simulation where students take on roles in a famine relief operation, making decisions about resource allocation and addressing various challenges.



Students create a short podcast episode discussing a contemporary famine crisis, its historical context, and potential solutions.



Students create physical posters to raise awareness about a current famine crisis, incorporating historical context and calls to action. These can be displayed in the classroom or school hallways.







Image Credit 1

Claire Nevill/WFP 2022

https://www.aljazeera.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AP22174465630548.jpg?resize=770%2C513&quality=80

Image Credit 2

FMSC, 2015

https://www.flickr.com/photos/fmsc/16558783387

Image Credit 3

Oxfam, 2011

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/ File:2011_Horn_of_Africa_famine_ Oxfam_01.jpg

Image Credit 4

Oxfam 2016

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f9/Oxfam East Africa -More_Aid_Is_Needed.jpg

Image Credit 5

Saleh Najm and Anas Sharif, 2023 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/ File:Fars Photo of Destruction in Gaza Strip during 2023 War 01.jpg

Image Credit 6

Going to School Gaza, John Cummings 2014

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sabha,6, getting ready to walk to school from her house on the borders eastern Gaza strip, where she and her family are still living in_tents.jpg

Image Credit 7

WFP 2003

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:World_Food_Programme_in_Liberia_002.jpg

Image Credit 8

UNICEF, 2023

https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/intensifying-conflict-malnutrition-and-disease-gaza-strip-creates-deadly-cycle

Credits

This learning resource was co-developed by the Heritages of Hunger research consortium and Nerve Centre Derry

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