



Save the Children
منظمة رعاية الأطفال

HANGING IN THE BALANCE



YEMENI
CHILDREN'S
STRUGGLE
FOR EDUCATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover photo: Rouba*, 12-year-old student sitting in her classroom in Lahj Governorate. Photo credit: Abdulsalam AlNajdi/ Save the Children.

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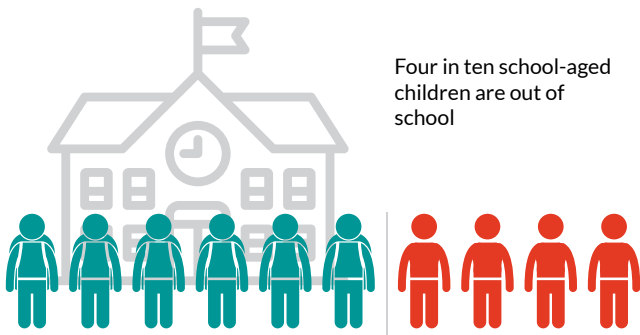
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INTRODUCTION

April 2, 2024 marks two years since the truce was declared in Yemen; a pivotal moment through which Yemeni children and their families hoped for stability, peace and a sense of normalcy.

While the truce has resulted in reduced hostilities, civilian casualties and displacement, it failed to effectively protect children's safety, wellbeing and rights including their fundamental right to safe, quality and inclusive education. With the war entering its tenth year, the impact on children's learning and well-being is severe. Today, over 4.5 million children in Yemen are out of school,¹ constituting 39 per cent of the country's school-age population. This figure raises serious concerns not only about the well-being and future of those children but also about the future of the entire country as education is a vital pillar of the country's potential for recovery. The challenging economic situation in Yemen, which has been a major contributor to the crisis in education, has also increased protection risks, with parents and caregivers adopting harmful coping mechanisms, such as child labour and child marriage.



Financial hardships, exacerbated by the economic warfare between the warring parties, have hindered Yemenis' livelihoods, compelling parents to confront the difficult prospect of withdrawing their children from schools as they navigate the intricate balance between hoping for a better future for their children and the more urgent reality of their challenging circumstances. The ongoing insecurity, persistence of explosive ordnance and displacement crisis, further complicates parents' choices. Meanwhile, humanitarian actors find themselves struggling to respond, grappling with a combination of access restrictions and funding shortages.

With hopes pinned on a new peace prospect and given education's ability to foster long-term stability and development, it is crucial to make sure this education crisis is addressed as the well-being and future prospects of Yemen's children are closely linked to the success of the broader peacebuilding efforts. Global research by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) found that countries with high education levels enjoy more overall social and political stability, and the opposite is also true.²

This report aims to shed light on the growing numbers of children out of school, the reasons behind dropouts, as well as the pressing need to prioritize children's education amidst ongoing peace efforts, recognizing it as a fundamental step towards building a sustainable and prosperous future for the country.

THE TRUCE

In April 2022, the UN announced a two-month truce giving hope to the population of Yemen of a return to peace. The truce was extended twice before concluding in October 2022.³ Progress was made regarding oil imports through Hodeidah port and the reopening of Sana'a International Airport before negotiations faced challenges, leading to the collapse of talks over reopening roads and public salary payments.⁴ Despite this, the truce has de facto continued for almost two years.

Perhaps the truce's most impactful element was the reduction in fighting, which led to a decrease in civilian casualties and conflict-related displacement. However, and while the truce had some positive impacts, the benefits were not felt by all Yemenis,

with many continuing to suffer high levels of need due to the lack of any improvement in their living conditions.

Almost two years after the April 2022 truce, hope for peace rekindled again when the UN Special Envoy welcomed parties' commitment to a set of measures to implement a nation-wide ceasefire, improve living conditions in Yemen, and engage in preparations for the resumption of an inclusive political process.⁵

It is essential that children and youth are represented in this process. Their exclusion risks their voices, needs, and rights, including their right to education, being overlooked, which not only undermines their fundamental rights and future but also jeopardizes the effectiveness of any agreements reached to make a real difference in the lives of children, their parents, and their teachers.



METHODOLOGY

This research employs a mixed-methodology approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods across Yemen. The quantitative component involved a survey of 1,068 children and 528 caregivers.⁶ As part of the qualitative component, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 impacted children, caregivers, and teachers to gain insights into their perspectives and experiences. Additionally, lead education and protection providers were interviewed to acquire comprehensive insights about the challenges they face in addressing the issues faced when accessing safe and quality education in Yemen.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 30 children from various regions across Yemen. These FGDs aimed to explore the perspectives, fears, hopes, and aspirations of the children regarding their education and future.

A desk review, encompassing a thorough examination of existing literature, reports and relevant documents was conducted to contextualize the study within the existing body of knowledge.



KEY FINDINGS

- School dropouts continue in Yemen, with one-third (34%) of Yemeni families reporting at least one child dropping out of school over the past two years. The truce has not improved access to education, the majority of caregivers suggest (58%).

- Displaced children are twice as likely to dropout of school in comparison to children in the host community with dropout rates of 58% and 27% respectively.

- While return to the area of origin reduces the vulnerability of displaced children to school dropouts by 20%, ongoing insecurity hinders return.

- Child labor was the driver of 44% of school dropout cases. Moreover, in 20% of families, children juggle work and education simultaneously, amplifying the risk of dropping out and exposing them to further vulnerabilities.

- Monthly school fees to support teacher incentives and the necessity

of purchasing textbooks significantly inflate school costs, driving school dropouts for 20% of families.

- Recent reduction and suspension of food assistance in the country is having an immediate toll on children's education.

- Despite the reduction in hostilities driven by the truce, security concerns persist, denying children and their families any sense of safety and resulting in school dropout rates for 14% of families.

- Unable to afford even the minimum food necessities, teachers abandon teaching, sometimes joining military groups. Those who continue to teach take on additional work after school hours, adversely affecting the quality of education.

- Children in Yemen call on the decision makers to end the conflict to restore access to education and secure their future.





THE SILENT EXODUS

Both children and caregivers were surveyed about the prevalence of school dropouts in their own families over the past two years. On average, approximately 34 per cent of respondents reported facing instances where at least one child in their families had to drop out or discontinue education during this period.

Displaced families reported significantly higher rates of school dropout, with 58 per cent of them facing such instances over the past two years, compared to 27 per cent in the host community. There are 1.3 million displaced school-aged children in Yemen.⁷ They remain among the most vulnerable groups, confronting multiple risks due to the precarious economic conditions resulting from their displacement. Approximately 80% of the country's displaced population comprises women and children, with 26% of displaced households headed by women,⁸ further exacerbating their vulnerability.

While the truce has indeed reduced the number of displaced families, still thousands of families were forced to leave their homes due to localized fighting across many parts of the country. This has placed more and more children at risk of leaving behind not only their homes, but also their education.

The relocation disrupted the education of all three of her children. Although the younger two were able to return to school, the older brother, aged 16 and a ninth-grade student, had to discontinue his education in order to work and contribute towards

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My eldest daughter was a very diligent student. She wanted to become a nurse. Unfortunately, circumstances dictated otherwise.”

Hani, 48-year-old teacher, discussing how his low income impacted his four daughters' education, leading to the withdrawal of two of them.

covering the increased expenses of the family following their displacement. Um Salem and her family were among at least 8,092 families who were displaced due to conflict in 2022 and 2023.⁹ Many IDPs have sought shelter in schools. As of November 2022, 475 schools were repurposed for sheltering IDPs of conflict and flooding worsened by climate change.¹⁰

Return to the area of origin can reduce the likelihood of school dropouts in the long-term for displaced children. Over 38 per cent of returnee families reported incidents where their children dropped out of school over the past two years – 20 per cent less than families that are still displaced. However, it seems that return is not an option for most displaced children, at least not in the near future. According to an intention survey conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in May 2023, 75 per cent of IDPs stated

that they will not return to their areas of origin anytime soon, with over 77 per cent of them citing lack of security at their places of origin as the main reason.¹¹ This suggests that despite the decrease in conflict after the truce, enough incidents still occur to maintain a sense of insecurity for most people. Indeed, close to 4,250 civilian casualties, including 695 child casualties, were reported since the truce.¹² As

a result, the number of families who returned to their areas of origin due to improved security since the truce remained low with 555 families,¹³ just 6% of the 8,092 people displaced by insecurity since the truce began.

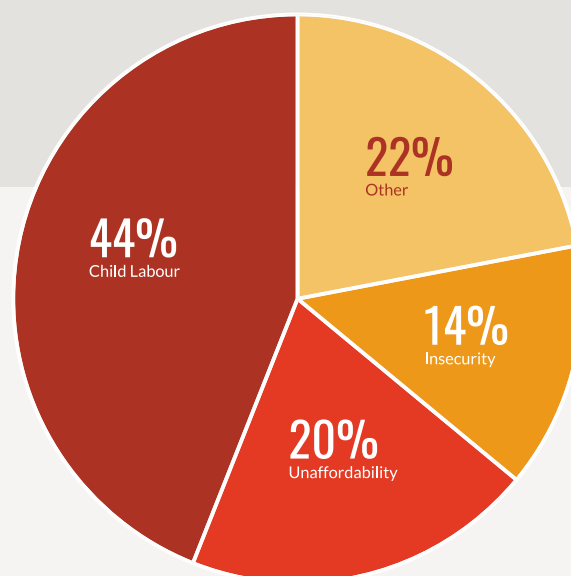
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I remember when the truce was announced; everyone was talking about how the situation would be safer. I never expected that we would end up here [in a displacement camp].”

Um Salem, 35-year-old mother of three, was displaced, with her family, to an IDP camp in August 2023 following recurrent shelling incidents on the demarcation lines.

WHY STUDENTS ARE DROPPING OUT

In light of the deepening economic downturn and ongoing insecurity, child and caregiver respondents highlighted the necessity for children to work to support family income, the financial strain posed by school expenses, and the prevailing sense of insecurity as the main three factors behind school dropouts in their families over the past two years.



Reasons behind school dropouts according to the survey

CHILD LABOUR

Over 44 per cent of parents and children said that the need to support their family's income generation was a primary reason behind school dropouts over the past two years. Child labour was highlighted as a pressing and escalating concern for children in Yemen,¹⁴ posing one of the most significant risks to their well-being and development. The prolonged conflict and its detrimental effect on the country's economy continue to push ever-growing numbers of the younger generation into child labor, exposing them to exploitation, sexual violence and physical and psychological abuse.

One of the teachers interviewed for this report shared an incident involving two brothers who are among the most diligent students in his class. A few months ago, one of the children fainted during his class because they had not eaten breakfast. The same incident happened again a few days later. Upon inquiry, he learned that their family's

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I was terrified of the sea because I could not swim. I wanted to be back to my school.

11-year-old Hadi describing his first day at work in a fishing boat.

financial situation was strained because their grandmother had been diagnosed with cancer and her treatment absorbed much of their resources. Subsequently, the children stopped attending school as they had to work, only returning months later after their grandmother passed away.

Regarding the prevalence of child labour among their school-aged children, approximately 20% of caregivers reported that children were involved in seasonal work – mostly in agriculture, referring to temporary employment work associated with planting or harvesting – as well as work after school. This suggests that children are balancing both school and work simultaneously. Such a situation not only has the potential to adversely affect their school performance but also puts them at an increased risk of dropping out of school as added stress and time constraints may lead

Khalid, a 14-year-old boy would miss many school days to collect scrap materials like plastic and iron to make ends meet for his family. Khalid says: "Lots of kids here work early in the morning. If you don't start early, you miss out, and you don't get paid." Indeed, caregivers reported that one of the main jobs that both boys and girls are involved in is begging or street vending¹⁵ which comes with additional protection risks. Khalid shared stories of other children collecting scrap like him and how much that impacted him: "One child found a metal thing that exploded when he tried to mess with it, and he lost his right hand. Another boy suffered a severe electric shock while attempting to extract wires. Every time I went out to collect stuff, I kept thinking about what happened to them. But I also thought about my family and how I needed to help them."

compared to one year earlier.²⁰

The impact has been immediate. Students spoke to Save the Children about four of their fellow students who dropped out of school over a month ago. They explained that these students had been working after school hours collecting plastic scrap to pay for their school fees and expenses. However, when food assistance was cut off, these children had to prioritise raising the money to buy the flour that was previously provided in the food basket their families used to receive. As families struggle to access adequate food, there is a greater likelihood of children being withdrawn from school to contribute to family sustenance.

to burnout, diminishing their motivation to continue their studies.

Yemen has also been facing a severe food crisis with 17.6 million Yemenis, over half the population, projected to experience food insecurity in 2024.¹⁶ Recent developments in the country risk further exacerbation of the financial struggles of vulnerable populations and pose heightened child protection risks. The reduction in food assistance across Yemen, affecting over 13 million people¹⁷ compounded by the interruption in food aid distribution to 9.5 million people in the north,¹⁸ is a crisis in the making. Additionally, escalating tensions in the Red Sea area, which have led to heightened insurance and freight costs, is particularly concerning given Yemen's heavy reliance on imports for 85 per cent of its domestic food needs.¹⁹ Only two months after the aforementioned events, the number of families unable to access adequate food increased by 11 per cent, according to the World Food Programme (WFP). The UN agency attributed the increase to the pause in food distribution in the north, stating that an additional six per cent of families are now forced to adopt extremely negative food-coping strategies

Lack of access to adequate amounts of food not only increases the risk of children dropping out, but also has other detrimental impacts on their health and development. Inadequate early nutrition undermines cognitive and physical development and negatively impacts educational attainment and income in later life. Poor nutrition for adolescents affects their ability to concentrate, causing tiredness, impairs their development and impacts their learning potential.²¹



UNAFFORDABILITY

Basic education is supposed to be free in Yemen,²² however, families are often burdened with school fees and costs that can, on average, amount to at least the equivalent to 50 USD for each student per year. In a country where the average fertility rate is 3.8²³, 80 per cent of the population is below the poverty line,²⁴ and with the minimum daily wage for those working between 2.5 and 5 USD a day,²⁵ the cost of education poses a significant barrier. Unaffordable education was behind 20 per cent of school dropout cases in the families surveyed.

Parents across Yemen are required to pay annual and/ or monthly fees to cover incentives for school staff and operational costs. In areas controlled by the authorities in the north, the majority of these fees are allocated to compensate teachers who have not received regular salaries since the conflict began. In areas controlled by authorities in the south, the fees are often used to pay for volunteer teachers, guards,

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My older sister was forced to leave school when she was in the sixth grade due to our family’s financial difficulties, which arose after my father had a car accident and could no longer work. Now that I’m in sixth grade, I’m afraid I might face the same fate.”

Bahiya, 13, a sixth-grade student

and cleaners due to limited governmental funding and the absence of new hiring to replace departed education staff. The amount of these fees can vary significantly, typically ranging from approximately 7 USD to 20 USD. There are reportedly instructions from the authorities regarding the voluntary nature of these fees, but not all schools adhere to these directions²⁶.

The country’s education authorities have been struggling to provide educational resources including school textbooks. This forces many parents across Yemen to purchase them through the black market. The total costs of the books needed for one school year ranges between 12 USD and 20 USD.

The authorities have made some attempts to improve access to textbooks, such as offering electronic textbooks on the official websites.²⁷ While creative solutions to manage limited resources are welcomed, many children do not have access to smart devices and/or internet connection as well

as to electricity, particularly those in early grades and in rural areas. Another attempt to improve access to textbooks involves retrieving textbooks from students who have moved on to higher grades, with the intention to redistribute them to other students. However, this initiative also has a very limited impact due to the limited number of textbooks retrieved and the bad condition of the books which makes them less suitable for redistribution.

There have been several community initiatives aimed at providing education assistance. One such initiative is the Father and Mother Councils. Established and empowered by Save the Children, the Councils aim to identify and address issues children face in enrolling and attending schools in their community. Among these issues, teacher salaries and textbooks stand out as the most persistent concerns, according to its members. In one of the schools, council members started a fundraising effort, seeking donations from businessmen and other community members to print textbooks and cover teacher incentives. However, these initiatives remain limited in number and effectiveness and are constrained by the overall economic hardships which restrict the donations available. Furthermore, humanitarian NGOs' ability to support such initiatives is hampered

by dwindling funds.

Other school associated costs such as transportation fees, stationery, and school uniform that parents are expected to provide increase the overall cost of schooling and contribute to financial burdens on families and further contribute to school dropouts. A Save the Children education staff member spoke about a young girl who used transportation to get to and from school, which cost the family about 6,000 riyals every month (equivalent to 11.5 USD). However, as inflation soared, the family could only afford to provide 3,000 riyals, forcing the girl to walk home from school. The distance between the school and the girl's home is approximately 5 kilometers.

The Muhamasheen children, among the most vulnerable groups in Yemen who have historically faced marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion from mainstream society, face greater risks of dropping out. While not surveyed for this report, a separate assessment by Save the Children on their socioeconomic situation revealed that 40 per cent of Muhamasheen caregivers reported recent school dropout among their children. Out of those, 83 per cent noted school expenses and the cost of sending children to school as the reason.



I N S E C U R I T Y

Violence continues to be rife, including in and around schools, threatening children's sense of safety. Overall, 14 per cent of children and caregivers attributed school dropout cases within their families to insecurity on the way to and from school. 78 per cent of students surveyed reported that their sense of safety has not increased over the past two years.²⁸

The beginning of the truce period was promising as no schools experienced attacks. However, after an eight-month pause, two schools were impacted in

December 2022, including in a drone strike in Hajjah, in which an 11-year-old boy was killed and two other boys were injured.²⁹

In 2023, armed violence in and near schools continued leading to child casualties, totaling at least three fatalities and numerous injuries. Incidents included drone strikes and shellfire in southern Hodeidah, shootings near schools in Taiz, and a tragic event near a school in Qa'atabah district where a 6-year-old boy was killed, and eight

other boys injured by drone strikes late 2023.³⁰

Explosive ordnance (EO), including landmines, were the largest cause of child casualties in the country in 2023³¹ continuing the trend observed in 2022 which saw the EO casualties triple.³² Many of these incidents occurred close

to schools. The latest of which was in mid-February 2024 when three children lost their lives and two others sustained critical injuries due to an EO explosion near their school in Lahj governorate.³³

The school principal told Save the Children: "One week has passed since the incident, and still over half of the students do not attend the school due to the fear and psychological impact of their colleagues' death." A total of 268 students study in the school.

Dropping out of school is one of the protection risks associated with survivors of armed violence as the country lacks the necessary social and health systems to provide survivors with the long-term care needed for recovery and a return to school.³⁴ In April 2023, Saleem, 11, faced a traumatic experience when an EO exploded while he and his friends were playing resulting in the death of his best friend and the injury of four others, including Saleem. The explosion left Saleem with multiple shrapnel pieces lodged in his body, including a dangerous shrapnel injury to his neck. Save the Children's case management worker assigned to Saleem said that he encountered social and psychological challenges stemming from the harrowing incident and the loss of a friend. Saleem was able to return to school after six months following close follow up and intense psychosocial support; a much-needed service that most schools in Yemen lack. Moreover, only three out of ten of these trained teachers felt sufficiently capable of providing psychosocial support.

”

On my way to school, I still get scared when I pass the street where the explosion happened because it could happen again. Only peace will make me feel safe again.”

Yasmin, a secondary school student who was injured due to an explosion in her way to school just before the final day of examination

QUALITY OF EDUCATION



36 per cent of the parents surveyed said the quality of education for their children was not good while 58 per cent said there has not been any improvement in the situation over the past two years. This perpetuates a sense that education is not worth the risks and cost involved, decreasing the likelihood that parents would keep their children in school.



Educating young children is our way out of the conflict.”

Khaled, 45, mathematics teacher

One of the significant contributing factors to the quality of education is the departure of teachers from the education sector. It is estimated that approximately 30 per cent of teachers in areas controlled by the authorities in the north have left the occupation due to inadequate and irregularly

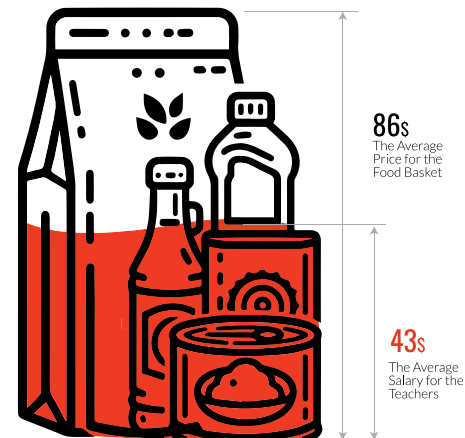
paid salaries.³⁵ In areas under the control of the authorities in the south, teachers’ salaries range from 43,000 riyals to 100,000 riyals before retirement, resulting in an average salary of over 70,000 riyals (approximately 43 USD) which is below the minimum wage in the country.³⁶ However, teachers in areas controlled by authorities in the north, which constitute 65% of the country’s teachers, have not received regular salaries since the conflict began. Instead, they typically receive half a monthly salary three times a year during specific occasions such as Ramadan and Eid. These teachers heavily rely on incentives, which vary significantly and depend on factors such as the amount of money collected from students, the number of school staff receiving incentives, and fluctuating operational costs from month to month. Reports indicate that some teachers receive the equivalent of 20 USD or even less in rural and remote areas.

Since 2018, humanitarian organizations have been providing support for teachers’ salaries across Yemen, with payments typically amounting to 50

USD. However, this assistance has been inconsistent and limited – especially recently with dwindling humanitarian funding - in both the number of teachers assisted and the areas covered. For instance, during the 2022-2023 school year, around 40,000 teachers were supported, primarily in areas controlled by the authorities in the north. For perspective, this falls short of affording the minimum food basket – the amount needed to sustain a family of seven for a month - which is equivalent to over 86 USD on average.³⁷ While the price of the food basket has increased by 300 per cent over the past five years,³⁸ salaries have not kept pace as no increases have been made since the conflict started.

Morad, a 53-year-old teacher earning a salary of 82,000 riyals (equivalent to 50 USD), says that buying a sack of flour consumes a third of his income. He explained that he has to work after school in agriculture, harvesting onions and other crops, to make ends meet for his family of 10. Morad mentioned that many of his teacher colleagues have left the profession to join the military in order to support their families, and he admitted that he has considered doing the same. The departure of experienced educators not only diminishes the quality of education but also disrupts the continuity of learning for students.

For teachers who are still working, they face difficult choices and most of them take on additional work after school hours. Majed, aged 51, has been a teacher for 31 years and earns a monthly salary of 89,000 Yemeni riyals, equivalent to 55 USD.³⁹ Despite being one of the highest-paid teachers due to his long tenure in the profession, Majed finds himself having to work as a shepherd and sometimes in agriculture after school hours to make ends meet for his family. Majed says that most of the teachers he knows take on additional work after school. On the impact of this on students, Majed says: “We often have to leave early to get to our other jobs which means fewer school hours for children which limits their learning time and we never have time to adequately prepare our lessons if we prepare at all as we used to which also affects the quality of teaching and student engagement in the classroom.”



Teacher strikes demanding regular and better salaries are frequent occurrences and can last for prolonged periods, disrupting students' education. For instance, at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, areas under the control of the authorities in the south witnessed a comprehensive teacher strike for almost two months,⁴⁰ and then more localised teacher strikes followed including in Lahj⁴¹ and Hadramout.⁴² While less common, teachers in areas controlled by the authorities in the north also staged a strike lasting over two months in August 2023, demanding salaries they had not received for the past eight years.⁴³ These disruptions exacerbate the situation, leading to inconsistent classroom environments and disrupted learning schedules. Speaking about the challenges stemming from frequent teacher strikes, a teacher mentioned experiencing delays in covering curriculum objectives. This sometimes forces them to rush through the curriculum later in the academic year, including the possibility of skipping some chapters altogether.

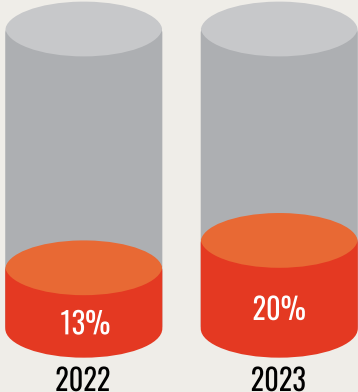
The lack of school materials, including textbooks, is another factor impacting the quality of education. Rania, an elementary school teacher, has been devising creative solutions to address the shortage of textbooks. She says, "Only five out of 60 students in my class have textbooks; the rest can't afford them. To cope with this challenge, we employ various strategies such as summarizing lessons on the

board for students to copy into their notebooks, and sometimes we convert lessons into questions and print them for students to work on at home." However, Rania notes that these measures are insufficient to replace having a physical textbook that children can reference at home and that parents can use to support their children's learning. Amin, aged 14, an eighth-grade student of Rania, indicated that he has somehow got used to the lack of textbooks given that the last time he had any was when he was in the third grade but added, "I miss carrying textbooks in my bag though."

Today, there are 2,426 schools that have been either partially or fully damaged or non-functional because they are being used for other non-educational purposes including being used as shelters for IDPs and by military groups.⁴⁴ This represents over 15 per cent of the country's total 16,034 schools⁴⁵ which significantly impacts students' access to education. It reduces the availability of schools and forces thousands of students to travel longer distances to attend school, thereby increasing the risks to their safety and adding transportation costs. The repercussions extend beyond students' access to schools, significantly influencing the quality of education. Fewer schools combined with a shortage of teaching staff results in school overcrowding. This strains resources, results in larger class sizes, and diminishes individualized attention for students.

A SHORTAGE OF INTERNATIONAL FUNDING

Funding for education in Yemen has been steadily dwindling over the past few years. In 2023, less than 20 per cent of the education funding requirements were met in the Humanitarian Response Plan, representing a significant decrease from the already low per centage of 13 per cent in 2022.⁴⁶ This substantial shortage has severely hampered the capacity of humanitarian actors to deliver education assistance despite contributions from multilateral funds, including Education Cannot Wait (ECW), which invested a total of over \$20 million in Yemen between 2016-



Humanitarian Response Plan Education Funding Received

2022, and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which currently holds a five-year grant for programme implementation worth \$47.5 million.

The ripple effects of reduced funding extend beyond educational realms, affecting other programmes crucial for addressing vulnerabilities leading to school dropout including child protection which was 48 per cent covered in 2023.⁴⁷ Without adequate support, vulnerable children are left without the much-needed safeguarding that child protection can provide and denying school dropouts from re-entering the education system.

FALLING SHORT: THE TRUCE HAS NOT IMPROVED ACCESS

When asked about their children's access to education over the past two years, over 58 per cent of parents said it has not improved. This underscores the widespread persistent toll of the prolonged conflict on education, displacement and on livelihoods and the ongoing access challenges despite the hope for improvement brought about by the truce.

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For us, the truce was a mere ink on paper, no more.

Mohammad, a father of five, when asked about the impact of the truce on his family and children.

However, it is noteworthy that 28 per cent of respondents indicated a relative improvement. 14 per cent thought there was an improvement which can potentially be attributed to better security conditions in certain areas and the return of displaced people to their areas of origin.

Yemen continues to grapple with entrenched conflict dynamics, characterized by deep regional segmentation and rivalry over resources. These factors have hindered the achievement of much-needed progress, not only in attaining lasting peace and stability but also in implementing steps outlined in the truce agreement to alleviate economic pressures on Yemenis. While the truce has led to a significant reduction in active fighting over the past two years, these conflict dynamics have persisted beneath the surface, contributing to a volatile socio-economic situation and impacting every aspect of Yemenis lives.

These dynamics have led to the reversal of some truce achievements almost immediately. For instance, importing oil through Hodeidah port was a significant breakthrough of the truce agreement. However, this was briefly halted following attacks against oil pipelines and ports in Hadramout and Shabwa in October and November 2022. The obstruction of gas and oil exports has resulted in reduced public revenue, leading to further oil shortages and prompted cuts to electricity subsidies and spending on goods and services.⁴⁸ Other commitments in the truce agreement that could have improved the day-to-day lives of Yemenis, such as opening of key roads – including

to Taiz, the country's third largest city – and disbursing public salaries for tens of thousands of employees including teachers, have not materialised. Meanwhile, the banking and monetary systems continue to be adversely split, experiencing disruptions that hinder financial transactions and exacerbate economic difficulties. Consequently, these challenges have significantly diminished

the government's ability to support education in the country including providing adequate salaries to teachers and ensuring sufficient educational resources for schools and rehabilitating damaged schools. It has also intensified economic strain on families, making it increasingly burdensome for them to afford school fees and necessary supplies.

In Yemen, despite commitments made in national legal frameworks, there has been insufficient effort to protect and prioritise education, schools and students. This is primarily due to the continued focus on the conflict and conflict-related issues, which overshadow the urgent need to enforce measures and laws safeguarding the rights of children, including their right to education. Yemen has established regulations to protect education and uphold students' right to education, making it compulsory by law in 1992. Additionally, in 2017 Yemen committed to the Safe Schools Declaration, an intergovernmental initiative aimed at safeguarding schools, universities, and their occupants during armed conflict.⁴⁹ While the Safe Schools Declaration is endorsed by the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG), there are commitments of the same nature endorsed by both authorities. In 2020, the Ministries of Education in the south and the north adopted the National Manual for Safety and Security in Schools. This manual outlines principles such as preventing the use of school buildings by armed actors and ensuring the continuity of education.⁵⁰ As of September 2022, there have been 672 attacks and incidents of use of schools for non-educational purposes since the start of the conflict.⁵¹ These have continued despite the truce and reduction in fighting.

EDUCATION AND PEACE: CHILDREN'S VOICES



Save the Children conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving 30 children from three Yemeni governorates. Each child had either a sibling and/or a fellow student who dropped out over the past two years. Kamal, a 14-year-old ninth grader, talked about his best friend and schoolmate Ahmad, with whom he used to study and play. When school started this year, Ahmad didn't show up, and Kamal later learned that he had to drop out to work and take care of his younger brother, as Ahmad was an orphan and the head of the household. Kamal has never seen his friend again.

Hamid, 16, recounted how his friends dropped out to collect scrap for a living and added: "their future is lost." Samir, 14, talked about his older brother who left school to work and now helps pay for his education. Samir wants to become a teacher to honor his brother, who also wanted to become a teacher before he dropped out. In focus group discussions with girls, they shared stories of classmates forced to abandon education due to early marriage and economic hardships.

The children expressed concerns about the prospect of leaving school as well. For Hamid, dropping out of school meant he would end up doing the same job as his friends, collecting scrap. Iman expressed fear about

leaving school, citing the inability to secure a good job in the future as her main concern. Rana was worried about the possibility of not being able to achieve her future dreams due to lost learning. Additionally, for Iman, early marriage was a concern if she were to leave school.

When asked about the significance of education to them, the children mentioned words like "future", "success", "fulfilling dreams", and "knowledge". Khalil described education as "everything", while Asmaa stated, "For a girl, education is her protection after her family."

The children expressed their desire for decision-makers to end the war so that "Yemen can return to how it used to be" as stated by Anwar, and so that "we can return to our villages and continue our education" as expressed by Amin. Rana, on the other hand, emphasized that decision-makers should recognize the danger faced by children in Yemen due to the lack of education and should prioritize making education a source of happiness for all children. Additionally, Taher insisted that full access to education should be granted at all costs, while Asala called for securing children's rights to learn and education so that they "can build a future for themselves and their families."

SAVE THE CHILDREN'S RESPONSE

Save the Children's Education Programme aims to provide equitable and inclusive access to learning for all children. We support both formal and non-formal education for children, particularly those affected by crisis and living in hard-to-reach areas, with a focus on reducing equity gaps. Our education interventions include the rehabilitation and construction of classes, gender-sensitive and inclusive WASH facilities, support for learning, provision of learning materials, non-formal education for out-of-school children, remedial education for children at risk of dropout, and professional development initiatives for teachers, in addition to child protection interventions.

Our education projects are integrated with child protection and Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sectors to ensure safe and protective learning environments. Financial barriers to education are addressed through cash and voucher assistance to families, as well as coordination with child protection case management systems which, depending on a thorough assessment of the best interest of the child, offers a range of services tailored to the needs of the identified child and their family, which may encompass referrals, social support, psychological support, and in-kind support.

Save the Children education projects supported over 475,000 students and teachers in 2023.



STORY OF RAMI*, 12-YEAR-OLD FOURTH GRADE STUDENT

Rami's decision came as his mother struggled to provide food for him and his siblings after his father fell ill. He started working after school hours for a while, but the money he made wasn't enough, so he had to transition to full-time work in an attempt to earn more. Rami would work from 8 AM to 9 PM.

Save the Children learned about Rami from his mother, who was receiving treatment for malnutrition at one of Save the Children's centers. Save the Children supported Rami's family with several services, including the provision of funds to cover food needs for three months, as well as providing kitchen and shelter materials. Additionally, Rami's older sister was enrolled in a vocational training program where she learned sewing. She is set to receive the necessary equipment to start her own business, including a sewing machine, which will enable her to earn money for the family. This support coupled with raising awareness about the risk of dropping out of school as part of psychosocial sessions enabled Rami to return to school earlier this year. Rami hopes to continue his studies all the way to university.

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How can I go to school when my siblings are in need of food?

Those were the words Rami, a 12-year-old boy from Taiz, told his mother just before he dropped out of school to work full time at his uncle's barbershop two years ago when he was in the fourth grade.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To urgently address the challenges Yemeni children face in fulfilling their right to education and securing a better future for themselves, including preventing school dropout, Save the Children calls on stakeholders to:

THE AUTHORITIES IN YEMEN

- Fully commit to a renewed and inclusive peace process, which not only includes a ceasefire but alleviating the economic repercussions of the conflict on Yemenis including easing restrictions on critical infrastructure, opening the roads and paying public servants' salaries, including teachers.
 - Comply with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) under all circumstances and adhere to commitments made to protect schools and students, including the Safe School Declaration and the National Manual for Safety and Security in Schools. This includes the immediate end of all military presence in schools and refraining from targeting school children for recruitment.
 - Ensure safe, unimpeded, and principled access for humanitarian actors across all regions of Yemen to guarantee the delivery of essential services, including education and child protection. This encompasses unfettered access to schools, individuals in need, and data.
 - Preserve and prioritise support for schools, students and teachers to ensure the quality and the continuity of education.
 - Increase funds to education to 20% of total budget expenditure or 6% of GDP. Improve the efficiency of spending by developing a fully-costed long-term education financing strategy and use monitoring and data collection systems to prioritise resources for the greatest impact on the most marginalised children.
- Support livelihood interventions centred around children's protection, such as cash distributions, to alleviate the pressure on vulnerable households to mitigate negative coping mechanisms, including dropping out of school, child labour, recruitment into armed groups and early marriage.
 - Fund and support stand alone and integrated child protection programming, including the capacity building of the social workforce and gender sensitive child protection systems and GBV services, including mental health and psychosocial support, and ensure a clear referral pathway for protection services in schools.
 - Invest and advocate to build the capacity and capabilities of the education sector in Yemen, with a particular focus on local actors, so that the sector can implement quality and appropriate responses.

DONOR STATES AND INSTITUTIONS

- Increase and sustain support for educational interventions, to ensure children are provided with quality and protective education in schools across Yemen. This includes rehabilitating damaged schools and ensuring schools are equipped with basic gender segregated WASH facilities school meals and school materials, including textbooks as well as teachers' incentives.

HUMANITARIAN AND PEACE-BUILDING ACTORS

- Scale up and strengthen integrated and multi-sectorial child protection interventions to reach more students and teachers in need, including increasing, developing and rolling out of targeted psychosocial support.
- Promote the importance of education among community members through awareness campaigns, educational outreach programs, and collaboration with local leaders and organizations to shape community attitudes towards education and child protection in Yemen.
- Work with education authorities to develop systematic approaches to education and foster collaboration and coordination among government agencies, humanitarian organizations, UN agencies, and other stakeholders to ensure a holistic and integrated approach to education.
- Take steps to ensure that children's voices are heard and their rights prioritized in dialogue around the UN-led peace process.

ENDNOTES

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