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Students sit on the floor in an overcrowded school in Sana'a.
(Photo: Mohammed Awadh / Save the Children)

FUTURES ON THE LINE

Yemen's children missing an education

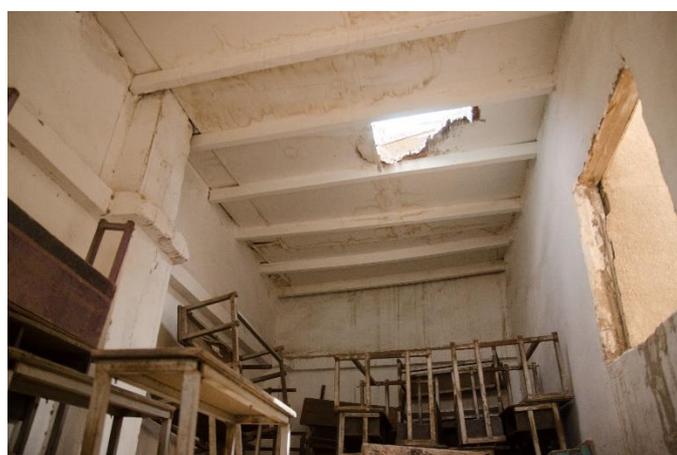
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I. OVERVIEW OF THE HUMANITARIAN AND PROTECTION SITUATION FOR CHILDREN

The humanitarian situation in Yemen has deteriorated month on month since the current armed conflict escalated in March 2015. Today 21.2 million people (or 82% of the population) are in need of humanitarian assistance, including nearly 10 million children who are experiencing unprecedented levels of suffering.

In addition to shortages of food, clean water, healthcare and other basic services, the conflict has severely disrupted the learning of millions of children, putting their development and future at risk. Both access to and quality of education has been impacted by the ongoing crisis, exacerbating pre-existing weaknesses in the sector. The education of 1.8 million children has been interrupted, often for many months, as a result of school closures due to general insecurity, damage and destruction of school facilities from attacks, the military use of schools by armed groups, and the occupation of schools by internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹ At least 1,600 schools remain damaged, occupied or closed.² Today 560,000 children remain out of school as a consequence of the conflict,³ adding to the 1.6 million school age children who already lacked access to education prior to the conflict.⁴



A damaged children's art classroom in Mutasim School in Sana'a. The school was affected by airstrikes which targeted the same area. (Photo: Mohammed Awadh / Save the Children)

Even where schools have reopened, insecurity has contributed to a situation where fewer girls are attending classes, exacerbating the gender education gap that pre-existed the conflict. Those boys and girls who are at school often receive poor quality education, aggravated by the current crisis, due to a combination of overcrowded classrooms, shortages of qualified teachers, and lack of basic equipment including desks, chairs and text books.

Evidence highlights the importance of education for children's development and well-being at a time when they are at their most vulnerable. Quality education can contribute to saving lives during humanitarian crises and protect children from the increased risks of violence, abuse and exploitation. However, to do this, schools must be safe and funding committed to education. Despite the critical role of education in the ensuring the development, well-being and safety of children, just 2% of the USD27.5 million required to provide emergency education during 2016 has so far been committed.

2. ENSURING THE SAFETY AND AVAILABILITY OF SCHOOLS

Airstrikes and ground fighting have badly disrupted education in Yemen, causing the nationwide closure of schools in April and May 2015.⁵ In July, 600,000 pupils were unable to sit national school exams because of the conflict.⁶ The start of the 2015-16 school term was then delayed two months from September to November due to insecurity, occupation of schools by IDPs and the use of schools by military groups, causing millions of children to lose an additional two months of schooling.

Damage and destruction to schools as a result of attacks by parties to the conflict has rendered many schools unusable. During 2015, the UN verified 51 attacks on education facilities, including schools and education personnel.⁷ In August 2015, for example, 13 employees of the Ministry of Education and four of their children were killed in an airstrike on a teachers' office in Amran as they gathered to prepare exams for thousands of children who had missed the end of school year because of the conflict.⁸

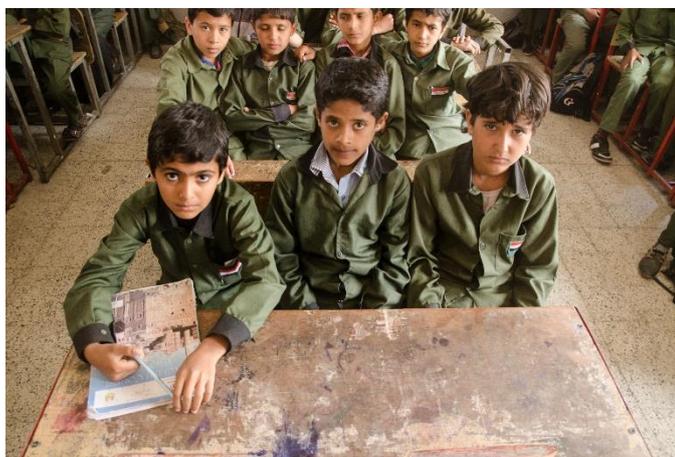
Attacks on schools have been designated by the UN Security Council as among six grave violations against which children should be protected during conflict.⁹ In some cases attacks in Yemen are alleged to have been deliberate and in violation of

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international humanitarian law, under which civilians and vital civilian facilities, including schools, are protected. Amnesty International, for example, investigated five air strikes that took place between August and October 2015 in Hodeidah, Hajjah, and Sana'a governorates, which it concluded appeared to have directly targeted schools.¹⁰ In addition to the lives lost and structural damage to schools, the fear of aerial bombardments and ground attacks that has characterised the conflict in Yemen has caused parents to keep their children at home.

The military use of schools has likewise put schools out of action, disrupted education and endangered children. According to UNICEF, there were 50 verified cases of military use of schools in 2015.¹¹ Not only does this occupy facilities that should be devoted to education, it can turn the school into a target for attack by opposing forces, as was the case on 5 January 2016 when a Saudi Arabia-led coalition bomb hit the compound of a school for blind children and adults in Sana'a, injuring staff and an 18 year-old student. The school was being used as a base by Houthi forces at the time.¹²



Sami*, Salah* and Saeed* attend a school in Sana'a after being displaced from Sada'a, Taiz and Aden. Sami*, 12 years old, was displaced nine months ago. "There was news that our area where our home is would be targeted by airstrikes and we should move before nightfall. Despite the difficulties of moving 25 members of my extended family, including ten children, particularly given the lack of transportation, we were lucky. The night we departed, two missiles hit our neighborhood, damaging part of our house and destroying my school". (Photo: Mohammed Awadh / Save the Children)

Many schools are also occupied by IDPs. One in ten Yemenis have been displaced by the conflict, including an estimated 1.3 million children.¹³ Many of those who have fled their homes have sought shelter in public buildings, including schools, putting them out of action completely or forcing IDPs and students to share facilities. According to the Ministry of

Education, in October 2015, 446 schools could not reopen at the start of the new school year because they were occupied by IDPs.¹⁴ By February 2016, although some schools had been vacated, 184 of these schools remained closed.¹⁵ Some schools occupied by IDPs continue to operate, but classes are reduced and the quality of education is negatively impacted while, at the same time, the lives of IDPs are further disrupted. In one school in Al Taiziyah District in Taizz Governorate, for example, IDP families have to vacate the classrooms for a few hours each day so that teaching can take place.¹⁶

Schools affected by conflict in Ibb Governorate¹⁷

In just one conflict-affected governorate, Ibb, a March 2016 assessment conducted in 18 out of 20 districts by the Yemen Foundation for Development and Response, found that 94 schools had been affected by the conflict. Out of these schools, 66 schools had been or were being used as shelters by IDPs, of which 24 were still operating with IDPs present, while the remaining 42 had been vacated but were in need of rehabilitation. Another 28 schools had been damaged or destroyed – 17 due to airstrikes, of which six had been directly hit and destroyed, and 11 as a result of clashes between fighting forces.

Recommendations

The UN, national governments and other stakeholders with influence over armed forces and armed groups should :

- Strongly condemn violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including attacks on schools and other grave violations against children; demand that parties comply with their obligations under international law; and support the establishment of a fully independent international commission of inquiry to investigate reports of violations.
- Call on all parties to the conflict to stop the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, in order to avoid the devastating and predictable harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools, which their use entails.
- Call on all parties to the conflict to immediately vacate the schools they are using, ensure that schools are safe for students to return, and issue orders to commanders not to use school buildings or school property in accordance with the 'Guidelines for Protecting Schools

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and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict' (the Guidelines).

Yemen Governing Authorities should:

- Express a clear political commitment to protect students and teachers from attack, and schools from military use, by endorsing the 'Safe Schools Declaration,'¹⁸ including incorporating the Guidelines into relevant policy and operational frameworks; collecting data on attacks on students, educational personnel, and facilities; assisting victims; and supporting humanitarian programming that promotes the continuation of education during conflict.
- Prioritise the identification of alternative accommodation for displaced persons occupying schools with support from local authorities and the humanitarian community.

3. ACCESS TO QUALITY LEARNING

The conflict has exacerbated pre-existing challenges relating to the quality of and access to learning. Where schools are functioning or have been rehabilitated and reopened, there remain multiple challenges to delivering quality education to children and to reaching traditionally excluded and marginalized groups. These include ethnic minorities such as the muhamasheen,¹⁹ girls, IDPs, and children from rural communities who were typically less likely to attend school even before the current armed conflict.



Girls attending a damaged school in Sana'a. (Photo: Mohammed Awadh / Save the Children)

Low school attendance among girls in particular is a long-standing problem. Although girls' enrollment and primary education completion rates in Yemen increased substantially in the last decade, gender disparity remained severe, with pre-conflict enrolment rates for girls at 62% compared to 72% for boys of primary-age.²⁰ An assessment conducted in Aden Governorate in March 2016 suggests that the gap between girls and boys attending school has widened further, at least in that governorate, with 76 girls to every 100 boys in the sampled schools, compared to 92 per 100 pre-conflict.²¹ According to the assessment, conflict-related insecurity has compounded pre-existing social, cultural and economic deterrents to sending girls to school.²²

The conflict is also having a detrimental impact on the quality of education, restricting the benefits that education can provide to children's learning and well-being at the time when they are at their most vulnerable. Damage and destruction of schools has limited the number of school facilities available for instruction. Concurrently, in a move to try and ensure that IDP children can continue their education, the Ministry of Education has issued instructions for schools to accept displaced students even if their school credentials are missing.²³ However, the combination of fewer facilities and the hosting of IDP children in schools has resulted in severely overcrowded classrooms. Overcrowding was already an issue before the crisis, but the assessment of schools in Aden found that on average there were 68 children per class, nearly double the already high 40-45 stipulated in Ministry of Education guidance.²⁴ There are also severe shortages of educational materials for both teachers and students, including text books which cannot be printed because of paper shortages or distributed because of lack of fuel in some areas as a result of a de-facto blockade on shipping imposed by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition throughout 2015 and early 2016. Desks, chairs, whiteboards and other basic equipment are also in short supply. Teaching quality is often low, including as a result of shortages of adequately trained teachers and high rates of teacher absenteeism.

Having lived through over a year of brutal armed conflict, both students and teachers also face new psychological challenges. Schools can provide a sense of stability and normalcy that gives children a sense of hope for and control over their future, and at the same time can mitigate the effects of stress caused by crisis, which can affect children's social, emotional and cognitive process and ability to learn and succeed in later years. However, teachers and education officials currently lack the specific skills necessary to support the extraordinary needs of children affected by conflict. In order to cope with and recover

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from such experiences, children need psychosocial support, a protective environment where life and cognitive skills are developed, and a return to a state of normalcy after exposure to trauma.

There is a great need to provide for recreational activities, and basic psychosocial support to enable children to develop coping skills, and process shock and stress. For a smaller group suffering from more serious psychological problems as a result of the conflict, additional support services might be needed.

School attendance can also contribute to protection against human rights violations, including military recruitment and use of children by armed groups – which according to UN figures has increased five-fold in Yemen since March 2015²⁵ - and exploitation and abuse, such as child labour and early child marriage, both of which are commonplace in Yemen.²⁶ Moreover, schools can provide a place for children to learn the skills they need to survive in such a hazardous environment, including landmine awareness and maintaining health and sanitation.

Impact of conflict in the education system in Aden Governorate²⁷

Compared to other governorates, Aden had a comparatively good record of education provision prior to the conflict. However, during much of 2015, all schools in Aden were closed because of fighting, occupation by IDPs, use by armed groups or damage in attacks. As a result, 127,500 children missed between 90 and 160 school days. By January 2016, 90% of the closed schools had re-opened. Despite progress, significant challenges remain. A Joint Education Needs Assessment, led by Save the Children for the Yemen Education Cluster in 18 schools across six of Aden's eight districts in January 2016, revealed that:

- One in five, or 35,000 school-age children in Aden remained out of school.
- 61% of out of school children were girls, which participants suggested were mainly from poor and marginalized communities.
- There was an acute shortage of textbooks across all grades. In 72% of sampled schools, children in grades 1-3 completely lacked textbooks.
- Teacher shortages and absenteeism, both problems before the conflict, continued. Parents interviewed for the assessment estimated that 30% of teachers did not attend school regularly, which was attributed primarily to job dissatisfaction and low salaries which require them to find additional work to supplement their incomes.
- Classroom overcrowding had risen by 26%, with the average teacher to pupil ratio increasing from one teacher for every 54 students pre-conflict to one teacher per 68 students.
- Inadequate access to safe drinking water and insufficient numbers of toilets was cited as a problem by students. Less than half of the sampled schools had gender-segregated toilet facilities.
- Most schools lacked emergency preparedness and planning, and – although 12 out of the 18 sampled schools had introduced new emergency-related topics such as land-mine awareness, HIV prevention, and health and nutrition - integration of protection into the curriculum was limited, and in six of the 18 sampled schools, non-existent.
- Other protection concerns that emerged from the assessment included psychosocial and emotional distress experienced by children, insecurity and fear from gun fire and explosions, and bullying and harassment especially of girls by “loafers”.²⁸



Samira*, 11 years old, with her brother and father sitting in their tent in a displaced camp in Hajja. “I was in grade four before the beginning of the conflict in Yemen. It was difficult to go to school in the IDP camp but my parents made sure I attended regularly. Since being displaced to this new IDP camp I can't go to school. In any case, I don't feel like going to school anymore after I lost my mother and brothers. I feel so scared all the time of the bombings and airstrikes that killed many of my family. I am afraid to be outside our tent just in case something happens to the remaining members of my family and I don't want to go anywhere. And although my mother encouraged me to attend school so one day I could become a doctor, I don't want to go to school anymore.” (Photo: Ali Ashwal / Save the Children).

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Recommendations

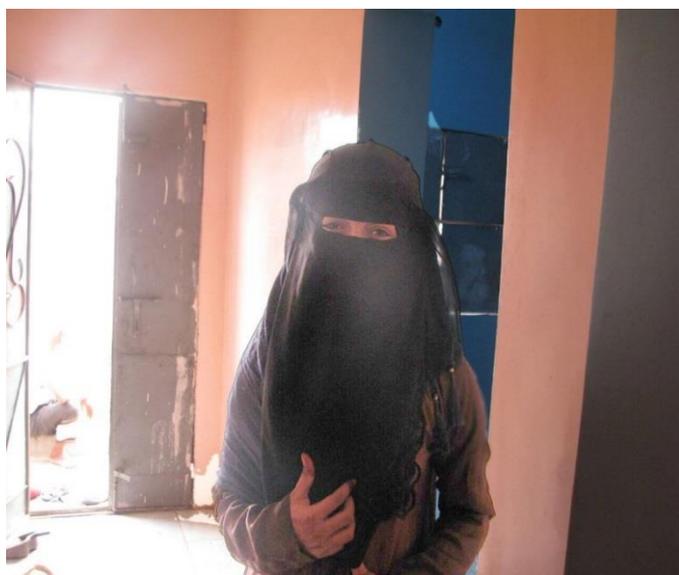
The Ministry of Education, with the support of Education Cluster parties, should work to:

- Increase the availability of safe, quality learning environments by rehabilitating damaged infrastructure and supplementing as needed with temporary learning facilities, and provide school equipment and teaching and learning materials.
- Conduct outreach activities to identify children who have dropped out of school, and establish catch-up classes and alternative forms of education so that children who have missed school can rejoin formal education. There should be a particular focus on girls and vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities.
- Ensure that education programmes receive adequate funding for and prioritise the integration of psychosocial support activities, and training of teachers and social workers to identify and support affected children within the learning environment.
- Provide greater support and professional development opportunities for teachers, social workers and school personnel, with priority accorded to providing psychosocial support and conflict sensitive approaches to education. Ensure that teachers and personnel are paid living wages and that they attend school regularly.
- Ensure that schools develop emergency preparedness plans and safety and security procedures, to ensure the safety and protection of children, teachers and other staff. Train teachers on delivering emergency-related topics including psychosocial education support, mine risk reduction and hygiene promotion.

4. FUNDING

Evidence suggests that in most emergency contexts, children, their families and communities place great store on education.²⁹ Education cannot wait and should be prioritized even as armed conflict continues. Despite the skills-building and life-saving role that education can play, the education sector in Yemen has not been prioritized and is virtually unfunded. Under the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP), 27.5 million USD has been requested to deliver emergency education to 1.8 million children out of a total of three million in need of educational support.³⁰

Without even this urgently required funding for emergency education, hundreds of thousands of children will be denied their basic right to education. Planned emergency classroom repairs, provision of basic school furniture and school supplies, establishment of temporary learning spaces, provision of alternative learning opportunities for out-of-school children, and psychosocial support cannot be delivered. Beyond that, long-term funding is also needed to ensure that all Yemeni children can access quality learning; that teachers are trained – including in teaching methods and classroom management – and receive adequate salary, and for capacity building for education authorities to ensure continuity in the education system despite ongoing conflict.



Reem*, 13 years old, and her family live in Lahj after having been displaced from Taiz. She is now back at school after having missed almost one year. "It took us a long time to reach Lahj governorate and meanwhile my two brothers and I were not going to school. We are now staying in my sister's house in Lahj. It is a safer area but when we first arrived I was upset when I found out that the school in this village was damaged because of the conflict. However, the people in the village opened their houses as classrooms and everyone in the village has contributed to restarting education. I am happy that after almost a year I am attending school again. I am lucky. My two brothers had to drop out because they need to support my family." (Photo: Jehan Bawazeer / Save the Children)

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Recommendations

Donors and international community must:

- Recognize education as a core component of the Yemen humanitarian response and fully fund the USD 27.5 million required under the 2016 YHRP for emergency education services to ensure that children affected by conflict in Yemen have access to quality learning opportunities. Going forward, provide funding to ensure that all children displaced by the conflict are guaranteed not to be out of school for more one month.
- Longer-term, funding must go beyond addressing urgent humanitarian needs, and must take the form of multi-year investment in the provision of enhanced, quality educational services. This includes through capacity building for the Ministry of Education/Education Cluster agencies and support to training and professional support to teachers, as well as monitoring and evaluation of school-related staff performance. Additionally, funding should be made available to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education/Education Cluster agencies to protect children's access to education during emergencies and to improve the education management education system to produce more reliable and timely information. This would allow for more effective planning, informed decision-making and enhanced accountability.



One of the many damaged schools in Lahj Governorate, where Faisal* was the School Director. “Our school was completely destroyed because of the intensified conflict in our district. When the situation was calmer, we tried to resume the second term that we had missed during 2015. But how can we restart the school year when there were no school buildings, no teachers, furniture, books and other school materials?”

It was very challenging to do so but fortunately, community members provided us with strong support. They helped us to rent three houses in the village, some of them being unfinished, with no electricity, water or sanitation services, but still better than a destroyed building. We were able to start the activities after we received the official approval from the Education Office. The teachers and some parents contributed with their own resources to pay the rent of the three houses. We received all displaced students, even those who didn't have their school documents, and supported them to continue their education. We call on everyone to support the reconstruction of schools which should be in adequate, equipped and safe school buildings, and the provision of education to all children”. (Photo: Mona Fishashi / Save the Children)

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ENDNOTES

¹ UNICEF, *Yemen: Childhood Under Threat*, August 2015, p. 9

² Yemen Education Cluster, *2016 Strategy*, p.1

³ UNICEF, *Yemen Situation Report*, April 2016

⁴ OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin Yemen*, Issue 11, 8 May 2016

⁵ UNICEF, *Yemen Situation Report*, October 2015

⁶ In August 2015, the Ministry of Education launched a campaign to allow children to be able to sit their exams. The "National Certification Exams" targeted 600,000 children in grades 9 and 12. Due to insecurity, only 15 out of the 22 Governorates could hold the exams, reaching approximately 65% of the targeted school children. By March 2016, more than 600,000 children in grades 9 and 12 were able to sit their exams and graduate from primary and secondary school.

⁷ UNICEF, *Children on the Brink. The impact of violence and conflict on Yemen and its children*, March 2016, p. 3

⁸ UNICEF, Statement by Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director on attack on teachers' office in Yemen, 19 August 2015, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_82946.html, accessed May 2016

⁹ UN Security Resolution 1612 (2005)

¹⁰ See for example, Amnesty International, 'Our Kids are Being Bombed, Schools Under Attack in Yemen', December 2015.

¹¹ UNICEF, *Children on the Brink. The impact of violence and conflict on Yemen and its children*, March 2016, p. 3

¹² For further details see, Human Rights Watch, *Yemen: Houthis Endangered School for Blind Coalition Airstrike Shows Added Risks for People With Disabilities*, 13 January 2016

¹³ UN OCHA, UNHCR, Protection Cluster Yemen, *Task Force on Population Movement 8th Report*, April 2016

¹⁴ UNICEF, *Yemen Situation Report*, October 2015

¹⁵ Yemen Education Cluster, *Trend of Affected Schools*, August 2015 – February 2016

¹⁶ UN OCHA, *Yemen: Students share classrooms to shelter displaced families*, 5 May 2016, <http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/yemen-students-share-classrooms-shelter-displaced-families>, accessed May 2016

¹⁷ Yemen Foundation for Development and Response, *Assessment of Conflict Damaged Schools in 20 Districts of Ibb Governorate*, March 2016

¹⁸ The Safe Schools Declaration was opened for endorsement at the Oslo Conference on Safe Schools on May 29, 2015 since when over

50 States from around the world have already joined the Declaration.

¹⁹ Muhamasheen, also referred as Al-Akhdam, are considered an outcaste community in Yemen and are discriminated against on all levels. About 10% of Yemenis are believed to be Muhamasheen. They have the lowest school enrolment rate and illiteracy rate as compared to the Yemen's general population's children.

²⁰ UNICEF, *Children on the Brink. The impact of violence and conflict on Yemen and its children*, March 2016, p.5

²¹ Current gender enrolment gap in Aden was calculated based on the *Joint Education Needs Assessment Report* data (see full reference below). Pre-conflict gender enrolment gap is provided in the assessment.

²² Yemen Education Cluster, *Joint Education Needs Assessment Report, Aden, Yemen*, March 2016

²³ UNICEF, *In Yemen, eager to learn, despite the fighting*, 25 September 2015, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/yemen_85650.html, accessed May 2016

²⁴ Quoted in Yemen Education Cluster, *Joint Education Needs Assessment Report, Aden, Yemen*, March 2016, p. 14

²⁵ UNICEF and CAC, *Yemen children bearing the brunt of brutal conflict*, attributable to Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and Dr. Peter Salama, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, 10 April 2016

²⁶ Global Protection Cluster, *Child Protection Desk Review - Yemen*, August 2015

²⁷ Yemen Education Cluster, *Joint Education Needs Assessment Report, Aden, Yemen*, March 2016

²⁸ "Loafer" in Arabic refers to youth who do not work/study, they sit in the corners and to verbally and sometimes physically harass girls.

²⁹ Save the Children, *What do Children Want in times of Emergency and Crisis? They Want an Education*, June 2015

³⁰ UN OCHA, *Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan*, January 2016, p. 23

* All names changed to protect identities