

CHILDREN ON THE BRINK

THE IMPACT
OF VIOLENCE
AND CONFLICT
ON **YEMEN**
AND ITS
CHILDREN





BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

On 26 March 2015, the conflict in Yemen escalated into a brutal war as violence gripped most of the country. The southern cities of Aden and Taiz are in ruins, the northern city of Sa'ada is wrecked and many other areas are extensively damaged. Yemen is in the midst of an acute humanitarian crisis.

And there is no end in sight to the deadly conflict. Close to 10 million children face fear, pain and deprivation.

Children do not start wars, yet are the most vulnerable to their deadly effects.

UNICEF verified more than 1,560 incidents of grave violations against children in Yemen. As a result, over 900 children were killed and more than 1,300 were injured in the past year alone. On average at least six children have been killed or maimed every day since March 2015, a sevenfold increase compared with the whole of 2014. Most of the killing and maiming of children happened in the governorates of Taiz, Sana'a, Sa'ada, Aden and Hajjah where the violence and fighting have been the heaviest. Children represent around one third of all civilian deaths since March 2015.

Child recruitment has exponentially increased in the past year. The UN documented 848 cases of child recruitment most of them in Sana'a, Shabwa, Taiz, Abyan and Aden. Reports indicate that warring parties recruited children as young as 10 years old in the fighting.

Tragic as they are, these statistics are a tip of the iceberg as they only represent cases that UNICEF was able to verify.

Attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian assistance to children continue to occur. The UN verified 51 attacks on education facilities, including schools and personnel while 50 additional schools were occupied by parties to the conflict denying children a chance to learn.

Even hospitals were not spared. According to latest data, 63 health facilities were attacked and three were used for military purposes.

Basic services and infrastructure in Yemen are on the verge of total collapse. Schools, health facilities, and water and sanitation systems have been destroyed, evacuated or forced to close down due to the lack of fuel, supplies and financial resources.

The scale of suffering in the country is staggering. The violence has forced the majority of Yemenis into destitution. An estimated 21.2 million people - 82 per cent of the total population - need urgent humanitarian assistance.¹ Almost half of those in need are children.

The violence has forced people to flee, sometimes overnight. Displacement levels have jumped from 334,000 at the end of 2014 to 2.4 million in February 2016.² Half of the displaced are children. Most displaced people live in overburdened host communities, sharing homes of relatives or sheltering in public buildings, makeshift tents or in the open air.

“ I had no time to take anything, all I had were the clothes on me and a ring. I just ran on the street holding my children. I saw people getting in a car so I jumped on with my children. I didn't even know where it was going. ”

Elham Ghalib, a 23-year-old mother and nurse who fled the city of Taiz. She lost her three-year-old daughter when her parents' house was bombed.

These massive needs for urgent, life-saving assistance come at a time when humanitarian and commercial delivery of food and other basic supplies is more challenging and dangerous than ever.

Since March last year, restrictions on imports - and severe damage to the western port of Al-Hodeida, the main import hub for supplies into the country's north - hindered the rapid delivery of critical commodities to people in need. Parties to the conflict set up roadblocks and checkpoints challenging the access of humanitarian teams and the delivery of supplies.

1 UNOCHA, Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan, February 2016.

2 *ibid.*

Yemen was cut off from its food pipeline. Fuel has been in very short supply, bringing services to a standstill and crippling the economy at a time when the needs of desperate families and children continue to increase.

Even before the conflict intensified last year, Yemen needed large amounts of humanitarian assistance, with 15.9 million people - 61 per cent of the total population - in need.³ These needs stemmed from years of widespread poverty, underdevelopment, environmental decline, intermittent conflict and a fragile rule of law.

Child and maternal mortality rates were much higher than in other countries across the region.

With global media and donor attention flitting from one crisis to another, Yemen risks becoming a forgotten crisis. Yet the needs of Yemen's children are enormous. Almost all of Yemen's population are in need of humanitarian assistance.

“ He had big dreams. He deserved to live to fulfill them. But he also had no choice with all the pressure around him to take up weapons and go to war. A child, inexperienced in fighting, was dragged to such a cruel end. ”

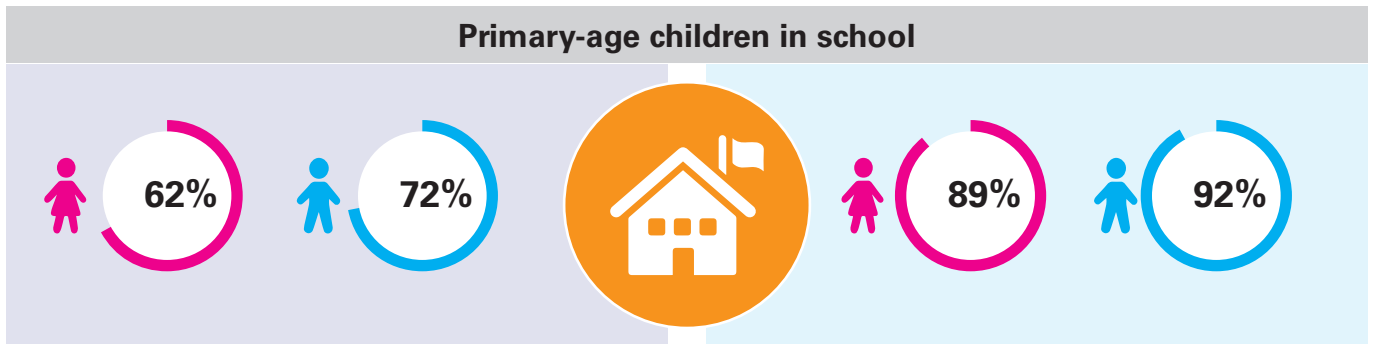
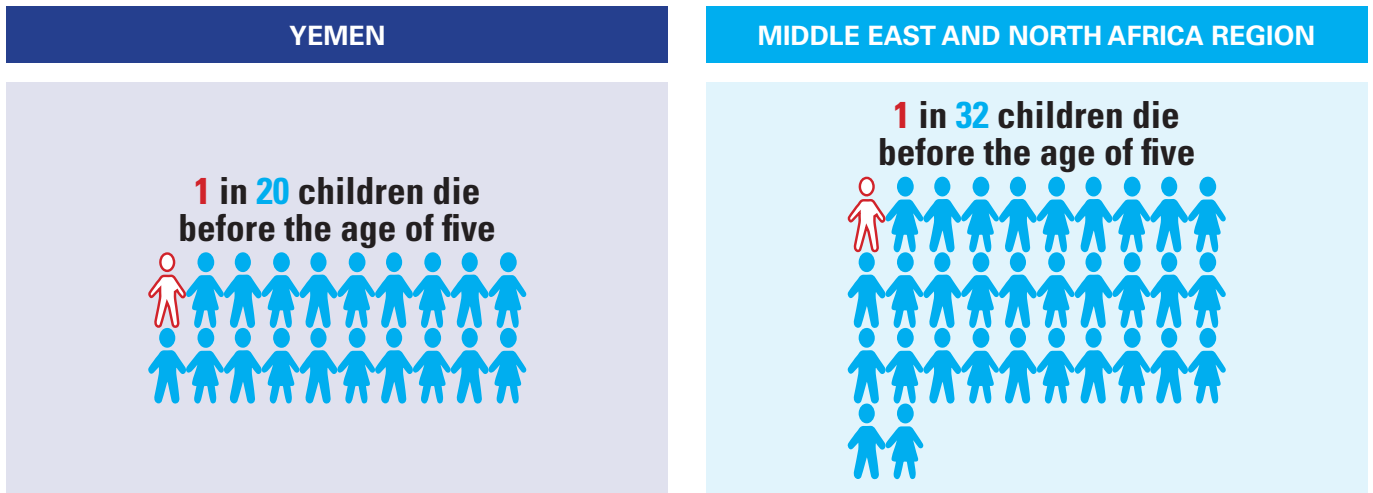
Jehad, sister of 15-year old Mohammed who was killed in violence in the Ma'alla district, in the southern city of Aden.

3 UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2016 Yemen, November 2015



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A boy from the Muhamasheen minority community hold his younger brother in their makeshift shelter in Sana'a.

Yemen's child and maternal indicators were already well below regional averages before the escalation of the crisis.





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A marginalized mother with her child, during the registration of beneficiaries for UNICEF's social support.

A FUTURE IN JEOPARDY

“I feel scared...very scared. Everything around me is frightening. My mother’s sad face and her tears are what torture me the most. I am scared that all of us will die in this dark basement.”

Abdullah Nawar, 13, trapped with his family in Aden

Even if children survive the bombs and bullets, the broader impact of violence goes much further and will have an impact for generations to come.

The conflict is deepening poverty and deprivation, keeping children locked in a vicious cycle of violence, loss and uncertainty.

Nearly half of the population of Yemen lived under the poverty line. With 50 percent of Yemen’s population less than 18 years old, there were at least six million children living in poverty.

In particular, the minority community of the Muhamasheen is one of the most affected. Even before the fighting escalated in March last year, they languished at the margins of society, suffering from persistent discrimination.

According to a mapping of 9,200 Muhamasheen households carried out by UNICEF and the Social Welfare Fund in 2015, there are serious disparities between the marginalized Muhamasheen community and the general population in education, housing, child protection and water and sanitation.

Only nine per cent of homes in Muhamasheen communities had piped water, against 29 per cent of the general population. 39 per cent of children aged 6 - 17 years were enrolled in education, compared to the national average of 69 per cent. Over half of Muhamasheen children under one year old had not been immunized.

The hopes of children and families of escaping from spiraling poverty will soon be dashed if the war continues.

The Social Welfare Fund, a public cash transfer introduced in 1996 on which 35 per cent of Yemenis depended to make ends meet, has been severely disrupted by the conflict and lack of funding. With the collapse in social protection systems and decline in basic services, the urgency of reviving cash transfers is paramount.

Living in violent environments, children experience what no child should witness, the destruction of their homes or the death of their parents, siblings or friends. Physical dangers lurk everywhere for children. Public buildings, schools, fields and communal areas are littered with mines, unexploded bombs and other remnants of war.

The physical and emotional violence to which children in Yemen are exposed shatters their world. Many will carry these heavy emotional burdens into adulthood.

Health in Precarious Balance

The escalation of the conflict in Yemen has left an estimated 14.1 million people, including 7.4 million children, in need of health care.

These huge needs come at a time when the health system is on the brink of collapse.

Nearly 600 health facilities have stopped working due to damage and shortages in supply, electricity, fuel and personnel. According to reports, more than 100 health facilities have either been partially damaged or completely destroyed by conflict. The UN was able to verify 63 attacks on health facilities. A fifth of all vaccination centres and district vaccine stores are now closed down. Health workers have been killed or injured and many have fled. Medicines and medical equipment are in short supply. Outbreaks of measles and dengue fever in 2015 show how precarious public health is in the current situation.

UNICEF estimates that nearly 10,000 children under the age of five may have died in the past year from preventable diseases as a result of the decline in key health services such as immunization against vaccine preventable diseases and the treatment of diarrhoea and pneumonia. This is in addition to nearly 40,000 children who die every year in Yemen before their fifth birthday.⁴

The estimates also show that 2.5 million children face the threat of diarrhoeal diseases and over 320,000 are at risk of severe acute malnutrition. In addition, over 1.3 million children are at risk of acute respiratory tract infections and 2.6 million of them under the age of 15 are at risk of measles.

Without access to basic and obstetric health care, clean water, sanitation facilities, food and shelter, young children and mothers – the most vulnerable of population groups – will succumb to infectious diseases, other preventable causes of death and malnutrition in far greater numbers than before. Studies have shown that between 3 to 15 times as many people die from indirect causes of armed conflict as from direct causes.

4 State of World's Children Report, 2015



Malnutrition Escalating

Before March 2015, almost half of all children under the age of five in Yemen were chronically malnourished. Today, UNICEF estimates that 320,000 children face severe malnutrition, while 2.2 million children need urgent humanitarian assistance to prevent a further deterioration in their nutritional status.

Malnutrition will stunt children's growth and blunt their intellect. In the worse cases, it is fatal. The economic costs of malnutrition are very high, running to millions of dollars in lost GDP. If Yemen is to find a lasting way out of violence, poverty and underdevelopment, it cannot afford the costs of malnutrition.

The Basics of Life Running Dry

After 12 months of violence, 10.2 million children risk going without safe drinking water and sanitation.

Before March 2015, Yemen was already one of the world's most water-scarce countries. Over-pumping is rapidly depleting the remaining aquifers. In 2012, only 55 per cent of the population had access to an improved drinking water source, with vast inequalities in access between the rich (99 per cent access) and the poor (8 per cent). Women and girls are most seriously affected.⁵ One third of women and girls take 1.5 hours roundtrips to fetch water far away from their dwellings. Only one third of Yemenis living in the rural areas use improved latrines or toilets.

The entire country now faces a water, sanitation and hygiene emergency. Due to the erratic power supply, incapacity of water service providers, and a lack of supplies and funds, more than half of the Yemeni population experienced a dramatic deterioration in access to improved water sources, primarily piped water. This resulted in a greater reliance on uncontrolled private water vendors including water trucking or unreliable water sources like agricultural or unprotected traditional wells. This has exposed the population, especially children, to a high risk of waterborne diseases. Up to 2.5 million children are at risk of diarrhoea, compared to 1.5 million by end of 2014.

A Bleak Future

Education is often overlooked in emergencies in favour of more immediate life-saving responses. Yet the routine and security of attending class is precisely what frightened and distressed children need.

However, countless children in Yemen are risking the prospects of seeing a classroom diminish with every passing day.

After the escalation of the conflict and the closure of nearly 3,600 schools, over 1.8 million school-aged children were forced out of school, bringing the school-age population out of school to 3.4 million, half of the total school age children. Although schools re-opened in November 2015, over 1,600 schools remain closed due to insecurity, infrastructural damages or use as shelters by displaced people, mainly in al-Jawf, Sa'ada and Taiz governorates. The Education Cluster estimates that more than 1,000 schools have been damaged and 184 are used as shelters by displaced populations. The closure of schools now impacts nearly 387,000 children.⁶

Without investment and support for education, the chances of Yemen and its children recovering and building a peaceful future are bleak.

“Sometimes I still hear children's laughter in the school yard. Then I realize that I'm just imagining. There are no more children in this school.”

Umm Mojeeb, a community volunteer in Toban district, Lahej governorate, speak of Al-Shahyed Abdulalim primary school, which had more than 500 children before it was destroyed.

⁵ Baseline survey conducted in 2012 on the 106 districts of the UNICEF Country Programme 2012-15.

⁶ Yemen Situation Report, February 2016.

UNICEF AND PARTNERS IN THE FIELD

In the past 12 months UNICEF and its partners were able to mount a rapid, large-scale and innovative humanitarian response.

“Public services like health, water and sanitation have been decimated and cannot meet the ever-increasing needs of a desperate population. But we refuse to give in. Here in Taiz, with the help of our partners, UNICEF has provided support to water service providers so that piped water supply services in most seriously affected towns could be sustained. Also 93,500 children were treated for severe acute malnutrition and over 520,000 were able to take their delayed school exams. This makes our work worthwhile.”

Mohammed A. Ali, UNICEF WASH specialist in Taiz



Health

“During these campaigns, I vaccinate as many as 375 children a day. While on regular days, I vaccinate roughly 40 children who come to the centre on Mondays and Wednesdays.”

Entesar Saeed Bamoumen, a midwife from Mukalla city, part of the mass polio and measles vaccination campaigns in 2015.

UNICEF used an integrated and mobile approach to emergency health service delivery to reach the maximum number of women and children as quickly as possible.

Yemen’s polio-free status was maintained through two mass national immunization days in 2015. Displaced children living in communities and districts with low immunization coverage were vaccinated against measles and polio. UNICEF helped to restore and maintain the vaccine cold chain by providing solar-powered fridges and vaccines, at a time when fuel and power shortages were frequent.

In 2015, five outreach campaigns offered immunization, Vitamin A supplementation, de-worming, screening and treatment of childhood illnesses and malnutrition to children and women living far from health centres. Mothers were offered ante- and post-natal care. Each round reached around a quarter of a million children.

The number of mobile health teams increased from 25 prior to the conflict to 94 by the end of November 2015. Local medical teams drove through the country in “rescue cars,” often on roads fraught with danger, to provide a lifeline to children and mothers in remote areas cut off from vital health services. Midwives, as part of the teams screening and treating malnourished children, helped with home deliveries, attended to pregnancy-related complications and treated common childhood illnesses.

Key response activities in 2015

- **4.68 million** children under the age of five vaccinated against polio, maintaining Yemen’s polio-free status
- **1.8 million** children vaccinated against measles
- **57,000** children treated for childhood illnesses and 43,000 women provided with ante- and post-natal care by mobile health teams
- **570** health facilities in **17** governorates given health supplies and medicines to cover the needs of 400,000 people



Nutrition

Children and women were screened for malnutrition and provided with treatment, especially for life-threatening severe acute malnutrition. Vitamin A, iron and multi-micronutrient powders supplied during outreach activities helped boost children and women's immunity and nutritional status. Children were de-wormed to prevent malnutrition and mothers were counseled on feeding infants and young children.

Between 2015 and early 2016, UNICEF supplied 3,159 metric tons of therapeutic food and vitamins to treat 197,242 severely malnourished children.

In 2015, nutrition surveys were carried out in five of the ten highly affected governorates (Hodedidah, Hajja, Aden, Lahj and Albaida).

The results pointed to a much more serious situation than earlier projections suggested. For example in Hodeida, 96,600 children under the age of five were found at risk of severe acute malnutrition compared to 23,000 before the escalation of the conflict in March. In Aden, the figure was 7,700 compared to 3,000. The outcome of these surveys helped UNICEF and partners to mount a rapid response.

Key response activities in 2015

- **4.1 million** children under the age of five supplemented with Vitamin A and multiple micronutrient powders.
- **175,979** children under the age of five de-wormed.
- **243,865** pregnant and breastfeeding mothers supplemented with iron to prevent anemia.
- **1.44 million** children screened for malnutrition.
- **197,424** children treated for severe acute malnutrition



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

“Yemen is on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe. We are working around the clock to provide children and their families affected by the conflict with clean water and basic hygiene kits like soap and jerry cans. Our biggest fear is that the children who survive bullets and bombs may die of preventable diseases like diarrhoea and pneumonia.”

Marije Broekhuysen, UNICEF WASH specialist.

UNICEF in Yemen began providing fuel to local water corporations in 11 governorates to restore urban water supply systems. To tackle the piles of solid waste accumulating in the streets of Hodeida and Sana'a, UNICEF provided fuel to a local "Cleaning and Improvement Fund."

School toilets and water points were repaired in more than 300 schools and fuel provided to run rural water projects in Sa'ada governorate.

In conflict-affected areas and where internal displacement was widespread, including Ibb, Lahj, Amran, Abyan, Sana'a and Taiz, water was trucked to vulnerable displaced families and host communities. Water tanks and temporary toilets were constructed and hygiene kits, ceramic water filters and water purification tablets provided.

Key response activities in 2015

- **3.76 million** people have access to improved water.
- **3.3 million** litres of fuel provided to local water corporations in 11 governorates to pump water to 1.2 million people.
- **59,474** families received hygienic items, household water filters, and hygiene promotion messages.
- More than **300,000** school children benefitted from rehabilitated toilets and water points in schools.



Education

“ Understanding the risk of being out of school for a long time and learning about the loss that it would cause, I tried to spend some time at night reviewing mathematics and literacy lessons with my own children. But I was thinking of all those who continued to be out of school. I was so relieved when schools finally reopened.”

Abdullah Modesh, UNICEF education specialist in Yemen.

More than 600,000 children in Grades 9 and 12 were able to sit their exams and graduate from primary and secondary school. UNICEF provided support to the Ministry of Education to print, administer and grade the exams.

Minor repair of partially damaged schools is ongoing and tents have been provided to set up temporary classrooms in areas with vulnerable displaced children.

School bags with learning supplies were given to displaced and other vulnerable children to help ease them back into schooling. UNICEF and partners launched a large-scale training programme for social workers and teachers to provide psychosocial support to traumatized children.

Key response activities in 2015

- **373,487** internally displaced children and other out-of-school children provided with catch-up classes, school bags and learning material. Textbooks delivered to **300** schools; **90** schools cleaned of debris and **321** classroom tents provided.
- **1,500** teachers trained to give psychosocial support to traumatized children.
- Ministry of Education supported to print, administer and score Grade 9 and 12 exams for more than **600,000** children.



Child Protection

UNICEF and partners deliver community-based child protection services, including psychosocial support, focusing on strengthening the capacity of children, families and communities to overcome the impact of conflict and displacement and to protect children from further violence, abuse and exploitation. Issues like abuse, birth registration, child marriage and good parenting skills have been prioritized. Response also includes basic psychological first aid training for those involved in service provision and child protection outreach with volunteers.

Children and their communities benefited from large scale mine risk education campaigns to reduce risks of injury and death amongst internally displaced and host communities.

Key response activities in 2015

- **372,956** children in distress benefited from community-based child protection including psychosocial support.
- Close to **470,000** people provided with information on safety measures for mines and unexploded bombs, grenades and other remnants of war.



Social Protection

Until 2015, the Social Welfare Fund reached 7.9 million people, but was suspended in March 2015. In response, UNICEF began supporting humanitarian cash transfers to prevent the poorest and most vulnerable Yemenis from falling into destitution. The monthly cash grant of US\$100 per month have reached 12,500 households, mostly from the marginalized Muhamasheen communities in Sana'a and Taiz. Mothers and female-headed households are the primary beneficiaries of the grant. Most of the recipients report that their living conditions have improved as a result of the cash transfer.

The programme is currently facing a major and urgent funding gap of US\$20 million. If the shortfall is not met, UNICEF will not be able to continue supporting these 12,500 households in Sana'a and Taiz beyond May 2016, with no possibility of expanding support to other desperately needy families and children.

Key response activities in 2015

- More than **87,500** vulnerable people from the Muhamasheen community and other poor households provided with cash transfers.



Humanitarian Supplies

UNICEF has sought innovative solutions to bring essential medicine, water and nutrition supplies to those in need at a time when imports are restricted and port infrastructure damaged. A transit supply hub was set up in neighbouring Djibouti. Local sailing vessels were used to bring supplies to smaller ports on the Yemen coastline along the Gulf of Eden. UNICEF chartered flights to bring vaccines into Yemen when commercial airline routes were suspended. Between March 2015 and February 2016 boats and chartered planes have transported 4,157 metric tons of humanitarian supplies to Yemen.

Moving supplies inside Yemen is a challenge. UNICEF has worked with local partners, including ministries, to apply for transport permits and secure passage through checkpoints manned by the warring parties. A reputable local company was engaged to help monitor the delivery of humanitarian aid to children and women in areas where UNICEF staff cannot access because of security concerns.

Key response activities in 2015

- **4,157** metric tons of emergency supplies delivered to Yemen between March 2015 and February 2016.



THE WAY FORWARD

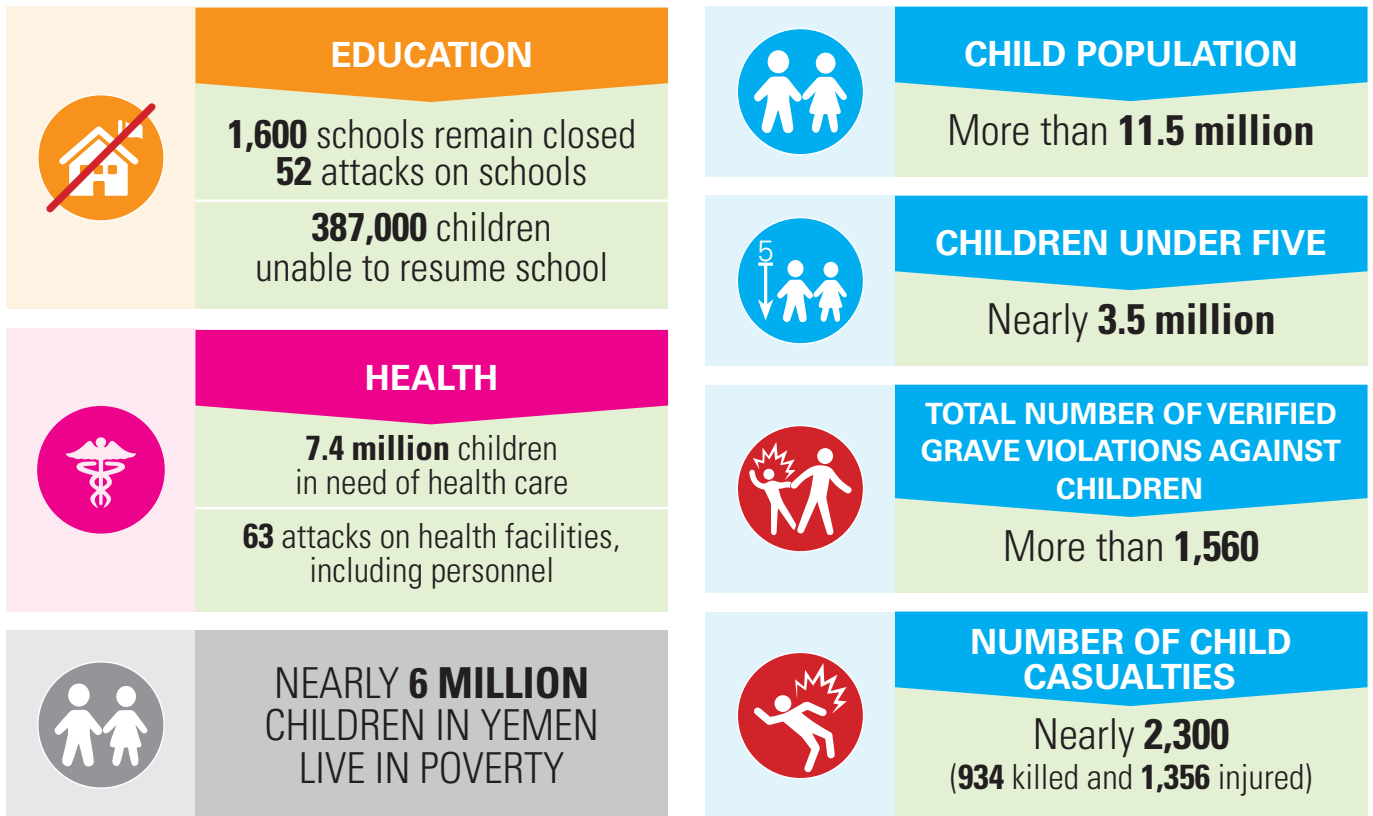
Donor support was considerable in 2015, helping fund just over three quarters of UNICEF's humanitarian requirements that year. The year 2016 began with good momentum but more funding is urgently needed. The unrelenting war is pushing children and women into the worst crisis the country has ever experienced. Every minute counts.

UNICEF reiterates its call to all parties to the conflict to put an end to fighting in Yemen and reach a political settlement. While the search for peace continues, urgent measures are needed:

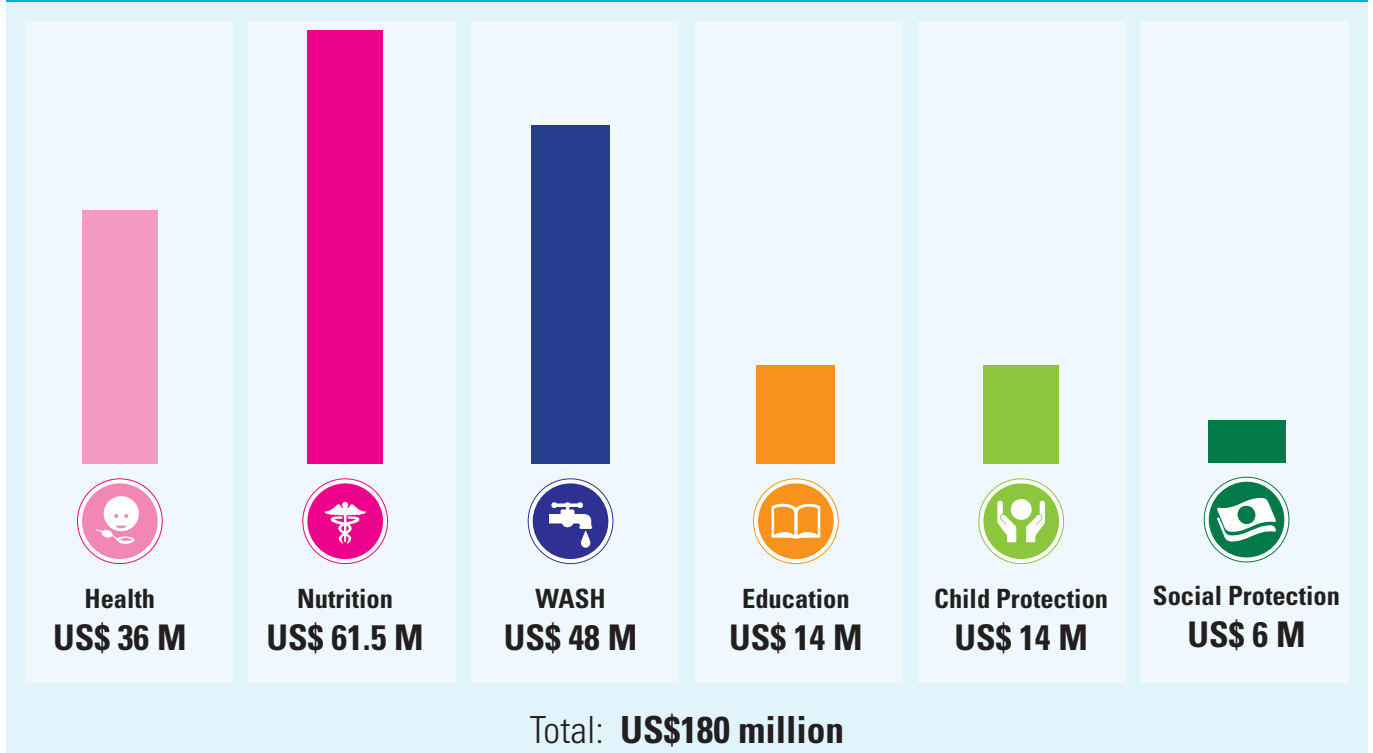
- **All parties to the conflict should abide by the laws of war, and immediately stop attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools, health and water facilities;**
- **All parties should put an end to child recruitment and allow all children in their ranks to return to their communities. Parties to the conflict must prevent all boys and girls under the age of 18 from participating in hostilities or supporting armed groups in any manner, non-combat roles included.**
- **All parties should provide unhindered and unconditional humanitarian access to all children wherever they are in the country, including areas cut off by conflict.**
- **UNICEF and its partners urgently need to secure funding. To date, UNICEF has received only 18% of its \$180 million funding requirements for 2016.**



IN YEMEN



UNICEF'S FUNDING NEEDS FOR 2016



Funding Gap: US\$148 million



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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A boy sits amid rubble, all that remains of his home – which was
destroyed in an air strike – in Okash Village, near Sana'a, the capital.

