Air strikes and bombings affected as many as 1,500 schools and 100 universities in Yemen. Individually targeted attacks by non-state armed groups killed or injured almost 100 university students and personnel. Armed forces and non-state armed groups used dozens of schools and universities for military purposes, particularly in the contested city of Taizz, and there was at least one case in which two children were recruited at a school.

Context

Fighting in Yemen began in 2011, as protest movements called attention to the need for stronger human rights protections in the country and made other demands inspired by the Arab Spring movement across the Middle East and North Africa region. Following months of protests against his rule, President Ali Abdullah Saleh agreed to step down under the terms of a deal with the Gulf Cooperation Council. He stepped down in 2012, but the transitional process was aborted when fighting broke out in 2014. In September 2014, the Zaidi Shiite Houthi armed group (also known as Ansar Allah), who were allied with Saleh, took over the capital, Sana’a, and much of the country’s north.

This violence escalated in March 2015 after a Saudi-led coalition, at the request of the internationally recognized government of President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, launched a military operation against the Houthis and the Saleh loyalists who were allied with them. Violent extremist groups like al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the local ‘IS’ affiliate also carried out numerous attacks against Houthi forces and the Hadi government in various cities. In late 2017 the Houthis killed their former ally, ex-president Saleh, after he and his forces withdrew from their nearly three-year alliance. The conflict continued between the coalition, Yemeni government, and the Houthis.

The violence gravely affected Yemen’s children. Between March 2015 and September 2017, at least 5,006 children were reported to have been killed or injured, and more than 400,000 school-age children were among the millions displaced. According to OCHA, as of December 2017, 1.9 million out of 7.5 million school-age children in Yemen were out of school. By August 2017, the largest number of schools that were inoperable due to destruction, damage, or use by IDPs or armed forces was concentrated in Taizz (325), Aden (260), Saada (239), and Amanat al-Asimah (227) governorates.

The 2013-2017 reporting period saw a marked increase in attacks on education compared to the period covered in Education under Attack 2014, particularly in the form of attacks on schools, which was largely due to Saudi-led coalition air strikes.

Yemen endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration in October 2017.

Attacks on schools

Reports of attacks on schools began to rise dramatically in 2015, seemingly as a consequence of air strikes on areas controlled by Houthi-Saleh forces. Prior to 2015, attacks on schools usually took the form of mortars fired and explosives placed by unknown attackers and non-state armed groups. By December 2017, OCHA reported that air strikes and shelling had fully destroyed 256 schools and that another 1,413 schools were partially damaged. The UN was able to verify 144 attacks on schools during the same period. According to the Education Cluster, the damage was most significant in the Houthi-controlled areas of Saada governorate.

UN and government reports stated that dozens of schools were damaged or destroyed in 2013. The UN documented but was unable to verify a total of 35 attacks on schools or education personnel, including mortar attacks and timed explosives. Attacks on schools in 2013 included the following:

- The US Department of State reported that on May 25, 2013, in al-Jawf governorate, an unidentified bomber drove a car full of explosives into a school during Friday prayers, killing at least 12 people. The number of students and teachers harmed was not reported.
- Unknown assailants targeted a girls’ school in Saada city on December 31, 2013, detonating a device outside the school buildings. It was not clear whether the school was targeted because it was a girls’ school or for other reasons.
Reported rates of attacks on schools remained similar throughout 2014. That year the UN verified 35 attacks on schools by various parties to the conflict. Among these, fighting between Houthi-Saleh forces, the Yemeni Air Force, and pro-government tribal militias destroyed 10 schools in Amanah al-Asimah governorate. Many of the schools attacked that year closed as a result.\textsuperscript{2539}

Reports of attacks on schools increased in 2015, corresponding with the start of Saudi-led air strikes and intensifying conflict. The UN verified 92 attacks on schools in 2015, including 62 in Taizz, 20 in Saada, 19 in Lahj, 14 in Amanat al-Asimah, and 10 in Aden.\textsuperscript{2540} Of the 42 attacks on schools described in the UN Secretary-General’s “Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict,” 57 percent were attributed to the Saudi-led coalition, 16 percent to Houthi-Saleh forces, and 21 percent to unknown perpetrators. The most heavily affected governorates were Saada (10 attacks), Taizz (10), and Amanat al-Asimah (12).\textsuperscript{2541}

Using information shared by the Education Cluster and the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, GCPEA found that there were at least 200 attacks on schools in 2015.\textsuperscript{2542} According to Human Rights Watch researchers, indiscriminate Saudi-led air strikes in 2015 and 2016 caused 90 percent of the damage to or destruction of schools in Sana’a, the capital.\textsuperscript{2543} Examples of reported incidents included the following:

- The UN verified that air strikes between March and May 2015 damaged at least 38 schools.\textsuperscript{2544}
- Human Rights Watch reported that one air strike on al-Rasheedi School in Ibb on April 7, 2015, killed two children and wounded two others.\textsuperscript{2545} This incident was not included in the UN-verified list.
- Local media reported that on November 14, 2015, unidentified attackers threw explosive devices at the Martyr Zubairi School in Hudaydah city, al-Hudaydah governorate. It is unknown if there were casualties from the blast.\textsuperscript{2546}

Reported attacks on schools were slightly fewer in 2016 than in 2015. The UN verified one-third of the attacks, as it had the previous year, including 33 incidents affecting 30 schools in 2016. Air strikes carried out by the Saudi-led coalition damaged the majority (28) of these schools, while the Houthis were reportedly responsible for four and the Yemeni Armed Forces for one.\textsuperscript{2547} According to information shared by local sources and media reports, there were at least 70 reported but unverified attacks on schools that year.\textsuperscript{2548} One school in Taizz was repeatedly bombed on approximately a dozen different days between January and December 2016.\textsuperscript{2549} Although data on casualties resulting from attacks on schools were scarce, at least several attacks were deadly. For example:

- Mortars fired by suspected Houthi-Saleh forces struck a school in Taizz governorate on June 8, 2016, according to media sources. Five people were killed in the attack, but it was not clear whether they were students or education personnel.\textsuperscript{2550}
- On August 13, 2016, according to information verified by the UN, at least 7 children were killed and approximately 21 injured in a Saudi-led coalition air strike on a school in Haydan, Saada governorate, where Houthi-Saleh forces were active.\textsuperscript{2551}

The UN verified at least nine attacks on schools in 2017.\textsuperscript{2552} According to information from Human Rights Watch and media reports, both the Saudi-led coalition and Houthi-Saleh forces were responsible for attacks throughout the year. For example:

- On January 10, 2017, an air strike on an informal gas station near al-Faleh School killed two students and a school administrator and wounded three other children. The attack also damaged the school’s windows, electrical wires, and speakers.\textsuperscript{2553}
- According to the Independent, an opposition news agency reported that a second school was struck by a Saudi-led coalition air strike outside Sana’a on January 22, 2017.\textsuperscript{2554}
- A local activist told Human Rights Watch that there was one attack near a school on May 21, 2017, when Houthi-Saleh forces were shelling the area.\textsuperscript{2555}
According to information shared by an international humanitarian organization, armed men attacked schools in eight instances in October 2017, in an attempt to force their education personnel to engage in a strike demanding higher teacher salaries. An international humanitarian organization also reported to GCPEA that around November 2017, principals and several district heads of education reported increased threats against schools on social media. For example, several schools had received WhatsApp messages threatening that they would be bombed if girls continued to attend school.

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

From 2013 to 2017, attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel in Yemen included killings, torture, assaults, illegal detention, and threats of violence in forms similar to those highlighted in the 2014 issue of *Education under Attack*. The total number—approximately 100 students and education personnel harmed by targeted attacks—were also consistent with the levels reported in *Education under Attack 2014*.

Gunfire and other types of violent attacks killed and injured students and teachers in sporadically reported incidents in 2013. For example:

- According to the UN, on February 23, 2013, Houthi-Saleh fighters allegedly entered Al-Emam Al-Hady School in Saada governorate and demanded to use the school to temporarily detain a prisoner. When school administrators refused to allow the prisoner to enter, the group opened fire, injuring one teacher.
- Media sources reported that on April 4, 2013, armed assailants beat the principal of Al-Fatah School in Al-Hash-wah district with the butts of their rifles. Local sources claimed that Houthi forces were responsible for the attack, which was carried out in retaliation for the principal prohibiting students from chanting a Houthist slogan.

Sporadic reports of targeted killings and abductions continued into 2014. For example:

- According to media reports, on February 23, 2014, armed assailants allegedly from Ansar al-Sharia, a subgroup of al-Qaeda, opened fire on a group of Houthi-affiliated teachers in Al Bayda governorate, killing two. The teachers did not appear to be at school when the attack occurred.
- The same media source reported that Houthi forces abducted two teachers on July 13, 2014, in Saada city, and unknown assailants exploded a device under a school vehicle in Amran, just north of Sana’a, killing six people and wounding four others on September 11, 2014. It was unclear how many of those killed or injured in the second attack were students or education personnel.
- The UN verified that on December 16, 2014, a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb near a primary school bus close to a Houthi checkpoint in Radaa city, Al Bayda governorate, killing at least 9 children and injuring 24.

Reported violence individually targeting students and education personnel escalated in 2015, harming close to 50 individuals in documented attacks. For example:

- Media sources reported that on April 9, 2015, suspected assailants affiliated with Houthi forces entered a religious school in Yarim, Ibb governorate, and abducted the director and 15 students. Their whereabouts were still unknown as of May 2017.
- The Human Rights Council, UNICEF, and Save the Children each reported that on August 18, 2015, unidentified jets struck a teachers’ office in Amran in an air strike, killing 13 Ministry of Education personnel and four of the teachers’ children. Twenty people were killed and seventeen injured, including five children. According to Education International, the teachers had gathered after school to prepare exams for thousands of children who had missed the end of the school year, due to continued fighting.
- The Education Cluster provided information that on November 4, 2015, a stray bullet injured a primary school girl in her shoulder while she played during recess at Dar Sa’ad School in Aden.
According to the Taizz-based Research and Education Resources Information Centre, there were 16 incidents of children killed on their way to or from school in 2016. Students and teachers also were reported abducted in at least two incidents:

- According to media sources, fourteen civilians, including five teachers and two students, were allegedly abducted by suspected Houthis on April 27, 2016, in al-Taizziyah district, Taizz governorate. The outcome of the kidnapping was unknown at the time of writing.

- On September 20, 2016, armed assailants thought to be Houthi-Saleh fighters entered the classroom of an English-language school in Sana’a and kidnapped an American teacher. The outcome of the kidnapping was unknown at the time of writing.

In 2017 there were three reported attacks on students or education personnel:

- On January 5, 2017, the Gulf News wrote that a shell fired by Houthi forces killed one primary school student and injured another as they were walking home from school. This incident was not documented or verified by the UN.

- An international humanitarian organization reported that on September 13, 2017, an army commander attacked an education office in Al-Dali governorate after threatening the director of education.

- The international humanitarian organization also reported that armed men forced the Tawahi district education office in Aden to close for reasons related to salary demands.

**Military use of schools and universities**

Armed forces and various non-state armed groups used dozens of schools as detention centers and barracks, resulting in damage and destruction. According to UN reports, military use of schools was documented more often in 2014 than in previous years. It is unclear whether this trend was related to actual changes in military use or to changing access to information.

Several different groups reportedly used schools in 2013. For example:

- The US Department of State, citing international NGOs, reported that Houthi groups used an unreported number of schools as detention centers in 2013.

- The UN documented but did not verify the use of a school in Amran as barracks for Yemeni armed forces from January 19 to March 1, 2013. The same report stated that militias associated with the Al-Osimat and Qaflat Uthar tribes used and destroyed four schools in Amran in 2013.

- The UN also reported but did not verify that Houthi forces and the Salafists used four schools as barracks and firing positions during clashes, leading to the schools’ subsequent closure in October 2013. The report did not indicate which Salafist groups used the schools.

The UN verified that armed forces and groups used 92 schools during 2014. Houthi fighters were responsible for the majority of this use. The US Department of State reported that in May, June, and July 2014, Houthi forces seized several schools in Amran, using them as barracks and detention centers. The group vacated 25 schools by the year’s end in response to government and UN interventions.

Non-state armed groups also allegedly used universities during 2014. For example:

- Scholars at Risk reported that on September 20, 2014, Houthi fighters took control of Sana’a’s Al-Imam University, seizing it from government security forces who had closed and occupied the university since earlier in the week.

- One month later, on October 29, 2014, Houthis occupied Dhamar University campus, also in Sana’a. Also according to Scholars at Risk, the Houthis claimed that their intention was to stop corruption at the university.

The UN verified 84 cases of military use of educational facilities in 2015. Of the 51 cases reported in the UN Secretary-General’s annual report, 44 cases took place in Taizz city, where Houthi-Saleh forces were responsible for the greatest number of cases of military use (20). Popular committees such as tribal groups, some of which supported the Yemeni
army while others supported the Houthi forces, were responsible for eight cases, and unknown armed groups were responsible for 16 cases. Houthi-Saleh forces also used schools in the cities of Aden, Dali, and Lahj. For example, according to Human Rights Watch, Houthis were using a girls’ secondary school in Sana’a as a food distribution center at the beginning of the year. The school had been damaged in air strikes, which local residents believed had targeted the school because of the Houthi presence.

Armed groups also occupied at least two universities in 2015, according to information reported to OHCHR but not verified:

- On May 6, 2015, a Houthi-affiliated sniper used the roof of the Education College building in Al-Humaira village, Al-Dhali, as a firing position.
- On September 2, 2015, Houthi-affiliated fighters and forces loyal to the former president of Yemen took up fighting positions on the campus of Taizz University, according to the same source.

There were significantly fewer reports of military use in 2016, when the UN verified that 12 schools were occupied by armed forces and armed groups. Houthi-Saleh forces reportedly were responsible for six cases of occupation, the Popular Resistance was responsible for four cases, and the Yemeni Armed Forces and Ansar al-Sharia were each responsible for one. According to a report by Al Jazeera, military use appeared particularly prominent in Taizz city, where the Houthi-affiliated Popular Resistance armed group was allegedly using approximately 30 schools as of November 2016.

Human Rights Watch reported that the al-Noor Center for the Care and Rehabilitation of the Blind, a boarding school for blind students in Sana’a and Yemen’s only educational center for students with visual impairments, was damaged because of military use. On January 5, 2016, a bomb dropped by the Saudi-led coalition reportedly hit the school compound. At the time of the strike, Houthi-Saleh forces were based near the school, housed fighters in the school, and had established an office in its kindergarten. Two school staff members, an 18-year-old student, and a local resident were wounded. Although the bomb did not detonate, its impact broke windows and blew out doors in the school.

In February 2017, Save the Children reported that 24 schools were being used for military purposes. The vast majority of these schools (21) were located in Taizz governorate. Save the Children did not report who was responsible for using the schools. In December 2017, OCHA reported that 23 out of the 24 schools were still occupied by armed groups. As of September 2017, the UN had verified one case of school occupation so far that year. An international humanitarian organization reported that an armed gang was using part of a secondary school yard in Tawahi district, Aden, in June 2017, and that the army was using Omar bin Abdul Aziz School in Karesh, Lahj, in August 2017.

**Child recruitment at, or en route to or from, school**

Child recruitment was reported between 2013 and 2017, as it was between 2009 and mid-2013, especially by the Houthi forces. Most available information did not indicate the extent to which such recruitment took place in schools, making it difficult to compare reporting periods. However, at least one case of child recruitment at school was documented in Sana’a. In January 2017, Amnesty International documented eyewitness reports that two boys had been recruited by a Houthi member at a Quranic school. They were later returned to their families. This incident was not documented or verified by the UN.

**Sexual violence by armed parties at, or en route to or from, school**

At least two incidents of sexual violence reportedly affected female students between 2013 and 2017:

- One unverified media report alleged that Houthi fighters threatened to strip a female university student naked in December 2014 if she did not comply with their orders to wear a cloak that fully covered her body.
- A women’s journalist group alleged that Houthi gunmen were responsible for sexual assaulting students and teachers at a girls’ school in Sana’a on April 17, 2017, after the students and teachers refused to chant the group’s slogan.
**Attacks on higher education**

Throughout the reporting period there were over 100 reported attacks on institutions, scholars, and students of higher education in Yemen, based on information compiled by GCPEA. These attacks included explosives and air strikes, as well as violent repression of protests. Reports of attacks on university infrastructure were significantly more common during the 2013-2017 reporting period than in 2009-2013, while reports of targeted attacks on personnel and students remained constant between the two periods.

In 2013 there were two media reports of attacks on higher education personnel, according to media sources:

- On May 24, 2013, unidentified gunmen reportedly opened fire on the car of the vice president of Hajjah University in Abs district, Hajjah governorate. It is unknown whether he was injured in the attack.

- On June 11, 2013, suspected al Qaeda members allegedly kidnapped a Dutch couple who worked at the Lebanese International University in Sana’a. The group let the couple go for unknown reasons six months later, on December 11, 2013.

There were at least four reported attacks on higher education institutions in 2014 and at least six reported attacks on university students and personnel, affecting at least more than 40 individuals. For example, according to news sources, on September 20, 2014, unidentified perpetrators detonated a device near Imam University in Sana’a city, Amanat al-Asimah governorate, killing at least three people.

Among the reported attacks on university students and personnel in 2014 were several cases of hostage-taking and abductions of university students and personnel, according to media reports. For example:

- On October 1, 2014, unidentified assailants reportedly stormed a university dormitory in Sana’a city and held an unreported number of students hostage for 10 days. Students attributed the attack to Houthi forces.

- On June 10, 2014 al Qaeda members allegedly abducted three al-Bayda University professors in Dhamar governorate and took them to Qayfah district. The group released two of the professors on July 31. The fate of the other was unknown.

- On December 20, 2014, suspected Houthi fighters allegedly kidnapped 30 students from Al-Qalam University in Ibb city, releasing them two days later.

As with other forms of attacks on education, reported attacks on higher education intensified in 2015, coinciding with the onset of Saudi-led coalition air strikes. There were more than 100 attacks on higher education that year, including at least 87 air strikes affecting university buildings, according to information compiled from Watchlist and the Education Cluster. University buildings, infrastructure, students, and personnel were targeted in 2015, and they also suffered collateral damage. Reports of attacks on university facilities included the following:

- Media sources recorded that on October 26, 2015, armed ‘IS’ members distributed leaflets at the University of Aden, demanding gender segregation, a ban on music, and collective prayer sessions.

- On December 29, 2015, suspected Ayman Asfar loyalists attacked the University of Aden because the university was coeducational. The assailants dragged students out of the buildings and detained two students for filming the incident.

Media sources also reported several killings and kidnappings of professors and academics throughout 2015. For example:

- On January 18, 2015, assailants, reported to be Houthi fighters, attacked and killed a university professor in Al-Dali City.

- The same source reported the abduction of five students from Dhamar University, Dhamar governorate, by unidentified assailants in August 2015.

- Also in August 2015, al Qaeda detained university students in al-Mukalla city, Hadramawt governorate, because their university was coeducational, but released them several hours later.
Both government security forces and non-state armed groups targeted university students during protests in 2015. For example:

- Human Rights Watch reported that on January 25, 2015, at least 15 members of the police and Special Security Forces stormed Sana'a University and shot in the direction of 15 to 20 students who were petitioning to have an exam postponed because of increasing conflict in Sana'a city. The next day, Houthi supporters blocked the gates to Sana'a University, preventing students from going to class.2611

- Scholars at Risk alleged that Houthi fighters repeatedly attacked protesters in and around the University of Sana'a in late January 2015.2612 In one instance the group detained around 12 students, protesters, and activists, in addition to two reporters.2613

The number of documented attacks targeting higher education appeared to decline in 2016 and 2017. GCPEA found reports of 11 incidents during the two years, which included air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition on seven universities, colleges, and vocational schools in Sana'a, Saada, Hudaydeh, and Amran.2614 In addition, non-state armed groups were reportedly responsible for two attacks on university students and personnel in 2016 and 2017:

- In November 2016, Houthis attacked peaceful protesters at Sana'a University, where academics were protesting a three-month delay of salary payments.2615

- In 2017, according to Reuters, a gunman shot Amjad Abdulrahman, a law student, in an Internet café in Aden city on June 26, 2017. Abdulrahman was a member of a secular student and intellectual cultural club that had come under pressure from members of extremist groups. Reuters reported that his involvement in these clubs was the suspected reason for his killing, and that Abdulrahman had moderated a debate on women's conditions in Aden a few weeks before being killed.2616


2614 Information provided by the Education Cluster, February 6, 2017. Information provided by Watchlist, April 24, 2017.

2615 "Houthi rebels storm Sana’a University protests," Al Arabiya, November 13, 2016.