

YEMEN

Airstrikes, mortars, and crossfire continued to damage schools and universities in Yemen throughout the 2017-2019 reporting period. Airstrikes constituted almost half of all attacks on schools in 2018 and 2019. Armed groups detained or killed university staff. In one particularly devastating attack, an airstrike killed more than two dozen children when it struck a school bus in Saada governorate. Armed parties also used schools for military purposes and recruited children from schools.

Context

Conflict between Houthi forces (also known as Ansar Allah) and Saudi Arabia and Emirati-aligned coalition armed forces continued during the 2017-2019 reporting period.²²⁷³ According to analyses by ACLED, 2018 and 2019 were the deadliest of the five years of conflict.²²⁷⁴ Taizz and Al Hudaydah governorates were the sites of some of the most significant fighting during the reporting period.²²⁷⁵ In Sana'a city, where the Houthi-backed Supreme Political Council was based (De Facto Government -DFG), Saudi-led coalition airstrikes continued in the reporting period, albeit less frequently than previously, and the Houthis increasingly repressed dissent.²²⁷⁶

Since 2015, Aden, Yemen's second largest city, has functioned as the temporary capital for the internationally-recognized government (IRG) of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi.²²⁷⁷ In August 2019, a new fighting front opened up in the south of Yemen, originating in Aden, but with clashes radiating out to Abyan and Shabwa provinces.²²⁷⁸ The Southern Transitional Council (STC), an Emirati-aligned group in opposition to the IRG, took the city of Aden from forces loyal to Hadi between August and November 2019, when Hadi's government and the STC signed a Saudi-brokered power-sharing agreement.²²⁷⁹

In 2018 and 2019, Yemen remained the world's worst humanitarian crisis.²²⁸⁰ In December 2018, 7.4 million children were in need of child protection services.²²⁸¹ At the end of 2019, 80 percent of the population, 24 million people, were in need of humanitarian assistance, more than 20 million people were food insecure,²²⁸² while 3.9 million were displaced, including 600,000 people who fled fighting in Al Hudaydah governorate during the second half of 2018.²²⁸³ According to ACLED, the conflict caused over 100,000 reported fatalities from the beginning of 2015 to October 2019, including 12,000 civilian fatalities from events that directly targeted civilians.²²⁸⁴

The conflict continued to weaken Yemen's already struggling education system. In September 2019, the UN reported that two million students remained out of school and another 3.7 million children were at risk of losing access to education.²²⁸⁵ Girls were particularly affected, with Save the Children reporting that some families kept their girls home from school because of fears of sexual harassment and other forms of violence on the way to or from, or at, school.²²⁸⁶

Throughout the reporting period, the payment of teachers' salaries affected quality of, and access to, education. A nationwide teacher strike led 90 percent of public schools to remain closed at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school-year.²²⁸⁷ Southern teachers returned to teaching in mid-October 2018, after receiving a salary increase, but hyper-inflation decreased the value of those salaries and in December 2018, Save the Children warned of the risk of another teacher strike because of fluctuating currency exchange rates.²²⁸⁸ By the end of 2018, neither teachers nor other school-based staff in Yemen's 11 northern governorates had received government salaries for more than two years, since October 2016.

Attacks on schools

For the 2017-2019 period, GCPEA identified at least 130 reports of attacks on schools. However, the Education Cluster reported that nearly 1,800 schools were either damaged or destroyed due to conflict between March 2015 and December 2018;²²⁸⁹ unavailability of disaggregated data prevented GCPEA from determining the years in which attacks occurred. The UN verified 244 attacks on, and military use of, schools, for the period between April 2013 and December 2018, 140 of which were attributed to the Saudi-led coalition; close to half of the attacks were carried out during the escalation of the conflict in 2015, primarily in Saada and Taizz governorates, and more than 90 percent of attacks damaged or destroyed schools.²²⁹⁰ Due to challenges faced by the UN in verifying attacks on schools and military use of schools, the true number of attacks is likely to be higher.²²⁹¹

Based on the information collected by GCPEA, a significant proportion of reported attacks on schools were allegedly the result of airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition; however, ground combat, targeted explosive attacks, and targeted threats also affected schools. Attacks on schools had devastating effects on infrastructure – over 2,500 schools were closed in March 2018, two-thirds of which were damaged by fighting, and seven percent of which were being used by displaced persons or for military purposes.²²⁹²

The UN verified 20 attacks on schools in 2017.²²⁹³ During the same period, GCPEA identified reporting from the Yemen Data Project, the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project, media, and international organizations, which indicated almost 70 reported incidents of attacks on schools,²²⁹⁴ at least 20 of which occurred in Dhubab, Taizz governorate.²²⁹⁵

Yemen's Education Cluster estimated that there were 37 attacks on schools in 2018.²²⁹⁶ In the same period, the UN verified 28 attacks on schools, and reported that 84 percent of attacks on schools and hospitals resulted in damage or destruction of facilities.²²⁹⁷ The UN reported that the Saudi-led coalition and Houthis each perpetrated 12 attacks, and unidentified perpetrators were responsible for the remaining four.²²⁹⁸

In 2018, reporting by media, UN, and NGO sources indicated that more than half (22)²²⁹⁹ of the 40 reported attacks on schools²³⁰⁰ that occurred were the result of airstrikes. Artillery, canons, and ground shelling contributed to seven reported attacks on schools. For example:

- ACLED and CIMP collected reports from a local news agency of allegations that, on January 13, 2018, an airstrike hit a school in Al-Hamazat area of Sahar district, Saada governorate, causing damage to the school, including hundreds of books in its library.²³⁰¹
- CIMP and the Yemen Data Project reported that on April 11, 2018, an airstrike struck near a girls' school in Bani Rabi'ah, Saada governorate. CIMP reported that the strike damaged the building.²³⁰²
- The Yemen Data Project and CIMP collected reports by news media that on July 2, 2018, an airstrike allegedly hit Abdulla Ateyah School in Zabid city, Al Hudaydah governorate, killing three civilians and injuring three others, including a child.²³⁰³
- ACLED and CIMP collected reports that on November 18, 2018, six female students and one teacher were injured when unidentified gunmen allegedly targeted a member of the Security Belt Forces of Abyan governorate as he passed by Al-Fardous School in Enmaa, Aden governorate. Bullets allegedly hit the school's gate and school-yard.²³⁰⁴

In 2019, reports of attacks on schools continued at a similar rate as the previous year. GCPEA collected over 30 reports from news, civil society, UN, and NGOs, of attacks on schools, including airstrikes, ground-launched strikes, and explosives. These attacks led to the injury or death of at least 65 school students and personnel.²³⁰⁵ Between January and June 2019, the UN Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting documented 21 reports of attacks on schools by unidentified elements but did not indicate how many incidents were verified.²³⁰⁶ Examples of these included:

- According to allegations reported by the Yemen Data Project, on March 26, 2019, in Ar Rabsha area of Hudaydah city, armed groups launched a ground strike, including mortar shells and rockets, which struck Al-Awrah School for Girls. The attack reportedly resulted in significant damage to the buildings.²³⁰⁷
- On April 7, 2019, UN, NGO and media sources reported that the contents of a warehouse in Sana'a city caught fire and detonated.²³⁰⁸ The UN and Human Rights Watch reported that Houthi forces had stored volatile material in the warehouse.²³⁰⁹ The blasts caused the windows of four nearby schools to shatter, although it was not clear whether or not all of these were in use at the time. Some schoolchildren were injured from broken glass, while others were injured or killed by trampling in the panic that ensued, or by attempting to jump from windows to escape. At least ten students were killed and dozens more injured, according to the UN. One school reportedly served at least 2,000 students.²³¹⁰
- According to reporting by local media and the Yemen Data Project, on May 16, 2019, a coalition-led air raid allegedly damaged Battar School in Qatabah district, Al Dhale governorate. Houthi forces were reportedly present in the area.²³¹¹

Attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel

For the 2017-2019 period, GCPEA identified at least ten reports of attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel. School students, teachers and personnel continued to be killed, injured, or abducted in targeted and indiscriminate attacks, with approximately five incidents occurring during each year of the reporting period, according to information GCPEA collected from UN, NGO, and media sources.²³¹² These attacks were significantly more fatal in 2018, when more than 60 students and education personnel were killed or injured, than in 2017, when five students and education personnel were harmed.

The escalation in deaths in 2018 was primarily the result of a single airstrike by the Saudi-led coalition that struck a school bus on August 9, 2018, in Dhahyan, Saada governorate.²³¹³ The attack occurred in the middle of a market, and the children on the bus were reportedly part of an excursion during a summer program.²³¹⁴ According to Human Rights Watch, the attack killed at least 34 people, including three teachers and 25 children who were on the bus, and a child and teacher who were in the market. In addition, 13 children on the bus and six children in the market were wounded. Human Rights Watch called the attack an “apparent war crime.”²³¹⁵ The Saudi-led coalition, under international scrutiny, later admitted that the airstrike had not been conducted in accordance with its rules of engagement.²³¹⁶

In addition to the school bus attack, ACLED and the Yemen Data Project collected reports alleging that the following attacks targeted students, teachers, and other education personnel in 2018:

- The Yemen Data Project reported that on July 2, 2018, shots fired by an apparent sniper allegedly killed three children and injured three others who were in the vicinity of the Zaid Almoshkki school in Taizz governorate.²³¹⁷ Reports collected by GCPEA suggested that other incidents involving the injury of school students and personnel occurred several times between May 2017 and June 2018.²³¹⁸
- The Yemen Data Project reported allegations that armed actors assassinated the director of a school in al Mansurah district, Aden city, as he was leaving home on September 23, 2018. The armed actors were reportedly wearing military uniforms and traveling in a pickup truck.²³¹⁹
- Local media *News Max One* and the Yemen Data Project reported allegations that, on December 10, 2018, the director of the Education Office in Dhamar governorate was shot and killed by unidentified armed assailants as he left his home in Dhamar city. Reasons behind the killing were unknown.²³²⁰

In 2019, GCPEA collected two reported incidents of attacks on school teachers or education staff and one attack on a school student, affecting at least 27 people. These included:

- CIMP, local media, and the UN reported that, on April 3, 2019, a student brought a bomb, which he had found near his home, to Al-Fatah school, Sana’a governorate. The bomb allegedly detonated and killed two students between the ages of 12 and 14, and injured eight children.²³²¹
- In January 2019, local media *Aden al-Ghad* reported allegations that armed assailants reportedly arrested 24 education staff, 23 teachers and the director of the Education Office, at an unspecified location in Ibb governorate, with the alleged intent to extort them for money. They were returning from collecting their salaries in Aden city.²³²² Another report indicated that the education personnel were arrested in late December, with the majority being released two days later.²³²³

Military use of schools and universities

For the 2017-2019 period, GCPEA identified at least 30 reports of military use of schools. Dozens of schools and universities continued to be used for military purposes during the reporting period. While the UN verified eight cases in which schools were used in Taizz (3), Amanat al-Asimah (2), Saada (2), and Sana’a (1) governorates for military purposes in 2017, OCHA reported that 23 schools remained in use in August 2017.²³²⁴ The UN noted that the Houthis were responsible for five of the verified cases of military use, while Yemen Armed Forces were identified as responsible for one incident, and the Popular Resistance was responsible for two incidents, over the period. Three of the schools used for military purposes were later targeted for attack.²³²⁵ In 2018, the UN verified 32 cases of military use of schools, four times as many as verified in 2017; 28 were attributed to Houthi forces.²³²⁶

In 2019, GCPEA identified five reported incidents of military use of schools and universities as prisons and barracks, from media and UN sources.²³²⁷ For example, *Al Jazeera* reported that on September 1, 2019, airstrikes hit the campus of a community college in Dhamar city, Dhamar governorate, which was being used as a prison.²³²⁸

Child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school

For the 2017-2019 period, GCPEA identified at least 21 reports of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school. The number of reported incidents of child recruitment at schools increased during the 2017-2019 period, as compared to the 2013-2017 reporting period, when only two cases were collected by GCPEA.²³²⁹ One of these reported incidents occurred in 2017 and affected at least three boys, according to Amnesty International.²³³⁰

In 2018, the UN reported that Houthis used 20 schools to mobilize and train children, of which four were used for recruiting and mobilizing girls. However, it was unclear whether these schools were in addition to, or included in, the 32 schools reported as being used for military purposes, as reported above.²³³¹ Child recruitment at, or on the way to or from school, may appear to have increased due to improved monitoring and reporting on the violation.

Attacks on higher education

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 30 reported incidents of attacks on higher education. According to reports, higher education facilities were affected by airstrikes, explosives, or other effects of armed violence. Reports collected also indicated that higher education personnel were occasionally abducted, arrested, injured, or killed by armed elements. In *Education under Attack 2018*, GCPEA identified over 100 incidents of attacks on higher education, most of which were attacks on higher education facilities, and which escalated in 2015.²³³²

In 2017, GCPEA identified five attacks on university facilities and students. The Yemen Data Project reported at least three alleged airstrikes on universities in Al Hudaydah, Dhamar, and Sana'a governorates;²³³³ *Reuters* reported one alleged incident of an attack on a higher education student in Aden in 2017.²³³⁴

Attacks on university students and personnel appeared to escalate in 2018 in contrast to the previous year. GCPEA identified ten attacks on higher education facilities and three reported incidents of attacks on university students and personnel, which harmed approximately 60 students and personnel, according to reporting from the Yemen Data Project, media, NGOs, and the UN.²³³⁵ Reports included:

- At least five university professors were abducted on June 19, 2018, as they were traveling from Sana'a to Aden to receive their salaries from the internationally recognized government in Aden.²³³⁶ On June 25, 2018, *Al Arabiya* reported that the professors had reportedly been moved to a prison. A female professor and her daughter who had allegedly been detained were reportedly released, but the Houthis detained and imprisoned her husband instead.²³³⁷ At the time of writing, there was no information on how long the professors were held.
- OCHA reported that the facilities of Khalij Aden University in Al Dhale governorate, and the facilities of Zabid Technical Institute in Zabid, Al Hudaydah governorate, were affected by the conflict in late August or early September 2018.²³³⁸
- On October 6, 2018, police forces reportedly arrested at least 55 student protesters, including 15 women, at Sana'a University. The students were protesting the deteriorating economic conditions, and local authority gunmen had been stationed at the university.²³³⁹ According to information reported by ACLED, police beat the detained students with electric shock batons and clubs and transported them to unknown locations.²³⁴⁰ *Reuters* reported that students were released the same day, although Scholars at Risk reported that it was not known whether all students were released.²³⁴¹

In 2019, GCPEA identified 14 alleged reports of attacks on higher education infrastructure²³⁴² and one reported attack on a higher education student.²³⁴³ Examples included:

- In two incidents on January 2 and January 4, 2019, artillery shells fired by an unknown party damaged the Faculty of Medicine in Al Hawak, Al Hudaydah governorate.²³⁴⁴
- On April 14, 2019, a hand grenade launched by an unknown armed party damaged the Faculty of Education in Khur Maksar, Aden governorate.²³⁴⁵

- On August 23, 2019, in Al Hali, Al Hudaydah governorate, artillery shells struck the Faculty of Engineering, according to CIMP.²³⁴⁶ CIMP also reported that the same Faculty was affected by airstrikes on September 3 and September 29, 2019.²³⁴⁷

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²²⁷⁶ Andrea Carboni and Valentin D’Hauthuille, *Yemen’s Urban Battlegrounds*, pp. 4-7.

²²⁷⁷ Andrea Carboni and Valentin D’Hauthuille, *Yemen’s Urban Battlegrounds*, p.8.

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²²⁸⁷ Save the Children, *Education in Yemen - Make or Break for the Future of Yemen*, pp. 1, 4.

²²⁸⁸ Save the Children, *Education in Yemen - Make or Break for the Future of Yemen*, pp. 1, 4.

²²⁸⁹ Education Cluster, as cited in OCHA, “Yemen Humanitarian Update Issue 5,” March 21, 2019.

²²⁹⁰ UN Security Council, “Children and armed conflict in Yemen: Report of the Secretary General,” S/2019/453, June 3, 2019, para. 43.

²²⁹¹ UN Security Council, “Children and armed conflict in Yemen: Report of the Secretary General,” S/2019/453, June 3, 2019, paras. 2-3.

²²⁹² UNICEF, “If not in school: the paths children cross in Yemen,” March 2018, p. 1.

²²⁹³ UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/72/865-S/2018/465, May 16, 2018, paras. 207-208.

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²²⁹⁷ UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/73/907-S/2019/509, June 20, 2019, para. 193.

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