



Statement by the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The impact of crises and disasters on children The example of IOM Yemen

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Half of Yemen 27 million people are under the age of 18. Over 20% of the Yemeni population is aged between 15 and 24, and, according to UN estimates, it will increase to 69% by 2025. This is the second fastest growth rate in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

At the same time, Yemen also has high rates of illiteracy and together with Egypt and Iraq, Yemen makes up three-quarters of the 10 million illiterate youth in the region – two-thirds of which are girls.

Children remain one of the most vulnerable groups impacted by two years of conflict in Yemen, with over 5 million in need of protection.

As featured in the 2017 Yemen humanitarian needs overview, the conflict impact is evident in the number of child deaths and injuries, child recruitment for military activities, and emerging trends of child trafficking. Such negative impact includes pulling children out of school to engage into child labour and marrying off children at a young age, and children recruited to work with armed and terrorist groups.^[1]

In response to this alarming situation of children in a conflict situation, the UN Yemen Child Protection Sub-cluster is advocating for a holistic approach in addressing the diverse range of child protection issues in the country.^[2]

Since 2014, IOM is a core member of the Global Child Protection Working Group, which is an Area of Responsibility under the Global Protection Cluster. As a result, IOM has committed to uphold, use and promote the Child Protection Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Action (CPMS) throughout its

^[1] 2017 Yemen HNO. <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-2017-humanitarian-needs-overview>

^[2] Ibid.



operations, activities and projects.

IOM Yemen is consequently applying this global commitment in Yemen and is a member of the Child Protection Sub-cluster. We apply a holistic approach to provide multi-layered mental health and psychosocial support for children, their families and communities, coupled with actions aimed at providing protection through shelter, food and non-food items.

The approach is based on Child protection in emergencies aimed at ensuring *the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children*. It includes direct case management, medical referrals and rehabilitation assistance, and psychosocial support (PSS) through access to child-friendly spaces (CFS) and community-based child protection networks. It also includes mine-risk education, prevention messaging related to recruitment, socio-economic reintegration support for children released by armed groups, and family tracing and interim care services for trafficked children and other unaccompanied and separated children.

IOM contributes to child protection outcomes within the framework of its manifold activities. These involve transport assistance for crisis-affected populations, including unaccompanied and separated children; the identification of specific risks of exploitation, to which children might be exposed to in camps, transit centers or temporary shelters and crisis-affected communities; the prevention of child recruitment and affiliation with armed groups; and the fight against child trafficking and the worst forms of child labour.

IOM responds to child protection in the Yemeni conflict on the basis of its network of protection teams who assess child-specific needs and risks during context and situation analyses, through a mechanism called Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and other assessment tools. With child protection partners, IOM Yemen can address child-related incidents and advise on referral pathways. These may include national authorities in charge of child protection, UNICEF, specialized INGOs, national NGOs and others. On that basis, IOM designs and implements projects that have child protection implications.

Because youth, and children, proved to be the driving engine in many communities, in social, cultural and economic aspects, IOM has invested into programmes putting children at the core of its actions.

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These actions concern two types of children:

The Yemeni society children

The protection issues of the Yemeni children are underpinned by social-economic challenges in the family, their displacement and the damaged infrastructure (such as schools, hospitals and of course their homes). Compounding the increasing number of grave violations of child rights is that approximately two million children have been out of school for a protracted period because of the conflict. Concurrently, adolescents are likely to adopt risky behaviour and coping mechanisms that increase their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.

Conflicts have negative consequences at various levels of the society: the collapse of the Rule of Law does not guarantee protection of children anymore, with abuses difficult to report, or when reported, not followed in an appropriate way.

Often crises are accompanied by the resurgence of abuses, such as trafficking in children. With a lack of law enforcement capacities to properly ensure child protection, we witness recruitment in forced labour, recruitment in armed groups, and trafficking for sexual exploitation. In Yemen, we also hear from various sources, still to be confirmed, that trafficking of children for organs removal is increasing. These situations deserve a very cautious approach, embarking into a legal fight against trafficking networks. The difficulty to gather evidences is making such fight often very complex.

While we are trying to gather data and evidences on these phenomenon, it remains unknown still and often not enough considered as a priority.

The huge displacement, 3 million of persons in two years, has dramatic consequences on the life of families, both displaced and hosting. While the war often separates families, it also creates environment which is not conducive for ensuring a proper development of a child. Displacement pulls out families and children outside their social network, communities, and infrastructure of reference. Displaced populations find refuge in public spaces and host communities. Majority of public spaces are schools, thus interrupting the education process for thousands of children unable to attend school occupied by those who left their home.



The collapse of the economy and particularly the non-payment of salaries has pushed teachers to ask children and parents to pay the daily education. This has led thousands of parents to give up sending their children to schools, favouring their trying to find work and food instead of attending classes.

It is said that soon teachers will stop teaching in the entire country, putting a stop to education countrywide.

War trauma may be huge for parents and adults, who lose their referral systems, community links, employment and belongings. Such devastating effects may be bigger on children.

The migrants

Yemen also witnesses the irregular entry of approximately 10,000 migrants a month. These migrants, mostly originating from the Horn of Africa, Ethiopians and Somalis, count 35% of children under the age of 18. The majority if not all are sent by their families with the hope to find a job and be able to return money back home for supporting the entire family circle. With this obligation in mind, the migrants are entering the country, trying to transit through Yemen and reach richer countries of the Arab Peninsula.

Such children are easy victims of abuses, and recruitment by armed and terrorist groups. Due to their vulnerabilities as children separated from their parents, in an unknown country, speaking another language, the migrants refer to smugglers helping them to transit through Yemen. It is unfortunate to note that smugglers are abusing the migrants, through torture, sexual abuses, and extortion of funds. Migrants are looking for means to pursue their journey and often accept any form of labour to gain the necessary funds to join Saudi Arabia and other countries onwards. Part of their journey may lead them to armed and terrorist groups that they may join with the promise of receiving funding.

IOM identifies and assists migrant children whose rights were gravely violated and offer them protection through a series of support.

Based on its mandate for both displaced population and migrants, IOM Yemen operates a series of actions aimed at *the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children*, guided with specific

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protection issues, guided by the UN monitoring and reporting mechanism of grave violations of child rights.¹

In 2016, 100,104 children benefitted from a range of psychosocial support activities, offered in 31 Child Friendly Spaces that IOM has established in parks, schools, and special centers in Sana'a and Aden. Additionally, 37,382 boys, girls, men, and women received psychosocial support from IOM psychologists in the country. Community Committees have been established for each Child Friendly Space, which serve to uphold child protection principles, instill community engagement and optimize the impact of the psycho-social support activities. IOM Yemen intensifies its approach to provide mental health and psychosocial support in 2017, operating Child Friendly Spaces and Community-Committees in additional locations that have a large population of conflict-affected children. In total, 5 million children are in need of protection currently in Yemen.

Another specificity of the Child Friendly Spaces is the high turnout of children with disabilities and special needs. Such situations are often "hidden" from public and remain marginalized in Yemen. Accordingly, IOM has established specialized centres such as the Al Noor Centre for the Blind and the Right to Live Foundation which assists children with cerebral palsy. With NGO partners, IOM supports children with specific needs which have faced immense challenges since the start of the conflict.

The beauty of such Child Friendly Spaces is that they are staffed though IOM Youth Volunteers. More than 100 Volunteers have been trained and assigned to the Child Friendly Spaces to facilitate psychosocial support activities for the child beneficiaries. Volunteers are mobilized to lead sessions such as acting, art, and sports, and mine-risk awareness. The Volunteers are trained to protect child rights, use referral mechanisms, apply a code of conduct and be sensitive to gender-based violence related issues.

In addition, the approach is looking at how sensitizing the overall communities, both the displaced and the hosting families. Fourteen Community-based Child Protection and Direct Assistance Committees (CBCPDACs) have been created, involving and sensitizing 535 members from various communities.

A series of actions have been launched to increase the knowledge and

¹ An explanation of the UN's monitoring and reporting mechanism on the grave violations of child rights is available through <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/our-work/monitoring-and-reporting/>



awareness of the population in Yemen and worldwide, about the situation of children in Yemen. Under the international slogan “From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Make Education Safe for All!”, IOM conducted several activities for the 16-Day of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. This 16-Day of Activism campaign allowed more than 500 men and women and 5,856 children in Yemen to receive information on the importance of education, the causes and types of violence, the gender concepts, and the human rights and gender-based violence. Complaints mechanism were informed and disseminated as well as information on the support provided by the humanitarian community in Yemen.

Under another campaign, with the slogan #MyHomeInYemen, IOM organized an exhibition of artworks created by artistic talents of Yemeni children in the Child-Friendly Spaces in Yemen. Children from 5 to 16 years old were coached to use their talents to express their feelings about trafficking in persons in Yemen. This was the result of several awareness-raising campaigns organized in the IOM Child Friendly Spaces in Sana’a, at the occasion of special events on the World Day against Trafficking in Persons on 30 July.

While those ‘soft’ actions are used for supporting the children, and help them coping with traumas of war, other actions also aim at offering a comprehensive care to the child. Specific health care are offered to children, as well as shelter, food and non-food items to the most vulnerable. Schools and education are also a priority through rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes.

IOM strongly believes that youth stability contributes to build a better future for Yemen. The lack of attention, illiteracy, and unemployment, besides the surrounding circumstances and the suffering of the war, may abolish their sense of innovation and beliefs in future. The crisis in Yemen cannot divert our attention from the youth. IOM has put the youth and children in the centre of its actions, both for Yemenis and migrants, suffering from the crisis.

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