



**#CHILDREN
NOTSOLDIERS**

Key focus:

Recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups

Situation Overview

Highlights:

- On 14 May 2014, an Action Plan was signed between the Government of Yemen and the UN to end child recruitment and use associated with government forces.
- Despite fuel shortages throughout the country, UNICEF worked with Harad Local Council and Oil Company to ensure sufficient fuel is available to operate the safe water supply system in Al Mazraq camp.

During May, 18,760 people (2,680 families) were displaced due to the conflict in Shabwa and 3,500 people (500 families) displaced in Abyan. However, the fighting moved out towards remote mountainous areas and grew calmer by the end of the month, allowing an estimated 60 per cent of those displaced in Shabwa and 80 per cent of those displaced in Abyan to return to their homes.

The education office ensured that all displaced school children in Shabwa would still be able to sit for their exams, with most taking place successfully on 26-27th May. The remaining exams are scheduled for the first two weeks of June. In other emergency areas, a back-up plan was announced by the education minister to ensure that the 27,271 children (17,681 boys, 9,590 girls) in need of a safe place to take their secondary and basic stage exams would be able to do so.

During the conflict, one school recently rehabilitated through the GPE project was briefly occupied by armed men, however due to a swift response by the education cluster, Ministry of Education and local councils, the school was evacuated and ensured safe and accessible only to children.

Mobile clinics were dispatched in affected areas to ensure the availability of integrated health services in Abyan and Shabwa and Al Dhale where the situation remains tense.

Access remains difficult in conflict affected areas, which impacts on the reporting of incidents of grave child rights as well as the availability of services. Four incidents were reported and verified in May including two boys maimed and two incidents of child recruitment, with a further 11 incidents verified as taking place since the beginning of the year.

During this period, fighting in Amran resumed between the Houthis and government forces with roads blocked and access to health services disrupted. Displacement within Amran as well as to Al Jawf, Hajja and Sana'a has been reported but figures are not yet confirmed.

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Recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups

Issue:

Last year, at least 127 boys were verified as recruited or used by the various armed forces and armed groups in Yemen, but because many cases go unreported, the total figure is likely to be much higher.

Since 2011, the Secretary General's Annual Report: Children and Armed Conflict has listed four parties to the conflict in Yemen that are recruiting or using children under the age of 18¹, including the Government. Challenges exist in monitoring and reporting the situation though as in some cases, birth certificates or other documents are falsified so that children appear to be of legal age.

Many of those recruited or used join armed forces and groups as they are expected to take the role of breadwinner, coming from female headed households or poor families. At least one of the armed groups is said to pay five times more than working as a fisherman or farmer, which are the only other viable options in rural Yemen. Poverty is not however the only reason that triggers recruitment and use of children. Over half the population of Yemen (51 per cent) is under the age of 18 but only 23 per cent of those aged between 15 and 17 attend secondary school² and 24 per cent are engaged in child labour³. Furthermore, strong social norms and values are deeply embedded in societies and there is a culture of tolerance towards children being armed and fighting to protect their families and communities. In addition, boys themselves often want to prove to their peers and families that they are 'men'.

Action:

The first step towards ending recruitment and use of children is to monitor and report on the situation, which is being done through the United Nations Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting of Grave Child Rights Violations in Armed Conflicts (UN CTF MR), set up in October 2012. Since then, the number of children reported and verified as recruited and used has gradually increased although it remains hard to assess the full picture while communities are sometimes reluctant to report for fear of dismissal or reprisals.

As well as reporting and monitoring the situation, the UN CTF MR, co-chaired by UNICEF, has been engaging with the listed parties to develop action plans designed to protect affected children and prevent further recruitment and use.

'Children, not Soldiers' is a global campaign led by the UN to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by Government security forces in conflict by 2016. Coinciding with the launch of this campaign in March 2014, the Government of Yemen and the UN signed their action plan on 14 May 2014. The plan includes provisions to release all children, reintegrate them into their communities and prevent further recruitment.

UNICEF and the UN CTF MR continue to engage with another of the listed parties Al Houthi/Ansar Allah to develop a similar action plan.



Leila Zerrougui, UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, with Prime Minister Mr Mohammed Salem Basundwah at the signing ceremony

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Impact:

Aside from the risk of death or serious injury during war, children recruited in this way suffer long lasting psychosocial impacts. Of the 57 boys recruited and used by one of the armed groups in 2013, 8 were killed and 17 were injured. Many of the rest said during interviews with UNICEF partners that they watched their friends die, or suffer injury in battles. In many cases, they are given very little training but expected to fight on the front line.

Children are also 'used' by the armed forces and groups as cooks, porters, messengers and spies: Of the 127 verified cases in 2013, 16 were used in such ways. For example, one boy, age 13 has been working as a cook since he was 10 years old, since his father and older brother died. He works from 6am to 10pm at a military camp but hopes to go back to school to study.

Recruitment:

compulsory, forced or voluntary conscription or enlistment into any kind of armed force or armed group, under age 18.

Use:

by armed forces or armed groups in any capacity, including as cooks, porters, messengers, spies, collaborators, as well as sexually.

1 i) Al Houthi/Ansar Allah; ii) Pro-government militias; iii) Government forces; iv) Ansar Al Sharia

2 National Social Protection Monitoring Survey, Government of Yemen and UNICEF, June 2012

3 2010 National Child Labour Survey, Government of Yemen, ILO and UNICEF, November 2012

Nationwide Response

Nutrition:

2,476 health workers and volunteers have been trained throughout the country in nutrition, feeding practices, the integrated package and communication for development.

375 central health facilities were visited as part of mentoring activities for nutrition.

30,146 children were screened for malnutrition centrally (25,643) and in Sa'ada (4,503)

SMART surveys were conducted in Hajja and Taiz

Plumpy nut therapeutic food provided by ECHO was distributed to all outpatient therapeutic programmes in Dhamar and Amran in support of the emergency response.

WASH:

6,297 students (4,127 girls and 2,170 boys) in 9 schools in Haradh now have improved hygiene facilities including 70 rehabilitated and 3 newly constructed latrines.

41,344 IDPs and schoolchildren settled in and outside camps continue to receive daily water supply.



Health teams carry nutrition equipment across difficult terrain for the SMART survey in Taiz



A safe daily water supply is provided for IDPs in schools

45,681 IDPs settled in and outside camps are being given adequate sanitation along with hygiene promotion activities.

6,525 IDP families in Hajja and Amran have been given monthly consumable hygiene kits.

Education:

150 out of school children from marginalized (Muhamasheen) or poor families continued preparatory classes in order to join school for the next academic year in Al-Mokha District.

30 teachers (10 male and 20 female) from Sa'ada were trained on early childhood development (ECD) teaching skills this month.

20 rehabilitated schools have been handed over to the Governorate Education Office (GEO) under the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) project in Sa'ada. A further 13 schools are undergoing final checks before being handed over soon.

2,600 out of school boys and girls sat their mid-year exams this month after being coached by 200 specially trained, new volunteer teachers in Hodeida and Hajja.

Interagency Collaboration

The child protection sub-cluster has completed all preparations for the launch of the Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS) in humanitarian settings held on 2 June.

In addition, 11 modules from the minimum standards were selected by the CPMS committee. A nationally representative group of 150 will be trained across the country on these global standards on CP in emergencies.

Child Protection:

51,477 people (including 16,804 girls, 22,992 boys and 4,307 IDPs in Haradh) received mine risk education (MRE) in 12 districts of Hajjah Governorate, while 1,074 (1,066 children) were reached with MRE messages in Abyan. In addition, staff and volunteers were trained and are now delivering messages on protection from risks in Al-Amanah and Sana'a Governorate communities.

MRE teams have resumed activities in five districts of Sa'ada, parallel to the de-mining activities.

2,907 children (1,335 girls, 1,572 boys) received psychosocial support services through community and school based child friendly spaces (CFSs) in the governorates of Abyan and Sa'ada. 43 girls, 105 boys and 9 adults received awareness raising sessions on child protection issues in Sa'ada and Abyan Governorates. 61 community volunteers were also trained on child protection in emergencies, psychosocial support and how to run the child friendly spaces, detect vulnerable children and refer them, while 273 children/adolescents were equipped with information and skills on their rights.



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A child reads about the risks of mines in Aslam District, Hajjah Governorate

33 unaccompanied migrant children, all boys, were assisted with safe voluntary return to Ethiopia in April thanks to a joint collaborative effort between UNICEF, DRC and IOM. An additional 47 unaccompanied migrant/Ethiopian boys arrived and were identified at the Sana'a Immigration centre in late May, making a total of 88 unaccompanied migrant boys waiting for their safe return back to Ethiopia.

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