

Watching Our Every Step: THE DEADLY LEGACY OF EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE FOR CHILDREN IN YEMEN



Save the
Children

Executive Summary



8 years of war, together with decades of historical conflict in Yemen, have left a deadly legacy of explosive ordnance (EO), including landmines, across the country – threatening children’s lives, their childhoods, and their futures.¹ For many, the effects of blasts are immediate, long-term and life-limiting. Over 11,000 Yemeni children have been killed or maimed since the beginning of the conflict.² This research brief highlights the impacts of EO for children, their unique vulnerabilities, and what must be done to better protect them from harm. Save the Children’s analysis reveals an alarming rise in child casualties caused by EO, including landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), in Yemen between January 2018 and November 2022.³ The findings rely on original analysis of data collected by the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project (CIMP)v and surveys conducted with 13 children (nine girls and four boys) from Taiz in January 2023, who had directly experienced EO incidents.



KEY FINDINGS

- **Landmine and UXO child casualties have increased from 1 every 5 days in 2018 to 1 every 2 days in 2022.** Meanwhile, overall direct child casualties from armed violence decreased.⁴
- **Children are disproportionately affected compared to adults.** Landmines and UXO account for around 1 in 10 overall casualties, but 1 in 5 of overall child casualties.⁵ 1 in 3 children involved in an incident die.
- **More than half of all child casualties in 2022 were due to landmines and UXO.**⁶
- **More than half of all landmines and UXO child casualties took place in just three governorates:** Hodeidah, Taiz and Sa’ada.
- **The proportion of child injuries and deaths from landmines and UXO increased during the truce.** Landmines and UXO constituted two-thirds of all child casualties from April-October 2022.⁷
- **EO has devastating psychosocial impacts:** Child victims have trouble sleeping, and experience daily fear and anxiety.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) returning to areas where hostilities have de-escalated following the truce are at increased risk of encountering EO on land perceived to be safe. This has been particularly pronounced in the strategic port city of Hodeidah, following the withdrawal of the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG) forces in 2021. Children are exposed to EO while playing, collecting firewood and water, and tending to livestock amongst other activities. They have been killed and maimed by landmines and UXO which exploded in or near schools. There have also been several instances of children being injured or killed on roads while travelling with adults in cars and on motorbikes.

HOW ARE CHILDREN UNIQUELY IMPACTED BY EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE?

Surveys conducted with child victims for the report reveal the devastating short- and long- term impacts of their injuries, including upper and lower limb amputation, requiring lifelong care and assistance. Given the difference in children’s bones and tissue, injuries early in life can affect later growth and lead to more complications in comparison to adults. However, Yemen’s health system is on the verge of collapse, and children do not have access to the long-term care needed to recover their mobility, return to school, and reintegrate into community life. Children also told us about the psychological distress and social isolation they endured following explosive incidents. Child victims experienced nightmares, daily fear and anxiety following their injuries. Worryingly, almost all children knew someone who has been maimed by EO. Children we interviewed also had their learning disrupted or had dropped out of school entirely due to their injuries.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



FOR THE DE-FACTO AUTHORITIES AND INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED GOVERNMENT:

- Comply with International Humanitarian Law under all circumstances.
- Avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and take immediate, practical, measures to reduce their impact on civilians and civilian infrastructure in line with the Declaration on the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.
- Immediately stop the use of mines and meet all the obligations of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, including to cease the production of mines, clear mined areas, and support the care, rehabilitation, and reintegration of child victims.
- Scale up coverage of safe, quality, gender- responsive and age- sensitive explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) including through radio, television, and print materials to reduce the risk of injury.
- Provide guaranteed access for humanitarian mine action activities, including expediting visas for international/technical staff and registration for humanitarian mine action actors.

FOR DONORS:

- Fully fund the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan of US\$4.3 billion, including \$225.7 million for the protection plan, to provide EORE to children, support child victims, and ensure they can access the multi-sectoral, long-term care needed to support their recovery and inclusion.
- Ensure that those responsible for causing harm to children are held accountable and that victims are provided appropriate redress, by re-establishing an international, independent, and impartial accountability mechanism to collect, consolidate, preserve, and analyse evidence of abuses and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.
- Increase funding and diplomatic support for existing IHL and International Human Rights Law monitoring mechanisms, particularly the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, to strengthen capacity to assess and verify grave violations against children.
- Ensure that the risks of serious violations against children are central to assessments under article 7 of the Arms Trade Treaty. Countries must deny or suspend the export, supply and transfer of arms, weapons, and other military assets to parties to conflict.
- Create a sustainable approach to humanitarian mine action, by ensuring that it is integrated as a core component of durable solutions strategies and policies.

FOR HUMANITARIAN MINE ACTION ACTORS AND HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP:

- Advocate for the active participation of child survivors and other children with disabilities in the victim assistance services they undertake.
- Strengthen the collection, analysis, and use of gender-, age- and disability- disaggregated child casualty data and share information, including on mine locations, to inform targeting and prioritisation of land clearance, risk education and child-focussed victim assistance.
- Use and strengthen referral mechanisms to connect child victims of EO to the appropriate victim assistance services so children can access the multi-sectoral, long-term care needed to support their recovery and reintegration.
- Ensure that any scale-up of the humanitarian mine action response happens across Yemen, in both IRG and DFA-controlled areas, including governorates where children have been heavily affected, and is guided by IMAS.

1. Explosive Ordnance (EO) – Encompasses the following munitions: mines, cluster munitions, unexploded ordnance, abandoned ordnance, booby traps, improvised explosive devices, and other devices.
2. UNICEF, Press Release: More than 11,000 children killed or injured in Yemen (2022).
3. Time period covered: Jan 2018 to Nov 2022. Whenever 2022 is mentioned, it is implied that Dec 2022 is not included, making it the only 11-month year.
4. Overall direct child casualties from armed violence have decreased from almost 3 per day in 2018 to 1 per day in 2022.
5. Children account for 21% (3,119) of conflict casualties, but 37% (657) of landmines/UXO casualties. Landmine/UXO account for 12% (1,796) of overall casualties, but 21% (657) of overall child casualties
6. More than half of child casualties - 199, or 55% - in 2022 are due to landmines/UXO.
7. Save the Children, Press Release: Disappointment and Concerns for a Renewal of Violence (2022).