

# The Cost of Inaction

## Gender-Based Violence in Yemen



The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is considered one of the world's largest, with over 23 million people – 75 percent of the population – in need of humanitarian assistance. In 2022, needs have only grown and the crisis remains one of severe displacement and protection concerns<sup>1</sup>. Yet despite the fact that preventing, mitigating, and responding to protection risks – including gender-based violence (GBV) – is one of the three objectives of coordinated response to the crisis in Yemen<sup>2</sup>, the appeal for GBV prevention and response of \$61.4 million is **only 16 percent funded**<sup>3</sup>. The costs of this inaction are the lives, dignity, and futures of millions of Yemeni women and girls.

<sup>1</sup> Yemen 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan. UNOCHA. April 2022. Available online: <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-response-plan-2022-april-2022#:~:text=Based%20on%20three%20nationwide%20needs,protection%20risks%20faced%20by%20crisis%2D>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> "Where Do We Stand Mid-Year 2022? A spotlight on operational access for protection." Global Protection Cluster. June 2022. Available Online: [https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/GPC\\_Protection\\_Funding\\_Mid-Year-Review\\_2022.pdf](https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/GPC_Protection_Funding_Mid-Year-Review_2022.pdf)



# Yemen – GBV by the Numbers

**6.9 million<sup>4</sup>**

People in Need of GBV  
Prevention and Response  
Services



**87 GBV service delivery points**

no longer providing services to survivors or  
to persons at risk from GBV due to funding  
cuts in the Last Year



**\$61.4 million**

funding appeal (just 1.4 percent  
of the overall appeal for Yemen)<sup>5</sup>



**240,000<sup>7</sup> Women & Girls**

at risk who had been accessing GBV  
Services – but lost access in the last year



**16 percent<sup>6</sup>**

funding met (\$58.89 million  
funding gap)



**500,000+ women & girls**

at risk currently accessing services at  
risk of losing access if current closure  
and funding trends continue



## Gendered Costs of War and Crisis

While the war affects everyone in Yemen, its effects are not gender-neutral. The war has magnified existing inequalities and systemic discrimination. Women and girls, as well as some boys and men, are being stripped of their basic human rights and freedoms. This is sometimes committed with the excuse of their own protection or in the name of traditional and cultural values. For instance, measures like *mahram* (the requirement for women to be accompanied by a male guardian) are being imposed and restricting women's and girls' movement, while over 1.4 million girls under 15<sup>8</sup> – and some children as young as 8<sup>9</sup> – are married off, often under the guise of “protecting” them from unwanted suitors.

Looming famine, ruined public services and infrastructure, the COVID-19 pandemic, and devastation wrought by war all combine to increase exposure to GBV risks: unprotected from discrimination and prejudice, women and girls are facing exploitation, abuse and different forms of GBV, including sexual violence. GBV does not discriminate based on age in Yemen; all women and girls, from infants through to older women are at risk as the violence takes one if not more of its many forms: female genital mutilation; child marriage; sexual exploitation and abuse (including exchanging sex for rent and other necessities); deprivation of basic needs such as food and water, and of access to services (education, reproductive health services and rights, etc.); forced marriage; and so-called honour killing.

<sup>4</sup> Yemen 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan. UNOCHA. April 2022. Available online: <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-response-plan-2022-april-2022#:~:text=Based%20on%20three%20nationwide%20needs,protection%20risks%20faced%20by%20crisis%2D>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> “Where Do We Stand Mid-Year 2022? A spotlight on operational access for protection.” Global Protection Cluster. June 2022. Available Online: [https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/GPC\\_Protection\\_Funding\\_Mid-Year-Review\\_2022.pdf](https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/GPC_Protection_Funding_Mid-Year-Review_2022.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Yemen Country Profile. UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage. 2021. Available online: <https://www.unicef.org/media/111411/file/Child-marriage-country-profile-Yemen-2021.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> “How Come You Allow Little Girls to Get Married?” Human Rights Watch. 2011. Available online: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/12/07/how-come-you-allow-little-girls-get-married/child-marriage-yemen#:~:text=prevent%20premarital%20sex.%5B-,Child%20Marriage%20in%20Yemen,and%20in%20Mukalla%20around%2010>



# What is Needed?

Discriminatory social attitudes, reflected in national laws and policies, offer no protection to women and girls at risk of – or experiencing – ever-growing levels of GBV in Yemen. As such GBV prevention and response experts are needed to implement minimum, essential, and life-saving services through humanitarian action. Mental health and psychosocial support, health services for survivors including the clinical management of rape, legal services, and empowerment programming are all part of the minimum package necessary to help Yemeni women and girls. These services are possible to deliver in Yemen; minimum services, including risk mitigation by non-Protection actors alongside specialised GBV services have made impacts beyond direct service provision as they sensitize and raise awareness of different national stakeholders about GBV and its impacts on the community.

GBV responders have been innovative and adaptive, including by learning how to continue services through the extreme constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>10</sup> Though GBV responders work hard, including to spur societal shifts, their efforts are far from over – social and behavioural change needed to drive change towards a society that is safe for women and girls in Yemen has only just begun. The foundations are laid, but still delicate – and if not reinforced with sustainable, lasting programmes, they risk crumbling under the discrimination that is deep-rooted in Yemeni tradition and legislation.

“Discriminatory social attitudes, reflected in national laws and policies, offer no protection to women and girls at risk of – or experiencing – ever-growing levels of GBV in Yemen.



## Cost of Response

The GBV appeal for Yemen in 2022 was determined to be \$61.4 million. This represents just 1.4 percent of the overall Yemen appeal, which was over \$4 billion.<sup>11</sup> The GBV appeal cost is determined based on ensuring the availability of at least one GBV service point per 20,000 persons; a ratio that is already inadequate to ensure quality service provision, and yet one that is very far from being achieved across many districts of Yemen. **GBV actors have been forced in recent years to close essential services due to lack of funding** and are currently faced with the requirement to close even more. In the last year alone, 87 service points have been affected, **leaving those being served – more than 240,000 survivors and those at risk of GBV – without current prevention and life-saving response services.**<sup>12</sup>

If current funding and closure trends continue, the GBV AoR in Yemen fears that **over half a million people currently accessing GBV services could lose this access**<sup>13</sup>; that figure does not account for the millions who have been identified as in need but who have never had access to life-saving interventions. The limited funding that does exist goes to very basic services that are segmented and have *extremely limited reach*. For instance, there is currently not a mobile response unit available to deploy to remote locations. In addition to the direct and immediate impact to survivors, the power to advocate and negotiate rights and freedoms of women and girls will significantly diminish as GBV response partners continue to lose value in the eyes of decision-makers. The lack of funding sends the signal that the international community has lost interest in the prevention of and response to GBV in Yemen and that GBV response can easily be excised from humanitarian efforts. Those who negotiate access for humanitarian aid are more likely to deprioritize protection in their efforts, while leaders who are inclined to disallow GBV programming in their regions will be further emboldened to do so. The services that still exist will shut down under this pressure, leaving women and girls in complete darkness without any ability to voice safely and freely their challenges, needs and concerns or access the services they desperately need.

10 Why Not Local? Gender-based Violence, Women's Rights Organisations, and the Missed Opportunity of COVID-19." International Rescue Committee. November 2021. Available Online: <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/6378/irc2021whynotlocalgbvreport.pdf>.

11 Yemen 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan. UNOCHA. April 2022. Available online: <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-response-plan-2022-april-2022#:~:text=Based%20on%20three%20nationwide%20needs,protection%20risks%20faced%20by%20crisis%2D>

12 GBV AoR in Yemen Response Analysis; Unpublished and available to discuss upon request.

13 GBV AoR in Yemen Response Analysis; Unpublished and available to discuss upon request.



# Support Beyond Funding

GBV actors in Yemen face an extremely constrained operating environment, including limitations by government actors – particularly in the North of Yemen – on using terminology related to GBV, as well as conducting assessments and implementing essential activities. These constraints are felt by all actors but are particularly concerning for local organizations and particularly by women-led organizations, who face additional scrutiny and security risks when implementing GBV activities in the country. They also limit the services and support that can be provided to GBV survivors and put the lives of women and girls at risk on a daily basis.

The GBV AoR in Yemen calls on donors and other stakeholders to use the opportunities they have in **bilateral and diplomatic communications with the government of Yemen and humanitarian leadership to advocate for the expansion of this operating space.** This includes:

- Aligning with internationally recognized terminology and practice, particularly in terms of the recognized types of GBV (e.g. rape, sexual assault);
- Promoting the relevance of the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and the delivery of services by non-governmental actors, in addition to drafting official strategies and policies.
- Allowing assessments to include questions related to women's safety and security and to directly (and safely) gather and report on information related to women and girls and their protection needs. By extension, this also includes enabling the participation of women and girls in decision-making processes.
- Allowing local and international organizations to implement GBV prevention and response activities, including training workshops to build national capacities and establish GBV community-based protection systems.



## The Bottom Line

The GBV AoR in Yemen, and GBV prevention and response in general, **urgently need focused, committed, and sustained funding and advocacy in order to ensure the needs of women and girls are voiced and answered, and to maintain the relevance of Yemen GBV AoR members before national authorities.** Durable funding will help to promote GBV integration in humanitarian action and enable its transformation into lasting public policies that can protect gender equality and prevent GBV, even well into a future transition to a development context. **Without such support, not only will women and girls suffer now, but the opportunity to fortify the GBV response through Yemeni social structures will be missed, resulting in devastating consequences on women and girls living in Yemen for generations to come.**



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