Coming of Age in a Fragmented State: Everyday Struggles and Perspectives of Yemeni Youth
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INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

The Yemen Polling Center (YPC) is an independent non-Governmental organization, providing the highest quality social science research services. YPC was established in 2004 as the first and only polling center in Yemen. We received our registration certificate No. 147 from the Ministry of Social Affairs & Labor in December 2005. YPC is the 2010 recipient of the Best Partner in the Middle East and North Africa award from Gallup International. We design and implement opinion polls, household and other surveys, and provide other services which fulfill research needs of national and international institutions, non-profit organizations, corporations, government agencies, and professional associations. YPC conducts public attitude surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, demographic studies, and market research employing both quantitative and qualitative methods for development projects, international organizations and foundations, publications, business groups, banks, and other stakeholders. As a member of both the World Association for Public Opinion Research and the American Association for Public Opinion Research, YPC remains committed to excellence in all aspects of social science. Since its inception, YPC has conducted dozens of qualitative and quantitative research projects on a multitude of issues ranging from satellite television and radio consumption patterns and consumer attitudes, to human rights, women’s rights, political reform issues, corruption, public health, and other governance related studies. In addition to numerous successfully completed public opinion surveys and research projects, YPC has implemented several economic surveys and qualitative studies covering all governorates in Yemen. We have surveyed more than 100,000 Yemeni citizens in face-to-face interviews. YPC has a dedicated, well-experienced and qualified team. In addition, the Center cooperates with dozens of experts, consultants and university professors within Yemen and abroad. Our experience, as well as our personnel and technical resources, allow us to conduct surveys of any size throughout all of Yemen’s governorates while adhering to the most stringent international standards in data quality. Furthermore, Yemen is a religious and conservative society in which male-female interactions are quite limited. As such, around half of our enumerators are female, which enables us to conduct interviews with women respondents. YPC has extensive experience in implementing internationally funded projects. It has cooperated, and thus far conducted, dozens of projects with international institutions including the World Bank, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Pan Arab Research Center (PARC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Ministry of Local Administration, among others.
BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHORS

Mareike Transfeld is a PhD candidate at the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies at the Freie Universität Berlin. She was previously a research fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) in Berlin and headed until 2014 the Research Department at YPC, where she managed the Yemen Parliament Watch project (ypwatch.org), as well as the Center’s youth program. She is a former co-editor of Muftah’s Yemen and Gulf countries pages.
MAIN FINDINGS

- The most pressing issues young people in Yemen are facing today are related to economic factors, which have intensified dramatically since the beginning of the Saudi-led intervention in March 2015. The manifold consequence of the war for the economy – including price hikes, shortages of food, fuel and medicine, unpaid salaries and diminishing job opportunities – effect families most directly.

- More than half of the Yemeni population between the ages of 15 and 25 are severely affected by the indirect consequences of the war, particularly the increase of prices and availability of food, fuel and water. 40% of the families of the youth questioned have received aid from humanitarian organizations at least once since the beginning of 2017.

- Although they feel somewhat valued by their communities, youth feel marginalized, especially because of the lack of job opportunities. 37% believe community leaders do not understand the youth’s needs and do not try their best to satisfy them; 14% do not know if these leaders understand the needs or try to satisfy them. Only 20% believe that community leaders at least somewhat understand the youth’s needs and try to satisfy them.

- Most of the youth see little to no work opportunities for themselves in their communities. The opportunities that they do see are to work as a day labourer in construction or agriculture, transportation or small projects.

- Even though many youth want to positively contribute to their communities, the participants in the focus group discussions noted a lack of opportunities and cite psychological problems and depression among youth as a result.

- Conflicts occur more often within the youths’ neighbourhood, as compared with their groups of friends or families. Political differences, money as well as food, medicine and fuel more often cause conflicts than religious differences.
REPORT OBJECTIVES AND CONTEXT

The most pressing issues young people in Yemen are facing today are related to economic factors, which have intensified dramatically since the beginning of the Saudi-led intervention in March 2015. The manifold consequence of the war for the economy, including price hikes, shortages of food, fuel and medicine, unpaid salaries and diminishing job opportunities effect families most directly. The financial hardship on families was already aggravated by the deteriorating economy in Yemen following the 2011 uprising against then president Ali Abdullah Saleh, but the current war puts extreme stress on families’ ability to provide even the most basic items necessary for survival. Seeing that the family is the most important social safety net young Yemenis fall back on1, this situation puts enormous pressure on young Yemenis, who are increasingly seeing their parents unable to provide for themselves and their families. Although they want to contribute to their families’ financial situation, as well as the development of the community, young Yemenis see little to no opportunities, while living in a highly volatile and insecure environment. The destitute situation doesn’t only impact the work market itself, but also the young people’s prospects to complete their education and in turn secure a job. Young Yemenis who were interviewed for this report see the war as having put an end to all their aspirations, ambitions and plans, with the future being completely unknown to them. Already, the number of underage boys being recruited by militias and girls being forced into early marriage in exchange for a dowry is on the increase.2

This report sheds light on the struggles youth are facing in their everyday lives. It is part of a project called “Youth Voices in Policy: Empowering Yemeni Youths in Local Communities” that was implemented by YPC between January 2015 and December 2017 and was funded through the Sharaka Shabab programme of the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Yemen. The Sharaka Shabab programme intends to strengthen civil society capacities to represent different groups of society at a local level, towards building local platforms and consensus on development issues, to strengthen representation of different groups within local governance structures – ultimately leading to more inclusive governance, and thereby to a reduction of conflicts and human rights violations at the local level. As the programme intends to strengthen social cohesion through building consensus at community levels, dialogue between local civil society actors and official structures is a major component of the programme Sharaka Shabab.

At its inception, the objective of the “Youth Voices in Policy” project was to empower youths at the community level and to involve them in policy debates on issues related to women’s and youth’s rights by creating efficient communication channels between youth and their representatives on the local and national levels. In 2013, when this project was initially designed, the time seemed ripe in Yemen to try to take a rights and institution based approach to advocate for better living conditions for Yemeni youth.

2 See for instance UNICEF (2017a, p. 4).
After the so-called “independent youth” had emerged as a driving force behind the 2011 protests, young Yemenis aspiring for a better future found themselves disenfranchised once again. The signing of the GCC initiative in November 2011, which defined a formal transition process for the country, marginalized the “independent youth,” who now had to struggle to retain the little influence on politics they had gained in the previous months. One opportunity to retain this influence was through the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), where the youth were represented with 40 out 565 delegates. In the conference, youth were able to contribute to debates on the future structure of the state and discuss different ways to resolve the multitude of conflicts that were plaguing the country, including creating perspectives for youth. The NDC outcomes stipulated that Yemen «take the necessary measures to achieve a wider youth participation in social, economic, cultural and political development of the country.» Specifically, this entailed, for instance, the establishment of a number of institutions, which could have improved the lives of young Yemenis. Examples include the “Supreme Council for Youth,” which would oversee and steer public policy on youth issues. The “Skills Development Fund” would have been tasked to alleviate unemployment, and the state was above that to make available funds for youth projects, facilitate loans and ensure that Yemeni citizens are prioritized over foreigners in the private sector and install a 20% quota for youth in government bodies.

Regarding the reasons behind the absence of youth in promoting peace and stopping the war, Mansour as-Samadi, a journalist and political activist said: “This absence is because of what we may call the big disappointment of Yemeni youth as they were completely excluded from the political scene despite all their efforts in the revolution of February 11, 2011. The young people’s demands were neglected as the political settlement through the GCC initiative was imposed. This policy disappointed the majority of the youth; they lost hope and as a result most of them were only bystanders of all political events and developments that took place in the country. Moreover, many activists of youth were polarized or their loyalties were bought for money by the conflicted parties and groups, thus their activities turned out to be in favor of these parties and groups. That also meant that their collective role was disrupted and it lost most of its values and strengths.

August 2016 – YLG Sanaa

One of the main goals of the “Youth Voices in Policy” projects was to raise awareness among young people on the outcomes of the NDC and outline different opportunities to become politically active and demand the implementation of these outcomes. As the result of the YPC survey shows, 71% state that they are not aware of the outcomes of the NDC. At the time, YPC had already been working with the Yemeni parliament in its Yemen Parliament Watch (YPW) project, which began in 2009.

3 Ala Qasem looks at the barriers of youth participation in political parties in the context of the transitional period in Qasem (2013) https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/176063/five-barriers-to-youth-engagement.pdf; Atiaf Alwazir analyzes three particular youth groups and their impact on politics during the transitional period in Alwazir (2016); also see Alwazir (2013) for an analysis of the independent youth movement in the NDC.

4 See Awazir (2013)

5 See al-Akhali (2014) for a comprehensive analysis of the NDC results with regards to youth empowerment and inclusion.
After YPW became the most important media source on parliamentary proceedings in the country, YPC felt it was well positioned to create communication channels between youth groups across the country and their representatives in the capital. In previous projects, YPC gained positive experience in consulting Yemeni government bodies, specifically the Ministry of Interior with regards to security sector reform. The project was to build on that momentum, as YPC realized the unique opportunity the formal transition period created when Yemen and its civil society received international support, while Yemeni politicians at the same time became more receptive to YPC’s work.

It was clear at the time, however, that youth development and participation did not rank high on the Yemeni government’s agenda. Despite the protests and the transitional period, the needs and demands of youths in Yemen continued to be neglected. Political changes that did occur have not positively impacted the daily lives of youths, particularly in regard to jobs, basic services, infrastructure and the humanitarian situation. A needs assessment survey with 485 youth activists from 7 governorates (Ibb, Sana’a city, Al-Baidha, Taiz, Houdeidah, Hadramout, Aden and Marib) conducted in September 2012 found that youth activists believed the government should focus on the economy and public services (25.5%), as well as security (19.7%).6 Rather than addressing these issues and thereby improving the livelihoods of not only Yemen’s young generation, but its entire population, the government was involved in elite infighting. These power struggles, as well as an ill-designed formal transition process has led to the failure of the deliberations in the NDC, the escalation of violence throughout the country and eventually to the military intervention of the Saudi-led coalition.7 With that the implementation of the NDC outcomes became impossible. Instead, the already weak state fragmented even further, with various non-state actors hijacking or replacing state institutions leading to a complex institutional landscape.

This new environment, with the obsolescence of national level institutions, including the parliament, required YPC to re-think the project “Youth Voices in Policy.” It was clear early on that the military intervention would soon leave a dramatic impact on the humanitarian situation of the Middle East’s poorest country. The amount of conflict within communities and families seemed to increase as violence escalated further. For that reason, it became a new priority to understand the living conditions of young Yemenis in this new environment, rather than to educate young people on the outcomes of the NDC. At the same time, YPC did not know whether Yemeni government officials would be receptive to youth advocacy efforts. Moreover, it was not clear how these officials, who themselves lost much of their influence on politics with the intensification of the conflict, would exert any influence even if the youths’ advocacy efforts were well-received. We shifted the focus to the local level only; connected youth not only with state representatives, but also with social figures who we deemed influential within communities, these included tribal sheikhs or neighborhood authorities (the so-called `aqils).

6 Funck & Transfeld (2013, p.3).
7 Although the NDC was often celebrated as an inclusive forum and as a model for a peaceful transition in the Middle East and North Africa, the conference failed to be truly inclusive with the southern Hirak movement and civil society being underrepresented and traditional political forces being dominant. Moreover, the conference failed to empower the range of voices included, while at the same time the timeframe remained unrealistic and elite infighting and violence surrounding the conference ultimately contributed to the conference’s failure, for a comprehensive analysis see for instance Transfeld (2016).
Youth Lobby Groups were established in the framework of this project and began reporting on the living conditions of young people and women in their communities in mid-2015. The reports are published in Arabic on the Youth Lobby Group website. The lobby groups are scattered throughout the country, with Sanaa, Marib, Ibb, al-Hodeidah, al-Dhali’ and Aden being at the heart of the project. Each group is composed of 15 members, with roughly half being women and half being men. They are roughly in the age between 15 and 34, and have different educational, social and political backgrounds. They were selected among 1100 applicants that expressed interest in the participation in the project in February 2015. A lot of their work concentrated on women’s education, forced marriage and child labor. The themes that the YLGs focused on in their work also informed the contents of this report, with parts of their reporting being re-printed here.

The report is based on a representative nationwide survey of 1500 youth that was implemented in May 2017. The respondents are between the age of 15 and 25; half of them are female and half of them are male. The survey was implemented in all of Yemen’s governorates with the exception of Socotra, as well as Saada, as surveying has become increasingly difficult in the Houthi stronghold since the beginning of the military intervention in March 2015. Further data was collected in six focus group discussions held in Sanaa, Marib, Ibb, al-Hodeidah, al-Dhali’ and Aden, as well as interviews conducted with 72 of the 120 members of the YLGs in the same governorates.

The following report builds on the efforts of the YLGs to report on the everyday struggles of young people within their communities, as well as how Yemeni youth see the future of Yemen. The first section looks at the general living conditions youth find themselves in today. We asked young people across Yemen about their own and their families’ wellbeing; what they and their families are lacking in their communities in terms of resources, infrastructure and services, and how they deal with food shortages in particular. The second section is dedicated to the youth’s everyday life within their communities, as well as conflicts they may be facing within their families’ or neighbourhood. Seeing that the financial pressure families are facing puts stress on the young generation, their potential to contribute financially to their families is also explored. The third section examines education of young Yemenis, as many youth are having to give up school and contribute to their families’ finances. The last section looks at how young Yemenis can be supported.

YLG Website: http://ylgyemen.org/
The most pressing issue young people are facing in Yemen today is the dire financial situation of their families. In the context of a dramatically deteriorated economy, with swaths of industrial infrastructure and agricultural land having been destroyed during the war and an ongoing partial sea and air blockade\(^9\), the families’ incomes are put under stress due to the increase of prices of commodities, as well as the salary crisis. Since September 2016, salaries of government employees were no longer paid due to a political conflict over the control of the Yemeni central bank\(^10\). 1.2 million Yemenis are listed on the public sector wage bill, with each being responsible for a household with an average size of 7. Unsurprisingly, the salary crisis was mentioned by participants in all focus group discussions as the one factor that effected their family’s situation the most negatively. The increased prices in combination with the salary crisis leaves many families unable to acquire items to meet their basic needs. A participant of the Ibb focus group explained that due to the shortage and prices of certain items, families have resorted to using firewood instead of propane gas and donkeys for transportation. In June 2017, a month before the survey was implemented, the national average price for flour was 28.4% higher than in pre-crisis period. Sugar and vegetable oil were respectively 27.2% and 15% more expensive. Prices of cooking gas increased by 82.5%, petrol by 42.7% and diesel by 41.6%\(^11\).

When asked to rate the situation of their family, about half of the youth see their current condition as either somewhat bad or very bad. Two thirds of the respondents stated that when thinking of the last year (2016), there were times their family did not have food. 43% said their families were suffering a lot from the increase of prices for food, medicine and fuel; 9% said their families were not able to buy these items. Life has become a little bit more difficult to 19%; 6% said their families are doing fine despite the war. Roughly one quarter rate their situation as neither bad nor good; another quarter assesses their situation to be either somewhat good or very good. This leaves more than half of the Yemeni population between the ages of 15 and 25 being severely affected by the indirect consequences of the war, particularly the increase of prices and availability of food, fuel and water. 40% of the families of the youth questioned have received aid from humanitarian organizations at least once since the beginning of 2017. When asked what families needed the most, food ranked the highest.

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\(^9\) With the onset of the Saud-led military intervention in Yemen, a sea and air blockade was erected with the goal to stop any transfers of arms to the Houthis. However, this has dramatically impacted the delivery of aid, as well as commercial trade affecting prices of basic commodities. A leaked UN document written by a UN panel of experts named by the UN Security Council questioned the legality of the blockade, arguing that there is no evidence that short range ballistic missiles had been transferred to the Houthis, see Oakford (2017). Beyond this, there are reports that the Saudi-led coalition has systematically and deliberately targeted agricultural land as well as industry, which not only impacts on food security, but also the job market, see Fisk (2016). Human Rights Watch (2016) documented the destruction of 13 civilian economic structures targeted by the Saudi-led coalition in violation of international humanitarian law.

\(^10\) For a comprehensive analysis of the Central Bank in the context of the conflict see Nasser (2016).

\(^11\) WFP (2017).
Graph 1: How available are the following items? (n=1,500)

Given the fragmented nature of the Yemeni state in terms of territory, institutions and infrastructure, the geographical dimension of the survey results are particularly interesting. After over two years of war in Yemen, the country’s institutional landscape has dramatically changed. The takeover of the capital Sanaa by Ansarallah, also known as the Houthi movement, in September 2014 and the subsequent resignation of the cabinet in February 2015 marked the end of national level authority over state institutions spanning all of Yemen’s territory. The geographical dimension of the survey results are particularly interesting. After over two years of war in Yemen, the country’s institutional landscape has dramatically changed. The takeover of the capital Sanaa by Ansarallah, also known as the Houthi movement, in September 2014 and the subsequent resignation of the cabinet in February 2015 marked the end of national level authority over state institutions spanning all of Yemen’s territory. There is a widespread sense of this, particularly in the capital, as indicated by the 93% of the youth in Sanaa city and 96% of those residing in Sanaa governorate that say the state is not present in their area. Other areas where a clear majority (>70%) see the state as being absent include Taiz (70%), al-Baydha’ (73%), Abyan (73%), Lahj (82%), and al-Jawf (83%). A plurality (42%) of young people believe the state is not present in their area. Areas where residents between 15 and 25 years of age perceive the state to be more present include Ibb, Hajja, Hadhramawt, al-Mahra and Amran. In Hajja, for instance, 98% have heard of the local council being active and perceive its activity mostly as being positive. This far exceeds the numbers in the other governorates.

According to the survey, those institutions affiliated with the state are more widely known, but generally perceived to be active in a rather negative way, when compared to civil society organizations. 45% have heard of CSOs being active in their area; 31% of these perceive CSO activity as being positive, whereas 30% remained indifferent. It must be underlined that CSOs, although they are often weak and underfinanced, have been active in the provision of basic services to communities in the context of the conflict. 13

12 For a comprehensive overview of the conflict in Yemen see Salisbury (2016).
In the focus group discussions, the participants most often referred to the General People’s Congress (GPC) and the Houthis as being active in their area, as well as Sunni/Salafi groups, depending on their location. Political parties are viewed particularly negatively, according to the data, which was also underlined in the focus group discussions.

**Graph 2: How present is the state in your area? (n=1,500)**

**Graph 3: Are the following active in your area? (n=1,500)**
The fragmentation of the state is further underlined when looking at the security perceptions of young people, who have increasingly come to rely on more localized leadership structures. When asked, what actors bring security to their area, state institutions (police and military) are mentioned by only 19%. Just over one-fifth (21%) say it is the citizens themselves who bring security, whereas 20% say it is the ‘aqil14 or the sheikh. 19% say that no one provides security to their area. In the south, respondents were more inclined to name state institutions, however, as 30% stated that the army and 19% stated that the police bring security. This may be due to the circumstance that the Hadi government, which might be viewed in the south as a more legitimate state representative than the Houthis in the north, has better access to institutions in the southern governorates as opposed to the Houthi held areas in the north. Nevertheless, this mostly points to the circumstance that authority lies with local social figures, rather than with state institutions or state representatives. The ‘aqil (34%) and tribal sheikhs (28%) are considered to be the most important community leaders. 10% consider such figures as military leaders, religious leaders, political party leaders or state representatives as influential within the communities.

The clear majority (81%) of young people between 15 and 25 want the state to be more present in their area. When discussing the meaning of “state” in the focus group discussions, participants on the one hand understood the state in terms of its institutions and laws, but on the other hand, also in terms of its responsibilities. The function emphasized most by the participants is that the state should provide security to the citizens. Other functions include the provision of basic services, such as education, health care and ensure food security. On the backdrop of the salary crisis, many also pointed to the state’s responsibility to create income sources and the paying of salaries to employees. Given the different levels the state is perceived to be present, the living conditions are clearly also perceived to be different depending on the location.

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14 The ‘aqil is a neighborhood authority that is selected based on social standing, influence and often political party affiliation.
Southern Yemen

In Yemen’s south-eastern governorates al-Mahra and Hadhramout, youth appear to be the least affected by the indirect consequences of the war. 20% of young people in al-Mahra,\textsuperscript{15} consider their family’s situation as very good; 50% consider it as somewhat good. In Hadhramawt, 9% regard their situation as very good, 45% consider the condition of their family as somewhat good. It is in these two governorates where the respondents are not facing food, propane gas or fuel shortages. It is only in Hadhramawt that 9% of respondents stated that there were times in 2016 when their families did not have enough food, and 4% stated that food is somewhat unavailable. However, 70% of the families of the youth questioned in al-Mahra have also received aid from humanitarian organizations at least once. In Hadhramawt, 55% of the families have received aid. Also contributing to the wellbeing of the residents in these two governorates is the availability of water, shelter or housing as well as electricity. In terms of the availability of these resources, infrastructure and services, al-Mahra and Hadhramawt rank among the top out of all governorates. These numbers decline when leaving the relatively stable east and moving west-ward.

**Graph 4: Availability of services, resources and infrastructure in al-Mahra.**

\textsuperscript{15} Although the sample of al-Mahra is too small to make any representative claims, the findings are supported by data of humanitarian organizations. In April 2017, just one month before the YPC survey was conducted, Al-Mahra and Hadhramout were for instance assessed to be at a stressed level in terms of food insecurity, whereas the rest of the country was rated to be at crisis or emergency levels, see ERCC (2017).
While many in the south regard themselves as not being affected by the current conflict, 14% nevertheless stated that their families were affected by the war and are not able to buy food. This number is above the national average and points to the severity of the situation in the affected governorates. In Lahj, al-Dhali’ and Abyan 37%, 33% and 17%, respectively, of the population between 15 and 25 stated that their families can’t buy food, medicine or fuel. Additionally, roughly 40% in each of the three governorates stated that their families are suffering a lot from the increased prices for food, medicine and fuel. In April 2017, Lahj and Abyan were rated at an emergency level in terms of food insecurity; al-Dhali’ was rated at a crisis level. It is these three governorates where the largest numbers of Yemenis between 15 and 25 years of age recall times in 2016 when their families did not have enough food (respectively, 58%, 63% and 83%). While the situation in al-Dhali’ in terms of the availability of resources, services and infrastructure appears to be average, youth in Lahj and Abyan face dramatic shortages. Particularly in Lahj, situated in Yemen’s most south-western corner, the respondents rated the situation of their families as mostly very bad (65%); 22% find the situation of their families to be somewhat bad. Only 5% regard their situation as somewhat good. With 42% stating that food is somewhat unavailable, Lahj comes out on top of all governorates in terms of food shortages. With 17% saying food is somewhat unavailable, the majority of the residents in Abyan between the age of 15 and 25 have access to food. However, nowhere else in the country are residents facing such a desperate lack of water. A staggering 77% of the respondents say water is not available in Abyan. Slightly over three quarters of the respondents do not have electricity in these three governorates.

16 ERCC (2017).
Graph 6: Availability of services, resources and infrastructure in Lahj. (n=60/MoE=12,65)

Graph 7: Availability of services, resources and infrastructure in al-Dhali’. (n=40/MoE=15,49)
Central Yemen

In central Yemen, Taiz is most severely affected by the consequences of the war with 17% stating their families are unable to buy food, medicine and fuel, whereas 60% regard themselves to be suffering a lot from the price increases. Being situated in central Yemen, Taiz has developed to become one of the harshest fronts of the current conflict, with the control over the city being divided between forces loyal to the Houthi-Saleh alliance, as well as militias being backed by the Hadi government and the Gulf States. The inhabitants of the city in the last several years have experienced dramatic shortages of basic supplies, also due to sieges that have been laid on the city. In April 2017, Taiz was rated to be at the emergency level in terms of food insecurity, with nearly 2.5 million people being severely affected.  

In contrast to Taiz, Marib stands out as an area in central Yemen where respondents expressed relative well-being. In Marib, the authorities were able to gain relative autonomy since the beginning of the conflict in March 2015. Although the governorate has experienced fierce fighting, presently the situation in Marib appears to be improving dramatically, with the population nevertheless being affected by the consequences of the war. 10% claimed to be doing fine despite the war, 45% said life has become a little bit more difficult, but they are doing fine; 25% stated that their families are suffering a little bit from the price increases. 20% stated they are suffering a lot from price increases of food, fuel or medicine.

17 ERCC (2017).
18 Also see Hubbard (2017).
None of the interviewed residents of Marib are unable to buy these basic commodities. Nevertheless, the conflict also more immediately impacts the availability of food. In the Marib focus group, participants mentioned that the closing of roads makes it difficult to access food and at the same time negatively impacts the income of farmers, who depend on the roads to transport their goods to the markets. However, it is important to note that 75% of youth in Marib have received aid from humanitarian organizations at least once since the beginning of 2017. Nonetheless, respondents in Marib do not face the dramatic shortage of water or food seen elsewhere in the country. With 60% having access to electricity, Marib ranks amongst the few governorates where residents have steady access to electricity. Participants in the focus group discussion conducted in Marib reiterate these findings, as they believe Marib is one of the most stable areas in Yemen. They also point to the circumstance that Marib is a host of IDPs, as evidence for the stability of the area. At the same time, the increasing number of IDPs are said to contribute negatively to the overall living conditions. The survey results reveal that 25% of the Marib sample have no proper shelter or housing; 20% only have somewhat proper shelter or housing in Marib.

In Ibb, one-third of the youth describe the situation of their families as being very bad, 27% say it is somewhat bad and 36% say its neither bad, nor good. Only 6% say the situation is at least somewhat good. 49% of the youth in Ibb say their families are suffering a lot from the increase of commodity prices; 31% say they are suffering a little bit from the increase of prices. 6% can’t afford to buy items to cover their basic needs. With 25% remembering having times when their family didn’t have enough food in the last year, Ibb remains under the national average of 34%. When it comes to the availability of resources, infrastructure and services, Ibb ranks better than many other governorates. Nevertheless, residents face shortages of electricity, water and to some extent food. Although many members of the focus group discussion held in Ibb believe Aden is stable because of the activity of President Hadi in that area, many also referred to rural areas of Ibb as being one of the most stable areas in Yemen, as there are no clashes.

In al-Hodeidah, the youth rated the situation of their families as slightly better than those in Ibb. 8% and 25% respectively say they are doing fine or that life has become a little bit more difficult. Nevertheless, 18% suffer a little bit from price increases, while 38% are suffering a lot from price increases, with 9% not being able to afford items to cover their basic needs. In al-Hodeidah 35% remember times when their family did not have food in the last year. The difficulties to access food impacts the way families prioritize expenditures. In the focus group in al-Hodeidah, participants mentioned that the number of daily meals was reduced as a consequence of the shortages, and that buying food became a priority over medicine. Again, focus group participants in al-Hodeidah mostly agreed that al-Hodeidah is one of the most stable areas in Yemen, referring to the city, they believe that life there is continuing normally, as the city has not experienced the war effects as much as other areas. Airstrikes, according to them, were mostly restricted to areas outside of al-Hodeidah city. Nevertheless, two participants of al-Hodeidah focus group believed that the capital is in fact the safest area in Yemen.
Graph 9: Availability of services, resources and infrastructure in Taiz. (n=190/ MoE=7,11)

Graph 10: Availability of services, resources and infrastructure in Marib. (n=20/ MoE=21,91)
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Graph 11: Availability of services, resources and infrastructure in Ibb. (n=170/ MoE=7,52)

Graph 12: Availability of services, resources and infrastructure in al-Hodeidah. (n=170/ MoE=7,52)
Northern Yemen

Although the results for Sanaa city indicate that the situation there is not as stable as, for instance, al-Mahra, Hadhramawt or Marib, young people in the capital feel they are better off than in many other parts of the country. 40% say they are suffering a lot from the price increase of food, fuel and medicine; 34% say they suffer a little bit from the price increases. 26% say they are doing fine or that their life has only become a little bit more hard. Certainly, with 37% saying that water is somewhat unavailable and 2% saying water is not available in Sanaa, the largest city in Yemen, shows the gravity of the water crisis in the country. Indeed, the focus group participants in Sanaa mentioned that many of the people they know in the capital depend on Sabeel water tanks, which are provided by benefactors to poor families and are made available at mosques. They likewise mentioned vouchers that were distributed to government employees in place of their salary, which enables families to purchase food items.

In the northern governorates, it is the mostly rural governorates of Hajja, Amran, Rayma, Mahweet and al-Jawf where the people have been most effected by the indirect consequences of the war. In Hajja, 21% stated that their families can’t buy food, medicine or fuel; 46% said they are suffering a lot from price increases. In al-Jawf, 10% are unable to buy these items, while 47% said they are suffering a lot due to the price increases. 6% in Amran, Rayma and Mahweet claimed not to be able to buy food, medicine or fuel. However, a staggering three quarters of the respondents in each of the three governorates stated that their families are suffering a lot from the increased prices. Food shortages are particularly pronounced in Hajja and Amran, where, respectively, 38% and 40% say food is somewhat unavailable. In the same governorates, respectively, 90% and 99% of the respondents do not have access to electricity. Despite these numbers, aid appears to not reach these regions as much as it gets to other regions. In Hajja 50% of the families have received aid, in Amran 23% of the youth stated that their families have received some kind of aid; in Rayma 17% have received assistance. In Mahweet it is only 3% who have received aid; in al-Jawf it is 57% who have received aid.
Graph 13: Availability of services, resources and infrastructure in Sana’a city. (n=140/ MoE=8,28)

Graph 14: Availability of services, resources and infrastructure in Hajjah. (n=120/ MoE=8,94)
Graph 15: Availability of services, resources and infrastructure in al-Mahweet. (n=40/ MoE=15,49)

Graph 16: Availability of services, resources and infrastructure in Amran. (n=70, MoE=11,71)
Graph 17: Has your family received any assistance since the beginning of the year? (n=1,500)
SENSE OF VALUE AT TIMES OF CONFLICT: COMMUNITY, FAMILY AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES

It has repeatedly been stated that the military intervention of March 2015 destroyed the social fabric within Yemeni society, impacting the communities’ sense of solidarity and tearing apart connections, which previously bridged social, political, regional and sectarian divides. Moreover, given the financial pressure families are under as well as the deterioration of the job market, youth find themselves under pressure to contribute financially to their families, and see the lack of their financial power being connected to their sense of worth. These factors would seemingly provide fertile ground for increased conflict, whether in the family, among friends, or at the larger neighbourhood level.

Generally speaking, conflicts appear more often within the neighbourhood, than within groups of friends or families. Females also experience more conflict than males. A third stated that conflicts sometimes take place within the neighbourhood. Political differences, the availability of food, fuel and medicine, as well as money are common reasons for conflicts when they do occur. Further sources of conflict were revealed in the focus group discussions, where participants pointed to land disputes, job opportunities, as well as housing as a source of conflict within the communities. Religious differences to a lesser degree cause conflicts, which is important to consider against the backdrop of the growing sectarian discourse. Conflicts within neighbourhoods appear most frequently in Abyan (27%), al-Hudeidah (27%), Lahj (25%), Marib (25%) and al-Dhali’ (38%).

Participants from Sanaa city underlined community solidarity as a means for survival. And indeed this is reflected in the survey results with only 5% saying conflict occurs often in the neighbourhood, and 39% stating it never occurs. In al-Hodeidah, where only 6% stated that conflicts never occur in the neighbourhood, focus group participants revealed that the sense of solidarity has changed within the communities. For instance, in the past it had been possible to buy food on credit at shops, which is no longer possible.

19 See Gardner (2016).
21 While neighborhood conflicts were relatively common in Abyan, it should also be noted that more than half (53%) stated that these conflicts never occur in their neighborhood.
Graph 18: How often do conflicts occur in these areas of your life?

Graph 19: What are the reasons for conflicts in your neighbourhood?
Youth in the Community

Many (42%) of the young people between the age of 15 and 25 feel valued by their communities, with 27% feeling somewhat valued. The focus group discussions reveal a more nuanced picture. Many expressed the sentiment that youth are marginalized within the community as they do not receive support. Even though many youth want to positively contribute to their communities, the participants in the focus group discussions complained about a lack of opportunities and cite psychological problems and depression among youth as resulting from the lack of opportunities. In Ibb, focus group participants underlined that youth were perceived as a cause for conflict within the community. Moreover, a lack of access to jobs and financial resources, as well as connections to influential figures, means they are not acknowledged as valuable contributors to their communities. Although the participants of the focus group discussions offered plenty of ideas for how youth could be active in for instance encouraging Yemen’s young generation to complete their education or in the fields of health, environment or development, the majority are not aware of youth groups being active in their area (54%), whereas 28% have heard about them. Additionally, the YLGs found that many youth groups ceased to be active due to the war and the economic situation. In Sanaa in particular the focus group participants underlined a fear of abduction as a reason for their lack of political activism. Generally speaking, but with the exception of Abyan, the activities of youth groups are perceived to be positive by the respondents. In Abyan, 75% believe youth are active in a negative way.

More than 45 youth initiatives and youth groups have joined the network of youth initiatives in al-Hodeidah governorate. However, in reality only about 10 initiatives of them are active due to the current conditions in the governorate as well as the lack of awareness about volunteering and adopting young volunteers. Captain Abdulsalam al-Sayaghi, the head of City Stars Team, a Hip-Hop and sport youth team, said “Most of the youth teams suffer from the deterioration of the economic situation as all activities and volunteering initiatives were suspended.”

February 2016 - Ala’a Alhatmi – YLG al-Hodeidah

Many participants of the focus group discussions also pointed to the discrimination between males and females, and indeed females feel slightly less valued by their community with 63% feeling at least somewhat valued, compared to 76% of males. In the reporting of the YLG about their communities, the disadvantaged position of females, particularly with regards to education, in the communities is often underlined. The lack of support and the lack of opportunities for youth in their communities is best reflected in the fact that 37% believe community leaders do not understand the youth’s needs and do not try their best to satisfy them; 14% do not know if these leaders understand the needs or try to satisfy them. Only 20% believe that community leaders at least somewhat understand the youth’s needs and try to satisfy them. It is particularly in Sanaa city, Sanaa governorate and Taiz where young people do not feel understood by their community leaders. All in all, 40% say community leaders do not give youth the opportunity to communicate their needs to them; 13% say they do not know about such opportunities and 14% say they somewhat do not believe that community leaders offer such opportunities. Nevertheless, 11% of young Yemenis between 15 and 25 are in direct contact with their community leaders and have communicated their needs to them. However,
only 2% of females, as opposed to 20% of males have this kind of contact. The majority of those who are in contact with these leaders have these exchanges face to face, in for instance Qat sessions, the mosque or public markets. 9% are in contact with community leaders over the phone, 4% visit these leaders in their offices, 2% are connected with them through social media.

**Family & Past Time**

Generally, when it comes to the young people’s everyday life, it is mostly dedicated to the family as they spend most of their time at home. 32% spend 13-16 hours at home; 25% spend 9-12 hours at home. And when they are outside of their house, while not being in an educational or vocational facility, they spend most of their time visiting relatives or friends (45%), as well as helping their family with activities outside of the house (17%). This is particularly true for females, who spend most of their time at home and/or helping the family with chores outside of the house. Males are much more likely to spend their time chewing Qat (19%) or playing games (19%) while outside. 27% of the young people say infrastructure for youth, most of them being soccer fields (65%), exist in their area. However, 68% say there is no youth infrastructure in their area, and clearly, the infrastructure that does exist is not appropriate for females, as social norms dictate that they are not supposed to play soccer, particularly in public.

26% of the youth between 15 and 25 spend more time at home as a consequence of the war. 19% spend less time at home and 53% spend the same amount of time at home as they did before the war began in March 2015. It is especially in al-Dhali’, Taiz and Marib where young people spend more time at home because of the war. Females traditionally spend most of their time at home, it is thus not surprising that the time they spend at home was not affected by the war for 62%. Nevertheless, 26% of females explicitly stated that they spend more time at home because of the war. Of the ones who spend more time at home, they do so because of the general insecurity (43%). Beyond the question of security, males mostly spend more time at home because they lost their jobs (37%), while females spend more time at home because their learning facility was closed (24%). The extra time spent at home is also used differently by males and females. Males chew Qat (23%), help their parents (20%), read books (18%), watch TV (17%) or use social media (12%) or do other things (10%). Females, on the other hand, clearly prioritize helping their parents (61%), and only then watch TV (14%), read books (7%) and use social media (6%).

Regarding women suffering from life burdens, women in addition to their usual housework, are increasingly working in agriculture, bringing firewood from far distances, taking hours to reach, aside from bringing water to the house. These are the main reasons behind girls dropping out of school.

February 2016 - Mohammed Alahmar - YLG Ibb
When it comes to the family, money followed by food, fuel, water and medicine are common reasons for conflict when they occur. This certainly underlines the difficult economic conditions families are facing in the context of the war. Nevertheless, the majority of youth (82%) feel valued by their parents. There are also no significant gender differences in this regard. 65% state that they believe their parents understand their needs and try to satisfy them and 61% of the youth believe their parents give them the opportunity to communicate their needs to them. 24% say parents somewhat grant this opportunity.

**Graph 20: What are the reasons for conflicts in your family?**

**Graph 21: How valued do you feel by your teacher, bosses, community and parents?**
Job Opportunities

In interviews conducted with members of the YLGs, the majority found that there are little to no job opportunities in their area. Yousra, 33 years old from al-Hodeidah says that young people “are looking for any job, whether it is suitable or not, just to get money for their poor families.” Given the salary crisis, focus group participants mentioned that families had to become less dependent on government jobs. With reductions of salaries in the private sector, focus group participants mentioned agriculture, self-employment and day labour in agriculture and construction as the most important sources of income for their families. In Sanaa, participants mentioned that many families leave the city to make a living on their farms in villages. Others in Ibb added that it has become more common for fathers to ask their sons to work full-time on their farms to increase their income. Ameen, 26 from al-Hodeidah believes that “agriculture is the field in which most of the rural communities are now working in. However, this field was affected very much by the war (fuel crisis and the closing of ports), this affected negatively the living conditions.” Focus group participants in Marib stated that the war also brought new possibilities to generate an income, as youth could join the military. Of course, this is highly problematic. Not only does the recruitment of young Yemenis cause their radicalization and militarization, but it also deprives them of an education and often recruits are underage. Naif, 31 year old from Ibb, stated that “there are no opportunities but to join the fighting and the militias. Many things are now different than before the war; salaries were paid unlike now, and there was a lot of investment, but now companies stopped working.” According to a UNICEF report, 1572 underage boys were recruited and used in the conflict, which increased from 850 in the last year.22

The war that was launched by the Arab alliance in Yemen in March 2015 has displaced many citizens and led to the suspension of both the primary and secondary schools as well as some universities in some governorates. War was the major reason behind the deterioration of the economic situation of families whose sons were forced to leave Yemen looking for better job opportunities or seeking asylum especially in European countries. Thus, Ibb governorate is suffering from an increasing number of students who drop out of schools as well as the spread of child labour, with children washing cars, working in shops, selling Qat or other day labourer jobs. Additionally, some children as well as some poor youth are begging in the streets or are being sexually exploited. It is also a pity that many children either by themselves or by force from their families join the Popular Revolutionary Committees. There is fear of children being trafficked, body organs trafficking and youth having to migrate due to the increase of poverty.

July 2015, Abdullah al-Badani

12% of the young Yemenis between the age of 15 and 25 actually generate an income with which they can support their families: 2% are fulltime employed; 8% are working as a day labourer. Those between the ages of 15 and 17 are most likely to be students (72% in this age cohort), but only 16% of the youth above 18 (18-25) have an income.

22 UNICEF (2017a, p.2)
Of those who are not students, the majority are housewives (60% of all female respondents) or unemployed (16% of the entire sample) and do not generate an income. It comes as no surprise that participants of the focus groups often referenced the salary crisis, as this puts pressure on them to also contribute to their families financially. Generally, males and the older cohorts feel slightly more affected by the war than women and the younger cohorts. Given that an increasing number of families are put under extreme financial strains, those among the young people interviewed who are expected by society to take responsibility and provide for the family feel more affected.

When it comes to employment, the gender gap is most obvious: 60% of females between 15 and 25 are housewives, 32% are students, 5% are unemployed and not looking for a job. With only 1% being part-time employed and 2% unemployed but looking for a job, only 2% of the females between 15 and 25 are or would consider becoming part of the workforce. The traditional role of the woman is in the household; for many Yemeni women secondary education and a job are therefore not an option due to restrictions imposed on them by their families and society at large. Because women do not generate an income for their families directly, families with little financial means see daughters as a burden. Dowries paid by grooms to the families of the bride are therefore an incentive for poor families to marry off their daughters at a young age. Although child marriages have long been common in Yemen, the number of underage girls being forced into early marriage is increasing due to the financial stress families are facing in the context of the current war. According to UNICEF, more than two thirds of girls are married off underage. This increased from 50% before the conflict escalated in 2015.23

If we are going to describe the social conditions of Ash-sha’ar women, this will not be much different from other Yemeni women, particularly in the rural communities. Socially, women endure different burdens such as the parents’ unfairness toward girls as they request high dowries in order for them to accept marriage proposals, treating their daughters like any other commodities, rather than human beings who have a right to get married and to be a housewife, raising children; this is the basic life that Allah gave to all people. In some cases, parents request more than $50,000 as dowry! Other issue that girls face is being forced against their will to get married to their cousins.

February 2016 – Moahmmed Alahmar – YLG Ibb

Girls in ad-Dhali’ are suffering as much as other girls in Yemen from early marriage in which girls must accept to get married to men regardless of the age or social status. Most of the parents have only one concern, which is money, seeing girls like any other cheap commodity sold in a public market. In addition to other reasons such as the traditional beliefs that unmarried women with 20 years of age or older bring shame and embarrassment to their families! As a result, women are forced to make such dangerous experiences at an early age.

August 2016 – YLG al-Dhali’

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23 UNICEF (2017a, p.2).
When compared to the family and the community, youth feel less valued in their educational or vocational institutions. This may contribute to the high dropout rates of young people from school, and to the young people’s sentiment that contributing to the family financially may be more important than pursuing higher education. 39% say they feel very valued by their teachers, professors or bosses; 26% feel valued. While 24% remain indifferent, 8 percent do not feel very valued and 2% say they do not feel valued at all. Interestingly, in terms of how valued they feel, there is not a significant gender gap. However, there seems to be a generational gap, with the older ones feeling more valued than the younger ones. Those in the south also feel significantly more valued than those in the north, with 63% and 32% respectively feeling very valued.

**Education: Giving up a Future for Present Survival**

The lack of education was expressed as a major concern for youth in the focus group discussions. The state of education in Yemen has always been weak, with low enrolment rates and high dropout rates, as well as large gender disparities. Nevertheless, the country has been able to make progress within the last decades, particularly with regards to the literacy rates, which increased for boys and girls.24 Any positive developments within the education sector are now regressing. After the Saudi-led military intervention began in March 2015, schools initially

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shut down and did not reopen until November of that year. Although it appeared the education system could withstand all odds and at least partially continue to operate in early 2016, the current salary crisis puts enormous stress on the educational system, risking the future of 4.5 million Yemeni children and youth. Teachers have not received their salaries regularly since September 2016 and have been on a strike since October 2017, which marked the beginning of the school year. Many young people had to quit school because the costs for education were too high given that the current salary crisis, as well as the increase of prices of commodities effect the income of their families. At the same time, the UN estimates that roughly 1,600 schools have been completely or partially destroyed during the war. Other factors, including frequent delays in examinations as well as the postponement of the school year, temporary school closures due to fighting, as well as the fact that teachers have not received their salaries in over a year puts extreme stress on the educational system in Yemen.

Graph 23: According to your opinion, how available are these services and products in your area? (Education)

26 UNICEF (2017b).
27 UNICEF (2017b).
Given the current situation, many also prioritize generating an income for their families. The value of education is nevertheless acknowledged by 43%, who believe that education at least somewhat prepares them for a good future, while a third remained indifferent. 14% say it only somewhat prepares them, while 8% claim it does not prepare them at all. With 51%, females feel more confident in education being important for a good future than male respondents, with 39% sharing this confidence. Certainly, given the patriarchal nature of Yemeni society, education is more important to women to be able to make progress in society in terms of securing a job and an income, whereas for males, patronage politics is as important as education with regards to their chances to find a job and secure a good future. As the survey results show, however, the gender gap in education remains pronounced and is likely to increase further in the context of the current war, which has exacerbated an already dire situation.

Despite these perceptions of education being important, in 2017, less than half (42%) of the 15 to 25 year olds are enrolled in school or university. 11% of the sample has never gone to school and is illiterate. While 6% of the 15 to 20 year olds are illiterate, illiteracy appears wider spread among the older cohorts. A staggering 18% of the 21 to 25 year olds are illiterate. These numbers certainly reflect the progress Yemen has made in terms of enrolment rates in the last 20 years. However, while enrolment rates have increased, drop-out rates have already been high in the past, with these numbers having increased with the escalation of violence. According to the survey data, 35% of Yemenis have dropped out of school before completing a secondary school degree. Often young Yemenis are taken out of school so that they can contribute to their families financially. Abdulrahman, 26 years old from al-Hodeidah finds: “There are many stories but most of them are generally about the inability of the heads of the households to provide the basic needs for education such as notebooks and other tools and costs. In many cases, sons stop going to school and work on the streets, looking for a living either from begging or working on Qat markets. I personally know many children who are supposed to be in school but they dropped out and join militias.” Abdulnasser, 28 years from al-Dhali’ tells the story of a family of six: “father, mother, three girls and one boy. The boy was forced to leave the school while he was in 8th grade to help his father who is working as a day labourer, just to provide the family with basic needs.”
The fewest in the sample have gone on to higher education. Clearly, this is also related to the age structure of the sample. Among the older ones, 7% of the 18-25 year olds have some university education but have not graduated (yet) and 4% of the 21-25 year olds have graduated from university.

We have met some of them [children who work on the street] to ask them about the reasons that forced them to work on the streets. Saleh is 7 years old and said: “If I stop going to the streets, my father will punish me and throw me out of the house.”

We also met Abdulrahman, he is 12 years old. “Why did you stop going to school as other children in your age?” we asked him. “What benefit will I get from school? If I attend lessons, does this provide me and my family with food?” he answered.

January 2016 – YLG al-Hodeidah

**Graph 24: Level of education per gender and milieu**

- **Female**
  - Literate (Can’t read and write)
  - Didn’t complete elementary school
  - Didn’t complete secondary school
  - Didn’t complete Institute after secondary school
  - Some university (didn’t graduated)
- **Male**
  - Literate (Can’t read and write)
  - Didn’t complete elementary school
  - Didn’t complete secondary school
  - Didn’t complete Institute after secondary school
  - Some university (didn’t graduated)

- **Rural**
  - Literate (Can’t read and write)
  - Didn’t complete elementary school
  - Didn’t complete secondary school
  - Didn’t complete Institute after secondary school
  - Some university (didn’t graduated)
- **Urban**
  - Literate (Can’t read and write)
  - Didn’t complete elementary school
  - Didn’t complete secondary school
  - Didn’t complete Institute after secondary school
  - Some university (didn’t graduated)
15% of the youth have not gone beyond elementary school education. Especially girls often do not have the opportunity to pursue secondary education, as they are expected to learn household tasks at home in preparation for their future as a wife and mother. 18% of the female respondents have not received any education higher than elementary level. 19% of them have not received any formal education at all. While young girls are more likely to be taken out of school at a young age. The percentages of the ones who do pursue higher education is only slightly lower than the percentages of males. 12% of females have completed secondary education; 4% less than males. 1% of the females have completed university, as compared to 2% of the males.

While young girls are more likely to be taken out of school in elementary or intermediate school, boys are more likely to dropout in secondary school. A plurality of respondents (28%) have begun secondary school, but many dropped out before completion. Regularly, a Yemeni youth would complete intermediate school around the age of 16 and graduate from secondary school at the age of 19. However, 28% of the 15-17 year olds and 52% of the 19-20 year olds are outside of school.

There is also a high percentage of students who are delayed in their education. For instance, 32.4% of the age cohort between 18 and 20 years have not finished intermediate school, although the regular age for graduation would be around 16. A common reason that causes delays in education next to failing one or more years, is an interruption of education due to displacement. Often youth will first go back to school once they and their family have returned to their home town after periods of forced displacement. Often displaced families do not have access to education because they lack the financial means for private schools, and are not accepted to public ones. Abdulsalam, 28 years old from Sanaa stated: “We have many neighbours who are IDPs; their houses and schools were destroyed in the conflict in Taiz. They couldn’t join schools here as they don’t have mediation or money for a private school; this is in addition to the teachers’ strike because of the salaries issue.”

Next to the financial strains, which prevent young Yemenis from acquiring an education, the security situation, as well as the destruction of educational infrastructure are factors that negatively impact youth education today. According to the Sanaa-based Ministry of Education, 234 schools have been completely destroyed and 1270 school have been damaged due to the war. 680 schools were closed during the war and 802 were turned into shelters for displaced people. The ministry report stated that there is a total of 9,517 primary and 2,811 secondary schools in Yemen. Some of the destroyed schools were replaced with make-shift schools, they are often outdoors or a have rudimentary infrastructure only. Some other schools absorbed students from areas affected by war, resulting in ever more overcrowded classrooms. Maymona, 23 years old from al-Dhali’ says: “I know that some female students from Morees area joined our school as their own school is located in violent clashes, and was taken as a military site.”

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3% of the youth questioned in the survey, equally located in the northern and southern governorates, reported that their school was completely or partially destroyed as a consequence of the war. Khaled, 30 years old from Hajja, explained. “I am a displaced person and in my neighborhood where I live now there is a school that was destroyed by an airstrike. Children can’t go to school because it has been destroyed!” One third said that their school buildings were old and in need of construction. This is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where 36% say the buildings need construction. About two thirds say their building is in good condition. Its particularly in the south, where the youth say their institutions are in good physical condition (75%).

The focus group discussions further revealed great concern for children’s safety. Families worry about children getting caught in the crossfire, other seemingly random violence and airstrikes, which could occur on the way to or at educational facilities themselves. These security concerns effect the time students may spend at their learning facilities, if they attend at all. Generally, 61% of the youth between 15 and 25 always feel safe and 16% feel mostly safe; 5% feel always unsafe and 11% feel mostly unsafe. It is particularly in Abyan (43%), Amran (13%), Taiz (8%), Shabwa (8%), and al-Dhali’ (8%) where respondents never feel safe. In the northern governorates it is the airstrikes of the Arab alliance that threatens the personal security of the respondents the most (27%). In the southern governorates it is the spread of robbery, kidnapping and assassinations (23%) that poses the greatest threat to young people between 15 and 25, with 32% making the absence of the state responsible for the insecurity.

The majority of the 15 to 25 year olds do not have a far commute to their school or learning institution: 44% say their school is within a 1 km from their house; 33% say their institution is between 2-5 km. Because 24% of the females were unable to say how far away their school facilities are, it is difficult to say how they compare to men. However, 21% of those females who had to quit their training did so because of the long distances they must travel. This is of course also related to the tradition that females should not leave their house without a guardian. Most youth walk to school, either alone (61%) or in company of a family member (16%). 23% of girls walk to school with a member of the family. The older cohorts are more willing to commute longer, certainly due to the scarce distribution of higher learning institutes. One student from Marib (a distance of 170 km) stated that he was studying in Sana’a but had to quit going to school because of the security situation. 15% of those between 24-25 have a commute of 6-10 km (the national average is 6%); 13% have a commute that is more than 20 km (the national average is 4%). The longer distances are mostly travelled with public busses.
Of those who attend school, university or vocational training, the majority spends between 5 to 8 hours at their institutions (47%). Generally, females spend more time in the institutions than men: 56% of the female students between 15 and 25 spend between 5-8 hours at their institutions, as opposed to 43% of males. The older students spent the longest hours at their institutions, with 50% spending 5-8 hours and 26% spending 9-12 hours. Generally, it is also in the south where the young people spend more time at school, with 11% spending 9-12 hours (the national average for that timespan is 8%), in the south 47% spend 5-8 hours and 37% spend 1-4 hours.
CONCLUSIONS

Youth in Yemen are facing a very uncertain future today. Given that they represent the future of the country and that their well-being is intertwined with the future development of Yemen, it is of utmost importance to support young people in Yemen today. Half of the Yemeni population is under 18 years of age today. The grave humanitarian situation youth are living in is exacerbated by the challenges of economic nature youth are facing. Not only do youth lament a lack of job opportunities, but the current salary crisis is often leaving them and their families without an income. This effects the youth’s ability to attend schools, as many of them are taken out of school either because their families cannot afford the costs of education or because their families expect them to contribute financially. In turn, the lack of education makes it even more difficult to find jobs, driving young people to join militias to generate an income for their families. The creation of job opportunities for young people, as well as the support for the educational system should therefore be a priority of international organizations working in Yemen. Young people specifically ask for support in the establishing small projects, which could help them contribute to their families financially. International organizations should also support Yemeni civil society organizations and other public bodies, which are already active in the creation of job opportunities. These include for instance SMEPS or the Small and Micro Enterprise Promotion Service, which creates opportunities in different fields, such as agriculture and the fishing industry. The international community should also support research to assess the current state of Yemen’s economic sectors in terms of their potential to offer opportunities to young people.

International organizations should also develop a local approach to state-building in Yemen and enable bottom-up initiatives in this regard. For instance, active youth groups should be supported to push for more political inclusion on the local level. Given the lack of opportunities often leads to sentiments of despair, opportunities (both paid and unpaid) can contribute to the youth’s sense of purpose and positively impact on their mental health at times when conflict and violence threatens to cause traumatization in the long-term. While nation-wide state institutions are absent, local level institutions are often still operating to different degrees. Here, state institutions can be pushed to create better communication channels for young people to communicate their needs to community leaders. To enhance the activities of individual youths and youth groups, the creation and strengthening of networks must be supported. Particularly since the war, individual initiatives function in an emergency mode, negatively impacting overall coordination with other initiatives. For individual activities to have a wider impact and to better share best practices, communication between individual civil society organizations and youth groups must be strengthened. Because of the war, particularly personal and face-to-face contact between various organizations has become increasingly difficult. These kinds of personal exchanges are extremely important to enable cooperation, however. International organizations can contribute to the strengthening of youth networks through conferences involving youth leaders from different parts of the country, for instance. While Yemen’s youth were in 2011 the center of international attention, today, they are threatened to be forgotten. It cannot be repeated often enough: With their well-being being intertwined with the well-being of the country, international organizations must prioritize their support for Yemen’s young generation.
MAP OF THE SURVEYED AREAS
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Policy Report

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