



# A generation at risk: How landmines are crippling Yemen's schools and futures

September 2025

Field Report



Life.. Without Mines



Project Masam is a humanitarian mine action programme launched in 2018 to clear landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and unexploded ordnance (UXO) across Yemen. Supported by Dynasafe and funded by Saudi Arabia's King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief), the project works to protect civilians, restore safe access to homes, farmland, and infrastructure, and support the country's recovery from conflict. Project Masam trains and equips Yemeni demining teams, combining international expertise with local capacity to deliver urgent clearance operations and life-saving risk education.

## A generation at risk: How landmines are crippling Yemen's schools and futures

Children across Yemen are returning to schools where landmines and unexploded ordnance continue to threaten students, teachers, and families. In Taiz Governorate, school gates remain locked while parents scan schoolyards for hidden explosives before allowing their children to enter. In Hajjah Governorate, families decide each morning whether the walk to class is worth the danger.

Project Masam Managing Director Ousama Algosaibi, whose organisation leads Yemen's largest mine-clearance project, explained that the threat is nationwide and directly undermines education: "Education should be a sanctuary, not a battleground. Yet in Yemen, mines and explosive remnants have turned classrooms into danger zones."

After more than a decade of conflict, Yemen's education system is in critical condition. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that by mid-2025 about **3.7 million children** were out of school. At least **2,700 to 2,800 school** buildings have been destroyed, damaged, or converted for military or shelter use.



*Grade 8 students pose in their classroom in the Ibrahim Aqeel school in Yemen's Taiz city.  
Credit: Elsa Buchanan for Project Masam*



Schools often became military sites because of their strong construction and central locations. Fighters stored weapons and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) inside classrooms and schoolyards, leaving contamination that continues to endanger students long after battles ended. In Haradh district in Hajjah, for example, **hundreds of students** were left to study in the open (despite the difficult weather conditions including extreme heat, dust and sandstorms), after the Houthis bombed the structures as early as 2019.

According to Project Masam, Houthi forces deliberately laid landmines and IEDs around and inside at least **344 schools** across the governorates of Taiz, Marib, Hudaydah, Shabwah, Hajjah, and Al-Jawf.

Landmine contamination continues to kill and injure civilians even in areas with no active fighting. The United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) recorded 115 civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war between August 2023 and July 2024, including 66 injured and 49 killed. More than **40 percent** of the victims were women and children.

“Every mine left in the ground is a lesson denied,” Algosaiibi said, outlining the long-term consequences. “By planting schools with mines, Houthis disrupt education and normal life, undermining government control and spreading fear among civilians. This tactic destabilises communities, displaces families, and weakens the social fabric. By destroying classrooms and spreading fear, they aim to keep communities uneducated and easier to control, using ignorance as a tool to entrench their ideology and weaken future resistance.”



*The Othman bin Affan School (eight classrooms, one administration block, one store block, one laboratory and four bathrooms) in Al-Qudhiyah in Al-Khawkhah was destroyed in 2018.*



Reports from Taiz show how mines directly shut down schooling. In 2021, students at Al-Omari School in the Dhubab area reported unexploded shells and a landmine detonation. Project Masam deployed Demining Team 27, led by Ali Hadi Rashid, which discovered at least eight shells and several warheads and fuses within days. By 2023, Demining Team 28 had joined the operation and cleared more than **50 banned anti-personnel mines** from the school and its surroundings.

In Jabal Habashi District, Yassin El Berkani, Deputy Director of the local Education Office, described the damage caused when weapons were stored inside Al-Shaab School: “Because there was a war in the region, weapons, landmines and other things were stored inside the school, causing an explosion that ruined more than six classrooms. As a result of the presence of landmines inside the school, students and teachers refrained from attending, and the educational process was reduced to the sixth grade only because there were no classrooms and because of the risks that students could be exposed to.”

One of the children affected was Hadi Abdo Fadel, who lost three fingers after picking up what was believed to be a detonator while playing in the schoolyard.

His father, Abdul Al-Qadi Abdul Al-Fadel, explained the family’s decision to withdraw him from school: “We suffered great fear for our children, and we suffered a lot preventing them from going to school. It is not easy for a father or a mother to stand in the way of his or her child and prevent him from going to school, especially if you know his love for it and his attachment to study there, but we had no choice, because fear from landmines made us prevent our children from attending their schools.”



*Eight-year-old Hadi Abdo Fadel lost fingers in the explosion of a landmine detonator in his school’s courtyard while playing. Credit: Project Masam*

Local community leader Sheikh Abdul-Rahman Al-Neweehy estimated that about 500 students in the area were either displaced to distant schools or stopped attending

altogether.

When Project Masam teams arrived after a series of explosions, Engineer Abdo Ibrahim, leader of Demining Team 23, described the conditions: “We found a lot of rubble and landmines scattered all over the place, in addition to the danger that was still under the rubble and in the school’s vicinity.”

Overseeing the wider clearance in Taiz, Supervisor Aref Al-Qahtani, who manages all Project Masam demining teams in the governorate, linked the **painstaking work** to educational recovery: “This work will lead to the return of students and the return of the displaced as many students have been uprooted to schools nearby.”

In neighbouring Mawza District, Thabet Al Zaatari, Director of Al-Amal School, recounted a similar experience.

“Al-Amal School was a centre for Al-Houthi from which they fought the national forces, which led to the school destruction and mining of the entire school perimeter. We could not reach the school for more than two years, and we were looking for alternative places to teach students away from the mines surrounding the school.”



*Al-Shaab School in Al-Daneen village in Al-Khawkhah was destroyed in 2018*



*Al-Wa'i School in Al-Rabat in Hays was destroyed in 2018*



*Al-Kifah School in Al-Hameiniyah village in Hays was destroyed in 2020*

Ali Muhammad Abdu Majali, Director of Educational Administration in Mawza, confirmed that he personally supervised the removal of many mines in Mawza schools, particularly in the Al-Safaliyah area, to protect children and grandchildren from further danger.

The contamination pattern is repeated elsewhere. By the end of 2023, Project Masam’s Demining Team 26 had completely cleared 13 mine-contaminated schools in Al-Khawkhah and Hays districts. Seven of these schools were completely destroyed and six were partially damaged between 2018 and 2020, each previously serving between 300 and 800 students.

Team leader Sami Saeed Omar Humaid explained: “The mines affected 5,970 male and female students [in these districts], as many schools stopped performing their work, in addition to the displacement of a large number of educational staff to other governorates.



Add to all this, the sporadic injuries suffered by students and educators due to the tragic mine accidents.”

His team found a network of explosive devices concealed under classroom floors and inside walls, including five improvised landmines and radio-command devices linking eleven charges at Al-Nasr School in Beit Bish village.



*Houthi explosive devices concealed under classroom floors at Al-Nasr School in Beit Bish village*



*The network of explosive devices was discovered under floorboards and concrete flooring*



*Team Leader Sami Saeed poses next to the five improvised landmines and radio-command devices linking eleven charges at Al-Nasr School in Beit Bish village after his team cleared the devices*

Across liberated areas, progress is tangible where resources align. Project Masam’s regular clearances, combined with **explosive ordnance risk education (EORE)** and careful tasking around school catchment areas, are reopening corridors and restoring confidence.

In Al-Dhale, one of the **most heavily mined areas** of Yemen, Project Masam’s demining Team 18 carried out an **awareness campaign** at Al-Zubairi School in the Shakib area, benefiting over 150 students.

Deminer Abdul Khaliq Fadel, a member of team 18, which operated in the area at the time, emphasised that schoolchildren and shepherds are especially vulnerable to mines due to their frequent movement. He shared the story of a young girl named Iman, who reported seeing a mine near her home after receiving prior awareness training, ultimately saving her life and that of others.

Ahmed Saleh, a teacher at Al-Zubairi School, meanwhile, added, “Awareness campaigns are vital, especially given the random spread of mines. They have helped students understand the risks and how to respond. However, we still require more support.”

Like many others, Al-Zubairi School was partially destroyed after Houthi militias stored mines inside the building, causing a large explosion and destroying much of it. Currently, the school

is severely overcrowded, with 170 to 178 students per class, Ahmed reported. As a result, many students are still either forced to travel to distant schools or drop out altogether.

Injuries from landmines and unexploded ordnance often end a child's education. UNICEF and local health offices continue to record high numbers of **child amputees** and survivors with shrapnel wounds.



*Ilham Sahili lost her legs in a landmine explosion near her home in Yemen's northwestern Hajjah region. Credit: Project Masam*

Thirteen-year-old Ilham Sahili, from Al-Awaa village in the Bani Hassan area of Abs District in Hajjah Governorate, lost her legs when the donkey she was riding stepped on a landmine.

"Now I am unable to attend school. I need help to get to school and join my classmates. I don't want to become a victim of ignorance as well. I feel sad when I see girls my age going to school, playing, and living normally, while I stay at home, unable to move freely. But I will not give up. I will try to go to school, continue my education, and build my life. Even if it is slow, I will keep trying until I succeed," the young girl said.

Her father, Hajj Mohamed Sahili, meanwhile, described the family's losses: "Our area is full of mines, and my family has paid the price. My daughter Ilham lost her leg, my son Omar died instantly, and my brother lost his right arm [in a landmine explosion]. Even our sheep and camels have been killed. These mines are a disaster. We live in constant fear."

Teachers in Taiz and other governorates report students arriving late because relatives must carry them or dropping out completely when travel becomes impossible.





*A teacher looks on as student walks past schoolrooms and administrative offices destroyed by IEDs and landmines in Ibrahim Aqeel School in Yemen's Taiz. Credit: Elsa Buchanan for Project Masam*

Conflict has undermined the teaching workforce as well as physical infrastructure. More than **170,000 educators** in Houthi-controlled areas have not received regular salaries since 2016. Teachers in government-controlled areas earn about **70,000 Yemeni rials** (around US\$30) per month - far below basic living expenses. Damaged buildings force communities to improvise classrooms, while repeated displacement severs children from familiar schools.

Landmines add a specific barrier: parents often keep children home even when teachers are present if the route to school is unsafe. Children who miss multiple school years rarely return.

The loss of continuous schooling exposes children to additional protection risks.

Girls face an increased likelihood of early or forced marriage when education pathways collapse. Families that lose access to safe schools often view marriage as a way to reduce household expenses or provide perceived protection for their daughters. Local authorities and humanitarian agencies report that when girls remain at home for long periods, pressure grows for them to marry, sometimes as young as 13 or 14, particularly in rural districts where alternative opportunities are limited. Early marriage usually ends any chance of completing basic education and increases health risks related to early pregnancy.

Boys face different but equally serious dangers. When school attendance drops, many are pushed into child labour to supplement family income, taking informal work in agriculture, small trade, or construction.

Others are vulnerable to **recruitment by armed groups**, including documented cases of children being enlisted by Houthi forces as fighters, porters, or lookouts. Human rights monitors, including Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the UN, have reported consistent patterns of child recruitment in governorates such as Taiz, Marib, and Hajjah when education is interrupted. These boys often face physical risk, psychological trauma, and long-term barriers to returning to school or formal employment.

This combination of early marriage for girls and child labour or armed-group recruitment for boys deepens the cycle of poverty and undermines Yemen's future workforce, making the restoration of safe, continuous schooling a central protection measure as well as an educational priority.



*Students at Ibrahim Aqeel school in Taiz are forced to take their Arabic language test in the blazing sun on the rooftop of their school because classrooms have been destroyed by landmines and IEDs explosions. Credit: Elsa Buchanan for Project Masam*

Since 2018, Project Masam has carried out large-scale demining across Yemen, removing over 500,000 explosive threats and clearing over 70 million square metres of land. The work is continuous and intensive; in the second week of September 2025 alone, teams disposed of more than one thousand explosive items in liberated areas.

Project Masam Managing Director Ousama Algosaibi explained that the operation is about far more than simply neutralising explosives: “Clearing mines is more than removing explosives: it’s about giving children their right to learn in safety.”



The results of this work can be seen in schools where education has resumed after clearance. At Omar bin Abdulaziz School in Al-Dhaweha village, construction supervisor Muhammad Sadiq Ali Saeed oversaw rehabilitation efforts once the grounds were declared safe.

He described how the school was able to reopen and expand. “We were able to get here and rehabilitate the school, clear it of remnants of war, and build three new classrooms. By the grace of God, the area was secured and the danger removed after clearing all existing mines and making the area safe again.”

Local residents confirm the broader benefits when roads and schools are cleared. Sheikh Mohamed Saleh al-Marani, a community member whose family had been cut off from education, said that the project restored more than just physical access.

“Project Masam opened roads and secured schools so that our children could learn in a civilised manner, as no nation can flourish without science and knowledge,” al-Marani explained.



*Sheikh Mohamed Saleh al-Marani, a resident from Al-Safaliyah area of Mawza, said hope was restored after Project Masam cleared his area, allowing residents to return from displacement and allow children to return to school after five years*

Officials also highlight the ongoing challenges. In Hajjah Governorate, Mohammed Yaqub, Deputy Governor, noted that many sites remain dangerous even after initial clearance, including public markets and coastal areas.

“We have schools that have been completely mined and blown up by the Houthis, but even the remaining rubble is still full of mines. We have displaced people who are unable to return to their homes because they are full of mines. We also have security centres rigged with mines, and even our coasts are strewn with mines, which has harmed many fishermen. We

have large markets within cities that are full of mines, leading people to flee from them,” Yaqub added.

Clearance teams that began work on 6 September 2025 report particular difficulties in coastal plains and agricultural zones, where devices can shift with floods or become hidden by moving sand. These conditions slow progress and complicate plans to reopen schools and restore civilian movement, underscoring the need for sustained resources and coordination between mine action and education authorities.



*Ibrahim Aqeel headmaster Abdulgani Mohammed Mahmud chats to student Mariam Fouad, 13 and in Grade 8, who says she is behind in school because explosive violence and landmines forbade her to walk to school in Taiz, Yemen. Credit: Elsa Buchanan for Project Masam*

Project Masam data show that clearance delivers the greatest educational benefit when paired with immediate support such as teacher stipends, classroom repairs, and school supplies. A safe road without a functioning classroom still leaves children without learning, and a repaired classroom without a safe road remains inaccessible.

Recommended actions include the prioritisation of clearance of approach roads, bus turnarounds, and school perimetres, the coordination of Mine Action with education funding so that newly cleared access translates directly into classroom hours, and finally the maintain of transparent public reporting on clearance near schools to help families make informed decisions and enable targeted catch-up programmes.

Planting landmines in schools, storing weapons inside classrooms, and mining civilian areas (including roads to homes and education centres) are prohibited under international



humanitarian law and constitute war crimes. These practices continue to endanger children and obstruct efforts to rebuild Yemen's education system.

Algosaibi concluded: "Every child who cannot safely reach a classroom is a tragedy for that family, and a loss for Yemen's future, prolonging the country's suffering."



*Students play football near the destroyed classrooms in their school in Taiz. Credit: Elsa Buchanan for Project Masam*



## **For inquiries, contact us.**

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