

UNICEF: Decades of progress for children at risk across Middle East and North Africa

11 September 2017 – Nearly one-in-five children across the Middle East and North Africa – over 90 per cent of whom live in conflict-affected countries – need immediate humanitarian assistance, according to new analysis by the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)).

“Conflict continues to rob millions of girls and boys of their childhood,” said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director, in a [press statement](#).

“Decades of progress are at risk of being reversed across the Middle East and North Africa,” he added.

UNICEF pointed out that children have been hit hardest by ongoing years of violence, displacement and lack of basic services. Civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, energy, water, sanitation and hygiene installations have often come under attack, exposing children to the risk of death and diseases.

Moreover, millions of families have been forced to flee their homes – some multiple times and under fire. Continued violence and displacement have increasingly made it difficult for children and families to cope.

“With no end in sight to these conflicts and with families’ dwindling financial resources, many have no choice but to send their children to work or marry their daughters early. The number of children affiliated with the fighting has more than doubled,” continued the UNICEF Director.

Children in the Middle East and North Africa region have undergone unprecedented levels of violence and witnessed horrors that no one should witness Geert Cappelaere

According to the latest analysis, inside Syria and in refugee-hosting countries, almost 12 million Syrian children require humanitarian assistance – up from half a million in 2012.

Additionally, an estimated two million children who live in hard-to-reach or besieged areas in Syria have received limited humanitarian assistance over the years.

Turning to Yemen, the fighting has destroyed water and sanitation systems – sparking the world’s worst cholera and acute diarrhoea outbreak, with over 610,000 suspected cases to date.

More than half of Yemen’s health facilities are out of service and water systems have been destroyed, cutting off almost 15 million people from safe

water and access to basic healthcare.

Across Iraq, more than 5 million children are in need of assistance as heavy fighting intensified, including in Mosul and recently in Tal Afar. They need water, food, shelter and education.

As for the Gaza Strip, an ongoing electricity crisis has reduced access to water by 30 per cent while diarrhoea cases among young children have doubled in just three months.

“Children in the Middle East and North Africa region have undergone unprecedented levels of violence and witnessed horrors that no one should witness. If violence and wars continue, the consequences – not only for the region but for the world as a whole – will be dire,” underscored Mr. Cappelaere.

“World leaders must do much more to put an end to violence for the sake of boys and girls and their future,” he concluded.