

Winter may be 'harsh blow' to vulnerable children in Middle East, UNICEF warns amid funding gap

27 October 2017 – Freezing temperatures, storms and heavy snowfall will add to the misery afflicting hundreds of thousands of families affected by conflict across the Middle East unless assistance – including cold weather clothing and supplies – is urgently provided, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has warned.

“Without help, the cold could be [yet another harsh blow to vulnerable children](#) in the region who have already been through so much,” said Geert Cappelaere, the UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, in a news release Friday.

“Children's health is weak from undernutrition, poor healthcare and displacement. Hypothermia and respiratory infections are a serious threat – if left untreated, children will die.”

Conflict, displacement and unemployment for years have already depleted families' resources, leaving them unable to purchase of warm clothing or heating fuel.

Furthermore, if schools are not kept warm, dropout rates are expected to rise, leaving children more vulnerable to early marriage, sexual violence or forced recruitment into fighting.

Staff at the UN agency are working against time to provide warm clothing, winter supplies and blankets before the cold sets in, but the agency is staring at a \$60 million (more than 80 per cent) funding shortfall for its \$73 million appeal.

The lack of resources could leave up to 1.5 million children across Iraq, Syria, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and neighbouring refugee host countries, exposed to the elements.

With sufficient funding, UNICEF aims to provide winter clothing kits to over 800,000 children across the region, including to families that have been displaced by recent fighting; thermal blankets for almost 240,000 children; child friendly spaces and school heating for 105,000 children; and cash assistance to the families of more than 320,000 vulnerable children.