

Surge in child malnutrition in Yemen as new research reveals that only half of UK 18 - 44 year olds are aware of the ongoing civil conflict



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Islamic Relief UK today share a new survey ran in collaboration with Savanta, revealing that less than half (49%) of 18 - 44 year olds in the UK are aware of the ongoing civil conflict in Yemen. This figure starkly contrasts the findings on 55 - 64 year olds and 65+ who were generally more aware of the conflict (73% and 78% respectively).

Despite an encroaching famine, when asked about the primary cause of death in Yemen due to conflict, there was an even split in responses, showing a lack of understanding around the growing issue of malnutrition in the country. Just under quarter (23%) of UK adults felt that hunger was the primary cause of death, whilst one fifth blamed bombs and bullets, and another fifth (21%) admitted they did not know what the primary cause was.

The number of malnourished children admitted to nutrition centres supported by Islamic Relief in Yemen has almost doubled in the past three months, as the crisis escalates and international governments cut vital humanitarian funding. The centres have also seen an 80 percent increase in malnourished pregnant women and new mothers seeking help.

After six years of conflict, more than half of Yemen's population is facing severe food shortages. Islamic Relief supports 151 health and nutrition centres across the country, and - in partnership with the UN World Food Programme (WFP)

- distributes food parcels to over two million people. However, due to funding cuts WFP have had to reduce the quantity and frequency of these parcels by half last year and malnutrition has skyrocketed since then.

“The situation has got out of control since food aid was halved. Now the centres are overwhelmed and the cases of malnourished children and mothers are quadruple what we were seeing this time last year. It’s heart-breaking to see how thin the children are, they’re just skin and bones. Last month 13 infants died here because of complications due to malnutrition and the number goes up every month. Most infants are born with problems because their mothers are malnourished.”

Islamic Relief staff warn the situation is even worse in remote rural areas. One in five districts in Yemen have no doctors at all and crippling fuel shortages mean many families cannot travel for medical assistance. Desperate poverty means that parents increasingly have to make painful choices about which children get food or medicine.

“We send out groups of volunteers to carry out screening in remote villages and the cases there are shocking. The children don’t have any muscles in their bodies. We recently had a three-year-old boy who was not responding to treatment. We gave him a course of medicine for two months but his condition kept deteriorating, so I sent a team to his home to investigate. The mother told us she had to sell the medicine to buy flour and feed her other children. She had to choose between saving one or saving the others.”

Despite the huge needs, this month’s high-level international pledging conference for Yemen raised less than half of the money needed and several big donors cut their funding. The recent poll ran by Savanta ComRes, surveyed around 2,000 UK adults, and showed that two thirds (65%) of adults aged 18 – 34 believe that the UK should be spending more than 1% of national income on international aid.

“After six years of conflict Yemen is not forgotten – it is ignored. It is shameful that the world is cutting aid when

children are eating leaves because they don't have enough food. The health and nutrition centres that we support are overwhelmed and completely inundated with people. Mothers who are themselves weak with hunger carry their young children for miles to get here in search of help. Fathers go hungry because they give their last scrap of food to their children. People are doing everything they can to survive but the world is abandoning them in their time of greatest need. "Global leaders must not wait for famine to be declared before helping people who are starving right now. Malnutrition affects young children's cognitive and physical development for the rest of their lives, so the hunger crisis will affect Yemen for generations to come unless action is taken now. People urgently need aid and for all parties to agree a lasting ceasefire."

The rise in malnutrition has led to a rise in other severe health problems, yet hospitals are critically short of medicine, fuel and doctors. Many medical staff no longer receive salaries and are working voluntarily for 14-16 hours a day.

For any questions or to request to interview one of our spokespeople, please contact:

The UN is warning that child malnutrition is at the highest level of the conflict so far, with 2.3 million children under-5 at risk of acute malnutrition and 400,000 at risk of severe malnutrition. Last year Islamic Relief's work in Yemen supported 3.6 million people with vital food, water, healthcare and shelter.

Results from the poll can be accessed here: ComRes interviewed 2,092 UK adults aged 18+ online from 13-14 March 2021. Data were weighted to be representative of population by age, gender, region, and socio-economic characteristics such as social grade. Savanta ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

About Islamic Relief

Islamic Relief is a faith-inspired, development and humanitarian agency working to transform and save the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in over 40 countries.

Islamic Relief assists people according to need and does not discriminate in any way.

Set up in Birmingham in 1984 by a group of volunteers, we have assisted over 117 million people all over the world. We're saving lives and empowering people to lift themselves out of poverty in over 40 countries – from Bangladesh to Bosnia, Pakistan to Palestine, Kenya to Kosovo. Islamic Relief is on the ground in some of the world's most dangerous and difficult places – including Syria and Yemen – strengthening the most marginalised communities to withstand conflict and natural disasters and to build a brighter future. We also support vulnerable people in the UK in partnership with local charities and organisations.

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