

UNHCR Yemen

Flash Update – flooding in Sa’ada Governorate



Situation Overview

On 23 July, Sa’ada City experienced torrential rain and hailstorms, causing extensive damage to makeshift shelters and belongings of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in several areas and numerous IDP sites. Tragically, two fatalities were reported due to the severe weather, including a child from Al-Sahn and an elderly man from Al-Zahraa sites in Sa’ada City.

Bypass water channels were dug by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and Yemen Development Fund (YDF) earlier in the year to redirect rainfall away from the makeshift tents and traditional mud shelters. However, the large volume of water from the heavy rain spilled over the channels, resulting in the destruction of over 1,300 shelters from initial assessments. Furthermore, a large amount of hail blocked water drainage in many areas, causing water levels to rise up to 30-40 cm and leading to flooding in IDP sites such as Al-Matlooh, Al-Ma’alla, Al-Sahn, Al-Zahraa, and Al-Rodah in Sa’ada

district. Personal belongings such as clothes, food, mattresses, blankets, and identification documents were destroyed, exacerbating the suffering of the IDPs who already had limited resources and assistance.

Immediately after the storm, UNHCR partner YDF conducted an initial assessment and found that the rain fully destroyed 574 shelters and partially damaged 730 more. The team continues to verify and assess the situation in the affected IDP hosting sites in Sa'ada district. The widespread destruction is making it difficult for IDPs to find safe and dry temporary accommodation.

Access to clean water, latrines, and food has become extremely challenging, exposing IDPs, particularly women and children, to health and protection risks. The floods exacerbate the vulnerability of many flood-affected communities, increasing existing protection risks. Destroyed shelters can lead to increased risk of homelessness, making people more susceptible to negative coping mechanisms, exploitation and abuse.

Urgent assistance is crucial to address the immediate needs of the affected families, including shelter, food, clean water, and healthcare. Efforts must also be made to minimize future protection concerns and prevent health issues resulting from stagnant residual flood waters and overflowing latrines. The most affected households are internally displaced and have been living in IDP hosting sites for over seven years due to the conflict.

Humanitarian response

- **Needs Assessment:** UNHCR is coordinating with partners on assessments to evaluate the most immediate and urgent needs. UNHCR's partner YDF initiated a needs assessment early on 24 July to understand the scope of the destruction and identify the needs of those affected. For vulnerable families with immediate shelter maintenance needs, there are shelter kits prepositioned for emergencies available for this purpose. Needs assessments are continuing.
- **Immediate Shelter Response:** UNHCR's partner YDF set up a safe shelter for approximately 40 of the most vulnerable families whose shelters were destroyed, providing them with a safe place to stay until proper assistance arrives.
- **Coordination:** UNHCR, as the lead of the CCCM, Protection, and Shelter/NFI clusters, is coordinating the immediate response to the devastation of shelters in the IDP hosting sites. A holistic inter-agency response with other clusters will be coordinated to ensure a robust response to those losing their homes again.
- **Referrals:** Based on needs assessments, families will be referred to available services such as health centres, child protection and civil documentation support.
- **Cash Assistance:** Based on needs assessments, vulnerable families may require one of the types of cash-based assistance available such as cash for protection or multi-purpose cash assistance.
- **Supplies:** UNHCR is moving 600 non-food item (NFI) kits and 1,000 plastic sheets from Sana'a to Sa'ada for immediate distribution to address the needs.

UNHCR has been present in Yemen since 1987, when its first office opened in Sana'a. In 1989, UNHCR established a presence in the south of the country. Today, UNHCR has a well-established footprint across the country, covering most of the 22 governorates and 333 districts through its country office in Sana'a, a sub-office in Aden, and field offices in Al-Hudaydah, Ibb, Ma'rib, and Sa'ada. The country hosts over 4.5 million internally displaced people, and over 71,000 refugees and asylum-seekers.