



Operational Context & Analysis

After ten years of conflict, Yemen remains one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, characterised by conflict, climate change, economic collapse, as well as the breakdown of public institutions and services. According to the 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview, over half of the population (an estimated 18.2 million individuals) require humanitarian assistance, including 4.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and over 60,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mostly from Somalia and Ethiopia.

The administration of the country remains divided between the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG) in the south, including Aden, and the *de facto* authorities (DFA) in the north, including Sana'a. In practice, this means that any humanitarian or protection activities must be coordinated with two separate authorities, depending on where in the country they are implemented.

While there has been a *de facto* continuation of the April 2022 UN-brokered truce (despite officially expiring in October 2022), the overall security situation remains unstable with frequent low-level violations in front-line areas. In lieu of a longer-term political solution to the ongoing crisis, prospects for a lasting peace remain dim, while regional developments in the Middle East and the Red Sea continue to adversely affect the security, economic, and political situation in Yemen.

The ongoing conflict and related breakdown of basic infrastructure and services, as well as limited availability of humanitarian assistance, has left many displaced individuals and households living in substandard conditions. Inadequate water and sanitation facilities contribute to frequent outbreaks of cholera, with resulting malnutrition. Compounding the severity of these needs, Yemen's economy is in crisis, with over 80% of the population now living below the poverty line. Of the 96,907 IDP and host community households (588,835 individuals) assessed to date in 2024, almost 50% reported earning 25,000 Yemeni Rial (50 USD) or less per month, with 35% reporting no income at all. This forces some families to rely on harmful coping mechanisms, such as skipping meals, taking children out of school to work, begging, and exposing women and children to other forms of exploitation and abuse, including early marriage.

From February 2024, pre-existing tensions in Yemen's banking sector escalated, following a series of decisions by the central banks in Aden and Sana'a that restricted transactions involving banks headquartered outside of their respective areas of control. In practice, this meant that funds could no longer be transferred between banks in the north and south of the country. Although the banks have since de-escalated the situation, the macroeconomic situation remains extremely challenging, with a shortage of hard currency, obstacles to currency exchange, and rapid depreciation of the Yemeni Rial. These developments have placed additional strain on displaced households, and impacted the implementation of humanitarian and protection activities, with some activities halted altogether, exacerbating existing protection risks.

Humanitarian access remains a major concern in Yemen. Bureaucratic impediments, along with general insecurity, the threat posed by explosive remnants of war (ERW), and the arrest and detention of aid workers, continue to hinder the delivery of humanitarian and protection activities. Restrictions on the movements of Yemeni female aid workers present a particular challenge to the delivery of culturally appropriate outreach and support activities, where the presence of female staff is essential. The pervasive presence of ERW and landmines in Hodeidah, Ta'iz, and Ma'rib governorates, makes Yemen one of the most heavily mine-contaminated countries in the world.¹

Climactic changes, environmental degradation, and severe weather events are significant drivers of need and displacement in Yemen, and these continue to worsen in both severity and frequency year on year. The 2024 rainy season brought unprecedented flooding to all governorates, affecting 100,000 families, and severely exacerbating existing shelter, infrastructure, and protection needs. At the same time, Yemen is among the world's worst water crises. Water scarcity is a growing concern, with steadily declining ground water levels. This has the potential to further aggravate tensions in the country, as competition over access to diminishing water supplies increases.

Key Trends & Figures

60,050

registered asylum-seekers and refugees as of 31 October 2024, of which 18,494 (31%) are in the north, and 41,556 (69%) are in the south, and 9,800 (16%) live in Kharaz, Yemen's only refugee camp (located in the south).

45%

of assessed refugee and asylum-seeker households have at least one family member with a specific need (*average household size is two*).

4.5 million

internally displaced people (IDPs), including approximately 1.5 million living in dedicated sites in the north and south.

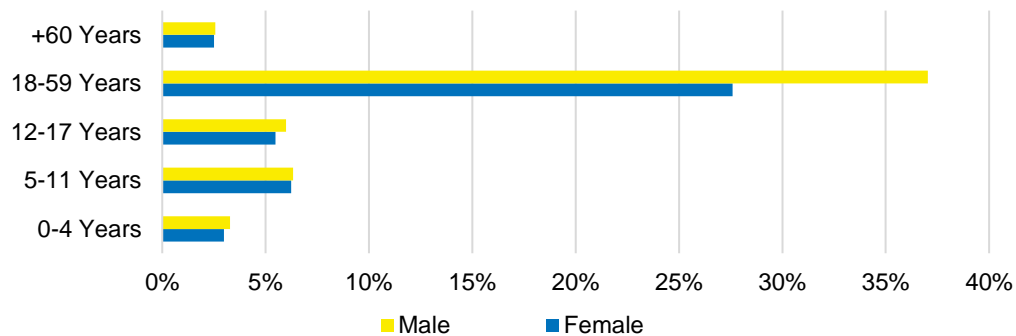
91%

of assessed IDP households have at least one member with an identified vulnerability (*average household size is six*).

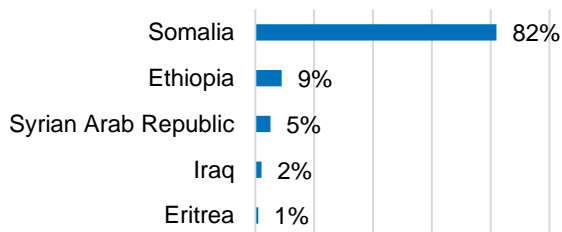
¹ UNOCHA (2024). *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen 2024*

Refugees and asylum-seekers:

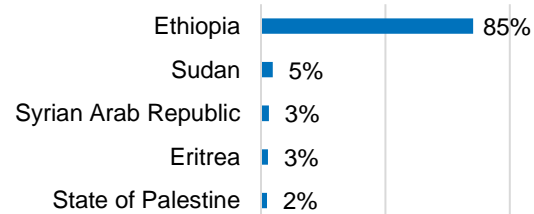
Refugee & asylum-seeker age and gender distribution



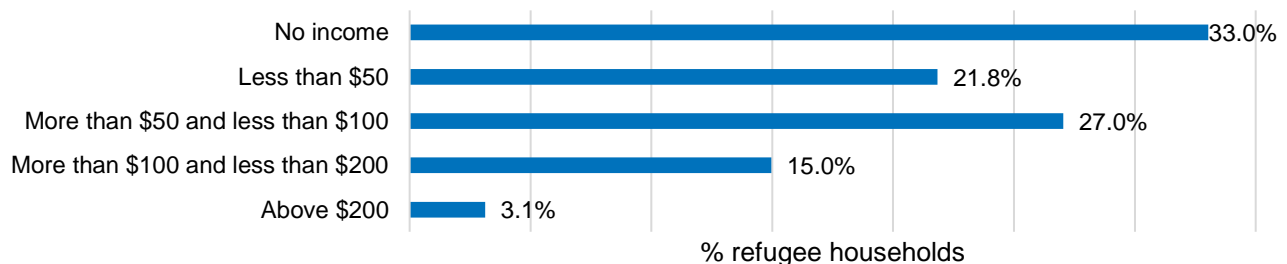
Top 5 refugee countries of origin



Top 5 asylum-seeker countries of origin



Average monthly refugee household income (% of assessed house)



Note: The currency exchange rate varies between the north and south. In October 2024, the exchange rate was approximately 530 Yemeni Rial to 1 USD in the north, and approximately 2000 Yemeni Rial to 1 USD in the south.

Specific needs identified among the refugee and asylum-seeker population by household



13%
Child at Risk



16%
Disability



11%
Older person at risks



14%
Women at risk



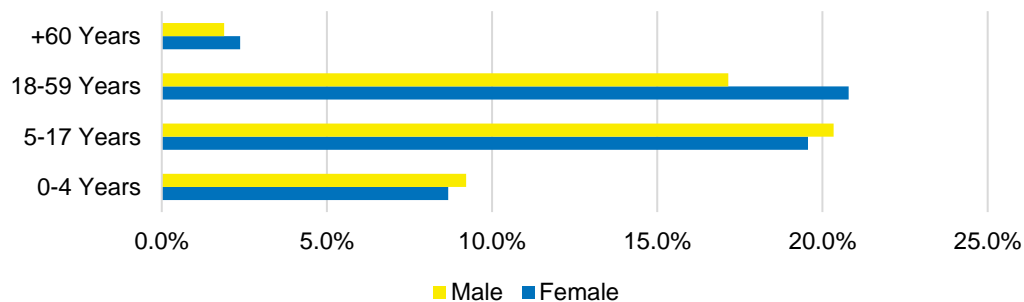
21%
Serious medical condition



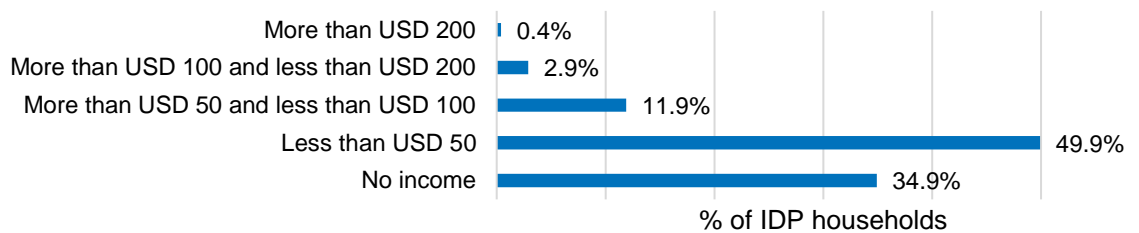
24%
Single parent

Internally displaced people (IDPs):

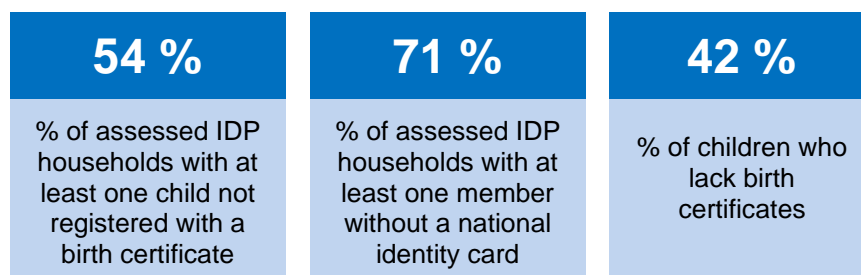
IDP age and gender distribution



Average monthly IDP household income



Civil documentation



Vulnerabilities identified among the IDP population by household



67%
Chronic medical condition



45%
Pregnant or lactating women



42%
Persons in need of psychosocial support



29%
Individuals in need of legal assistance (including legal advice, mediation and dispute resolution services, legal representation, and detention monitoring).



28%
Children not attending schools



24%
Persons with disabilities



21%
Female head of household



20%
Serious medical condition



17%
Children supporting their families



Ali, Amer, Ismail, and Saleh, Somali refugees, stand with their new back-to-school kits in Aden. Refugee children attend school together with the host community. ©UNHCR/Gregory Doane

Protection risks

Protection Risk I – Risks relating to internal displacement

Internal displacement continues to affect millions of people across Yemen, in the north and south, with entire communities having been forced to flee multiple times due to conflict, climate related disasters, and deteriorating socio-economic conditions. The complex political, security, and economic situation in the country creates significant protection risks for displaced populations and host communities. IDPs face particular challenges, as compared to non-displaced communities, in accessing basic services, including civil and identity documentation, and frequently experience social and economic marginalisation, with some families resorting to harmful coping mechanisms as a result. Of the approximately 4.5 million internally displaced people, around 80% are women and children, with around one quarter (26%) of households headed by women.

Internally displaced people remain heavily dependent on humanitarian aid, particularly the most vulnerable, such as women at risk, children, older people, people with disabilities, and people with other specific needs. UNHCR found that, of the IDP households assessed to-date in 2024, 91% had at least one member with a vulnerability. Individuals with specific needs are often at risk of social marginalisation and isolation due to the social and economic context in Yemen and can find it particularly challenging to support themselves without humanitarian assistance.

Many IDPs experience barriers to accessing basic rights and services, including healthcare, education, employment, and freedom of movement, because they do not have basic civil or identity documents. According to UNHCR, in 2024, 42% of displaced children do not have birth certificates, and 71% of displaced households reported that at least one family member does not have an identification document.

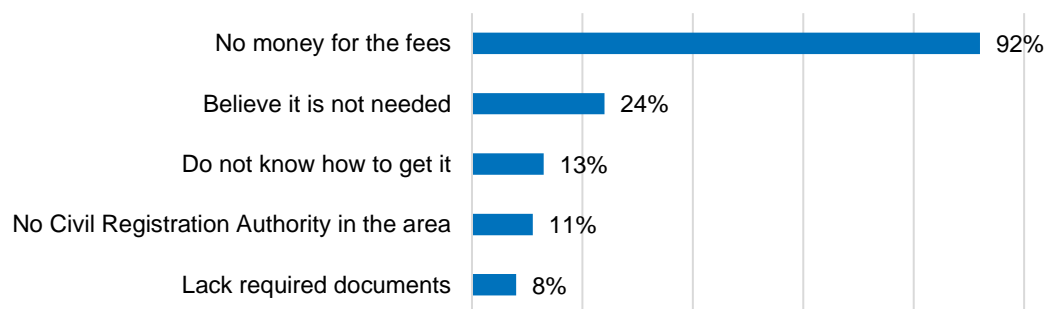
Displaced populations are often more seriously affected by the lack of civil documentation, particularly those who have been displaced multiple times. They can face significant challenges in retaining, replacing, or obtaining new documents. This is due to various factors, such as loss of documents during initial displacement, difficulty in retaining documents in substandard living conditions, and challenges in accessing essential services while living in remote and hard to reach areas.

Proof of address is often a requirement to issue new civil or identity documentation, and individuals living in displacement may struggle to clearly establish their place of residence, especially when they are living in an informal IDP site. Particularly vulnerable individuals, including people with disabilities or people facing movement restrictions, may face added challenges. Obtaining civil documents, including national identity cards, is an important step to ensure the prevention of statelessness amongst these at-risk populations, and also to safeguarding their housing, land and property (HLP) rights.

The deteriorating economic situation in the country, including rapid inflation and devaluation of the Yemeni Rial, along with limited livelihoods opportunities, has contributed to an increase in forced evictions. Many families find it increasingly difficult to pay their rent, which leaves them vulnerable to eviction, along with a wide variety of other serious protection risks. The majority of IDPs live in host communities, with around 1.5 million IDPs living in over 2,300 designated IDP sites. These sites are often in rural areas, and are frequently unsafe and overcrowded, with only limited access to basic services and infrastructure.

Members of the Muhamasheen ethnic community are particularly vulnerable due to their historic marginalisation. The Muhamasheen often live separately from the majority population, and frequently experience discrimination when seeking to access basic public services or engage in employment and/or livelihoods activities, which is further aggravated by conditions of displacement.

Barriers/reasons for not obtaining birth certificates



Internally displaced children often face obstacles in accessing education. Many are forced to abandon their studies to support their families or can find it challenging to access schools due to a shortage of school places in displacement sites.

A significant number of internally displaced households report adopting harmful coping mechanisms. UNHCR found that, in 2024, 77% of IDP households resort to borrowing money to purchase basic goods. Reliance on debt places internally displaced households in a vulnerable position and reduces their economic independence. Additionally, 70% of households reported reducing the size of meal portions, indicating a widespread compromise of their nutritional intake. These coping strategies expose internally displaced families to further protection risks and perpetuate a cycle of poverty that limits their ability to work and improve their living conditions.

Protection Risk II – Risks for refugees and asylum-seekers

Refugees and asylum-seekers: Yemen acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol in 1980, and remains the only state in the Arabian Peninsula to have done so. Yemen is also a party to many international human rights and humanitarian law instruments. Although a party to the 1951 Convention, the ability of Yemen to fulfil its international obligations has been negatively affected by protracted crises, and the lack of a national legislative framework on refugee protection.

Despite its domestic challenges and large-scale internal displacement, Yemen hosts over 60,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, with the majority originated from Somalia and Ethiopia. Asylum-seekers and refugees are at particular risk of social and economic marginalisation, with many struggling to access meaningful employment and livelihoods opportunities, and some living in acute poverty as a result. This is particularly true of individuals and households at heightened risk, who are often heavily reliant on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs.

The registration and protection regime in the country is complicated by the practical division in administrative responsibilities between the north and south, with a different agency responsible for the registration and documentation of refugees and asylum-seekers in each location. Since 1991, the IRG has been granting *prima facie* refugee status to Somali nationals in the IRG-controlled areas, while other nationalities, including Ethiopians, are registered and documented by UNHCR as asylum-seekers. Since 2023, the authorities in DFA-controlled areas have resumed the registration of new asylum-seekers. Prior to this, the registration of new asylum-seekers was largely suspended since 2016, following the outbreak of the civil conflict, save for a period between November 2018 and September 2019. As a result, a significant number of asylum-seekers and refugees were unable to access registration or documentation in DFA-controlled areas. Without documentation, refugees and asylum-seekers may struggle to regularise their presence, establish their identity, move freely, or access basic public services in the country. There continues to be a considerable backlog of refugees and asylum-seekers waiting for their documents to be issued or renewed.

Given the present situation in Yemen, refugee and asylum-seeker households are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the deteriorating economic situation, with many struggling to find employment or other meaningful routes to economic self-reliance. Work permits can be obtained by foreign nationals, including refugees and asylum-seekers, but the associated fees often make this unaffordable to those most in need of employment. This, combined with the very high rates of unemployment in the country, means that steady and legal employment is practically inaccessible to many within this community.

Refugees and asylum-seekers at heightened risk, including women at risk, children, older people, and people with disabilities, are often unable to participate in socio-economic activities, and so are disproportionately affected by the current deteriorating economic situation. In 2024, 76% of assessed refugee and asylum-seeker households had at least one member with a specific need. This puts them at particular risk of abuse or exploitation, with some adopting coping strategies that ultimately put them at risk of more serious harm.

In some cases, families may have to choose between meeting their basic needs or, for example, continuing to support their children in education. UNHCR has observed increasing numbers of early school dropout, with children at risk of exploitation, abuse, or neglect, as a result. In 2024, 50% of refugee households reported resorting to borrowing

money to purchase basic goods, while 49% of refugee households reported reducing the size of meal portions. In line with these findings, since the beginning of 2024, UNHCR has observed an increase in requests for humanitarian assistance.

For many of the most vulnerable refugees, third country resettlement remains a key durable solution and protection tool. Nevertheless, Yemen has only a relatively small number of third-country resettlement places in 2024. As a result, only a small number of cases can be submitted for resettlement, and then only on urgent or emergency medical or protection grounds.

Protection Risk III – Risks in the context of mixed movement

Mixed movements: Yemen continues to be a key transit country for people on the move, with considerable numbers undertaking dangerous journeys from the East and Horn of Africa to Yemen, with many ultimately intending to travel onward to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) or the Sultanate of Oman (Oman). Those arriving in Yemen in this way have diverse profiles, including individuals in need of international protection, and those affected by the conflict in Ethiopia,² travelling with or alongside individuals seeking improved economic opportunities or intending to reunify with family members elsewhere in the region. Many of those on the move have specific needs, including survivors of trafficking, survivors of violence, and people with disabilities or serious medical needs. Arrivals on the Yemen coast also include a high proportion of unaccompanied or separated children.

Smuggling or trafficking networks are often used to reach the Yemeni coast, as well as to move onwards within Yemen. Since the beginning of 2024, 11 shipwrecks have been reported, with at least 678 people drowned or missing at sea. Individuals travelling along these routes are at heightened risk of abuse and/or exploitation, often by the smugglers or traffickers themselves, and widespread gender-based violence and torture for ransom have also been reported.³ High numbers of deaths and injuries have also been reported as people have sought to move on from Yemen and cross to Saudi Arabia.⁴

The DFA authorities in the north continue to detain and forcibly transfer large numbers of foreign nationals to the south. Although this is purportedly done as a public security and immigration-control measure, the basis on which particular individuals are detained and expelled is not always clear. While UNHCR is able to obtain some information in respect of these detentions, including the number of people involved, UNHCR has only limited access to detention centres in the north. Those in detention are usually unable to contact family or have access to legal representation. As a result, no effective screening can be conducted to identify persons in need of international protection, individuals with specific needs, or family members at risk of separation.

² UNHCR Position on Returns to Ethiopia, March 2022: <https://www.refworld.org/policy/countrypolicy/unhcr/2022/en/124066>.

³ Ravenstone Consult *Captive Commodities: Commodification, exploitation and missingness of Ethiopian irregular migrants on the Eastern Route to Yemen and Saudi Arabia*, March 2023: <https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Captive-Commodities-Ethiopians-on-Eastern-migration-route.pdf>.

⁴ Human Rights Watch 'Saudi Arabia: Mass Killings of Migrants at Yemen Border', 21 August 2023: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/21/saudi-arabia-mass-killings-migrants-yemen-border>; Mixed Migration Centre 'Saudi Border Killings Continue', 5 June 2024: <https://mixedmigration.org/saudi-border-killings-continue/>.

Challenges & Opportunities

The arrest and detention of United Nations and NGO staff in the north of the country has served to further reduce the operational environment and inhibit humanitarian activities, as the United Nations has minimized the exposure of staff to risk, and prioritized lifesaving and life sustaining activities.

The resumption of registration of new asylum-seekers in DFA-controlled areas since 2023 has the potential to significantly improve the protection environment for refugees and asylum-seekers in the north, who now have access to registration and documentation. Discussions are continuing between UNHCR and the IRG and DFA authorities, respectively, to nationalise further elements of the refugee and asylum-seeker registration process. This has the potential to ensure more consistent and sustainable service provision in the future.

UNHCR continues to build on its strong working relationship with the civil registration authorities in the north and south to support improved access to civil registration and documentation for internally displaced people, including access to birth registration and certificates. Access to civil status documentation supports a series of key protection outcomes, including access to basic services, support for school enrolment, establishing family links, providing proof of identity, and preventing statelessness.

For Somali nationals seeking voluntary return to Somalia, UNHCR continues to support the Assisted Spontaneous Return (ASR) programme. This programme provides free transport for individuals seeking to return to Somalia, with a reinstallation grant and further subsistence allowance upon their return to support their reintegration in the country. The return is organized by UNHCR through boat movements from Aden to Berbera in Somaliland, with further onward movements to central and southern Somalia. Since the beginning of the ASR programme in 2017, UNHCR in Yemen has assisted some 7,840 refugees from Somalia to return. In 2024, over 1,700 Somali refugees with an intention to return received counselling from UNHCR.

To enhance national ownership, UNHCR continues working with the IRG and DFA authorities, other UN and humanitarian agencies, donors, civil society international and national organizations, community and women-led organisations, as well as the internally displaced people, refugees and asylum-seekers, and the host community to enhance the protection and assistance of forcibly displaced persons.

Calls to Action

Improved environment for humanitarian operations: Delivering aid to those most in need across Yemen remains an international humanitarian imperative and requires an operating environment which assures the safety and security of aid workers. The release of arbitrarily detained staff should be immediate and unconditional. All detained humanitarian staff must be treated in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law.

The protection of humanitarian space: Yemen is among the least permissive operational environments globally. UNHCR and other humanitarian partners face ongoing restrictions and challenges that impede the delivery of critical lifesaving interventions, and limit access to vulnerable forcibly displaced people, including women and girls. Donors have a vital advocacy role to play in supporting the humanitarian community in advocacy efforts for strengthened humanitarian space.

Adoption of a national legal framework for the protection of refugees: Yemen has not yet adopted a national legal regime for the protection of refugees. The development and adoption of such a framework would be an important step toward improving the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers in the country. UNHCR stands ready to provide technical support to the authorities at all stages in the development and adoption of such a framework.

Working towards durable solutions for IDPs: Durable solutions for internally displaced people are a priority. Given the ongoing conflict, humanitarian interventions have until recently remained focused on the emergency response, while efforts in pursuit of durable solutions need to be further strengthened. With the right levels of donor support, there can be scope to use humanitarian assistance strategically to support longer term development goals, including return and local integration for internally displaced people, while continuing to address immediate humanitarian needs.

In order to support improved access to durable solutions for the internally displaced, the national 2013 IDP Policy should be strengthened, with the development of a supporting action plan to guide its implementation, and support to build the capacity of local and national authorities, alongside civil society and community organisations. UNHCR stands ready to provide technical support to the authorities, civil society, and local community organisations at all stages in the development of such an action plan.

Improved access to solutions for the most vulnerable refugees: There continues to be an urgent need for a dedicated and predictable resettlement quota for Yemen to address the most compelling needs among the refugee population. UNHCR calls upon donor and resettlement countries to support the most vulnerable refugees by providing a dedicated resettlement quota. In light of the complex political and security context in Yemen, this may require resettlement countries to utilise flexible resettlement processing modalities, and UNHCR Yemen stands ready to support this process.

Strengthened response to mixed movements: There is an urgent need to strengthen the response to mixed movements, including in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, through improved search and rescue at sea, increased humanitarian access, including for the safe identification and referral to appropriate registration and asylum procedures of those with international protection needs, measures to enhance protection from the high levels of exploitation and abuse for those on the move, and increased solutions for those in need of international protection. International support in the form of funding and resettlement places is critically needed.

Re-enforcing the centrality of protection: Yemen continues to face a protection crisis characterized by civilian casualties, protracted large-scale displacement, marginalisation, discriminatory legal and social norms, and the consequences of extreme poverty, all of which have a profound effect on displaced people across the country. Protection remains central to the humanitarian response in Yemen. UNHCR leads the Protection Cluster and is the mandated agency for the protection and identification of solutions of refugees. In this capacity, it drives the development of protection and solutions strategies and initiatives at the inter-agency level, and works to ensure that protection and solutions are integrated across all sectors of the humanitarian response in the country, including at the Humanitarian Country Team level. UNHCR calls upon all humanitarian actors, donors, and civil society organisations working to support forcibly displaced persons in Yemen, to work in support of the centrality of protection, ensuring that protection is fully integrated in all elements of their humanitarian and development work.

PROTECTION BRIEF YEMEN



UNHCR

tran@unhcr.org

P.O. Box 2500

1211 Geneva 2

www.unhcr.org