UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Yemen

Legal Assistance

A lawyer - working for UNHCR partner (RADF) - providing legal advice to a displaced Yemeni woman on a legal issue linked to her displacement. Yemen @UNHCR.

Context in Yemen:

Yemen is among the worst humanitarian crises globally. Almost ten years of conflict have created and exacerbated vulnerabilities and eroded resilience and capacities to cope. Yemen is home to an estimated 4.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and over 60,000 refugees and asylum seekers.

Forcibly displaced populations are often more vulnerable and face additional barriers exercising their rights. barriers may vary according to legal status, nationality, place of residence, literacy level, needs, mother tongue, and more.

Free legal assistance is crucial to ensure safety from harm and the ability to live a full and dignified life.

Approach in Yemen: To ensure those forcibly displaced can effectively exercise their rights and ensure access to basic services, UNHCR implements a three-pronged approach: (i) providing legal assistance for safety and access to justice; (ii) facilitating access to civil documentation; (iii) conducting advocacy and capacity building.

The support includes legal counselling, mediation, and representation, and awareness raising and is provided by legal teams of licensed lawyers working with UNHCR and its legal partners. In this way, UNHCR empowers displacement affected individuals and families to navigate the legal and administrative systems in Yemen.

Legal assistance:

UNHCR and partners provide individual legal assistance to refugees and asylum seekers, addressing risks of refoulement, civil cases, family law, documentation, and forcible eviction to ensure due

UNHCR's legal assistance for IDPs and IDP returnees primarily focuses on civil matters relating to civil documentation, family law, and housing, land, and property (HLP) rights, offering specialized HLP assistance to address forcible eviction.

Civil Documentation:

Displacement affected populations are often unable to access or have lost civil documentation and face challenges seeking replacements. Reasons include needing to prove identity, lack of supporting documents, the absence of a male guardian, lack of awareness of the process, or an inability to pay costs. Further, the limited geographical presence and inadequate processing capacity of the Civil Status and Civil Registry Authority (CRA) also impede access. In certain governorates, IDPs displaced from the north to the south of the country are required to return to areas of origin to access identity documents and birth registration.

Without documents, many of life's basic services become difficult. A lack of birth certificates causes challenges for refugee children in the asylum process, access to humanitarian services, and can prevent enrolment into school. For an IDP, a lack of documentation can limit movement in Yemen, restrict access to wage earning opportunities, preclude access to public services, and increase risk of arrest.

UNHCR and partners help refugee families register the birth of their children and support access for IDPs and IDP returnees to identity documents issued by the CRA, including through legal assistance. UNHCR also supports the CRA as part of Joint Action Plans with the authorities. UNHCR has been rehabilitating selected CRA centres and providing equipment to enhance processing capacity and solarization to reduce costs. UNHCR targets locations with large numbers of IDPs and low levels of access to documentation.

Together with the Norwegian Refugee Council, UNHCR co-chairs the Legal Aid Technical Working Group, which serves as a coordination and advocacy platform for legal and civil documentation activities implemented by humanitarian actors across the country.

Advocacy and capacity building with the authorities:

UNHCR works with relevant authorities in Yemen to ensure access to rights for asylum seekers, refugees, IDPs, and IDP returnees.

Advocacy and capacity building efforts target relevant institutions and officials to sensitise on refugee and IDP laws and rights.

This includes work with the National Committee for Refugee Affairs to implement the Joint Vision on Refugee Protection and Solutions (2022-2024).

Housing, Land, and Property (HLP):

IDPs and IDP returnees face HLP issues, predominantly forced eviction, often related to an inability to pay rent.

Lessors often lack knowledge of the laws which can lead to violations of tenant's rights, including enforcement of eviction through physical force or intimidation outside the judicial process. A lack of tenancy agreements setting out mutual rights further contributes to violations.

Legal assistance is central to ensure refugee and IDPs' rights as tenants are respected. Assistance includes support with the drafting of rental agreements, dispute mediation, representation in court, and legal awareness.

Key 2023 Achievements:

- 3,001 refugees and asylum seekers, including children, received individual legal assistance.
- 789 refugee and asylum-seeking children were assisted in accessing birth certificates.
- 305 monitoring visits were conducted to police stations, prisons, and detention centres, assisting 704 refugees and asylum seekers.
- 15,091 IDPs and IDP returnees received individual legal assistance for civil issues.
- 2,294 IDP and IDP returnee households received legal support to resolve housing, land, and property disputes, including support with tenancy agreements and to avert eviction.
- 12,294 IDPs and IDP returnees were assisted to access national IDs.
- 2,598 legal awareness sessions were attended by 30,164 refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs and IDP returnees, enhancing understanding on important legal matters.

Legal awareness session conducted by UNHCR's legal partner (ALDAR Al-Arabiya (a lawyer and two interpreters). The content in legal awareness sessions is tailored to topics of relevance for IDPs, IDP returnees, asylum seekers, and refugees. 2024@UNHCR.

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