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. Ten years of conflict have exacerbated vulnerabilities and eroded resilience and capacities to cope. Yemen is home to an estimated 4.8 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 enable forcibly displaced individuals to exercise their rights and access essential services, UNHCR adopts a comprehensive approach: (i) offering legal assistance to ensure safety and access to justice; (ii) facilitating access to civil documentation; and (iii) engaging in advocacy and capacity building.

The support encompasses legal counselling, mediation, representation, and awareness-raising, all delivered by teams of licensed lawyers. This approach empowers displaced individuals and families in Yemen to effectively navigate the legal and administrative systems.

Legal assistance: UNHCR and its partners offer individual legal assistance to refugees and asylum seekers, addressing issues such as civil disputes, family law, documentation, and forced evictions, all to ensure due process is upheld.

UNHCR's legal assistance for IDPs and IDP returnees focuses primarily on civil matters, including civil documentation, family law, and housing, land, and property (HLP) rights. It also provides specialized HLP support to address issues such as forcible eviction.

Civil Documentation:

Forcibly displaced populations often face significant barriers in accessing or replacing lost civil documentation. These challenges stem from a range of factors, including the need to prove identity, lack of supporting documents, absence of a male guardian, limited awareness of the process, or an inability to cover the associated costs. Additionally, the limited geographical reach and insufficient processing capacity of the Civil Status and Civil Registry Authority (CRA) hinder access. In certain governorates, IDPs displaced from the north to the south of the country are required to return to areas of origin to obtain identity documents or register births.

Without proper documentation, accessing basic services becomes incredibly difficult. For refugee children, the absence of birth certificates complicates the asylum process, limits access to humanitarian aid, and may prevent school enrolment. For IDPs, lack of documentation can restrict movement, limit employment opportunities, deny access to public services, and increase the risk of arrest.

UNHCR and its partners assist refugee families in registering the births of their children and help IDPs and returnees access identity documents, often through legal support. In addition, UNHCR collaborates with the CRA as part of Joint Action Plans with local authorities, helping to strengthen the capacity of the CRA. This includes rehabilitating select CRA centers, providing essential equipment, and installing solar power to reduce operational costs. UNHCR prioritizes areas with high concentrations of IDPs and low access to documentation services.

UNHCR, in partnership with the Norwegian Refugee Council, co-chairs the Legal Aid Technical Working Group, a key platform for coordinating, harmonising, and advocating legal and civil documentation activities carried out by humanitarian organizations nationwide.

Advocacy and capacity development with the authorities:

UNHCR collaborates with key authorities in Yemen to safeguard the rights of asylum seekers, refugees, IDPs, and IDP returnees.

The advocacy and capacity-development initiatives aim to raise awareness among relevant institutions and officials about refugee and IDP laws and rights.

This includes working closely with the National Committee for Refugee Affairs to implement the Joint Vision on Refugee Protection and Solutions for 2022-2024 and to develop one for 2025-2026.

Housing, Land, and Property (HLP):

Forcibly displaced individuals in Yemen often face Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) challenges, with forced eviction being the most prevalent issue, frequently stemming from an inability to pay rent.

Lessors are often unaware of tenant rights, which can result in violations, such as evictions carried out through physical force or intimidation, bypassing the judicial process. The absence of formal tenancy agreements that outline mutual rights further exacerbates these violations.

Legal assistance plays a crucial role in protecting the rights of refugees and IDPs as tenants. This support includes helping to draft rental agreements, mediating disputes, providing court representation, and raising legal awareness.

2024 achievements:

- 4,372 refugees and asylum seekers received individual legal assistance.
- 318 refugee and asylum-seeking children were provided with legal assistance.
- At least 835 monitoring visits were conducted to police stations, prisons, and detention centres, assisting almost 578 refugees and asylum seekers.
- 12,110 IDPs and IDP returnees received individual legal assistance.
- 365 IDP and IDP returnee households received legal support to resolve housing, land, and property disputes, including support with tenancy agreements and to avert eviction.
- 14,445 IDPs and IDP returnees were assisted to access national IDs.
- 645 legal awareness sessions were attended by 6,920 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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