

YEMEN SITUATION

UNHCR CRISIS UPDATE

14/04/2015

Operational Context

Since 2011, Yemen's fragile process of political transition has been characterized by infighting between parties, which began unravelling in earnest in September 2014. Significant deterioration of security has been ongoing since late March when clashes broke out in the south of the country. The situation worsened on 26 March when airstrikes began. Over the past three weeks, airstrikes and clashes have triggered electricity cuts, and shortages of fuel, wheat, and other commodities including medicine. This has resulted in large-scale internal displacements, paralysis of transport systems, and a breakdown of public services such as hospitals, schools, and power plants.

The deepening crisis in Yemen prompts increased levels of internal displacement in various governorates of Yemen. The scale of displacement is difficult to gauge due to limited access, indiscriminate violence, and overall fluidity of the situation. Some people are leaving major urban centres returning to their places of origin that are unaffected by fighting. Many of the internally displaced (IDPs) are staying with relatives, host families living in rented or abandoned houses, or have sought shelter in schools. Civil society groups report many of the displaced families are headed by vulnerable women.

The conflict is affecting 18 of Yemen's 22 governorates; both IDP and refugee populations and displacements are taking place within and across governorates, including return and secondary movements. Several cities and urban centres are hosting IDP families. For example, Sada'a city alone has received over 2,500 displaced families from Hydan, Majez, and Saquin. Other families are relocating to Sada'a, Al Hajja, and Sana'a. UNHCR partners are also witnessing increased numbers of refugees returning to Kharaz camp where basic services are still available. These families were camp residents who relocated to urban areas some time ago. However, the pace at which the conflict has grown prompted them to return to the refugee camp in fear for their safety and to access basic services. UNHCR and partners are monitoring the situation to ascertain possible trends related to displacement to and from the camp.



Photo: An IDP who fled from Aden to Khanfar district in Abyan governorate is interviewed by Staff of the Yemen Women's Union, a UNHCR partner. Here, the new arrival is asked about his family size, place of origin, their current needs, and details of their flight. These families left with few belongings and are sheltered in a school in Khanfr district. Yemen Women's Centre, Abyan branch / 8 April.

Response in Yemen

Inside Yemen, UNHCR continues its operations to protect and assist the 250,000 refugees (mostly Somalis with smaller numbers of Eritreans, Ethiopians, Iraqis and Syrians), the 330,000 Yemenis displaced by previous waves of violence, mainly in the north, and the thousands more affected by the latest escalation in violence.

Some 115 UNHCR national staff members are in the country, making efforts with NGO partners to deliver essential emergency services to refugees and internally displaced persons, albeit hampered by the security situation and fuel shortages. UNHCR has temporarily relocated all 32 international staff members from Yemen; the Agency established a Yemen Operational Centre in Amman.

In light of the unfolding crisis, refugee programming is re-oriented to emergency and life sustaining assistance for vulnerable persons. Protection monitoring has been ramped up through refugee leaders and hotlines. The provision of health care, community mobilization, assistance to vulnerable refugees, child protection and SGBV responses are continuing. However, some vocational training sessions have been suspended, and public schools where refugee children attend are mostly closed.

Food distribution and medical care continue in the Al Kharaz camp in the south of Yemen, which is home to some 18,000 Somali refugees, and the primary school is open. UNHCR has witnessed over 2,000 refugees moving from urban areas to the camp, and are providing them with shelter and other aid. Through outreach to vulnerable refugees, protection counseling is taking place even where offices are closed through phone and email.

UNHCR continues to coordinate two key clusters, shelter/CCCM/NFI and protection. Cluster partners are mobilizing to implement rapid needs assessments of the situation of IDPs in accessible areas. Ad hoc rapid assessments have been conducted and one of the findings was that some families do not have the means to relocate to safer areas owing to lack of financial resources. Others have managed to find shelter in public buildings such as schools and hospitals, while many are staying with relatives, are accommodated by host communities, or are renting. However, as displacement grows and as the cost of goods and commodities rise owing to scarcity, the need for shelter and life sustaining items such as blankets and mattresses will increase markedly.

UNHCR has stocks for at least 5,000 families in the country. More items are required to assist the newly displaced.

Departures from Yemen

UNHCR is also extremely concerned about the dangers facing those fleeing Yemen crossing the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, where there are no search and rescue operations. Over the last ten days, more than 1,300 people have arrived in Djibouti and the autonomous regions of Puntland and Somaliland (Somalia), fleeing escalating violence in Yemen. Most arrived by boat in the ports of Obock in Djibouti, and Berbera and Lyghayaha (Somaliland) and Bossaso (Puntland).

Of those that arrived in Djibouti, UNHCR received 344 Yemeni individuals and an unknown number of other nationals who have fled/were evacuated. Upon arrival, refugees receive shelter at the transit centre in Al Rhama or at a nearby



Photo: Markazi camp in Djibouti was established as a result of the conflict in Yemen. As of 10 April, 325 individuals of various nationalities are sheltered in the camp where 70 tents have been pitched. Markazi is around four kilometres from Obock, the transit centre where new arrivals seeking asylum in Djibouti are received. UNHCR Djibouti/ 10 April.

sports centre where they are registered and receive medical checks and vaccinations before being transferred to the new camp at Markazi. The UNHCR contingency planning figure is for up to 30,000 arrivals in the next six months.

In Somalia, roughly 1,000 people have arrived in Puntland and Somaliland, including 155 Yemeni nationals. The majority of the arrivals are Somalis, mostly from Puntland, who since traveled to their areas of origin. All the new arrivals receive food and water, and health and medical checks. UNHCR planning figures for arrivals to Somalia is 100,000 arrivals over the next six months.

Departure destinations from Yemen (mixed nationalities)



UNHCR’s Position on Returns to Yemen

On 9 April, UNHCR issued a position on returns to Yemen. The guidance summarised the situation and highlights that while the environment in “Yemen remains highly fluid and uncertain, UNHCR calls on all countries to allow civilians fleeing Yemen access to their territories. UNHCR further recommends that States suspend forcible returns of nationals or habitual residents of Yemen to the country.” UNHCR’s position on returns to Yemen is available at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5523fdf84.html>

Coordination

UNHCR will be part of a Flash Appeal that is being developed by UNHCR Yemen colleagues in coordination with other humanitarian agencies, partners on the ground, colleagues in Geneva, and those relocated to Amman, (Amman Operational Centre). Additional requirements for those departing from Yemen will be developed in the coming days.

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Links:

<http://www.unhcr.org/5527c16a9.html>