UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Yemen

Refugee Population in Kharaz, Lahj

May 2024

The site in Kharaz opened in 2001 and is the only refugee camp in Yemen. It is located in an arid part of Lahj governorate.

The camp hosts almost 10,000 refugees from Somalia and Ethiopia. Services available to refugees are extended to the Yemeni host community.

Efforts are ongoing to improve sustainability of services for host and refugee communities and self-reliance of residents, while also seeking durable solutions for those living there.

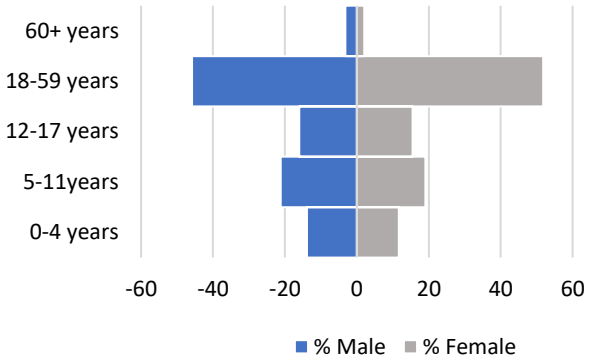
Key Figures

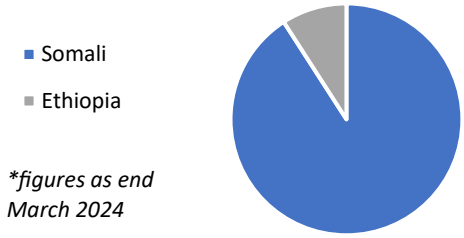
9,853
Number of **refugees and asylum-seekers** living in Kharaz Refugee Camp, up from 8,165 in 2018.

2,314
Number of **households** living in Kharaz Refugee Camp.

1,371
Number of **persons with specific needs** living in the camp, including serious medical conditions, unaccompanied children, and persons living with disabilities.

Demographics*





**figures as end March 2024*

Presence

UNHCR and partners support multi-sector humanitarian and protection assistance to refugees and host community members in the camp and surrounding area, including water and sanitation, healthcare, education, and protection services.

Efforts are being made to gradually integrate services into the national system and to build the resilience and self-reliance of those who live there. This includes, for example, installation of solar power systems.

A view of Kharaz camp. ©UNHCR/Doane

Conditions

Life in Kharaz camp is challenging. Many have lived there for over 20 years and many for their entire lives – as many as 2,668 of those registered in Kharaz were born in Yemen - and experience frustration with the limited opportunities available for livelihoods and solutions.

Service and assistance provision

Administration of the site is with the Government of Yemen. The camp administrator represents the Government and acts as the focal point for all Government authorities and services in the camp, including policing and the Immigration, Passport, and Nationality Authority.

Protection services are available, including case management, legal assistance, psychosocial support, child protection, and support to those with specific needs.

Increasingly, a community-based approach is applied, relying on the skills and capacities of the refugee and host community, built over many years with the support of UNHCR and its partners.

Registration and documentation is provided by the Immigration, Passport, and Nationality Authority.

Since 2015, as part of efforts to promote alternatives to camps, only the newborn children of refugees already resident are newly registered in Kharaz – all others are referred to Aden. Over time, the camp population has decreased from a peak of around 18,000.

Education is provided by UNHCR and partners, with over 3,000 students enrolled across primary and secondary level, following the Yemeni curriculum. School supplies are also provided.

Refugees also have access to universities in Yemen and are eligible to apply to the DAFI scholarship programme.

Health is provided at a primary health clinic on-site. Emergency and primary services, including psychosocial care, reproductive care, and physiotherapy are available. The host community can access this health clinic free of charge.

The clinic also provides information and awareness raising on nutrition, infant and child feeding practices, and hygiene.

The health personnel are qualified and acknowledged by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH). The MoPH and UNHCR have provided regular training to ensure up-to-date knowledge of national health programmes and UNHCR standards. Around 90 per cent of the personnel are members of the refugee or host community.

Water and sanitation services such as safe and clean water are provided in the camp and in surrounding communities. Garbage collection and sanitation services are available.

Food security and nutrition is promoted with the World Food Programme and refugees receive in-kind food baskets.

Prevention of and treatment for acute malnutrition for infants and children between six months and five years of age and pregnant and lactating women is available.

Shelter and Non-Food Items: including blankets, jerry cans, kitchen sets, solar lamps, and mattresses are provided on an ad hoc basis. Shelter maintenance support is available for vulnerable families.

Cash-based interventions are used to support only the most vulnerable refugees in Kharaz. Specifically, Case Management Cash is used to support highly vulnerable individuals who are undergoing a case management process to address identified protection concerns, working in combination with complementary protection activities.

In 2023, 306 households were supported in this way.

Faaduma and her children were living in Kharaz. Late in 2023 they returned to Somalia through the ASR programme. ©UNHCR/Doane

Looking forward

The site in Kharaz has hosted refugees since 2001. The remote location of the site, in combination with the broader context in Yemen, provides few opportunities for those living there.

As a result, many are reliant on humanitarian assistance year after year. For example, refugees in Kharaz are largely dependent on food distributions because of limited access to markets and to livelihoods.

Together with partners, UNHCR is working to implement a strategy to enhance self-reliance and seek solutions, while also improving conditions on site. The strategy includes:

→ **Solarization.** The solarization of the water system in 2023, which is now managed by the community, saves close to USD 1 million per year and ensures continued water and sanitation for all.

The planned solarization of shelters will build the self-reliance of inhabitants, providing a renewable source of electricity for day-to-day life at home, while also increasing safety at night.

→ **Promoting livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion.** Livelihoods training and start-up packages seek to support refugees earn incomes and to support themselves and their families.

Work is ongoing to ensure conducive legislation in this area and to promote independence and self-reliance.

→ **Working with authorities.** UNHCR is working with the authorities to expand services to Kharaz and for the gradual inclusion of refugees into national systems.

For example, efforts are being made to have the schools and health clinic in Kharaz mainstreamed into the national system, registering them with the appropriate authorities.

→ **Assisting Spontaneous Return (ASR).** The ASR program allows Somali refugees to make informed decisions and to ensure safe and dignified return for those who wish to make the journey.

For refugees and asylum seekers from Ethiopia, Voluntary Humanitarian Repatriation is available.

Additional funding is needed to fully implement the solutions strategy for Kharaz, including additional solarization, livelihoods, and assisted spontaneous return.

Refugee children attend school in Kharaz. ©UNHCR/Doane

Solar panels were installed in 2023 to improve sustainability. ©UNHCR/Doane

Nadifa works as a midwife at Kharaz camp. The clinic in the camp serves both the refugee population in the camp and the host community. ©UNHCR/Doane

Coordination

UNHCR works in partnership with the Lahj Governorate authorities, the Immigration, Passport, and Nationality Authority, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the World Food Programme, and NGO Human Access in Kharaz.

Camp residents are actively engaged through community-led committees which represent diverse groups, including the Al-Ghaith refugee committee, the Somali Grand Council Committee, the Ethiopian Grand Council Committee, committees for women, youth groups, teachers, tribal leaders, and persons living with disabilities.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is grateful for the support of:

With the support of the following organizations and private sector partners:

Aurora Humanitarian Initiative | Fondation de Luxembourg | Private donors Canada | Private donors Germany | Private donors MENA | Organizations & private donors Qatar | Private donors UK | Other private donors

With additional flexible funding support from:

Sweden | Norway | Private donors Spain | United Kingdom | Private donors Japan | Netherlands | Denmark | France | Private donors Republic of Korea | Germany | Switzerland | Private donors Italy | Private donors Sweden | Belgium | Ireland | Private donors USA | USA | Private donors Australia | Private donors UK | Private donors Germany

For more details, please contact:
Vi Tran, External Relations Officer, tran@unhcr.org
Gregory Doane, Associate External Relations Officer, doane@unhcr.org