UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

PROTECTION BRIEF 2025

Contents

Operational Context & Analysis	3
Key Trends & Figures	4
Protection risks	9
Challenges & Opportunities	13
Calls to Action	14

CONTACT US

Tara Fischer
External Relations Officer,
Email: fischer@unhcr.org

Abdullah Babrek
External Relations Associate
Email: babrek@unhcr.org

Mysa Khalaf
Communications Officer
Email: khalafm@unhcr.org

Zeyad Al-Sulaihi
Communications Associate
Email: alsulaih@unhcr.org

COVER PHOTOGRAPH:
Asma and her son sitting for an orientation session before their departure trip Somalia on UNHCR' ASR programme. UNHCR / Abdullah Babrek*

Operational Context & Analysis

After more than a decade of conflict, Yemen remains one of the world's most complex and protracted humanitarian crises. The country continues to face the compounded impacts of conflict, climate change, economic collapse, and the near-total breakdown of public services and institutions. According to the 2025 Humanitarian Needs Response Plan (HNRP), over half of the population, an estimated 19.5million people, require humanitarian assistance, including 4.8 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and over 61,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly 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 division requires humanitarian and protection activities to be coordinated separately with the respective authorities in each area, each of whom applies its own administrative procedures.

While there has been a de facto continuation of the April 2022 UN-brokered truce, which officially expired in October 2022, the overall security situation remains volatile, with intermittent violations along the front-line and sporadic armed clashes. In lieu of a longer-term political solution, prospects for a durable peace remain limited. Regional developments in the Middle East and the Red Sea have also had an adverse impact on Yemen's fragile economy and security environment.

The prolonged conflict and breakdown of basic infrastructure and public services, combined with the limited reach of humanitarian assistance, have left many displaced individuals and households living in substandard conditions. Inadequate water and sanitation facilities continue to contribute to recurrent outbreaks of cholera and malnutrition. Yemen's economy remains in severe crisis, with over 80 per cent of the population now living below the poverty line. According to UNHCR assessments in 2025 across Yemen, covering 189,214 IDP and host community individuals, 53.2 per cent of households reported earning 25,000 Yemeni Rial (=USD 50) or less per month, and 43.4 per cent reporting having no income at all. In this context, many families are increasingly resorting to harmful coping mechanisms such as skipping meals, withdrawing children out of school, begging, and/or resorting to early marriage, exposing women and children to heightened risks of exploitation and abuse.

At the same time, the humanitarian response has been severely affected by funding constraints. Reduced and delayed funding in 2025 has forced humanitarian actors, including UNHCR, to scale back assistance and prioritize only the most critical life-saving activities. These funding gaps have further strained already vulnerable displaced households and limited the ability of humanitarian partners to respond adequately to growing needs.

Yemen's macroeconomic situation has deteriorated further in 2025, and remains extremely volatile, marked by liquidity shortages, sharp exchange rate fluctuations, and continued currency depreciation. At the same time the humanitarian sector has also been deeply affected by funding gaps and shrinking operational space in DFA-controlled areas. These developments have placed additional strain on displaced households, and impacted the implementation of humanitarian and protection activities, with some activities halted altogether, heightening existing protection risks.

Humanitarian access remains a major concern in Yemen. Bureaucratic impediments, localized insecurity, the widespread presence of explosive remnants of war (ERW), and the arrest and detention of aid workers, continue to hinder the delivery of life-saving assistance.

The detention of UN and humanitarian workers along with unauthorized entries into UN Offices by authorities in Sana'a and other locations in northern Yemen remains a grave concern, making it increasingly difficult to provide lifesaving assistance to the displaced and Yemeni people. With the majority detained in 2024-2025, to date, some 59 UN staff remain in detention with some since 2021. The UN remains fully committed to securing the release of its staff, while also resolved to support the displaced and Yemeni people across the country with vital lifesaving humanitarian assistance based on the principles of impartiality, humanity, neutrality and independence.

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. Meanwhile, the pervasive presence of landmines and ERW especially in Hodeidah, Ta'iz, and Ma'rib governorates, makes Yemen one of the most heavily mine-contaminated countries in the world, impeding safe access to services, hampering returns and causing civilian casualties.[1]

Climactic shocks, environmental degradation, and extreme weather events continue to intensify in both frequency and severity, driving new and secondary displacement. The 2025 rainy season brought extensive flooding to governorates across Yemen, affecting over 460,000 people, and further exacerbating shelter, infrastructure, and protection needs. At the same time, Yemen is among those facing world's worst water crises, with part of Yemen experiencing drought and growing food insecurity. Water scarcity is also 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

62,202

registered asylum-seekers and refugees as of 31 October 2025[2], of which 19,274 (31%) are in the north, and 42,928 (69%) are in the south, and 9,801 (16%) live in Kharaz, Yemen's only refugee camp (located in the south).

77%

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

4.8 million

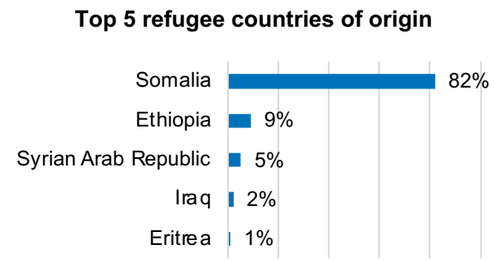
internally displaced people (IDPs), including approximately 1.5 million living in dedicated sites in the north and south, according to the 2025 HNRP.

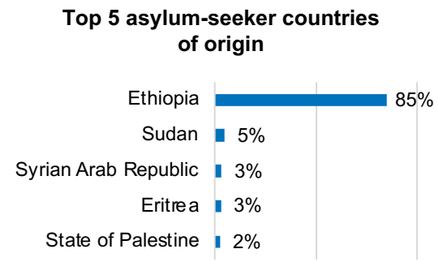
89.7%

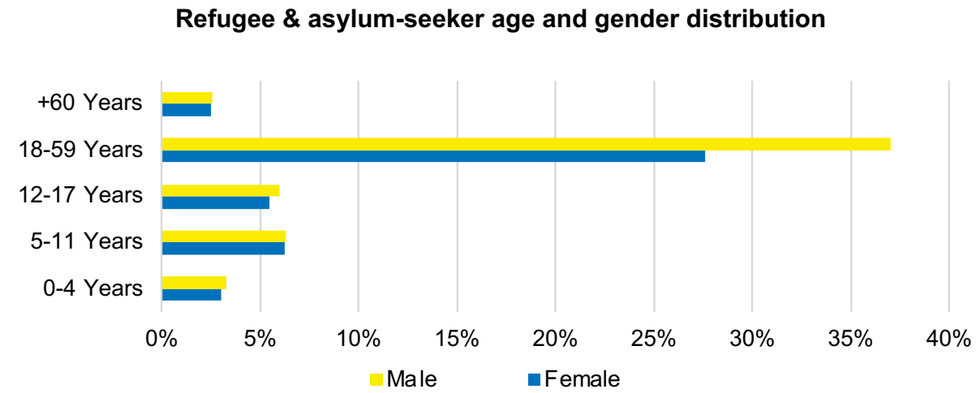
of assessed IDP households have at least one member with an identified vulnerability (average household size is six).

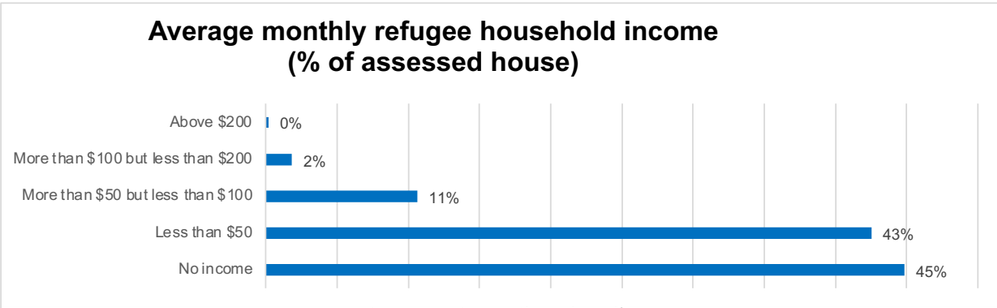
1. UNOCHA (2025). Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen 2025
2. Figures are as of 30 October for the southern governorates database and as of 31 July for the northern governorates database

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS:









Note: The currency exchange rate varies between the north and south.

SPECIFIC NEEDS IDENTIFIED AMONG THE REFUGEE AND ASYLUM-SEEKER POPULATIO POPULATION BY HOUSEHOLD

13% Child at Risk

10% Disability

8% Older person at risks

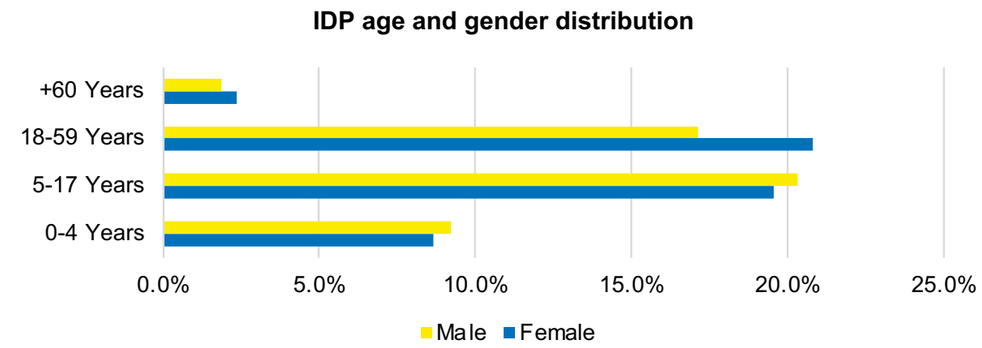
21% Women at risk

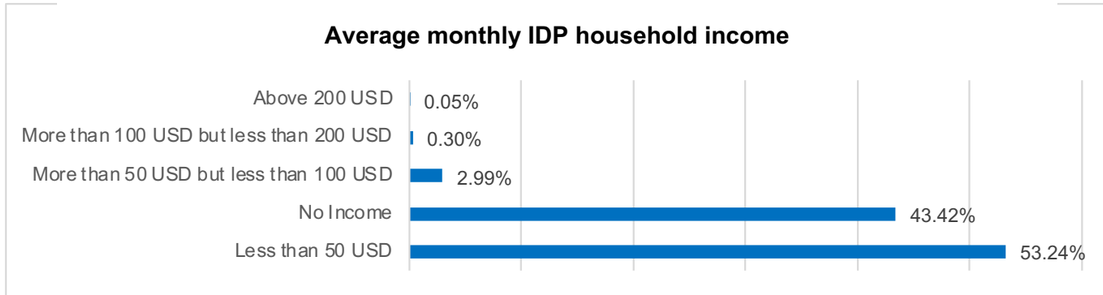
21% Serious medical condition

26% Single parent

Refugee students stand with their new back-to-school kits in Aden. Refugee children attend school together with the host community.
©UNHCR/Al Awn

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE (IDPS):





CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

54% of assessed IDP households with at least one child not registered with a birth certificate.

76% of assessed IDP households with at least one member without a national identity card.

43% of children who lack birth certificates.

VULNERABILITIES IDENTIFIED AMONG THE IDP POPULATION BY HOUSEHOLD:

70% Chronic medical condition.

41% Pregnant or lactating women.

52% Persons in need of psychosocial support.

24% individuals in need of legal assistance (including legal advice, mediation and dispute resolution services, legal representation, and detention monitoring).

32% Children not attending schools.

23% People with disabilities.

22% Female head of household.

26% Serious medical condition.

23% Children supporting their families.

UNHCR's Mohammed Sallam speaks with a displaced girl peeking out from her tour down tent during a field visit to assess the living conditions of internally displaced families. ©UNHCR/Human Access

Protection risks

PROTECTION RISK I Risks relating to internal displacement

Internal displacement continues to affect millions of people across Yemen, in both 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 environment continues to generate significant protection risks for displaced populations and host communities. Compared to non-displaced groups, IDPs face heightened barriers to 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 4.8 million internally displaced people, around 80 per cent are women and children, and one in four households (26 per cent) is headed by a woman, according to the 2025 Humanitarian Needs Response Plan (HNRP).

Internally displaced people remain heavily dependent on humanitarian aid, particularly the most vulnerable, including women at risk, children, older people, people with disabilities, and individuals with specific needs. UNHCR assessments in 2025 found that, 89.7 per cent of displaced households 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.

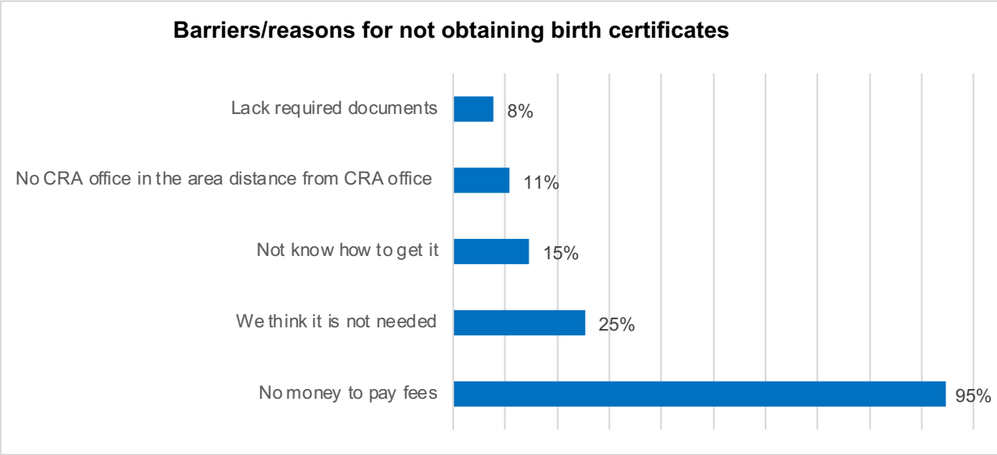
Access to civil documentation remains one of the most significant protection barriers. Without birth certificates or national identity cards, many displaced families struggle to access their basic rights and services, including healthcare, education, employment, and freedom of movement. Particularly 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 to safeguarding their housing, land and property (HLP) rights. According to UNHCR assessments, in 2025, 43 per cent of displaced children lacked birth certificates, and 76 per cent of IDP households reported that at least one family member does not possess an identification document.

These challenges are often compounded for those who have been displaced multiple times. Many have lost documentation during flight or are unable to afford replacement fees. This is due to various factors, such as loss of documents during initial displacement, difficulty in retaining documents in substandard living conditions, inability to pay required fees, and challenges in reaching essential services such as civil registration authority offices, while living in remote and hard to reach areas. Over 90 per cent of IDPs assessed cited their inability to pay the required fees to obtain or renew civil documentation, such as birth certificates and national ID cards.

Proof of address is often a requirement to issue new civil or identity documentation, and displaced individuals may struggle to clearly establish their place of residence, especially when they are living in an informal IDP site.

The deteriorating economic situation, marked by inflation, devaluation of the Yemeni Rial, and limited livelihoods opportunities, has led to a rise in forced evictions. Many displaced families can no longer afford rent, exposing them to homelessness and additional protection risks. While the majority of IDPs live within host communities, approximately 1.5 million reside in over 2,300 IDP sites across Yemen. 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 community, a historically marginalized group, remain particularly vulnerable. They often live in segregated areas, face entrenched discrimination in accessing basic public services or engage in employment and/or livelihoods activities, which is further aggravated by conditions of displacement.



Displaced children often face obstacles in accessing education. Many are forced to abandon school to support their families or limited capacity in host communities and displacement sites.

A significant proportion of internally displaced households report resorting to harmful coping mechanisms to meet basic needs. UNHCR assessment found that, in 2025, 75.8 per cent of displaced families reported borrowing money to purchase essential goods, placing them in a cycle of dependency and debt. 68.8 per cent reported reducing the size or frequency of meals, further compromising household nutrition. These negative coping mechanisms heighten exposure to exploitation and perpetuate poverty, limiting IDPs' ability to achieve stability and self-reliance.

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 own humanitarian and economic crisis, Yemen continues to host over 61,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, the majority originating from Somalia and Ethiopia. Refugees and asylum-seekers are among the most vulnerable populations in the country, often facing social and economic marginalisation. Many struggle to access employment, livelihoods, or public services and some live in acute poverty, heavily dependent on humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs..

The refugee registration and documentation system remain fragmented due to the political administrative division of the country. Separate mechanisms operate in the north and south, each under a different authority.

Since 1991, the Government of Yemen has granted prima facie refugee status to Somali nationals in IRG-controlled areas, while other nationalities, such as Ethiopians and Eritreans, are registered and documented by UNHCR as asylum-seekers.

In IRG-controlled areas, UNHCR continues to advocate for the gradual transfer of registration and documentation responsibilities for non-Somali asylum-seekers to the Immigration, Passports, and Naturalization Authority (IPNA) under the Ministry of Interior, to strengthen national ownership of asylum management.

At the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2024, the IRG made ten commitments to enhance refugees' legal, socio-economic rights spanning critical areas such as education, health care, social protection, durable

solutions, statelessness and the mitigation of climate change, pledges that are vital for the well-being and resilience of displaced populations, including as part of the commitment to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Mobilizing sustained international support will be essential to operationalize these commitments and ensure that refugee protection remains embedded in Yemen's national and humanitarian agenda.

In DFA-controlled areas, the registration of new asylum-seekers resumed in 2023 after a six-year suspension that followed the outbreak of conflict in 2016 (apart from a brief reopening between November 2018 and September 2019) As a result, large numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees had remained undocumented for years. Many still await the issuance or renewal of documents, leaving them unable to regularize their stay, establish legal identity, or access basic services such as education and health care.

The deteriorating economic environment has deepened the precarity of refugee and asylum-seeker households. Work permits can, in principle, be obtained by foreign nationals, including refugees and asylum-seekers, but fees are often prohibitive for those most in need. Combined with Yemen's extremely high unemployment rate, this renders formal employment virtually inaccessible. Consequently, many refugees resort to informal work or rely entirely on humanitarian aid.

Refugees and asylum-seekers at heightened risk, including women at risk, unaccompanied children, older people, and people with disabilities, are disproportionately affected by the ongoing crisis. In 2025, 77 per cent of refugee and asylum-seeker households assessed by UNHCR had at least one member with a specific need, exposing them to increased. risks of abuse, exploitation, and negative coping methods. Families are often forced to make impossible choices between meeting their most basic needs and continuing their children's education. Rising school dropout rates have been observed, with children becoming increasingly vulnerable to child labour, neglect and abuse. In 2025, UNHCR has carried out assessments for over 3,300 of the most vulnerable households. Among them, 87 per cent report no income, or income below 50 USD per month. 56 per cent of refugee households reported resorting to borrowing money to purchase basic goods, while 63 per cent of refugee households reported reducing the size of meal portions. 86 per cent reported reducing expenditure on non-food items, and 72 per cent reduced expenditure on needed healthcare or medicine. 20 per cent report having no regular accommodation. In line with these findings, since the beginning of 2025, UNHCR has observed an increase in requests for humanitarian assistance.

Abdi sits with his three children during a pre-departure orientation session in Aden, Yemen. Read the family's journy to a third country through UNHCR's resettlement programme. © UNHCR Yemen /Abdullah

For the most vulnerable refugees in Yemen, third-country resettlement remains a critical durable solution and an essential protection tool, particularly given the limited opportunities for local integration or self-reliance. Yemen hosts approximately 60,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, many of whom face heightened protection risks in an increasingly constrained humanitarian and security environment.

Resettlement opportunities, however, remain extremely limited. Since 2024, Yemen has had no dedicated resettlement quota, with only a small number of cases processed under unallocated global quotas, primarily on urgent or emergency medical and protection grounds. As of October 2025, only 38 refugees had departed Yemen for resettlement, despite far greater needs. UNHCR estimated that 4,783 refugees in Yemen will require resettlement in 2025, highlighting the significant gap between protection needs and available durable solutions.

PROTECTION RISK III Risks in the context of mixed movement

Mixed movements: Yemen continues to serve as a key transit and destination country for refugees and migrants in mixed movements from the East and Horn of Africa. Each year, thousands of people undertake perilous journeys across the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, often facilitated by smugglers and traffickers. As of November 2025, the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) has recorded over 130,000 migrant arrivals in Yemen. Many of these individuals arrive in Yemen intending to continue onward to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) or the Sultanate of Oman, while others seek asylum, family reunification, or better economic opportunities. Those arriving on Yemen's shores have diverse profiles, including individuals in need of international protection, and those affected by conflict in Ethiopia[3], and Somalia 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, with arrivals also featuring a high proportion of unaccompanied or separated children.

UNHCR handing pamphlets to refugees, who choose to return home voluntarily through the Assisted Spontaneous Return (ASR) programme. Read more. © UNHCR / FMF

Smuggling or trafficking networks are often used to reach the Yemeni coast, as well as to move onwards within Yemen. Since the beginning of 2025, at least five major shipwreck incidents have been reported along Yemen's west coast. Combined with fatalities occurring on the mainland, these incidents have resulted in at least 747 individuals reported dead or missing within Yemen this year. 74 people have been reported dead or missing along the east coast, near the border with Oman. Individuals travelling along these routes are at grave 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[4]. High numbers of deaths and injuries are also recorded among those attempting to cross from Yemen and into Saudi Arabia or Oman, where border areas remain highly militarized and dangerous.

The DFA authorities in the north continue to detain and forcibly transfer large numbers of foreign nationals to the south, ostensibly for immigration control or security reasons. However, the criteria and procedures for such actions are often unclear and inconsistent. UNHCR receives limited information regarding these detentions, including the number of people involved. UNHCR has only limited access to detention centres in the north. Those in detention are typically unable to contact their families or access 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. These dynamics highlight the urgent need for a coordinated humanitarian and protection response to mixed movements, including measures to strengthen search and rescue at sea, enhance screening and referral mechanisms, expand access to asylum procedures, and improve regional cooperation and coordination to save the lives of people on the move.

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

Challenges & Opportunities

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 collaboration 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, as well as through flight movements from Aden to Mogadishu. Since the beginning of the ASR programme in April 2017, UNHCR in Yemen has assisted a total of 9,512 refugees from Somalia to return home.

In 2025, the ASR programme officially concluded for the year on 9 December with a final flight carrying 148 passengers. Throughout 2025, a total of 957 Somali refugees were facilitated to return from Yemen to Somalia in safety and dignity. These returns were conducted through a combination of sea and air movements, including six organized flights. Looking ahead to 2026, UNHCR and its partners have set a tentative target of 1,000 individuals for assisted return, with the first flight movements expected in the first quarter of the year.

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 framework for forcibly displaced populations across Yemen.

However, the arrest and detention of United Nations and NGO staff in the north of the country have further constrained humanitarian operations and reduced available operational space. As a result, the United Nations has been compelled to limit staff exposure to risk and to prioritize lifesaving and life-sustaining interventions. Furthermore, a significant decline in humanitarian and development funding has severely limited the capacity of partners to meet basic needs and facilitate sustainable solutions for displaced populations. These resource constraints are exacerbated by the lack of a comprehensive and sustainable resolution to the conflict, which remains the primary inhibitor to the pursuit of durable solutions for IDPs. These developments underscore the fragility of the operating environment and the urgent need to restore safe, principled, and predictable humanitarian access across all areas of Yemen.

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 and where conditions permit, 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.

Refugee students stand with their new back-to-school kits in Aden. Refugee children attend school together with the host community. ©UNHCR/Al Awn

PROTECTION BRIEF
Yemen

CONTACT: UNHCR External Relations and Public Information Unit:
Tara Fischer, External Relations Officer, fischer@unhcr.org
Abdullah Babrek, External Relations Associate, babrek@unhcr.org
Mysa Khalaf, Communications Officer, khalafm@unhcr.org
Zeyad Al-Sulaihi, Communications Associate, alsulaih@unhcr.org
LINKS: UNHCR website | UNHCR Yemen Facebook | UNHCR Yemen X | UNHCR Data Portal