UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Yemen

Operational Update
January – June 2024

An IDP child walks through makeshift shelters at an IDP site in Yemen. © UNHCR/Gregory Doane

UNHCR has been present in Yemen since 1987, when its first office opened in Sana'a. In 1989, UNHCR established a presence in the south of the country. Today, UNHCR has a well-established footprint across the country, covering most of the 22 governorates and 333 districts through its country office in Sana'a, a sub-office in Aden, and field offices in Al-Hudaydah, Ibb, Ma'rib, Sa'ada.

Years of devastating conflict has led to a **protection and displacement crisis**. In 2024, the UN estimates 18.2 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection services (HNO 2024), including over 4.5 million internally displaced Yemenis and over 60,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in dire humanitarian need.

UNHCR is the only agency addressing the protection and well-being of refugees and asylum-seekers across Yemen. UNHCR and partners provide a wide array of services, such as protection, access to basic services including, education, healthcare, water and

sanitation, shelter, energy, and sanitation. All services provided to refugees are open to all persons in need, free of charge.

As part of the United Nations humanitarian response, UNHCR plays a key role in the inter-agency coordination mechanisms responding to the internal displacement crisis. UNHCR leads the Protection, Camp Coordination and Camp Management support (CCCM), and Shelter/NFI clusters. UNHCR is also co-lead with IOM of the Refugee and Migrant Multi-sector. UNHCR remains actively engaged in inter-agency working groups, including the Humanitarian Access Working Group, the Durable Solutions Working Group, and other specialized task forces. Through these coordination mechanisms, UNHCR advocates on protection and displacement issues, centrality of protection and durable solutions programming. Key areas include joint site identification (demining, site planning); policy on the civilian character of sites and non-encampment; housing, land, and property (HLP) issues; eviction guidance, including joint displacement tracking; support on community engagement, and protection considerations.

UNHCR maintains regular communication and cooperation with institutions entrusted with humanitarian assistance such as the Executive Unit (ExU), National Committee for Refugee Affairs (NACRA), and the Supreme Council for Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (SCMCHA). On refugee matters, UNHCR provides an advisory and support role to the Bureau for Refugee Affairs (BRA), and the Department of Immigration, Naturalization and Passports Authority (IPNA).

60,193

Number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Yemen. The majority are from Somalia (64%), Ethiopia (25%), Syria (5%), Iraq and Eritrea (1 %)

4.5 million

Number of internally displaced people in Yemen.

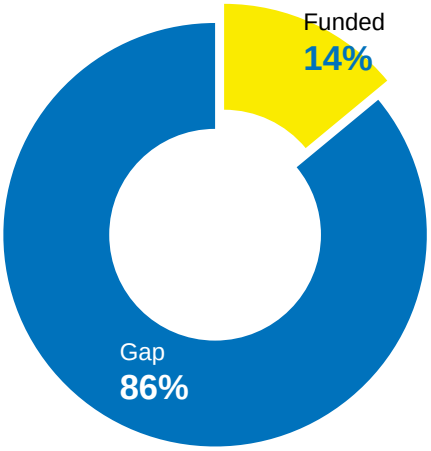
18.2 million

Number in need of humanitarian assistance in Yemen: 16.4 million need protection; 6.7 million need shelter and non-food items; 1.8 million need CCCM support.

FUNDING *(as of 30 June 2024)*

USD 354.4 M

requested



The dire underfunding situation in 2023 continued in 2024. As a result, UNHCR was forced to reduce its 2024 programming by US $18M.

This meant reducing cash assistance programming by 25%, affecting 20,000 households (140,000 individuals) reliant on life-saving multi-purpose cash assistance. The scaling back of UNHCR's shelter programmes means some 66,000 IDPs will continue to live in suboptimal conditions.

Livelihood support, initiatives to support spontaneous voluntary return, and quick impact projects will also be impacted, placing further strain on the protection and well-being of both refugees and IDPs in Yemen. Learn more here

Non-food items being distributed to IDPs affected by a fire incident in Marib City. © UNCHR/Human Access

A Somali refugee in Kharaz refugee camp provide feedback during a group discussion with UNHCR. © UNHCR/Gregory Doane

Protect: Attaining Favourable Protection Environment

UNHCR advocates and works with authorities to strengthen laws and ensure forcibly displaced people can access basic rights and humanitarian services.

Yemen acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol in 1980 and remains the only state on the Arabian Peninsula to have done so. Yemen continues to generously host Somali refugees and grants them prima facie refugee status since 1991 in the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) controlled areas. While Yemen is a party to the 1951 Convention, its ability to fulfil its international obligations has been negatively affected by the protracted humanitarian and protection crisis and the lack of a national legislative framework. It is also a party to all major international human rights and international humanitarian law instruments.

Confronted with the growing challenge of internal displacement, in 2013, Yemen adopted its first National Policy for Addressing Internal Displacement, confirming the duties of the authorities to assist, protect and find solutions for those internally displaced. The policy remains largely unimplemented, especially in relation to the pursuit of durable solutions.

Access to territory, registration, and documentation

Registration and documentation are crucial for those forcibly displaced to access protection and other basic services in Yemen. UNHCR is supporting authorities in the registration and documentation process and also directly registering non-Somali refugees in the IRG controlled areas.

Since January, 2,015 IDPs received or renewed their ID card. There were 3,031 refugees and asylum-seekers newly registered. They will be able to access health facilities, enrol in a learning institution, receive humanitarian aid, and apply for a work permit.

Status determination

Refugee Status Determination, or RSD, is the legal or administrative process by which governments or UNHCR determine whether a person seeking international protection is considered a refugee under international, regional, or national law. RSD is often a vital process in helping refugees realize their rights under international law.

Fatima, aged 73, is a widow placed to Hajjah governorate. While fleeing, her ID was left behind. With the help of UNHCR and partners, she was able to obtain a new one. "If I didn't have this card, I wouldn't have received any assistance," she said.

Protection policy and law

The Internationally Recognized Government participated in the 2023 Global Refugee Forum where they presented five pledges on refugee inclusion in education, healthcare, social protection, durable solutions, and climate change mitigation. They also renewed their commitment to the 2013 National Policy. Work is ongoing to realize these pledges ahead of the High-Level Official's meeting December 2025.

Since January, 355 representatives from different line ministries participated in trainings related to the international protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. Such as the UNHCR and the Migration, Refugees, and IDPs Studies Centre (MRISC), jointly held workshop for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL) in Sana'a. The workshop held sessions on the history of asylum, asylum in Islam, the definition of refugee, and UNHCR's mandate. The MoSAL expressed interest to work with UNHCR on access to work permits for refugees and asylum seekers.

Safety and access to justice

Forcibly displaced people continued to face obstacles in accessing safety and justice, often deriving from their status, or lack thereof, and from the ensuing discrimination and marginalization. Risks, including fear of being arrested, hindered access to essential services, negatively impacted their protection, and affected their ability to benefit from due process and justice.

UNHCR and partners conducted 265 monitoring visits to immigration detention facilities.

UNHCR and partners provided 5,405 refugees, IDPs and IDP returnees with legal assistance (counselling, representation, mediation) on civil and legal issues.

A counselling session on documentation with displaced Yemenis in Dhamar governorate. © UNCHR/SDF

Nadifa works as a mid-wife at Kharaz camp. The clinic in the camp serves both the refugee population in the camp and the host community. UNHCR/Gregory Doane

Respond: Realizing Rights in Safe Environments

People can only realize their rights in a safe environment if they find safety and security. They also need at least to have the very basics required to reduce risks and vulnerabilities and enhance their capacity: a roof over their heads, a safe and warm place to sleep, sufficient clean water, a working toilet, access to health care, enough food to keep hunger at bay, and education. In the 2023 Refugee Participatory Assessment, the creation of for income-generating opportunities was one of the most frequently mentioned recommendations from youth, women, and those individuals with specific needs.

Well-being and basic needs

To meet basic needs, including in emergencies, UNHCR distributes cash, a key modality of response, and where that is not possible it distributes core relief items to help people who have been forced to flee from their homes. Having cash to spend also helps forcibly displaced people to participate in the local economy and be included in the society where they live, increasing their economic empowerment, financial inclusion, and social protection. 206,408 refugees and IDPs received multi-purpose cash. [Learn more here]. Where cash assistance was not the preferred modality, UNHCR provides in-kind non-food item (NFI). More than 2,500 IDP households received in-kind NFI kits.

Healthy lives

The physical and mental health of those forced to flee are at risk due to the dangers and stresses that they experience, and yet they often face obstacles in getting care because of their legal and economic situation.

45,935 refugees and asylum-seekers and 13,929 Yemeni nationals accessed one of UNHCR and partners five primary health facilities. They conducted over 2,000 referrals to specialized care or secondary health centers. On average, 30% of those accessing the facilities are Yemeni nationals.

Education

Refugee children still do not have the same access to education as non-refugee children. Refugee inclusion into national education systems has proved challenging due to lack of financial support and resources to system strengthening, which is required to meet positive policy shifts.

UNHCR supports six primary schools with 5,625 refugee and Yemeni students currently enrolled.

The DAFI scholarship programme restarted in 2023, accepting new students into the programme. There are currently 129 DAFI scholars chasing their dreams.

Three friends attend a school in Al-Hudaydah that was rehabilitated in 2022. This is one of the 14 schools and 30 classrooms rehabilitated throughout Yemen in the last two years. The lasting impact of Quick Impact Projects are profound. UNHCR and JAAHD, are working to help Yemen's children survive the conflict and recover from its crippling effects.

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Persons with specific needs

Women, children, and persons with specific needs, including persons with disabilities, serious medical conditions, older persons, are particularly affected as the difficult living conditions heighten their susceptibility to abuse and exploitation and put them at risk of irreversible and lasting harm. Some 90 per cent of internally displaced households have at least one member with specific needs.

712 refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs living with a disability and 163 older refugees received protection and specialized medical, legal, administrative and/or cash-based assistance to reduce risks and vulnerabilities.

5,592 refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs received psychological first aid and psychosocial support.

Child protection

Recreational activities were provided, with 2,651 refugees and IDP children participating. UNHCR and partners provide child protection response services to refugees, Best Interests Procedures (BIP) and alternative care arrangements, among others. BIP was provided for 426 refugee children, and they were referred to specialized services such as individual assistance, material support, legal assistance, medical care, psychosocial support, and education.

Sustainable housing and settlements

More than 800 households received vital shelter assistance in various forms, including emergency or transitional shelter, shelter repairs, improved security of tenure, as well as cash grants or vouchers for rental subsidies or shelter materials.

UNHCR improved climate resilience and sustainability in its shelter response by using locally sourced materials, like khasaf (palm frond) and mud, to build transitional shelters. These shelters, designed with input from host communities and IDPs, provide income opportunities and last up to 36 months, significantly longer than the six-month lifespan of emergency tents.

At the beginning of this year, UNHCR was able to solarize essential facilities such as water wells, distribution pumps, and the only health clinic in Kharaz refugee camp. This is projected to save close to USD 1 million per year in fuel costs. [Learn more here]

UNHCR supported 20 Yemenis with beekeeping training in Sa'ada. The support included a five-day course on modern beekeeping, distribution of tools and 140 nests. They are now building stronger, healthier hives for better environment. © UNHCR/YDF

Empower: Empowering Communities

Those forcibly displaced see their vulnerability exacerbated if they cannot participate in decisions concerning their own lives and they face barriers accessing work. Women and girls are almost invariably at even greater disadvantage. UNHCR advocates for all persons to enjoy their full rights,

UNHCR found that 34 per cent of IDP households had no income, while 47 per cent earned less than 25,000 YER (USD 41) per month. With an average family size of six persons, families are having to make hard choices.

Community engagement

Community-based protection is the backbone of UNHCR's protection response. UNHCR and partners supported seven refugee community groups so far in 2024. UNHCR is supporting the refugee community in Aden put in place an election process for the formation of a new representative body. In Sana'a, UNHCR supports the refugee representatives and representatives.

Four displaced-led organizations are receiving funding from UNHCR to support projects like inclusion of those living with a disability and digital literacy for women and girls.

Self-reliance, economic inclusion, and livelihoods

Greater investment and targeted action supporting full socioeconomic inclusion is needed to reduce the stark figures of 80% of the population living under the poverty line.

UNHCR has found that 85 per cent those who were able to earn an income do so from the informal sector or as a daily wage labourer.

UNHCR and partners supported 59 refugees enroll into a national vocational school or on the job training opportunities.

UNHCR is supporting Somali refugees, like Ali, to voluntarily return to Somalia in safe and dignified conditions. Above, Ali is waiting to set sail from Aden seaport, in Yemen, to Berbera, in Somalia. UNHCR/Gregory Doane

Solve: Securing Solutions

The ideal solution to forced displacement is a safe, dignified, and voluntary return to the place of origin. Unfortunately, for the vast majority of those forcibly displaced in Yemen, this is not yet a reality. Many have spent years, if not decades for some Somali refugees, in exile.

The main factors that inform the IDPs' decision to return are safety and security (90 per cent of respondents), as well as access to livelihood opportunities (56 per cent), and access to adequate housing, including to property rehabilitation mechanisms (40 per cent). IDP returnees struggle to rebuild their homes, are exposed to hazards, lack access basic services, and struggle to meet their basic needs, possibly leading to secondary displacement and associated protection risks.

Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration

UNHCR continues to monitor the spontaneous return of IDPs back to their homes. Of those surveyed by UNHCR, most IDP returnees have been unable to meet their basic needs or find steady work upon return. UNHCR started an innovative house rehabilitation programme to support the most vulnerable IDP returnees.

Over 6,200 Somali refugees have voluntarily returned home since 2017. [Press Release] There is a clear demand in Yemen among Somali refugees to return home. The Assisted Spontaneous Return (ASR) programme provides a safe and dignified alternative to the dangerous journey, as well as access to counselling and information for those considering return to Somalia. The programme will restart after the stormy season ends in August. [learn more here]

Local integration and other local solutions

Although most people who have been forced to flee want to return one day, the reality is that very few are able to do so, and more and more find themselves in situations of protracted displacement. UNHCR is a recipient of the Internal Displacement Solutions Fund and is working with other UN Agencies and displaced communities to find solutions. A kick-off workshop was held on the 26 May 2024 with the implementing agencies and representatives from the Government of Yemen's Executive Unit and governorate Representatives from Aden, Lahj, Ma'rib, and Taiz.

In Aden, 60-year-old Aziza cares for her ailing husband while her son searches for work. Torn ceilings and rain-soaked walls threatened their safety. However, UNHCR's Cash for House Rehabilitation program offered a lifeline. With local labour and materials, Aziza repaired the roof and painted the walls, reclaiming her home.

© UNHCR/Mysa Khalaf

So far in 2024, UNHCR supported 577 IDP returnee and vulnerable families rehabilitate their homes. Additionally, nearly 800 families have undergone House, Land, and Property due diligence to be eligible. This program restores homes, revitalize communities, and provided economic empowerment.

Local skilled laborer paint Aziza's home.
© UNHCR/Mysa Khalaf

Resettlement and complementary pathways

The current resettlement landscape is marked by an increasing gap between needs and available places. On average, less than 1% of the world's refugee population benefit from resettlement. UNHCR estimates 5,380 refugees in Yemen may be in need of resettlement in 2024. So far, three refugees have been accepted for resettlement.

Partnerships

UNHCR works with the following partners and entities: Al-awn Foundation for Development | Al-dar Al-Arabia for Development and Advocacy | Benevolence Coalition for Humanitarian Relief | Deem for Development Organization | Executive Unit | Field Medical Foundation | Human Access for Partnership and Development | The Immigration, Passports, and Nationalization Authority | Jeel Albena Association for Humanitarian Development | The Migration, Refugees, and IDPs Studies Centre at Sana'a University | NAMA Small and Microfinance Foundation | Nahda Makers Organization | The National Committee for Refugee Affairs | Qatar Red Crescent | Rawabi Al-Nahda Developmental Foundation | Safe Road for Peace and Development Organization | Sustainable Development Foundation | The Supreme Council for Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation | Society for Humanitarian Solidarity | Tamdeen Youth Foundation | Yemen Alkair for Relief and Development | Yemen Development Foundation | Yemeni General Union Of Sociologists, Social Workers, and Psychologists | Yemeni Red Crescent Society | Yemen Women Union.

UNHCR is also partnering with four displaced-led organizations to ensure accountability to affected populations: Al Ghaith | Foundation for Humanitarian Cooperation for People with Disabilities | Reef Foundation for Human Development | Social Researcher Foundation for Development (SRFD).

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