

THEMATIC SERIES THE INVISIBLE MAJORITY

This thematic series addresses the gap in awareness, data and knowledge about the relationship between internal displacement, cross-border movements and durable solutions.



'EVEN IF THEY REOPENED THE AIRPORTS'

Barriers to cross-border movement expose Yemenis
to repeated internal displacement

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Cover photo: Checking his childhood home after it was destroyed in Aden, Ala'a, 22 years old, says, "Armed men invaded the house and turned it into a snipers assembly point, and then an air strike targeted it for that reason". He adds, "We moved during the conflict and now we live in Al Buraiqeh in Aden". Credit    UNHCR/ Saleh Bahulais, June 2019

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A displaced sits inside a makeshift tent at a displacement site in the Abs district of Hajjah governorate. Photo © UNHCR/Ibrahim Al-Ja'adi, May 2019

SUMMARY

Building upon years of instability, the escalation of the war in Yemen in 2015 plunged the country into the worst humanitarian crises of recent times. More than 80 per cent of the population is in need of aid, and millions have been internally displaced. Given the scale of the crisis, comparatively few Yemenis have sought refuge abroad. This study, based on 147 interviews with Yemenis displaced both inside and outside the country, seeks to better understand the relationship between internal displacement and cross-border movement. It explores the emigration environment and migration interface within which aspirations and abilities for cross-border movement are defined, and assesses the return outlook of displaced Yemenis.¹ The research arrives at the following key findings.

| Emigration environment: Yemen's social, economic and political context

Yemen is situated at the centre of a mixed migration crossroads. Widespread labour migration to neighbouring Saudi Arabia has been marked by repeated waves of forcible returns. At the same time, Yemen has received large numbers of refugees and migrants from the Horn of Africa, many of whom are seeking to transit onwards to richer oil-producing countries in the region.

Yemen's latest conflict is a result of longstanding social, economic and political grievances, marked by years of conflict in the north, repression of a southern separatist movement, and decades of stalled development and economic decline. At least 3.65 million people are thought to be living in internal displacement.² Whole neighbourhoods and even towns have been emptied of their residents as a result of the conflict. Repeated displacement is caused predominantly by shifting frontlines, but also by poverty and evictions. Displaced Yemenis are confronted with high levels of food insecurity, inadequate shelters and limited access to services.

| Migration interface: opportunities for and barriers to movement

A number of factors, including neighbouring countries' strict border controls, difficulties in obtaining necessary documentation, geography and the prohibitively high cost of travel, have restricted the ability of Yemenis to seek refuge abroad. This does not reflect a lack of aspirations, but rather represents a form of forced immobility. In other cases, the internalisation of obstacles to cross-border movement has resulted in a form of acquiescent immobility, whereby Yemenis rationalise their decision to remain in their country of origin by denying their aspirations for migration.

Restrictive migration policies have limited the modes of migration available to those who seek to travel abroad; as a result, much cross-border movement is irregular. Many of the refugees interviewed in Europe had first flown to countries with no visa restrictions for Yemenis before continuing their dangerous and costly onward journey to Europe via Spain or Morocco. Interviewees in Djibouti made the 14-hour boat journey across the Gulf of Aden, but have been discouraged by the lack of economic opportunities and harsh conditions in displacement.

| Return outlook: prospects for durable solutions

While a majority of internally displaced people (IDPs) said they would like to return to their areas of origin, few refugees intend to return to Yemen. Both groups reported that conflict and violence were the main obstacles to return, with refugees having little to no hope of an end to the war in the near or medium term. The likely drop in remittances resulting from deportations from Saudi Arabia threatens to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis, as does any potential scale-down of humanitarian assistance because of concerns about interference with aid in areas under Ansar Allah control.

INTRODUCTION

Firas was only 19 when he was forcibly recruited by Ansar Allah (also known as the Houthi movement) in 2016.³ Because he refused to hold a weapon, he was sent to jail, where he was severely beaten and abused. When a Saudi bomb was dropped on his prison, he managed to escape to Aden, where he boarded a flight to Egypt. From Egypt, he moved onwards to Iran, then Turkey, before boarding a boat to Greece. Difficult conditions in Chios prompted him to move onwards to northern Europe. With little more than a global positioning system (GPS) on his phone and a backpack, he walked through Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, reaching Stockholm in April 2019. Because he had already been fingerprinted in Chios, his asylum application was denied. Afraid of being deported back to Greece, he decided to move onwards to Germany, which is where he was interviewed for this study.

Airstrikes, ground clashes, persecution by armed groups, general lawlessness, food insecurity and a lack of livelihood opportunities and basic services have forced millions of Yemenis to flee their homes. Limitations in terms of research and data collection, however, mean that the scale of the phenomenon has not been well understood.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) secured authorisation for nationwide data collection in 2018, and estimates that at least 3.65 million people are living in internal displacement across Yemen, representing 12 per cent of the country's population. More than 390,000 new displacements were recorded in the first nine months of 2019.⁴

Conventional wisdom dictates that "economic hardship, political oppression, human rights abuses, violent conflict and state failure in developing countries create more asylum seekers".⁵ The conflict in Yemen has triggered the world's worst humanitarian crisis of recent times, with 80 per cent of the population in need of protection and assistance.⁶ Yet despite the scale of internal displacement in the country, less than 71,000 refugees from Yemen have sought refuge in the region.⁷ Even fewer have requested asylum in the EU.

The Migration Governance and asYlum Crises (MAGYC) project seeks to assess how migration governance has been influenced by recent "refugee crises" and how crises at large shape policy responses on migration. As part of this project, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) aims to assess continuity between internal displacement and cross-border movement.

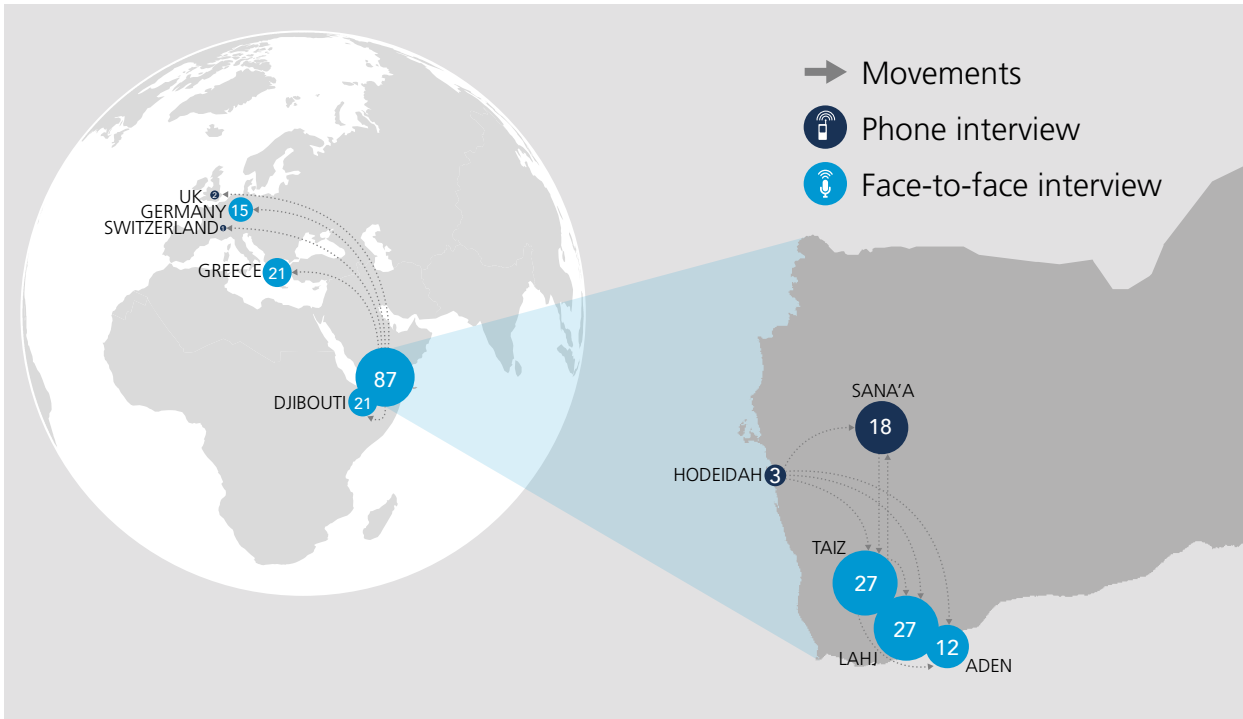
Based on primary research conducted among internally displaced Yemenis and Yemeni refugees, this study provides better understanding of the mobility of conflict-affected Yemenis within and across borders. The report first examines the emigration environment, understood as the social, economic and political context within which aspirations for mobility are situated, including historical patterns of migration and ongoing internal displacement.⁸

The report then analyses the barriers to and opportunities for movement that the migration interface comprises, revealing how restrictive immigration policies and the financial cost of migration at times result in forced immobility.⁹ Different modes of migration are examined, alongside conditions experienced by refugees in Europe and Djibouti.

The final chapter of the report provides insight into the return outlook, assessing future intentions of Yemeni refugees and IDPs, and discussing prospects for durable solutions both inside the country and abroad.

METHODOLOGY

This study draws on information gathered from an extensive literature review and data collected both inside and outside Yemen through structured interviews. Eighty-seven interviews were conducted with internally displaced families, 39 with refugees in Europe – in Germany, Greece, Switzerland and the UK – and 21 with refugees in Djibouti, making a total of 147 interviews. Interviews in Yemen took place in August and September 2019, and elsewhere in May and June 2019.



| Sampling strategy

Given the security and access challenges in conducting research in Yemen, a non-probability sampling technique was adopted. Respondents were identified through convenience sampling, based on the access and networks of researchers. Respondents in Europe and Djibouti were also identified through personal and professional networks and partner organisations. To improve the sample's diversity, men and women of various age groups in urban and rural areas and camps were chosen as respondents.

The sample is not representative. Finding a critical mass of interviewees in Europe was not easy given the low numbers of Yemeni refugees and asylum seekers. Inside Yemen, the security situation limited the geographic scope of the research, which included only a small number of interviews with respondents in areas controlled by Ansar Allah. As such, it is not possible to extrapolate the findings to apply to all IDPs in Yemen, or to all Yemenis abroad.

| Data collection

Two researchers in Yemen were recruited and trained

remotely by IDMC. Data collection with IDPs took place in three governorates controlled by the Saudi-led coalition and its allies. Local researchers in Yemen conducted 66 face-to-face interviews with families in Shamaytain district and Taiz city in Taiz governorate, Qubeita and Tuban districts in Lahj, and Sheikh Othman and Attawahi districts in Aden. Northern governorates controlled by Ansar Allah were not accessible to our researchers, so 21 interviews with IDPs and returnees in Sana'a and Hodeidah governorates were conducted over the phone.

For data collection with refugees, IDMC researchers travelled to Djibouti, Germany, and Greece to conduct face-to-face interviews. Three additional interviews with refugees in Switzerland and the UK were conducted over the phone.

Researchers used KoBoToolbox to conduct survey interviews. The quantitative data was cleaned and analysed in Stata to provide descriptive statistics. The majority of the report's findings, however, are based on the qualitative portion of the interviews, which provided a richness of detail not captured in the survey.

THE EMIGRATION ENVIRONMENT

The emigration environment is the macro-level social, economic and political context within which aspirations for mobility are situated.¹⁰ In the case of Yemen, the emigration environment is marked by the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis and widespread internal displacement, but also a longstanding history of migration.

A MIGRATION CROSSROADS

The shortage of economic opportunities in Yemen has contributed to large-scale emigration to other Gulf countries since the 1950s, with Yemen representing “one of the labour reservoirs for its oil-producing neighbours”.¹¹ Emigration slowed in the 1980s when a drop in oil revenue in neighbouring countries resulted in the emergence of restrictive policies favouring national employment.¹² Nonetheless, by 1991, over half of the country’s active population was living abroad.¹³ In Saudi Arabia, Yemenis accounted for 27 per cent of foreign workers, representing the largest foreign population in the country.¹⁴

“Saudi Arabia is Yemenis’ necessary evil. Yemen is surrounded by desert and sea and the Horn of Africa. There is nowhere else to go for economic opportunities, so Saudi Arabia has been a destination for many.”¹⁵

The 1990–1991 Gulf War resulted in a shift in migration patterns in the region. The Yemeni government having implicitly sided with Saddam Hussein by refusing to support Operation Desert Storm, other Gulf states took retaliatory measures. Around 731,800 Yemenis were expelled from Saudi Arabia alone.¹⁶ Since then, “borders of oil-producing countries have become largely closed to Yemenis”.¹⁷

Widespread emigration to oil-producing states freed up employment for immigrants, who came to replace

departed Yemenis in the labour market. At the time of the revolution in 2011, Yemen had a foreign population of around half a million.¹⁸

Yemen is also situated at “the epicenter of one of the world’s busiest mixed migration routes, linking Africa, Asia, and Europe”.¹⁹ Far from reducing migration, the breakdown in law and order associated with the conflict has enabled more migrants and asylum seekers fleeing desperate conditions in the Horn of Africa to attempt the journey, resulting in record levels of migration.²⁰ Irregular maritime crossings in 2018 exceeded those in the Mediterranean.²¹ Over 138,000 migrant arrivals were recorded in 2019, the majority of whom intended to travel onwards to Saudi Arabia.²² Around 276,000 refugees and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa remain in Yemen, many of whom are now likely to be living in internal displacement in situations of heightened vulnerability, at higher risk perhaps than in their countries of origin.²³

SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

| Ansar Allah

Ansar Allah’s emergence on the world stage may have come as a surprise to some, but it had long been embroiled in a war against the government that had triggered considerable displacement since 2004. The political and security vacuum created by the Arab spring protests of 2011 and the subsequent political transition laid the grounds for Ansar Allah’s takeover of the capital and, later, much of the country.²⁴

Since the 1962 revolution in North Yemen that led to the creation of the Yemen Arab Republic, the northern governorate of Sa’ada has suffered political, social and economic marginalisation. Development has been



Looking at the remains of his former relatives house and farm in Sana'a, Ali recalls the air strike incident and says "five girls got injured and the little child, sadly, died". Photo © UNHCR/Shohdi Alsofi, June 2019

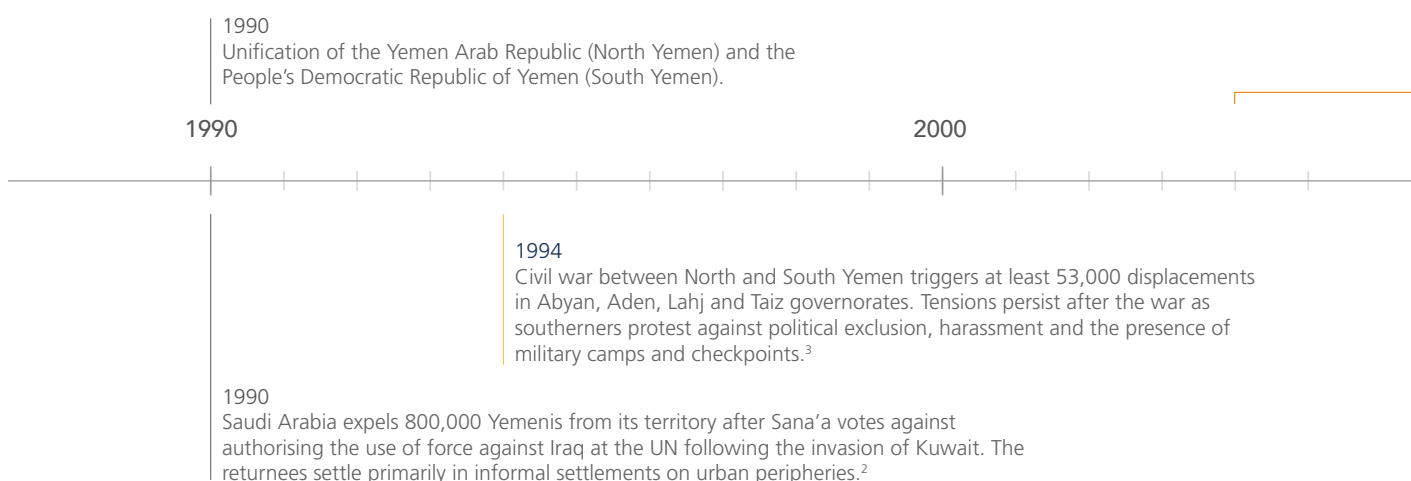
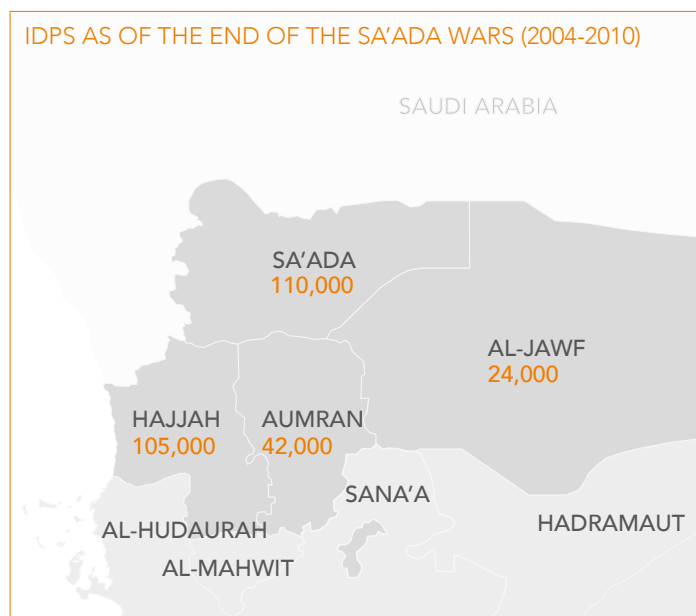
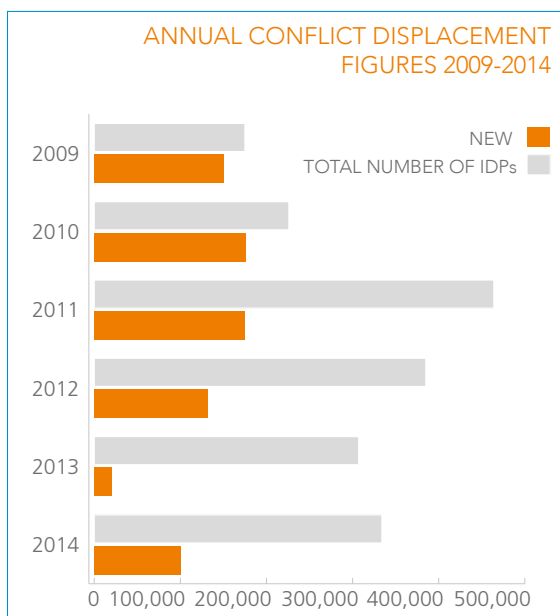
minimal and the state has limited itself to co-opting tribal leaders.²⁵ At the same time, growing Sunni Salafi influence from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf was seen as a threat to the region's Zaidi Shia minority, who had formed the ruling class of northern Yemen for centuries. In response, a movement promoting Zaidi culture and education called Shabaab al-Mo'meneen or Young Believers emerged as a precursor to Ansar Allah in the 1990s.²⁶

In 2004, conflict was sparked when the government tried to arrest Hussein Badr Din al Houthi, a Zaidi religious leader and former parliamentarian tied to the Young Believers. Al-Houthi was killed in the first outbreak of conflict, but his group went on to fight the security forces five more times over the next six years.²⁷

Each round of fighting aggravated grievances further. What had begun as isolated clashes in Sa'ada morphed into a political and tribal conflict. Saudi Arabia became involved in 2009, supporting the Yemeni government's attacks on Ansar Allah positions with fighter jets, helicopters, tanks and artillery.²⁸ The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) registered about 342,000 IDPs in Al-Jawf, Amran, Hajjah Sa'ada and Sana'a governorates. Some also tried to cross the border to Saudi Arabia, but many were sent back to Yemen.²⁹

Ansar Allah made huge territorial gains in 2014, seizing control of Sana'a and pushing on towards Yemen's southern governorates. A coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia launched a military offensive against Ansar Allah in March 2015 to reinstate the Hadi government, marking the onset of the latest conflict.

KEY PRE-2015 DISPLACEMENT EVENTS



This timeline is not an exhaustive representation of displacement events in Yemen. Restrictions in access to areas affected by conflict over the years mean the true scale of the displacement involved is unknown. There is also relatively little data available on displacement associated with disasters, particularly drought and water scarcity.

The government began collecting displacement data in late 2009 with technical support from UNHCR. It launched national registration for IDPs in February 2010, but the system has been hampered by insecurity. It also established an executive unit as the national focal point for internal displacement. The unit's mandate includes collecting data on IDPs, addressing their needs and promoting and facilitating returns. The government also developed a national policy internal displacement, which was adopted in June 2013.¹

The government's loss of control over its territory and the ensuing humanitarian catastrophe since 2015 has made it difficult for it to implement or further develop its policy on internal displacement. The executive unit's key task has been the coordination of international humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict, including IDPs.

- Displacement triggered by disasters
- Displacement triggered by conflict with Ansar Allah
- Displacement triggered by conflict with southern separatists
- Displacement triggered by the fight against al-Qaeda

2004-2010

Six rounds of fighting between Ansar Allah and the Yemeni government leave more than 250,000 people living in displacement. A year after the fighting officially comes to an end, there are 110,000 IDPs in Sa'ada governorate, 105,000 in Hajjah, 42,000 in Aumran and 24,000 in al-Jawf. Many people are displaced various times over six years.⁶

2007-2009

A year-long drought triggers thousands of displacements from mountain villages in al-Mahwit governorate.⁴

May 2008

Flash flooding triggers between 20,000 and 25,000 displacements in Hadramout and al-Mahara governorates.⁹

October 2008

Flash flooding triggers between 20,000 and 25,000 displacements in Hadramout and al-Mahara governorates.⁵

Early 2010

Severe storms damage or destroy hundreds of shelters in displacement camps in Hajjah governorate, leading to secondary displacement.¹⁰

May 2011

The government cracks down violently on protesters across the country. Fighting between rival factions in the capital Sana'a triggers thousands of displacements.¹¹

Early 2012

Fighting between Ansar Allah and the government triggers 50,000 displacements in Sa'ada and Hajjah governorates.

April 2012

Flash floods inundate IDPs' settlements in Hajjah governorate, affecting 76 families.¹⁴

2010

2020

August-September 2013

Floods affect 52,500 people across nine governorates, including about 12,000 IDPs living in camps in Hajjah.

June 2012

Fighting between the government and al-Qaeda militants is thought to have triggered more than 200,000 displacements, particularly in Abyan governorate

May 2011

Fighting between government forces and al-Qaeda militants for control Zinjibar, the capital of Abyan governorate, triggers 90,000 displacements.¹²

September 2010

Conflict between the government and militants linked to al-Qaeda triggers 6,000 displacements in Shabwa governorate.

2006-2010

The southern separatist movement Hirak emerges, giving rise to numerous mass protests that are further fuelled by the government's repressive response.⁷

May 2009

Two hundred families are displaced in Lahj governorate following violent clashes between protesters and the security forces.

May and June 2010

Fierce clashes between the army and militant separatists trigger displacement in Lahj and Dahl governorates. Scores of homes are destroyed and other flee in fear.⁸

| The southern issue

In 1994, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in the south reunited with the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in the north, which led to a 70-day civil war and established perceived northern dominance over the entire country. Tensions persisted after the war as southerners protested against political exclusion, harassment and the presence of military camps and checkpoints.³⁰ The emergence of a southern separatist movement known as Hiraq in 2006 marked the beginning of renewed calls for southern independence.

The government's subsequent repressive response fuelled resentment and led to the growth of Hiraq. Numerous mass protests have taken place since 2006. Sporadic but fierce clashes between government forces and groups of armed individuals linked to Hiraq have also triggered displacement.³¹

The entry of the Saudi-led coalition into Yemen's civil war in 2015 has further complicated the southern issue, because its key members, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), back different allies on the ground. Violence has flared several times since 2015, thrusting the issue back into the spotlight as a divisive trigger of conflict and displacement.

Yemen's internationally recognised government and the secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC) signed an agreement brokered by Saudi Arabia in November 2019 in an attempt to heal rifts among the coalition of forces fighting Ansar Allah. Fighting had broken out between the two coalition parties in August, leading to a standoff in the south that raised fears of a civil war within a civil war.³² Despite the slow and shaky implementation of the deal and ongoing fighting, cautious optimists have since suggested that the agreement could lay the grounds for a wider peace deal.³³

| Economic woes

Along with the economic marginalisation of particular groups in the north and south, the general deterioration of Yemen's economy fuelled nationwide protests in 2011 and established a support base for Ansar Allah's rise.

Relative prosperity in the 1980s was followed by steady economic decline over the following decades and a sharp fall since the onset of the latest conflict

in 2015. Emigration to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf had been generating mass remittances that significantly improved the lives of rural families, enabling them to sink new wells, buy diesel-powered pumps and irrigate their fields.³⁴ The remittances, however, dried up after the waves of deportations in the 1990s, creating an economic crisis for many families who were barely able to sustain themselves above the poverty line.³⁵

Environmental factors, poor water management and a switch from rain-fed farming to the irrigation of water-intensive crops such as qat have also led to a steady decline in agriculture since 1990. Over-extraction for irrigation has left shallow wells dry, which in turn has aggravated poverty, forced farmers to become sharecroppers or day labourers and led to the displacement of entire villages left without water.³⁶

The war has taken a heavy toll on what was already a struggling economy. Unemployment had reached an all-time high before the war began, more than 50 per cent of the population was living under the poverty line, 14.7 million were in need of humanitarian assistance, and 13 million had no access to safe water and sanitation.³⁷ After five years of conflict, more than 80 per cent of the population live in poverty and are in need of humanitarian assistance, and more than two-thirds of the country is food insecure.³⁸

Subsistence and commercial farming have both suffered badly, partly due to the coalition's bombing of farms and critical infrastructure and the mining of agricultural land. The fishing industry has also been severely affected because of the destruction of boats, ports and markets.³⁹ Shocks to the oil and gas industry have shrunk foreign currency reserves and reduced the state's ability to import goods and products. The use of land, sea and air blockades as a war strategy and restrictions on commercial imports have reduced the amount of food, fuel and medicine that can enter the country. This has pushed prices up and, given the import-based nature of the economy, has caused living costs to soar. At the same time, around 35 per cent of businesses have closed since the start of the war, causing household incomes to plummet.⁴⁰

WIDESPREAD INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

IOM estimates that at least 3.65 million people are living in internal displacement across the country's 22 governorates and 333 districts, representing 12 per cent of the country's population.⁴¹

I Triggers of displacement

More than 90 per cent of respondents described a specific conflict event as the trigger of their displacement. Saudi-led coalition airstrikes have disproportionately affected civilian areas, destroying infrastructure including hospitals and schools, farms, fishing/livelihoods and food production infrastructure, in what the UN described as breaches of international humanitarian law as early as December 2015.⁴²

The worst-affected governorates have been Sa'ada and Taiz, which have both recorded 16 per cent of the country's conflict events – described as fighting, violence against civilians or airstrikes – since 2015. Hodeidah has recorded 14 per cent.⁴³ The three governorates have also produced the most IDPs.

In areas under Ansar Allah control, the most common displacement trigger cited by respondents was an airstrike or bombing nearby. One widow displaced with her six children from Hodeidah left the day her husband was killed in a coalition airstrike while at their neighbour's funeral.⁴⁴ Another family left Abs in Hajjah when a coalition airstrike destroyed part of their home, including the roof.⁴⁵

One man from Hodeidah decided to leave when airstrikes woke him and his family at three in the morning.



Ali and his family have been unable to rebuild their house, and remain internally displaced in their hometown. Photo © UNHCR/Shohdi Alsofi, June 2019

"I was sleeping at home, with my wife and children, when we heard an explosion that shook everything around us. We woke up, terrified, not understanding what had happened. It was three in the morning and the bombings continued." A weapons depot had reportedly been the target of the airstrike, setting off munitions that detonated into the morning. His family and most of the others in his neighbourhood left the same day.⁴⁶

Other people fled areas controlled by Ansar Allah because of persecution. One respondent, who is a journalist, said: *"I was grocery shopping at lunchtime when I received a message from my colleague saying that Ansar Allah had raided our office and were searching for me. I froze and began to feel everyone's eyes on me. I organised my thoughts and called my wife. I told her to prepare a bag and meet me at a designated location. I did not want to go home for fear they would be waiting for me there. We got in a car and drove to Taiz city. At every Houthi checkpoint I prayed that nothing would happen to me or my family."*⁴⁷

Social and political activists opposed to Ansar Allah have also been targeted. One teacher from the town of Rabi'i in rural Taiz had spoken out against the group, but when its fighters advanced on the governorate he decided to rein in his activism to protect himself and his family. One day, he was on a bus that was stopped at an Ansar Allah checkpoint. *"The soldier that ordered me off the bus used to be one of my students,"* he said. He was released soon afterwards, but subsequent threats forced him to flee Rabi'i for good.⁴⁸

Ansar Allah has also allegedly cleared towns of their residents upon arrival.⁴⁹ When the group took over Tabi-sha'a in rural Taiz, it is reported to have laid partial siege to the town, restricting residents' freedom of movement until finally ordering them all to leave.

*"We heard a voice through the speakers ordering us to leave the area and threatening anyone who stayed with death ... I can't describe the feeling as we all left our homes, all of us together, the whole family, all the neighbours, everyone."*⁵⁰

It is not uncommon for major conflict events to displace whole neighbourhoods or villages. Individual families decide to leave, but their decisions coincide with those of others, leading to mass displacement. Families either leave on foot or hire vehicles large enough to travel in

together. In doing so they ensure safety in numbers and reduce transport costs, the main outlay associated with displacement.

*"Bullets and shells were flying everywhere and a number of homes were hit. We were frightened ... The entire village left that day. We tried to avoid areas where clashes were taking place and saved ourselves ... We were about 50 families, we walked together carrying our young and elderly on our shoulders for about an hour ... We slept in the fields outside a nearby village and ate what the locals offered us for three days. Then families began to go their separate ways."*⁵¹

*"We heard fighting and shelling ... women and children were screaming everywhere ... We all left, no one stayed behind. I still remember the scene, it was terrifying, as if the day of reckoning had arrived."*⁵²

FORCED EXPULSIONS IN AUGUST 2019

STC launched an offensive in August 2019 to take over areas controlled by the Yemeni government. It made significant gains, taking control of Aden and then advancing into neighbouring governorates. It was not STC's first such attempt, but it proved to be the most destabilising.⁵³ Negotiations between the group and the government in Sana'a culminated in the two sides signing an agreement in Riyadh in November.⁵⁴

Fighting between government forces and STC and Security Belt forces broke out after the funeral of a prominent Security Belt commander killed the week before by an Ansar Allah missile in Aden. STC and Security Belt forces accused the government of having coordinated the attack against their military camp with Ansar Allah.⁵⁵

Festering anti-northern sentiments surfaced immediately after the attack, and Security Belt forces began rounding up people of northern origin and expelling them to Taiz. Authorities and monitoring groups registered hundreds of such displacements in early August, but the exact number is unknown.⁵⁶ The campaign seemed to primarily target shop and restaurant owners. Their premises were burnt down and they were

detained, beaten and threatened with further consequences if they failed to leave Aden immediately.⁵⁷

Women or families were not spared. One woman with three children said Security Belt forces entered her home, threw her and her children out and pillaged their belongings. They told her she would be killed if she ever went back inside, she said.

*"What I experienced that day, the insults, the beating I was given, the fear I felt for my children, I will never forget it."*⁵⁸

Some were given 24 hours to leave, but others were rounded up into vehicles on the spot and taken to military bases, where they were subjected to further abuse before being expelled the following day.

One man from Taiz described his experience. He had been living in Aden with his wife and three children for two years, and had set up an accountancy firm that was doing well. He was on his way to the local market during his lunchbreak when he was stopped by Security Belt forces, who were checking people's identification and detaining those of northern origin. They took his phone and money and beat him and insulted him, saying he was a member of al-Qaeda. He passed out from the beating and was taken to their military base with a number of others.

He was released to his nephew because of his deteriorating health after the beating. He spent time in hospital being treated for his wounds and then left for Taiz. He was shocked but defiant about what had happened.

*"Yes, I want to go back, my source of income and the office I set up are there, Aden is my success story and I won't let some racists take that away from me. Aden as I know it is a city of peace that embraces everyone, its people are kind and friendly. Those who did this could not have been from Aden."*⁵⁹

The fighting that ensued, pitting government forces against those of STC and the Security Belt, also displaced Adenis. One family who had returned to Aden after fleeing their home in 2015 was displaced again when clashes broke out in Dar Saad neighbourhood in early August. They went to stay in a hotel in al-Turba in Taiz governorate until the dust had settled in Aden. After a few weeks, however, they were still in the hotel but unable to afford to stay any longer. The Taiz authorities in charge of helping IDPs negotiated with the hotel to allow them to stay, but it was unclear how much longer the arrangement would last.⁶⁰

Repeated displacement

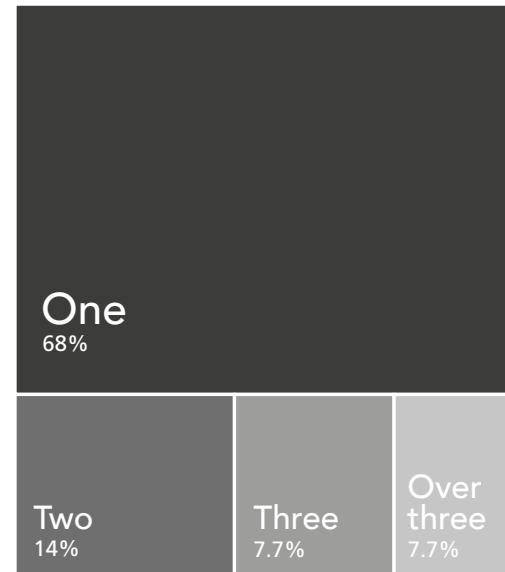
About 32 per cent of IDPs surveyed had been displaced more than once (see figure 1). Even among those who said they had been displaced only once, stories often included initial flight to a friend or relative's home while they decided where to go next. Many respondents described an overwhelming feeling of being a burden on already poor host families living in cramped conditions, which led them to move on again.

One member of a family from rural Taiz said: *"I felt we were a heavy burden on my wife's family from the minute we arrived. We were 13 people, but I didn't have any other options. I looked for alternatives, and one day a friend called me and told me about a building that was hosting IDPs in Taiz city. I took my family and hurried there."*⁶¹ Another respondent from Taiz city said: *"We stayed at my brother-in-law's house for three days, but it became clear that his wife did not welcome our presence."*⁶²

Shifting frontlines in the conflict also caused some IDPs to move on again. One family displaced from Taiz city in 2015 fled to Hodeidah city, where they were able to re-establish their lives. The fighting caught up with them in 2018, however, and airstrikes forced them to flee again, this time to a hosting site in rural Taiz.⁶³

A few respondents had tried to return to their areas of origin, only to find that the security situation was

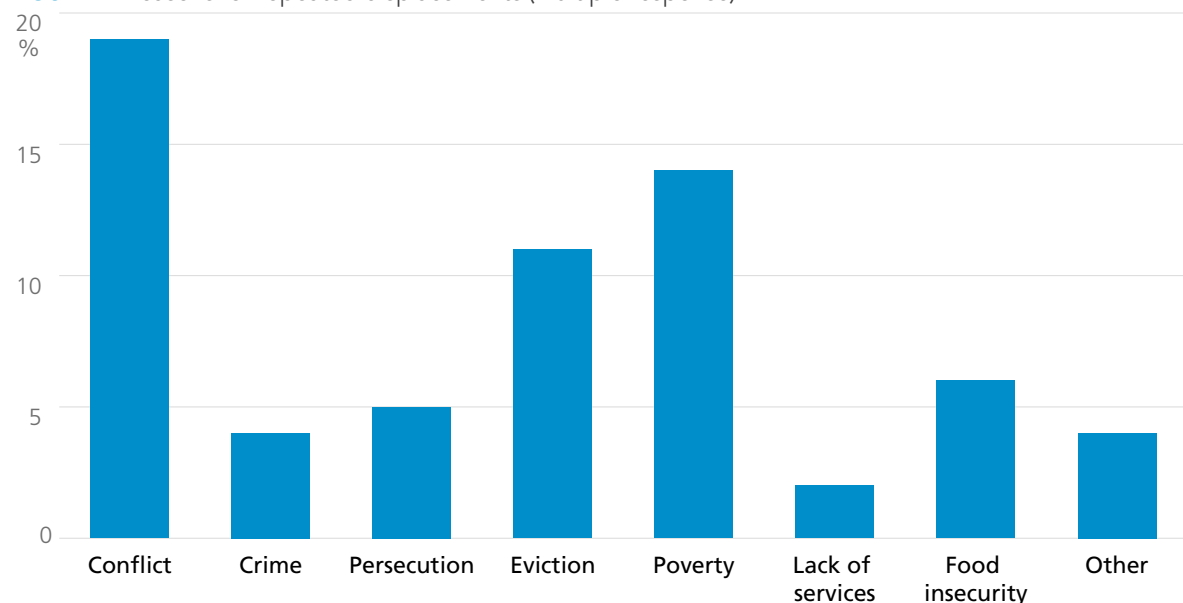
FIGURE 1: Number of displacements



worse than they had expected. One resident of Dahy neighbourhood in Taiz city left when the war started, and when he returned the siege of the city was at its height. There were also snipers everywhere, so he left again.⁶⁴ A woman from Hodeidah city living in rural Taiz tried to return home a number of times because conditions at her displacement site were unbearable, but was forced to go back when security in her home town deteriorated.⁶⁵

Other factors fuelling secondary displacement include poverty, food insecurity and eviction, all of which

FIGURE 2: Reasons for repeated displacements (multiple response)





A woman surveys her shelter at a hosting site for internally displaced persons in Aden, Yemen, after heavy rain caused extensive damage on 25 March 2020. Photo © UNHCR/Essam Adduais, March 2020

are tied to families' inability to secure livelihoods (see figure 2). Nearly half of Yemeni adults surveyed in 2015 reported that their household had lost its main source of income because of the conflict.⁶⁶ Around 81 per cent of Yemenis are now living below the poverty line.⁶⁷

Rent payments are the main financial burden on displaced families, particularly those in urban areas. The landlord of one damaged building in Taiz city decided, after a year's grace, to start charging the 13 displaced families living there \$40 a month in rent. Four of the families were unable to pay and had to leave. The landlord then began to repair the building, and six months later he doubled the rent to \$80, putting it beyond the means of the other nine families, who were also forced to leave.⁶⁸

Another family from Hajjah governorate paid \$20 a month for a one-bedroom apartment in Sana'a until they were no longer able to afford the rent and went to live in a mosque. Two months later, however, they were kicked out and left with nowhere to live. A local resident allowed them to create a makeshift shelter using an outer wall of his house, which is where they still live.⁶⁹

Another family had been displaced five times between villages in rural Taiz, and depended on the kindness of local people and market traders to give them enough food to survive. In some of the places they stayed they were able to create a makeshift shelter, but in others

they slept in the open. Each displacement was the result of eviction by the owners of the land or of the empty buildings where they were living, such as schools at the start of the academic year. Unable to meet their most basic shelter and food needs, they were forced to keep moving to survive.⁷⁰

As well as driving repeated displacements, poverty has prevented some families from fleeing their local areas due to lack of resources. According to key informants, some destitute rural families were only able to move a few kilometres from their homes – just far enough to be out of the line of fire – and had no further resources with which to move further afield or establish a livelihood. They have found shelter where they can, in abandoned homes and with local host families, and rely on whatever humanitarian assistance is available.

I Patterns of displacement

The primary pull factor to areas of displacement was the presence of friends or family who might provide initial shelter and support. Some IDPs have also been able to use their social networks to find livelihood opportunities in their area of displacement, but most still need friends and family to provide a roof over their heads.

Respondents also said they had fled to places they thought would provide them with better safety and security. Those interviewed in Kirsh district of Lahj

governorate had fled between 15 and 20 kilometres from villages on the frontline of the conflict to escape immediate danger.⁷¹ They found empty homes they could live in, and plan to remain there as long as they are safe and have shelter. Fighting continues in their home villages, which are also littered with mines and unexploded ordnances.

Large geolocated displacement datasets offer some insight into whether IDPs move from and to urban or rural areas. Data was disaggregated using IOM’s data on IDPs from November 2018 and the EU’s Global Human Settlement Layer, which assesses degrees of urbanisation using census data from national statistical institutes and satellite observations. The analysis shows that 69 per cent of IDPs live in rural areas, and 31 per cent in urban centres. This is in line with the distribution of the country’s population as a whole, 63.4 per cent of whom live in rural areas.⁷²

Reflecting this pattern, about 62 per cent of respondents moved to places similar to their area of origin (see figure 3). Transferrable education, skills and networks were the main factors cited. Twenty-eight per cent of respondents had moved from rural areas to urban centres; many found it difficult to establish livelihoods with which to afford the relatively high cost of living.⁷³

Only 10 per cent of respondents had fled from urban to rural areas, making it the least common pattern of displacement. For many families, doing so was a last resort

after they had been displaced various times within cities, which depleted their resources. They sought shelter in rural camps, where they could avoid the high cost of renting and where there was the prospect of humanitarian aid.⁷⁴

| Conditions in displacement

More than half of the \$4.2 billion requested to fund the humanitarian response in Yemen is earmarked for food security. As much as two-thirds of the population are in need of food assistance, and a third are in acute need. Assessments also revealed incidents of “catastrophic hunger” for the first time in February 2019.⁷⁵ About 85,000 children have died of starvation since 2015.⁷⁶

In line with national statistics, about half of the IDPs interviewed for this study said they went hungry at least several times a month, and close to 10 per cent said they go hungry every day (see figure 4). Nationwide, more than half of households of IDPs said food was their main need, followed by shelter and access to financial support or income-generating opportunities.⁷⁷

| SHELTER CONDITIONS

IDPs’ housing conditions varied significantly from location to location and based on their available resources, but most of those interviewed were living in substandard conditions. Very few were satisfied with their shelter arrangements. The absence of electricity and running water, overcrowding and lack of privacy were cited as problems across locations.

FIGURE 3: Patterns of displacement among respondents

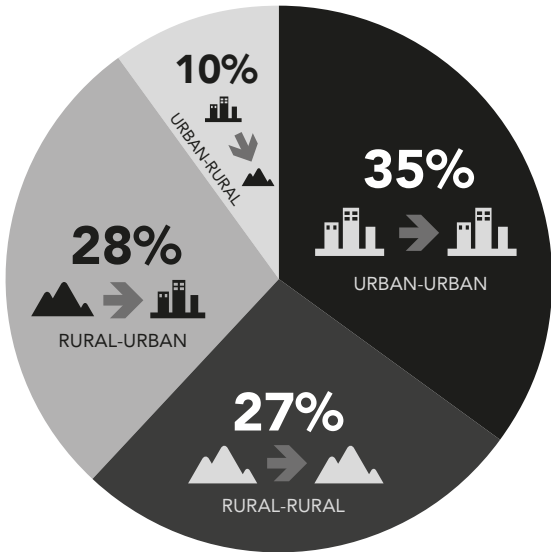
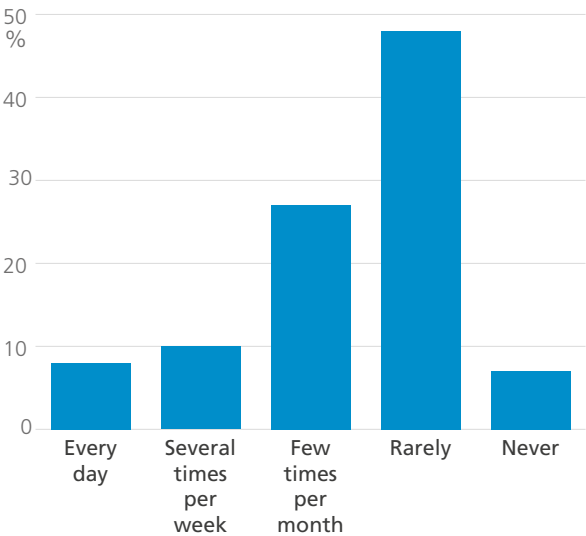


FIGURE 4: Frequency of hunger





Displaced persons and staff try to deal with the floodwater at a hosting site in Aden affected by heavy rains. Photo © UNHCR/Mohammed Mukhawesh, September 2019

About 85 per cent of urban centres and 20 per cent of rural areas had electricity before the war, but infrastructure damage and lack of maintenance since has crippled supplies in many areas.⁷⁸ More than half of the IDPs interviewed did not have access to electricity, and many of those who did relied on small solar systems that generated enough power to turn on lights and a television for a few hours a day. The scarcity and high cost of fuel has impeded the widespread use of diesel or petrol-powered generators.⁷⁹ Some IDPs in Aden city had intermittent connections to the national grid, but they were the exception.

Many IDPs also cited a lack of access to running water as a major problem. Some in Taiz relied on trucked water, a service that is becoming prohibitively expensive for many. Those in rural areas drew water from wells, some having to travel up to 15 kilometres to reach one.⁸⁰ Respondents living in a settlement for IDPs in Lahj governorate said their presence had greatly increased the number of people using the local water point, which had caused tension between them and the host community.⁸¹ Those living in rented accommodation in Aden had access to mains water, but the supply was regularly interrupted.

About three-quarters of the IDPs interviewed were living in rented accommodation or with host families. The remainder, considered the most vulnerable because of their limited resources, were sheltering in hosting sites

including public buildings and collective centres, or in dispersed settlements.⁸²

These rented accommodations varied from apartments in regular urban neighbourhoods to abandoned homes in rural villages. A number of families in Qubeitah district of Aden governorate were sheltering for free in such properties, but they are aware that if the owners were to return they would be forced to move again.⁸³ Another family in the same village was living in a restaurant that had gone out of business because of insecurity in the area, for which the owner was charging them \$40 a month.⁸⁴

Other families in Tuban district, also in rural Aden, were living in single rooms with no bathroom or kitchen, often sharing with other families. Some of the shelters had no roof, doors or windows, exposing the occupants to the elements.⁸⁵ Those living in a school in Shamaytain district of Taiz governorate spoke of overcrowded toilets and a complete lack of privacy.⁸⁶ Others living in a settlement for IDPs in the same district said the landowner had issued them with eviction notices, but that they did not know if or when they would have to leave.⁸⁷

| ACCESS TO SERVICES

Many displaced families struggle to keep their children in school. Lack of resources was cited as the main barrier to education, given the absence of livelihood opportu-

nities and large family sizes. For many, even buying basic school supplies and providing meals for their children constituted a major financial burden.⁸⁸

Other families identified long journeys to the nearest school as a barrier, particularly in rural areas. This was already a significant issue before the war – the result of insufficient public funding for the education sector and for the public transport needs of Yemen’s dispersed rural population, who account for 80 per cent of the country’s school-aged children.⁸⁹ The war has only made the situation worse, leaving as many as 2,000 schools unfit for use as of the end of 2018.⁹⁰

Some respondents said large class sizes and overcrowded classrooms were also a concern, particularly in areas with large numbers of IDPs, and they were reluctant to send their children to schools where the quality of education was poor. The head of the education office for Shamaytain said the district’s schools had integrated thousands of displaced children since the start of the war, putting significant pressure on the local education system.⁹¹

Lack of previous educational records was also mentioned as an issue, though no families said it had prevented them from enrolling their children in schools in their areas of displacement. Some, however, said it had meant their children did not receive completion certificates at the end of the school year, unlike their local peers. Others said their children had received completion certificates thanks to schools in their area of origin transferring records.⁹²

The head of the education office in Shamaytain district said schools always tried to communicate with schools in IDPs’ areas of origin to acquire the necessary documentation, but that this was not always possible, particularly in areas under Ansar Allah control where communication and cooperation between the two sides may be difficult, or if the school had closed down.

Discrimination or problems between IDPs and their host community were only cited a couple of times as a barrier to education. Families in one area said local children bullied displaced children, which discouraged them from going to school. Respondents in a settlement for IDPs in Shamaytain said the local school had refused to enrol any of their children. The school said it was already overcrowded and unable to accept new students, but the families concerned were convinced that discrimination was the real issue.⁹³

More than 80 per cent of IDPs in urban areas said they went to see a doctor when they were ill, compared with less than 50 per cent in rural areas. Those in Aden city said a range of health services was available, from public hospitals to private clinics. They also said the services were affordable, despite public hospitals charging fees to cover some of their costs. In rural areas, by contrast, cost and long journeys make health services inaccessible for many. Of the respondents who said they did not see a doctor when they were ill, more than 60 per cent cited the cost of treatment and about 25 per cent the fact that clinics were too far away.

| AVAILABILITY OF ASSISTANCE

Attempts by Ansar Allah to obstruct, divert and interfere with aid distributions have made it more difficult for humanitarian organisations to operate in territories under its control. Over 700 access incidents were recorded between October and November 2019 alone, with humanitarian partners facing “an unprecedented number of delays, denials and blockages in reaching people in need”.⁹⁴ Combined with an attempt by Ansar Allah to levy two per cent of the aid budgets of all non-governmental organisations (NGOs), this has prompted the US and British governments to call for a scale-back of humanitarian assistance in northern Yemen.

Some observers have questioned the extent to which this suggested scale-back is based on concerns for humanitarian principles. The US administration is already proposing to cut its foreign aid budget by over 20 per cent in 2021.⁹⁵ Others have suggested that the scale-back could be driven in part by Ansar Allah’s ties to Iran.⁹⁶

Regardless of the motivations, the UN has warned of the potential humanitarian impacts of such a scale-back. *“Stopping the world’s largest aid operation would be fatal for millions of people”*, said the UN humanitarian relief coordinator.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia remains one of the biggest unilateral donors to Yemen, with funding of \$16.7 billion provided in the past five years.⁹⁸ Arab aid allocations have been shown to be higher for Arab countries that vote similarly to Saudi Arabia at the UN General Assembly.⁹⁹ Along with the UAE, however, Saudi Arabia has been accused of hypocrisy and double standards “for both providing aid and instigating violence”.¹⁰⁰

THE MIGRATION INTERFACE

Around 18 per cent of adult Yemenis and 23 per cent of youth aged 15 to 19 would like to migrate to another country permanently if they had the opportunity to do so.¹⁰¹ Compared to the high numbers of IDPs, however, there are relatively few Yemeni refugees. There are only about 71,000 refugees from Yemen in the Horn of Africa, particularly Djibouti and Somalia, and in the neighbouring countries of Saudi Arabia and Oman.¹⁰²

Unlike Afghans, Iraqis and Syrians, who have arrived in Europe in large numbers via both regular and irregular means, few Yemenis have made it to the continent. Information on them is scarce. Although the Yemeni population in Europe has doubled since 2014, just over 11,000 Yemeni citizens were recorded in Europe in 2019, with the majority being hosted in Germany (see figure 5).¹⁰³

Just as the aspiration to migrate is influenced by the emigration environment, the ability to migrate is influenced by the migration interface, defined as the “structural frame of opportunities and barriers within which potential migrants can move” – or, in other words, “a dense jungle with various paths, each associated with

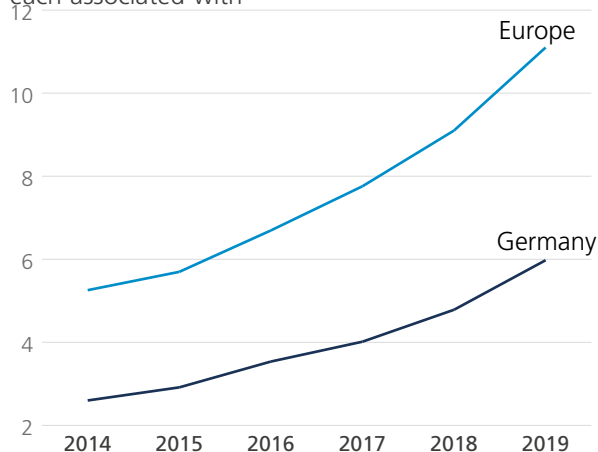


FIGURE 5: Yemeni citizens in Europe, in thousands

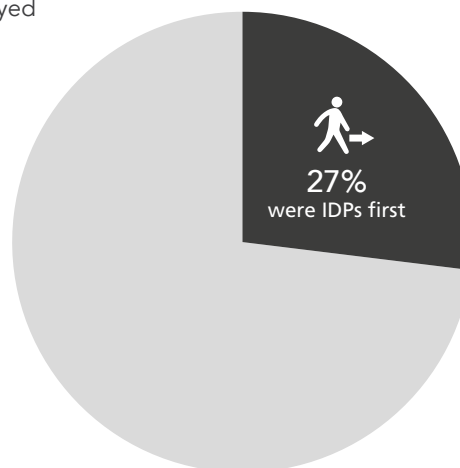
specific obstacles, costs and risks”.¹⁰⁴ In the case of Yemen, these obstacles result in forced immobility, acquiescent immobility and perilous modes of migration.

FORCED IMMOBILITY

Twenty-seven per cent of the refugees and asylum seekers interviewed in Europe and Djibouti had been displaced internally before they left the country (see figure 6). When asked why they had not left immediately, many explained that they had been unable to: “Borders and airports were closed.”¹⁰⁵

Many Yemenis would leave the country if they had the ability to do so. They are effectively involuntary non-migrants.¹⁰⁶ Involuntary immobility is particularly acute in conflict settings, where aspirations are heightened but ability restricted. Lack of development, epitomised by poverty and lack of education, can further undermine the ability to migrate.¹⁰⁷

FIGURE 6: Prior internal displacement among refugees surveyed



| Restrictive immigration policies

UNHCR warned that political obstacles were blocking the ability of some IDPs to seek refuge abroad as early as 1997.¹⁰⁸ Numerous studies have since shown that restrictive immigration and asylum policies can limit the number of arrivals in target countries. One study found that tougher policies reduced asylum applications by around five per cent.¹⁰⁹ Policies aimed at restricting access to a territory and at tightening the refugee status determination procedure were found to have a particularly deterrent effect.¹¹⁰ Another study found similar results in the context of lower recognition rates and policies aimed at restricting employment.¹¹¹

There are only 33 countries which allow access to Yemenis without a visa. Yemen is 103rd in the Henley Passport Index's list of countries with visa-free access, just before Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. In contrast, Japanese nationals have visa-free access to 191 countries.¹¹² As a result, many respondents cited their lack of passports, visas and other documentation as a barrier to fleeing the country. The queues at passport offices are so long that some people spend the night in line.¹¹³ The backlog of applications is also overwhelming, and the situation is aggravated by the fact that offices in some parts of the country are closed.¹¹⁴

Over 300 Yemenis were refused entry at external borders of the EU between 2015 and 2018.¹¹⁵ Within the EU, Yemenis are faced with the challenge of seeking protection. There were 10,425 asylum applications by Yemenis in the EU between 2015 and 2019, but only 665 positive decisions in the same time period.¹¹⁶ Although the recognition rate of Yemenis in the EU is estimated at 82 per cent, over a thousand cases had been pending for more than six months as of December 2019.¹¹⁷ The uncertainty surrounding these lengthy determination procedures "may pose a greater risk for mental health disorders development than the extremely stressful events that asylum seekers were exposed to in their country of origin".¹¹⁸

Movement within Europe is constrained by the Dublin regulations, which stipulate that the country of entry is responsible for processing their asylum claim.¹¹⁹ Some interviewees in Germany had arrived in Greece by boat and were fingerprinted there, barring them from seeking asylum elsewhere in Europe. Those who attempt to travel onwards because of the harsh condi-

tions in Greece find themselves at risk of deportation. *"I walked through 12 countries to get to Sweden and then saw my dreams disappear,"* said Firas, whose story features in the introduction of this report. Overall, about 25,000 people were transferred back to their country of first arrival in 2018 as a result of the Dublin regulations.¹²⁰ These transfers have a negative impact on the mental health of asylum seekers, interrupting "established routines, social networks and established sense of security in the life of an asylum seeker, which is a necessary prerequisite for trauma recovery and successful integration".¹²¹

Meanwhile, borders of neighbouring countries are virtually closed. To the east, Oman is building a wall.¹²² Saudi Arabia already started building a border fence in 2003; despite disputes with borderland tribes, construction resumed after Ansar Allah took control of the northern Saa'da governorate.¹²³ The fence has been reinforced with "electric wires, video surveillance, thermal cameras and heavily armed guards".¹²⁴ Last year, a new regiment was deployed to support the Saudi Border Guards in securing the border – Saudi Arabia having previously received training from US Special Forces.¹²⁵ Irrespective of border controls, airstrikes, artillery barrages and hostile checkpoints on route to the border act as further deterrents.¹²⁶

Saudi Arabia has also increased deportations of undocumented migrant workers, many of whom are Yemeni. Following amendments to the labour law in 2013, Saudi authorities launched a nationwide campaign to detain and deport undocumented migrant workers.¹²⁷ Within a year, nearly 600,000 Yemenis are thought to have returned to their country of origin.¹²⁸ These returns continue: there were over 50,000 returns from Saudi Arabia in 2019.¹²⁹

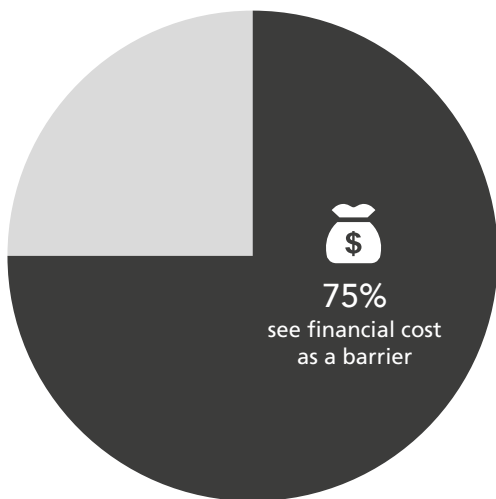
| Financial cost

Restrictive immigration policies contribute to increasing the cost of migration in a country where 81 per cent of the population is living below the poverty line.¹³⁰ When respondents were asked why they had not tried to leave Yemen, three-quarters said the cost of such travel was so high that the thought had never even crossed their minds (see figure 7).



On one of the stony beaches of Kos island, close to the town centre, dozens of migrants are camped out, with nowhere else to go.
Photo: Stephen Ryan / IFRC, August 2015

FIGURE 7: Cost as a barrier to cross-border movement among IDPs surveyed



Previous research has shown that the poorest are often unable to migrate abroad, usually remaining instead within national borders.¹³¹ One respondent in Germany said those who had made it to Europe were the “*rich and educated*”, those who were able to afford passports and airfares or who were studying abroad when the war broke out.¹³² As a result of the clandestine nature of travel, journeys to Europe cost as much as \$26,000.¹³³

The country’s geography also contributes to the high cost of travel. One interviewee said: “*If Yemen was located like Syria, there would be as many refugees.*”¹³⁴ The cost of air travel is prohibitive for the vast majority. As one respondent put it: “*Even if they reopened the airports, only the rich would be able to leave. The poor would be left behind.*”¹³⁵

ACQUIESCENT IMMOBILITY

Although financial cost was the major barrier to cross-border movement, a high number of respondents said they had never even thought of migrating, which gives a sense of how out of reach the prospect is for many Yemenis. Among the IDPs surveyed, only two respondents aspired to leave the country in the future. The lack of either aspiration or ability to migrate constitutes a form of acquiescent immobility.¹³⁶

When people are confronted with the complete inability to migrate, they sometimes react by “subconsciously subduing their migration aspirations”, thereby rationalising their immobility.¹³⁷ As a result, “asking people about migration aspirations is meaningless if they have internalised obstacles to mobility”.¹³⁸

This should be tempered with the strong attachment some feel for their country of origin, which genuinely discourages migration. Two refugees said they had tried to get their mothers to join them in their new country, but that they had refused. One respondent’s mother said she did not want to leave the rest of her family behind in Yemen. Or, as she put it: *“If we die, I’d rather die together.”*¹³⁹

MODES OF MIGRATION

The migration interface determines the modes of migration available to those who seek to travel abroad, “either in compliance with or defiance of the various migration regulations”.¹⁴⁰

In the case of Yemen, “restriction on emigration and border crossings, combined with the reduced availability of work visas for Yemenis, simply resulted in much of the migration to the Gulf countries becoming clandestine.”¹⁴¹ The breakdown in law and order has also contributed to smuggling in the region, although smugglers have been known to withdraw during episodes of heavy fighting.¹⁴²

The journeys of Yemeni refugees who took part in this study varied immensely. Some left before the war broke out and some as soon as the conflict erupted. Others were displaced internally various times before they left. Once out of the country, circumstances often dictated their journeys.

Some interviewees in Europe had left Yemen before the war to study or work. The two respondents in the UK had previously been living and working in Saudi Arabia, but were forced to leave in 2018 when Riyadh introduced more restrictive policies on migrant workers.¹⁴³ They felt lucky to have been given a tourist visa for the UK, where they subsequently claimed asylum.¹⁴⁴

Those who fled to Europe during the war flew initially to countries with no visa restrictions for Yemenis, such as Algeria, Egypt, Iran and Sudan. From there they made long and expensive journeys fraught with uncertainty and danger to Greece via Turkey, or Spain via Morocco.¹⁴⁵ Others eventually made their way as far as the island of Mayotte, a French department off the coast of Mozambique, in a last attempt to reach Europe.¹⁴⁶

The interviewees in Djibouti had the most straightforward journeys, crossing the sea from the ports of Aden, Hodeidah and al-Makha. Despite a voyage of up to 14 hours which many described as terrifying, there have been significantly fewer deaths in the Gulf of Aden than on other sea routes for refugees and migrants.

The cost of the journey to Djibouti remains affordable to many Yemenis, and those unable to pay are often allowed to travel anyway. Almost half of those interviewed said they had not paid and thanked kind-hearted captains for understanding their plight and allowing them on board. Others paid \$100 at most for each adult crossing. There was an estimated total of 95,000 maritime crossings into the Horn of Africa between March 2015 and April 2017, although many of these were migrants returning from Yemen to their country of origin.¹⁴⁷

Djibouti has been open to Yemenis fleeing the war, but despite the services it provides and the refugee status it offers on arrival, it has not become a coveted destination. Economic opportunities are few and far between.¹⁴⁸ At just over \$3,000, Djibouti’s gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is far lower than that of Oman (\$16,400) or Saudi Arabia (\$23,300).¹⁴⁹ As has been widely argued in the literature, economic performance has an impact on asylum seekers’ choice of destination, with rich countries generally perceived as more attractive.¹⁵⁰

Very few of the interviewees in Djibouti had anticipated seeking refuge across the Gulf of Aden, and fewer still



Sam (right) is an internally displaced boy from Hudaydah. When his family fled to Aden he had to get a fishing job to help support them. Photo © UNHCR/Mahmood Al-Falastiny, May 2019

had any idea of what to expect on arrival. Most had left Aden or other governorates near ports as Ansar Allah advanced south in 2015. Many were displaced abruptly from their homes and the chaos and flow of people pushed them towards the ports where people were boarding boats in droves.

CONDITIONS IN EXILE

I Refugees in Europe

The European Commission emphasises that *“EU Member States have a shared responsibility to welcome asylum seekers in a dignified manner, ensuring they are treated fairly and that their case is examined to uniform standards so that, no matter where an applicant applies, the outcome will be similar.”*¹⁵¹

Despite directives and regulations designed to uphold high common standards across member states, condi-

tions vary substantially according to national laws and regulations. Although the revised Reception Conditions Directive sets out to ensure *“humane material reception conditions”*, there is a stark difference in living conditions and access to basic services for refugees and asylum seekers in Germany and those in Greek camps.¹⁵²

In Germany, many interviewees reported receiving financial support from the German government, representing on average €350 per household per month. About half of those interviewed were living in government accommodation reserved for asylum seekers. Some mentioned crowded conditions, lack of privacy and shared bathrooms as issues with their living conditions. Those living in rented accommodation described similar difficulties, since many were living in close quarters with a number of other refugees.

One of the main difficulties reported in Germany is the psychological pressure caused by lengthy asylum procedures. Many had been waiting over a year for their asylum

application to be processed. Legal fees can represent a financial burden, in particular in the case of appeals. One interviewee reported having already spent €925 in legal fees.¹⁵³ Another interviewee was finally granted international protection *“two years, two months and one week”* after his arrival in Germany.¹⁵⁴ Another respondent, whose application was denied because he had been initially fingerprinted in Greece, feels that his life has been put on hold – his inability to apply for family reunification in particular has left him feeling severely depressed, affecting his ability to learn German or seek employment.¹⁵⁵

Despite the challenges, all respondents said Germany was the best place they had been – especially when compared to Greece. *“Go to Greece to see the forgotten ones in Europe,”* said one interviewee in Berlin.¹⁵⁶

Most of the interviewees in Greece were living in a camp on the island of Kos, in conditions so poor that *“death would be less miserable”*.¹⁵⁷ The camp was overcrowded and some people had to sleep outdoors. Lack of hygiene, which led to the spread of disease, was mentioned by many respondents (see figure 8). Interviewees described open sewers teeming with worms and mosquitos. They also spoke of safety concerns and barely edible food: *“If you gave a dog this food, it wouldn’t eat it. I had food poisoning from the rice once.”*¹⁵⁸

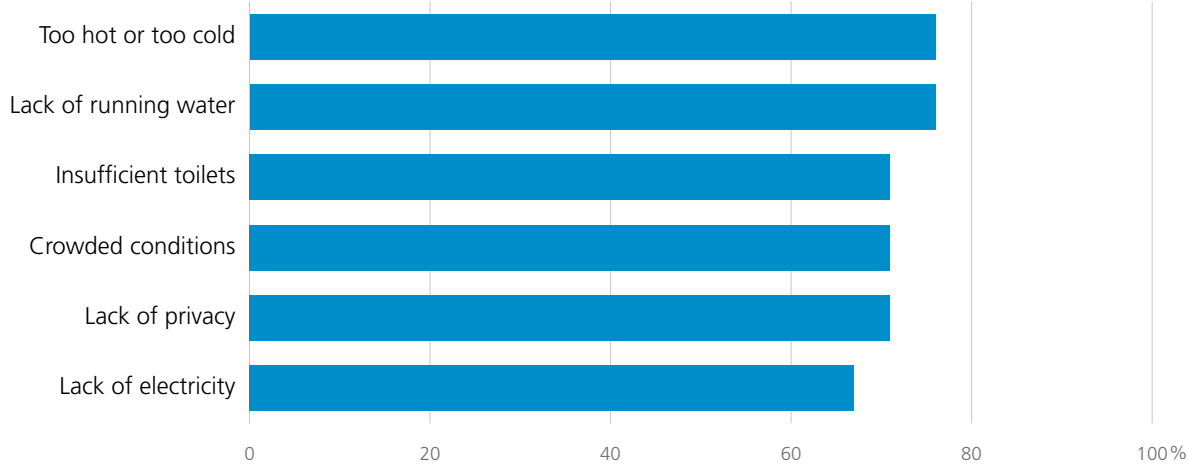
One interviewee had slept in the street when he first arrived on Kos, because there were no containers available in the camp. The containers were also filthy, he said.¹⁵⁹ Another was sleeping in a tent he built himself next to an open sewage drain. *“I don’t have any health problems at the moment, but I probably will have soon living like this,”* he said.¹⁶⁰

More than 70 per cent of respondents said their access to health services was “very bad”. One said someone had died two days earlier while waiting for an ambulance. The incident prompted a protest and the camp director said she would do her best to resolve the problem, but an ambulance called the following day still took two hours to arrive.¹⁶¹ Another respondent said an Iraqi man had been taken ill, but that when his daughter asked for an ambulance she was told to take a taxi. The man died waiting.¹⁶²

One interviewee said his pregnant wife had begun feeling ill after a month living in the unsanitary conditions of the camp. He said she had been given “a fake medical check” and that the medicine she was prescribed eventually made her vomit blood. She was taken to hospital by ambulance, where they were told she needed an ultrasound and other tests that they would have to pay for. Unable to pay, they went back to the camp. The man said he did not even have the money to provide his wife with food and clean drinking water, and that she wanted to go back to Yemen.¹⁶³

Nor does the camp offer language courses, education or skills training to prepare its inhabitants to integrate into Greek society. There is a waiting list for a school, but as one respondent put it: *“It’s not real school, just something to pass the time.”*¹⁶⁴ Asylum seekers are not allowed to work while they wait for a decision on their claim, so they have no choice but to sit around and wait. One young man said he wanted to get a job but feared he might be caught and removed from the camp. Another with a business degree from Sana’a University had been there for almost a year with no information, no papers and no interview date, but somehow managed to remain optimistic. *“I know I can make it,”* he said.¹⁶⁵

FIGURE 8: Housing challenges in Greece (multiple response)





All migrants arriving to Lesvos need to be registered at the Moria transit camp, Lesvos, Greece. Here they wait to be registered.
Photo: Caroline Hagal/IFRC, January 2016

Deprived of adequate shelter and basic services and with little hope for the future, respondents on Kos painted a grim picture of their living conditions. In many ways Greece was worse than Yemen, one said: *“In Yemen at least you have a place to live. There are bombs so you could die, but here you are dying every minute.”*¹⁶⁶ Another said: *“All I want are the basics for my family. Safety, health and education. I know there’s humanity somewhere in Europe, but there’s none in this camp.”*¹⁶⁷

There are few hopes that the situation in Greece will improve significantly in the near future. In late 2019, Greece passed a controversial new law widely seen to limit asylum seekers’ access to protection and reduce access to healthcare.¹⁶⁸

I Refugees in Djibouti

Djibouti is in many ways the most viable option for Yemenis trying to flee their country. The government

provides refugee status to all arrivals when they first reach the country, based on the conditions in their country of origin. This allows them to work and access basic services, but language barriers in the French-speaking country and a combination of high living costs and few economic opportunities have discouraged many from making the 14-hour boat journey across the Gulf of Aden.

About 37,000 Yemeni refugees live in Djibouti.¹⁶⁹ The camp that houses the most vulnerable – female-headed households, the elderly and people with disabilities – is in the town of Obock and sits on a patch of desert where temperatures are about 35C (95F) for half the year.¹⁷⁰ Some residents had been upgraded from tents to containers, but the containers were significantly smaller and many families complained about the proximity between the kitchen and toilet. Other issues raised included lack of electricity, which was cut off for most of the afternoon, the extreme heat and squat toilets that the elderly had difficulty using.



Yemeni refugees in the remote village of Obock, Djibouti.
Photo © UNHCR/Petterik Wiggers, December 2017

A few respondents in Djibouti city said they initially arrived at the camp but had to leave because of the difficult conditions there. One young woman arrived with her asthmatic mother, but the dust and sandstorms in the camp aggravated her condition so they left for Djibouti city where the woman found a job.¹⁷¹ Another young woman said her family decided to return to Yemen because of the harsh conditions in Djibouti.¹⁷²

The respondents in Djibouti city lived in rented accommodation, and their meagre salaries meant that many shared with others. The asthmatic woman and her daughter were living in a four-bedroom apartment, but with each room housing a family there was no privacy and conditions were extremely cramped.¹⁷³ Another respondent was sharing with nine other men.¹⁷⁴

Refugees in urban areas receive no humanitarian assistance, with the exception of ad hoc donations – especially during the *Eid* holidays. Those in the camp receive food and other basic necessities, but not on a regular basis. To make ends meet, many camp inhabitants have tried to find work within the camp with international NGOs and other service providers as builders and cleaners.¹⁷⁵

At the time of the research, the government had started transferring service provision in the camp from international NGOs to line ministries. In theory, the initiative should accelerate refugees' local integration, giving them access to the same accredited education and health services as Djiboutians.¹⁷⁶ In practice, however, the situation is rather different.

Healthcare services in the camp have declined significantly since the changes. A doctor was available for only a few hours each day and the clinic was poorly supplied and equipped. *"They just give us painkillers for everything,"* one respondent said.¹⁷⁷ Most cases were referred to medical services in town, but at a cost. Like Djiboutians, Yemeni refugees are expected to pay. One man with diabetes said he had had great difficulty in acquiring insulin, which he had to buy himself.¹⁷⁸

Refugees in the city also complained of the cost of medical services. One woman working in a restaurant said her entire salary went on rent and medical care for her ill mother.¹⁷⁹ A young man working at the same restaurant said he had undergone emergency surgery to remove his appendix, which he had to pay for himself.¹⁸⁰

Education services were also wanting. Pupils in the camp school were taught by Yemenis, many of whom had never worked as teachers before. Parents complained the quality of education was poor. Language is also a major barrier. The Djiboutian curriculum is taught in French, while Yemeni children are schooled in Arabic and English. *"Education in the camp is not in French, which would make it very difficult for any of us to get in to Djiboutian universities,"* said one respondent in his twenties.¹⁸¹

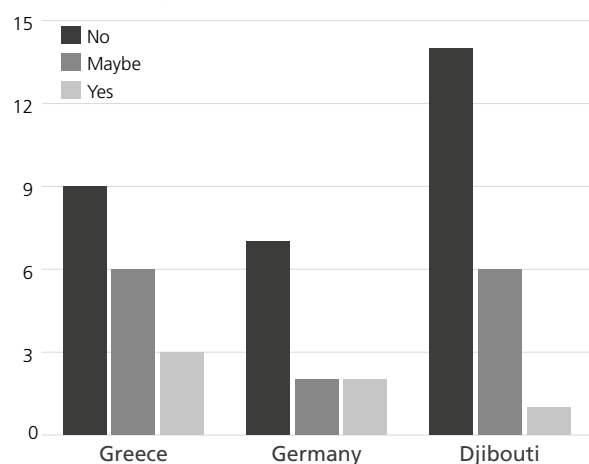
One mother was also worried that the camp school's diplomas may not be internationally recognised. She was concerned that her daughter, who will finish high school next year, would not be able to apply to universities.¹⁸² Parents held high hopes that their children's education would allow them to leave the camp, but were worried that language and certification might hold them back.

THE RETURN OUTLOOK

REFUGEES

Worldwide, only five per cent of first-generation Yemeni migrants want to move back to their home country.¹⁸³ Among respondents interviewed for this study, despite the harsh realities experienced in displacement, only six people wanted to return to Yemen in the future, often driven by a desire to help rebuild the country (see figure 9). *“If we’re not going to fix it then who will?”* questioned one refugee in Germany. Others thought they would maybe return if the war were to end, but most categorically stated that they would never return.

FIGURE 9: Would you like to return to Yemen?
(Number of respondents)



Many of those who said they would not go back cited the destruction of their country and the lack of options left for its inhabitants. One respondent in Greece said: *“We are looking for another motherland, our motherland is gone and doesn’t want us anymore.”*¹⁸⁴ A young refugee in Djibouti felt that people of his age in Yemen had to choose between joining an armed group or sitting around doing nothing, and that the situation would not change for many years. *“The war is never going to end, there are just too many interests at play,”* he said.¹⁸⁵ Another young man said the priority for those in their 20s and 30s was to move forward in life and to help their families in Yemen by sending money back.¹⁸⁶

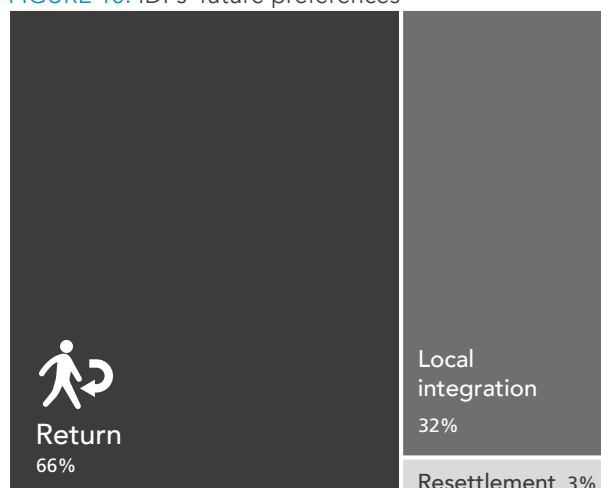
Others echoed pessimism about the prospect of a swift end to the fighting. *“There’s no way to fix this mess,”* said one respondent who thought return would be impossible.¹⁸⁷ Another in Greece said: *“The war will not stop in my time.”*¹⁸⁸ One respondent in Berlin who had been forced to fight with Ansar Allah said there was no way he could go back. Ansar Allah members still went to his home every few months in search of him, he said, and they had told his mother they would kill him if he returned.¹⁸⁹

A 67-year-old man from Aden living in the Djibouti camp talked about the wars and uprisings he had lived through since his youth. He remembered when British forces were driven out of South Yemen in 1967, an 11-day civil war in 1986, unification in 1990, the subsequent civil war in 1994 and, most recently, the chaos since 2015. *“Yemen is a land that always thirsts for blood,”* he said. He had been displaced, lost his job and suffered discrimination, and said he would never return even though his wife and children are still in Yemen. *“I escaped death a million times, but now I am free,”* he said. *“Freedom comes at a price of course, but I am never going back.”*¹⁹⁰

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

Unlike refugees, around 66 per cent of the IDPs interviewed said return was their preferred solution if the security situation were to allow it (see figure 10). When asked when they thought they would actually return, 87 per cent said they had no idea. Only three respondents thought they would return within a year. Conflict, violence and persecution were the main barriers to return. The main reasons cited by those wanting to return were missing home or a desire to regain their property or livelihoods.

FIGURE 10: IDPs' future preferences



Despite the grim prognosis for the situation in Yemen, about 1.28 million returns of IDPs were recorded between 2015 and the end of 2018.¹⁹⁵ The extent to which returnees have been able to achieve durable solutions is unclear, but their progress is likely to have been minimal. The figure is also likely to have been inflated,

given that IDPs who have made various attempts to return may have been counted more than once. Four of the IDPs interviewed said they had tried to return a number of times.

One woman from Hodeidah, who was living in a school in rural Taiz with other displaced families, had tried to return twice because of the difficult living conditions and lack of livelihood opportunities in her area of displacement. Both times, however, conflict and insecurity forced her to flee again. On her last attempt to return, she found her home had been damaged and left uninhabitable.¹⁹⁶

Other respondents interviewed in Hodeidah had managed to return after fleeing to Sana'a in mid-2018 when the conflict escalated. The security situation had improved when they returned in 2019 with the aim of regaining their property or livelihoods, but they still struggle to make ends meet and the fragile security situation puts them at risk of further displacement.

THE IMPACT OF RETURNS

Despite the ongoing conflict, returns are already taking place: over 50,000 Yemenis returned from Saudi Arabia in 2019.¹⁹¹ There is concern that such returns may have a further destabilising effect on Yemen's economy.

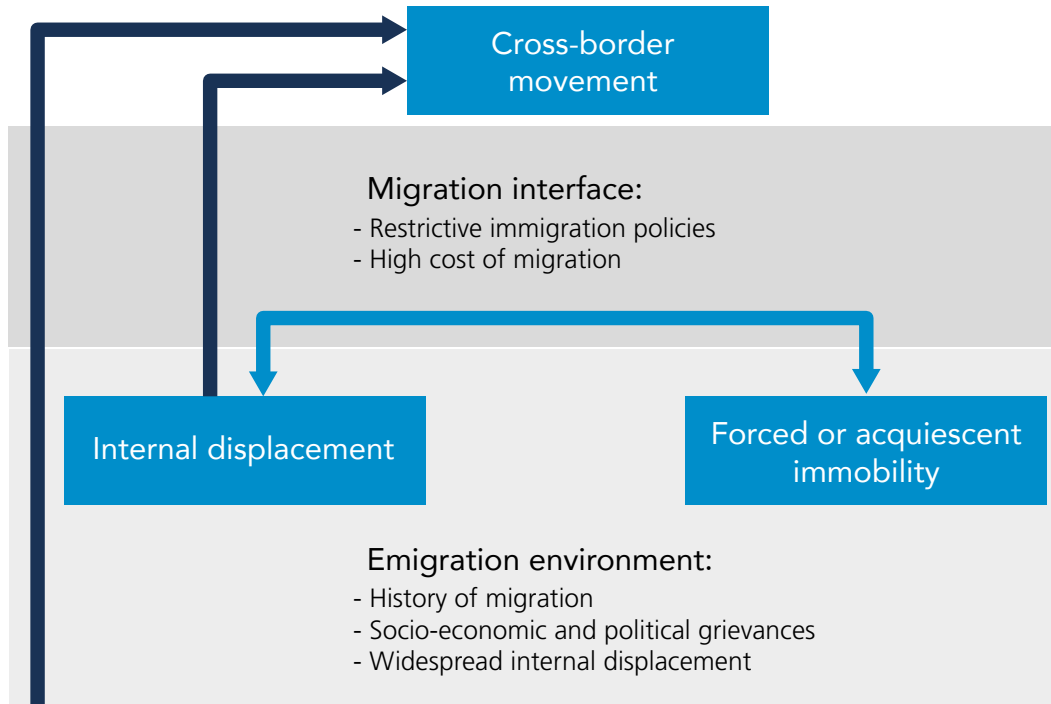
There is precedence for this. There were close to 762,000 returns

in 1991, and nearly two million people are thought to have been deported from Saudi Arabia between November 2013 and January 2015.¹⁹² In both cases, these massive repatriations had severe socio-economic impacts on Yemen.¹⁹³

Research conducted with returnees found that only a minority were able to find a job upon return to

Yemen, and most of these jobs were poorly paid and insecure. While the average monthly wage in Saudi Arabia was estimated at \$500, less than a third of respondents received more than \$50 per month in Yemen. As a result, the majority faced serious problems satisfying their basic needs. Unsurprisingly, more than 70 per cent aspired to migrate again to other countries.¹⁹⁴

CONCLUSION



Yemen is described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Inside the country, at least 3.65 million people are living in internal displacement, exposed to poverty, hunger and threats to life.¹⁹⁷

Given this emigration environment, it is somewhat surprising that more Yemenis have not sought refuge abroad. As this report has argued, this is likely due not to a lack of aspirations, but rather a lack of ability to migrate given the unfavourable migration interface with which Yemenis find themselves confronted.

Restrictive immigration policies both in neighbouring countries and further afield, and the associated high cost of migration, contribute to limiting opportunities for cross-border movement, resulting in widespread forced immobility among a population exposed to airstrikes, armed clashes and persecution. Those who are able to

migrate, meanwhile, have little choice but to engage in perilous modes of migration, and often face harsh conditions in exile.

Achieving lasting peace that addresses underlying drivers of conflict and displacement is a precondition for durable solutions, and many Yemenis are pessimistic. Any agreement to end the country's war will have to address historical grievances over social, political and economic exclusion and marginalisation. This is true not only in Ansar Allah's northern heartland and in the south but for all Yemenis, who have suffered the effects of years of instability and underdevelopment. In the meantime, more pressure and investment into peace efforts are needed, alongside a scaling up of humanitarian assistance for displaced Yemenis both at home and abroad.

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