

3 October 2011

Yemen

New displacement due to unrest, displacement due to Sa'ada conflict continues

In the wave of civil protests which have swept across the Middle East and North Africa, political instability and increasing violence involving the Yemeni government, protesters, rival tribal militias and militants have led to new waves of displacement in southern, central and northern areas of the country.

In northern Yemen, conflict between the government and the Al-Houthi movement has affected more than 800,000 people since 2004, and caused repeated large-scale displacement. In early 2011, more than a year after a February 2010 ceasefire, more than 250,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) remained in protracted displacement. Close to 93,000 people had reportedly returned to their place of origin, but their situation was unclear.

The instability and violence of 2011 has led to the new internal displacement of more than 100,000 people, particularly in the southern governorate of Abyan but also in other governorates including the capital Sana'a. It has heightened the humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations throughout Yemen, including those displaced or otherwise affected by the conflict in the north.

The level of destruction due to the conflict in the north has been significant: insecurity has limited movement and prevented many civilians from fleeing or seeking assistance. Many people have been killed or injured while fleeing.

IDPs have had limited access to food, shelter, education or health care. The government has had limited success in enabling greater access of humanitarians and in encouraging international assistance. While access in the north has improved since Al-Houthi groups gained control of Sa'ada governorate in April 2011, but humanitarian agencies have continued to face a range of challenges in gaining access to IDPs. Only 55 per cent of the \$290 million requested for the humanitarian response in Yemen had been funded by August 2011, and a continuing shortfall is expected to lead to substantial assistance gaps.

Background: Fragile state, civil unrest and armed conflict

The wave of popular uprisings and civil unrest currently sweeping North Africa and the Middle East has dramatically affected Yemen. It has made an already volatile and impoverished country yet more unstable (OCHA, July 2011; IRIN, May and August 2011).

Yemen is the poorest country in the Arab world, with an estimated 35 per cent of the population below the poverty line. It faces widespread food insecurity, widespread water scarcity and depletion of its natural resources including oil (WB, April 2009; IRIN August 2011). The instability in the country has worsened the economic crisis, increased the cost of living, and further limited the provision of basic services.

Unrest in central and southern Yemen

Until 1990, Yemen was divided into two states, the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south (HRW, October 1994). The two fought three short wars in 1972, 1979 and 1988. In 1990, reconciliation led to the unified Republic of Yemen with Sana'a as its capital, but a 70-day civil war in 1994 caused the displacement of over 50,000 people (HRW, October 1994; UN SC, June and July 1994). Tensions grew into massive and violent protests from 2006, including in Lahj, Hadramout and Abeyan in 2009, and in Lahj and Dahl in 2010 (HRW, December 2009; SOHR, June 2010).

Civil protests against the 32-year rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh broke out in early February 2011. Although they were repressed with excessive force, the protests intensified throughout the country, particularly in central and southern Yemen (AI, March 2011; ICRC, March 2011; Reuters, May 2011). Following the realignment of tribal factions in support of the opposition, and Saleh's failure to commit to a promise to resign, the protests became more intense and the response

more violent. Violent crackdowns against protests across the country were widely condemned by human rights organisations (HRW, May 2011; OHCHR, May 2011).

In May, fighting between rival factions in the capital Sana'a displaced thousands of people (AI Jazeera, May 2011; IRIN, May 2011; ADRA, June 2011; Al Diyar Online, June 2011; Al Watan, June 2011). Ceasefires were declared in May and June, but clashes persisted.

In Abeyan governorate in southern Yemen, clashes erupted between pro-government factions and militants which the government accused of having links to Al Qaida. As they fought for control of the governorate capital Zinjibar, tens of thousands of people fled to the neighbouring governorates of Lahj and Aden (NYT, May 2011; OCHA, June, July and August 2011). There were also demonstrations and fighting between military units loyal to the government and opponents in Taiz, Yemen's second-largest city, and in neighbouring Ibb governorate (OHCHR, May 2011; OCHA, June 2011; Yemen Times, June 2011).

Unrest and conflict in northern Yemen

In the northern governorate of Sa'ada, the "Al-Houthi" movement has since 2004 engaged in armed conflict with the Yemeni army and government-backed tribes (ICG, May 2009; RAND, May 2010). The movement was initially founded to promote Zaydi religious education among the Shi'a Zaydi tribe, but it developed into an opposition movement. Isolated clashes in Sa'ada had extended by February 2010 to Amran, Hajjah, Sana'a and Al Jawf governorates, and into the province of Jizan in southern Saudi Arabia.

There were six rounds of this conflict, each more intense; the sixth round involved the armed forces of Saudi Arabia and intense fighting in heavily-populated towns (HRW, April 2010; RAND, May 2010). Human rights organisations reported that all parties to the conflict had perpetrated human

rights violations including indiscriminate shelling, the recruitment of children and forced disappearances (HRW, October 2008, December 2009 and April 2010; YOHR, June 2010; AI April 2010 and December 2009).

Following a ceasefire in February 2010, Sa'ada, Amran and Al Jawf governorates enjoyed relative security, but intermittent clashes continued, large areas of Sa'ada remained under Al-Houthi control, and all parties to the conflict continued to operate checkpoints (RAND, May 2010; IRIN, June 2010; OCHA, June 2010). Saudi Arabia maintained a ten-to 15-kilometre buffer zone along the Yemeni side of the border, in which villages were reportedly razed and civilians displaced (Yemen Observer, May 2010; OCHA, December 2009). In June 2010, the Yemeni government and Al-Houthi signed a reconciliation agreement to reinforce the ceasefire and encourage internally displaced people (IDPs) to return to their homes (IRIN, July 2010; Yemen Post, June 2010; Shabwa, July 2010).

In April 2011, in the context of the civil unrest across the country, the 2010 ceasefire collapsed when Al-Houthi took control of Sa'ada governorate and the majority of Al Jawf governorate. Since then, sporadic clashes and isolated security incidents have hindered large-scale returns and limited access in Sa'ada, Al Jawf and northern areas of Amran governorate (USAID, August 2011).

IDP figures and patterns of displacement

Estimates of the number of people displaced have varied due to difficulties in access and verification. According to UNHCR and the government, there were an estimated 420,000 IDPs throughout Yemen as of August 2011, of which an estimated 48,000 were unverified (OCHA, August 2011). Over one in three, or over 140,000 people, had been newly displaced by the violence in central and southern Yemen since May 2011.

The wide dispersal of IDPs has made it difficult to provide an adequate profile of the internally displaced population. Poor rural communities have been displaced, as well as inhabitants of cities such as Sa'ada, Amran, Sana'a and Zinjibar. The majority of IDPs in the north are Shi'ia, but members of the Sunni population and the Jewish minority have also been displaced, while in the south most IDPs are from the Sunni majority.

Across the country, many people have been displaced two or more times (Yemen Times, February 2009 and April 2009). For example, many IDPs from the north were displaced again by the factional fighting of May 2011 in Sana'a.

New displacement in 2011

Most new displacement in the south has been in the governorate of Abeyan. The fighting between militants and government forces in Zinjibar displaced 13,000 people within Abeyan, 62,000 to the neighbouring governorate of Aden and 16,000 to Lahj. Intermittent violence in the governorate of Taiz reportedly displaced 1,000 people, and in Shabwa 600 people, though these figures were unconfirmed. Close to 6,000 were displaced in September 2010 in Shabwa by conflicts between Yemeni military and militants (IRIN, September 2010).

By early June, the clashes in Sana'a had displaced approximately 5,500 people (Reuters July, 2011; USAID, July 2011).

In northern Yemen, clashes reported in Al Jawf between Al-Houthi and Al-Islah militants aligned with the government had displaced between 1,500 and 3,500 people by August (OCHA, August 2011).

Displacement continuing from previous years

Situations of displacement following the conflicts in Sa'ada have become protracted. In February

2011 over 250,000 people remained displaced, in Sa'ada (110,000 people), Hajjah (105,000), Amran (42,000) and Al Jawf (24,000). UNHCR estimated in February 2011 that approximately 93,000 IDPs had returned to Sa'ada since the end of hostilities. Ongoing insecurity and the fear of reprisals and forced recruitment, the extensive presence of land mines, damage to or destruction of property, and the lack of livelihoods were all hindering returns (OCHA, February 2011; UNHCR, February 2010; RSG on IDPs, April 2010).

Protection of IDPs

The government has discouraged the reporting of protection concerns in Yemen. Lack of access to conflict areas has also prevented reliable reporting on the protection of civilians remaining in conflict areas, on the magnitude of the displacement and the situation of returnees. From the few reports from those areas accessed in Sa'ada, the level of destruction has been significant, unexploded ordinance widespread and reconstruction efforts limited; humanitarian needs have been significant in the absence of basic services (OCHA, February 2011; OCHA, July 2010; WFP, July 2010). In early 2010, 70 per cent of health care facilities in Sa'ada were reportedly either destroyed or used as military installations, while an estimated 220 of the 725 schools in the governorate had been destroyed, damaged or looted (IRIN, March 2010; RSG on IDPs, April 2010).

Physical security and integrity

Insecurity, checkpoints and (particularly in the north) landmines have limited movement and prevented many civilians from fleeing or seeking assistance there. They have also caused death and injury among those who have been able to flee (Sahwa Net, August 2011; ADRA June 2011; HRW, April 2010; USDoS, March 2010 and April 2011).

In northern Yemen, people who did flee faced risks including exposure to sexual or gender-

based violence, arbitrary arrest, confiscation of personal identification documents, looting of personal property and the separation of their families. There is no similar information regarding recent displacement in the south; however human rights organisations have expressed concern over possible human rights violations (HRW, 2011; Sahwa Net, August 2011; OHCHR, May 2011).

Children, whether displaced or not, have been particularly affected. Child recruitment has been pervasive, by government forces as well as Al-Houthi groups and tribal militias affiliated with the government (IRIN, April and July 2011; UN, April 2010; HRW, June 2011; Al Hewan, July 2008). Children continue to be killed or injured by mines and clashes, while their exposure to violence has led to high rates of trauma and anxiety (Yemen Post, July 2011; IRIN, February 2008 and July 2011; Seyaj, March 2010).

Shelter and basic necessities

In northern Yemen, displacement has been prolonged, with most IDPs living in rented and overcrowded housing, sometimes up to five families in one home, with limited access to services or assistance. Others have been in makeshift shelters, schools or clinics (DRC, January 2011; CARE, December 2009). Only 15 per cent have stayed in the four camps or settlements in Hajjah and Amran.

IDPs have had limited access to education and health care services, and there have been tensions between IDPs and host communities over limited resources, particularly in Amran (CARE, December 2009; DRC, January 2011). In late 2010, an exercise to profile households internally displaced by the Sa'ada conflict underlined the insufficiency of food rations provided (DRC, January 2011).

The majority of people newly displaced in southern governorates have sought refuge with hosts, and others in schools, mosques or other makeshift shelters. Local support groups have reported

that in Lahj, 90 per cent of IDPs have sheltered with hosts, five per cent in schools, and five per cent in rented accommodation, whereas in Aden most IDPs have sought refuge in over 47 public schools or in remote villages (OCHA, July 2011; Yemen Times, July 2011; UN, July 2011). In Arahab in Sana'a governorate, some IDPs have taken shelter from heavy shelling in caves, where they have endured very poor hygiene and living conditions (Alertnet, August 2011; OCHA, August 2011).

The food security and access to clean water of displaced and non-displaced people in conflict-affected areas in southern Yemen have remained of significant concern. Thousands of people have remained at risk in areas where the delivery of basic services has been severely disrupted or ceased altogether: they have been unable or unwilling to move further due to their concerns over property and livestock or the limitations to their movement (ICRC, July 2011; Alertnet, August 2011).

In Zinjibar and surrounding villages in Abyan, severe water and food shortages have been reported, yet access has remained severely limited due to the ongoing conflict (OCHA, July, and August 2011). In accessible areas in Aden and Lahj the general sanitation and hygiene conditions facing IDPs have remained extremely poor. Inadequate sanitation and water facilities in the schools where many IDPs have sought refuge have led to several reported cases of cholera (OCHA, July 2011; Yemen Times, July 2011).

Strained coping mechanisms

Displaced and non-displaced people across the country have had to contend with rising commodity prices; the fuel crisis and drought of the first half of 2011 have further strained the coping capacities of households while hampering humanitarian responses (Alertnet August 2011; OCHA August 2011). The rising food and fuel costs have in particular placed significant strain on displaced households from Abyan and hosting communities in Aden and Lahj (UN July 2011; ICRC

July 2011; ECAI, May and June 2011). Assessments by national and international NGOs have revealed that many IDPs depend on assistance for survival (ADRA June 2011; ECAI, May and June 2011; Intersos June 2011).

In northern Yemen, the coping capacities of families in Sa'ada, Amran, Al Jawf, and Sana'a have been exhausted as their displacement has become increasingly prolonged (DRC, January 2011; RSG on IDPs, April 2010; IRIN, April 2011 and May 2010). Many rely on scarce daily labour while access to agricultural or pastoral land is limited. Many IDPs have sold assets including jewelry and livestock, but indebtedness is now rife (CARE, December 2009; DRC, January 2011).

IDPs in the north and particularly in Amran have also reportedly faced tensions with host communities, and discrimination in access to basic services, employment, education, and shelter (IRIN, April 2011; Yemen Times, June 2008; News Yemen, April 2010).

Assessments have underlined the particular vulnerability of groups including single mothers, girls and people with disabilities (CARE, December 2009; DRC, January 2011). Many internally displaced children in vulnerable households have been forced to beg, smuggle or collect refuse to complement family income (OCHA December 2009; IDMC interview, June 2010). The vulnerability and poverty of displaced families has raised concerns of child trafficking and early marriages, though information on the situation is lacking (IRIN, June and July 2010; USDoS, June 2010).

National and international responses

National response

Conflict, civil unrest and political divisions have affected the national response to displacement, though existing institutions have continued to

address the situation of internal displacement. Following the conflict in northern Yemen, the government established in August 2009 the High-Level Inter-Ministerial Committee for Relief Operations, headed by the Minister of Health and complemented at the operational level by the Executive Unit for IDPs, which seeks to coordinate humanitarian response.

The Executive Unit has sought to facilitate humanitarian access and appeal to the humanitarian community for assistance (Saba Net, August 2011). It hosted in April 2010 the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the human rights of IDPs to assess the situation of displacement caused by the Sa'ada conflict and recommend how to proceed. It also took part in the development of a national strategy to respond to the displacement (IRIN, April 2010; UN News, April 2010). However, the access of humanitarians in northern and southern Yemen has remained only sporadic, and the development of the national strategy has been stalled since late 2010.

Meanwhile, the responses of host communities, national civic associations and local NGOs have been particularly valuable. Associations such as the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance to IDPs of Abyan, the Yemeni Red Crescent Society, the Al Amel Association and Seyaj have generally enjoyed wider (but still restricted) access, and provided essential assistance (CHAIA, June 2011; News Yemen, April 2010; Al Ishtiraqi, May 2008).

International response

Following the start of the sixth round of the Sa'ada conflict, the UN activated the cluster approach to facilitate coordination between humanitarian agencies. The latest Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan for 2011 includes an appeal for \$290 million; as of late August it was 55 per cent funded (OCHA, August 2011). The limited response, despite the international condemnation of the situation in Yemen, reflects a broader neglect by the wider international community of

the displacement situation in Yemen over the past three years (OCHA, March and May 2011).

The humanitarian community has highlighted IDPs' urgent shelter needs, and the gaps in the response, particularly as the number of IDPs continues to increase in the south. It has predicted that the displacement will become protracted and affect longer-term needs such as education (OCHA, August 2011). It has also continued to draw international attention to Yemen, warning on numerous occasions that inadequate funding is likely to cause a grave humanitarian crisis and trigger further instability (OCHA, July 2011; Intersos, June 2011; UN News, April 2010; WFP, June 2010).

Humanitarian agencies have faced a range of challenges in gaining access to IDPs and conflict-affected civilians and have faced diversion of assistance, targeting of convoys, hijacking and kidnappings (AFP, May 2011; IRIN, April 2010; HRW, November 2008). While access has improved and more people have been assisted in the north since Al-Houthi groups gained control of Sa'ada governorate in April 2011, the delivery of assistance has continued to be impeded (Yemen Post, June 2011). In July, an estimated 14,000 households in need of food assistance in Sa'ada could not be reached (OCHA, July 2011).

In southern Yemen, humanitarian agencies have continued to face difficulties in accessing conflict-affected areas including Abeyan but also areas including Taiz, Shabwa, parts of Sana'a, and some areas further north in Amran and Al Jawf (ICRC, August 2011; OCHA July and August 2011). They have continued to appeal to all parties for wider access in southern as well as northern Yemen.

Note: This is a summary of IDMC's internal displacement profile on Yemen. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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Yemen Times, 9 February 2009, Yemeni Jews tell their story and demand rescue

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people.

In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

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