

Millions at risk as Yemen's displacement crisis continues

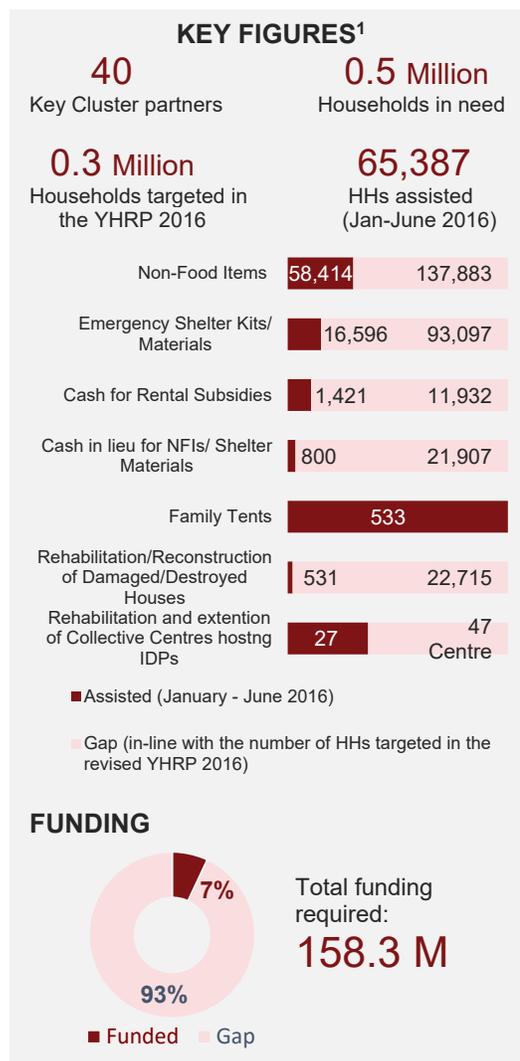
As the displacement crisis in Yemen continues, humanitarian organisations and UN agencies working with IDPs, returnees and host communities in Yemen call on the donor community to better respond to the ongoing shelter crisis. Currently the Shelter/NFI/CCM Cluster remains only 7% funded, which impacts upon the overall response capacity of the cluster and leaves countless vulnerable people without support. Host communities have so far been generous in accepting displaced people, but there are indications that tensions are rising as an increasingly severe financial crisis is felt across the country. Extra resources are urgently needed to ensure that those affected by displacement have access to adequate shelter and do not resort to more desperate coping mechanisms.

A crisis of displacement

Yemen is currently experiencing an unprecedented crisis of displacement. Since the conflict escalated in March 2015, **more people fled their homes than in any other country in the world** during the same period. Yemen hosts over **one quarter of the world's population of people internally displaced by conflict** in 2015.²

Figures from August 2016 indicate that there are **currently 2.2 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in Yemen** – around eight per cent of the country's population.³ This figure represents a population larger than the entire city of Hamburg, twice the size of Birmingham, and almost three times the size of Amsterdam. More than four fifths of Yemen's IDPs (approximately 1.8 million people) have **been displaced for twelve months or more**.

In addition, almost **1 million people are identified as 'returnees'**. However, returnees often face new challenges – some of them return to houses completely destroyed, or find that their homes are littered with unexploded ordinance or other explosive devices. Often, the only option they have is to move yet again.



Recently, severe flooding and landslides have presented new challenges and increased hardships for the Yemeni population, leading to the displacement of thousands of families in eight governorates. Preliminary assessments have revealed significant damage caused by the floods, including loss of livelihood (i.e. livestock) and destruction of farm lands and other household belongings (e.g. furniture).

Intensifying one of the world's most severe humanitarian emergencies

Life before displacement was already hard for the people of Yemen, with major **underdevelopment, financial crisis, and poverty**. Since the conflict escalated in March 2015, 33% more people find themselves in need of humanitarian assistance and protection (up from 15.9 million to 21.2 million), 112% more children are out of school (up from 1.6 million to 3.4 million), and 1.5 million of the poorest Yemenis have been cut off from social welfare programmes. Currently, an estimated 14.4 million people are unable to meet their food needs, with 7.6 million classified as severely food insecure. 19.4 million people lack access to clean water and appropriate sanitation, whilst 14.1 million people are unable to access adequate healthcare.

93% of Shelter/NFI/CCCM related needs in Yemen currently remain unfunded

The displacement crisis has **intensified an already bad situation**, with many people forced to abandon farmland and familiar livelihoods; in a country that imported 90% of its food prior to the current crisis, this has a particularly serious impact on people's coping mechanisms, further worsened by the ongoing international blockade on most imported goods.

In this context, it is not surprising that the biggest concern for most people is finding their next meal – and indeed, amongst IDPs and returnees around two thirds of them identify food as their number one priority. However, this means that other important needs such as shelter are often neglected, **leaving people vulnerable to the elements and other threats to their safety and health.**

Hitting vulnerable communities the hardest

The majority of IDPs (62%) are currently residing with host families, whilst 19% are accommodated in rented property. The remaining 19% (around 420,000 people) have **sought refuge in alternative shelter arrangements in collective centers (incomplete or abandoned public or private buildings, schools, health facilities or religious buildings) or spontaneous settlements**. Women and girls face particular threats to their safety from living in such cramped and crowded conditions.

Vulnerable and marginalised groups often find themselves excluded from even collective centres, forced to sleep out in the open under little or no cover. Those staying in spontaneous settlements are deemed to be in critical shelter arrangements and have persistently high needs. Spontaneous settlements tend to be very basic, informal sites where families have been provided

with emergency shelters or have constructed rudimentary shelters which are not durable enough to withstand longer periods of displacement and climatic conditions. They present **considerable protection concerns for IDPs, as a result of a lack of privacy, limited access to clean water, and lack of appropriate sanitation.** Land disputes are also not uncommon, and displaced families have reported that they often face **harassment from the local communities** with whom they share already scarce resources, including often limited water supply.

There are no formal IDP camps in Yemen, and limited funding of the Shelter / NFI / CCCM Cluster has prevented setting up comprehensive needs monitoring in the numerous Collective Centres (over 400 scattered across the country) and Spontaneous Sites. Even in the case of the 81% of IDPs who are housed in rented accommodation or hosted by communities, problems of **overcrowding, exploitation, and eviction threats** are being reported. Vulnerabilities often remain hidden from sight, however a **focus on the protection concerns of specific groups must be a priority** for donors and partners on the ground.



Amal Hassan, a 50-year-old widow, shares one small room in a tiny house that she lives in with her 13-year-old son. Amal and her son live in Lahj, on the border with Taiz governorate – one of the areas that has been hardest hit by the ongoing conflict in Yemen. Amal told the Norwegian Refugee Council that, when airstrikes started near their home, they had nowhere else to go. So they stayed put, hoping and praying that they would stay safe despite the violence that had erupted around them.

For Amal, the conflict has worsened an already desperate situation. Even before the escalation of the conflict her house contained no furniture.

With the support of ECHO, NRC has been able to provide some help to her in the form of mattresses and kitchen equipment, but rising food prices and a worsening economic crisis mean that Amal has few prospects for longer-term support: “We don’t have any other means of earning a living – we survive on the charity of others.”

Host communities at breaking point

The displacement crisis in Yemen has to date **largely been invisible to the rest of the world.** There are no massive waves of displacement to other countries, and on the whole Yemenis have chosen to stay in the country – even those whose homes have been completely destroyed. This is in part a reflection of the important relationship Yemenis have with their land, and is in part a result of the ongoing naval and air blockade. It is also an indication of how generously IDPs have so far been supported by their host communities. However, **these communities are now stretched to their limit** – they have been sharing whatever meagre resources they have for more than a year and many have **incurred massive debt.** In such cramped and difficult conditions,

intra-family tensions are starting to appear. Many IDPs chosen to settle in schools, meaning that not only are IDPs housed in unsuitable buildings but also that children are unable to attend school in these areas. Host communities are becoming increasingly unwilling to tolerate such a situation, and IDPs staying in schools are under a lot of pressure to vacate the buildings so educational activities can be resumed.

Such tensions present a worrying trend for the future of Yemen, as community-based relationships are key to maintaining the strong social fabric of the country. As host communities exhaust their own resources, it is likely that these communities will resort to increasingly negative coping mechanisms – and it is possible that their generosity will begin to run thin. **As the situation becomes more desperate for everybody in Yemen, it is difficult to tell what drastic measures people may take.** A power vacuum in the south of the country has led to the rise of non-state armed groups, and the promises of financial and other benefits made by such groups become increasingly tempting for those who have exhausted all other options, especially young people.

Recommendations

- We strongly urge that all donors recognize the severity of the current displacement crisis in Yemen, and scale up their response accordingly.
- In particular, we ask that donors prioritize funding for shelter, NFIs, and CCCM site monitoring needs. even just responding to the most immediate needs alone (non-food items and improved emergency shelter) will require almost \$80 million, a sevenfold increase on current funding levels.⁴
- We also ask that donors recognize the close link between shelter arrangements and protection concerns, and ensure that their support allows for an adequate response to the most vulnerable populations, and particularly those at risk of abuse, exploitation and further displacement.
- It is not only IDPs who are affected by Yemen's displacement crisis, but the whole population. Donors should consider supporting innovative projects to improve community cohesion and resilience against further shocks, such as rehabilitation of former collective centres, and a resumption of services and access to livelihoods.
- On a countrywide level, donors must use their influence on the parties to the conflict in order to advocate for increased humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas, as well as calling for a relaxation on barriers to trade in order to ensure that the economic crisis does not worsen and plunge Yemen into even greater turmoil.

¹ Taken from Yemen shelter/NFI/CCCM Cluster Factsheet for June 2016.

² See Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2016) Global Report on Internal Displacement (IDMC: Geneva).

³ See Task Force on Population Movement 10th Report.

⁴ Figures based on priorities classified as 'Immediate' in draft Shelter/NFI/CCCM Cluster strategy 2016.