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YEMEN

Internal displacement continues amid multiple crises

In recent years, Yemen has simultaneously faced intermittent internal armed conflict in the northern governorate of Sa'ada, civil unrest and popular uprisings across the country, a resurgent separatist movement in the south and increasingly active Islamic militants in the south and elsewhere ([International Crisis Group](#), 3 July 2012; [OCHA](#), 17 August 2012; [Chatham House](#), January 2012)¹. This in the context of an already volatile and impoverished country with considerable development challenges and pre-existing humanitarian needs ([OCHA](#), June 2012; [IRIN](#), 4 August 2011). The resulting political instability has further limited the government's capacity to provide basic services, contributing to increased humanitarian needs among vulnerable groups. Fighting between various factions - government, opposition, tribes and militants - has made these conditions worse among populations already chronically impoverished and resulted in continuing internal displacement in the northern, central and southern regions of the country.



The UNOCHA estimates that there are more than 430,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in Yemen, many of whom have been repeatedly displaced ([OCHA](#), 19 November 2012; [OCHA](#), 20 October 2012; [OCHA](#), 4-12 June 2012). The main factors have been internal armed conflict and civil unrest, but disasters - including flash floods, drought and land erosion - have also contributed ([OCHA](#), 4-12 June 2012; [UNHCR](#), May 2012).² There are no reliable estimates for the number of people displaced by disasters, but in October 2008 flash floods in Hadramout and al-Mahra governorates forced nearly 25,000 people from their homes ([WFP](#), 25 November-6 December 2008; [OCHA](#), November 2008; [IRIN](#), 24 May 2009; [IRIN](#), 6 November 2008). Many of those displaced have since been assisted via reconstruction and development efforts that are still on-going ([Saba Net](#), 17 March 2012; [World Bank](#), January 2009)³.

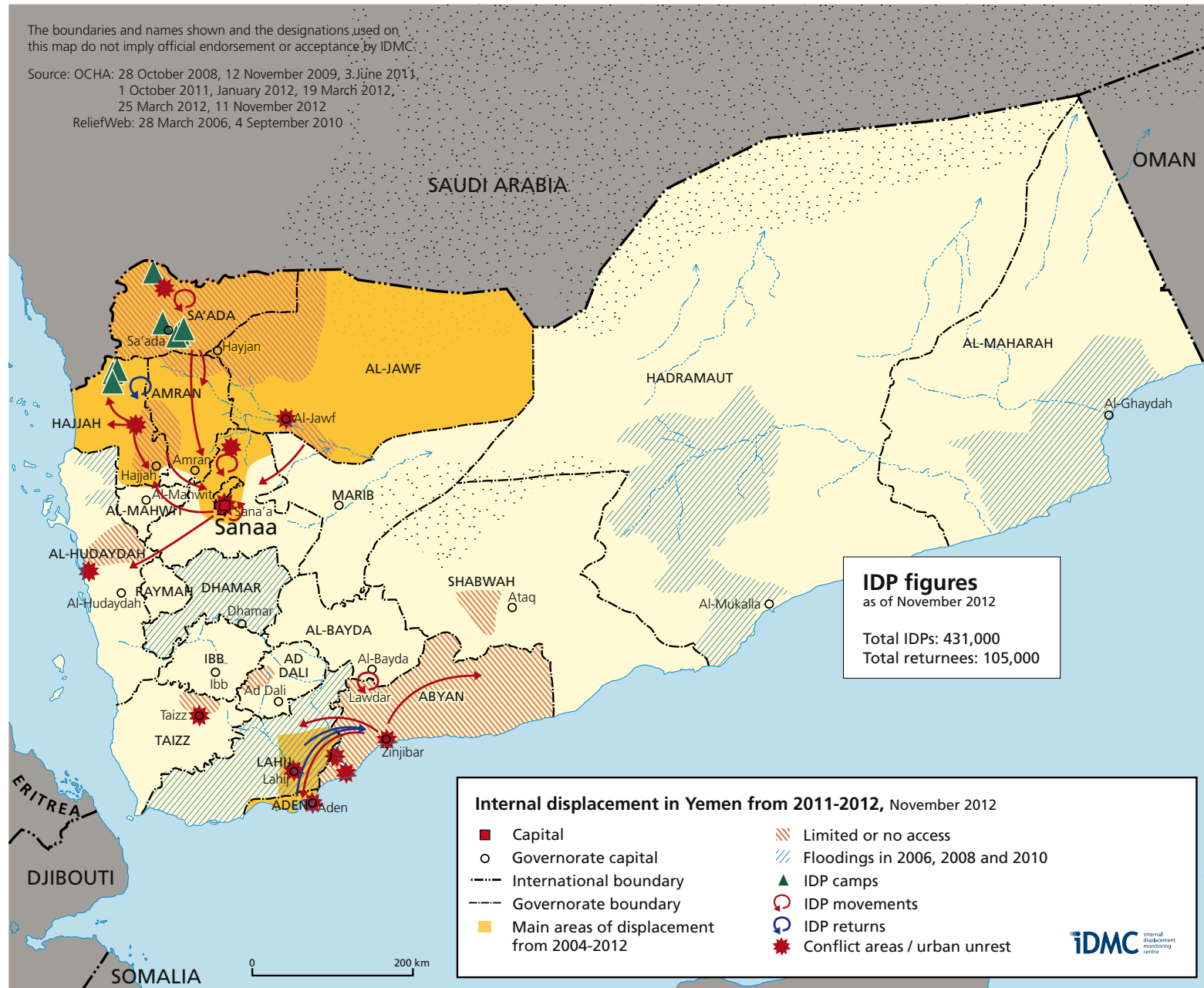
1 For the latest information on the Humanitarian Country Team and their response to the Yemen crisis in 2012, see their [homepage](#).

2 The UN figures refer to conflict-induced IDPs and do not include those who have fled natural disasters. The situation of IDPs is distinct from that of the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers. Irregular migration and human trafficking have also played a role. The flow of migrants has increased annually, with nearly 200,000 Somali refugees and an estimated 100,000 migrants and asylum seekers arriving in 2011.

3 In March 2012, the Reconstruction Fund for Hadramout and al-Mahara reported that it still required nearly \$560 million to complete reconstruction efforts. The World Bank (WB) had estimated that reconstruction efforts required \$929 million, of which around 60 per cent has been disbursed.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IDMC.

Source: OCHA: 28 October 2008, 12 November 2009, 3 June 2011, 1 October 2011, January 2012, 19 March 2012, 25 March 2012, 11 November 2012
 ReliefWeb: 28 March 2006, 4 September 2010



IDP figures
 as of November 2012
 Total IDPs: 431,000
 Total returnees: 105,000

Internal displacement in Yemen from 2011-2012, November 2012

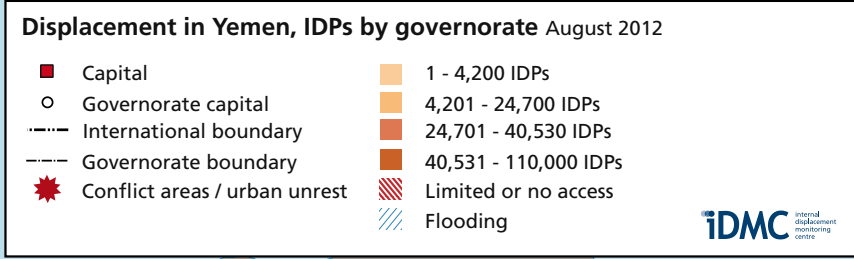
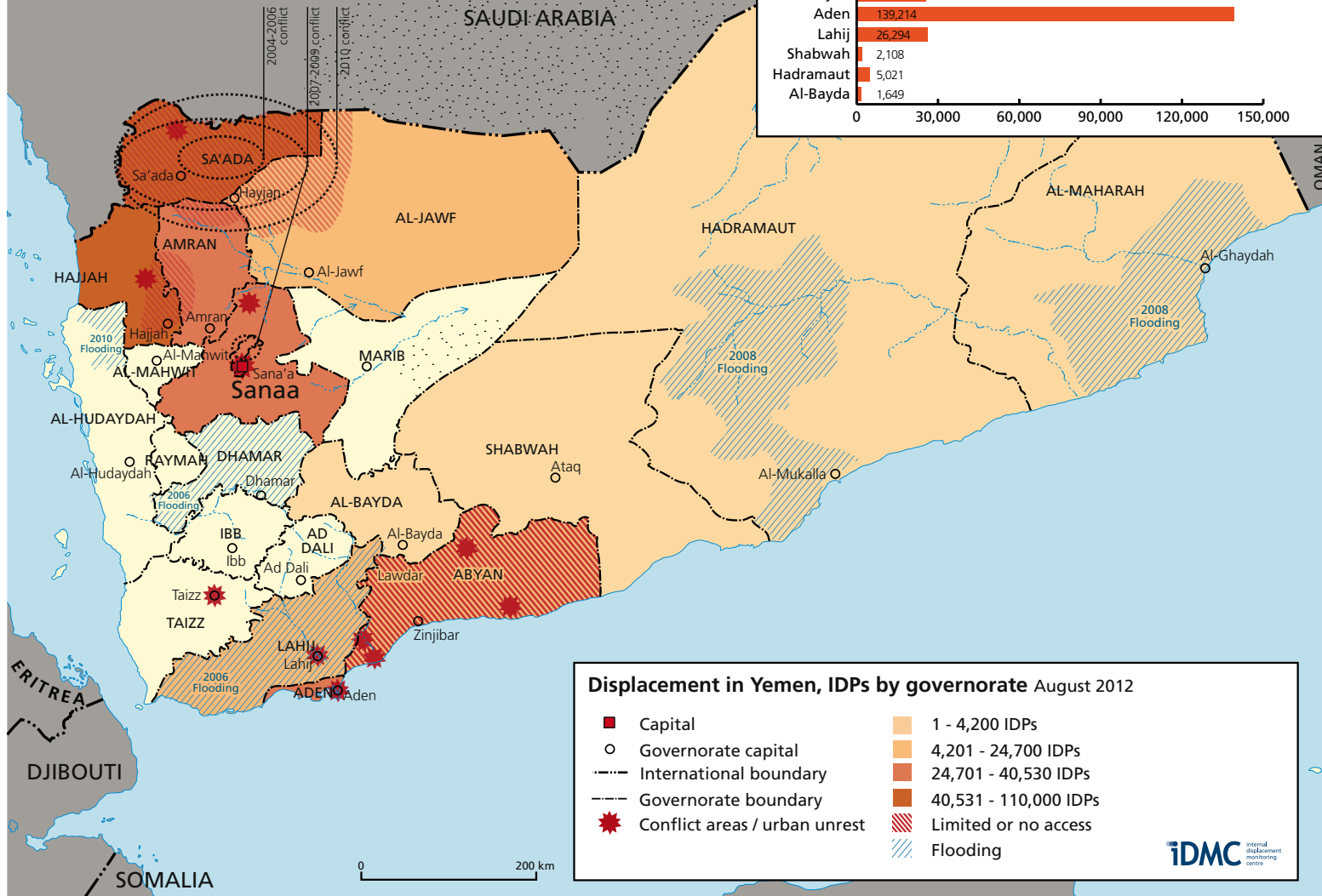
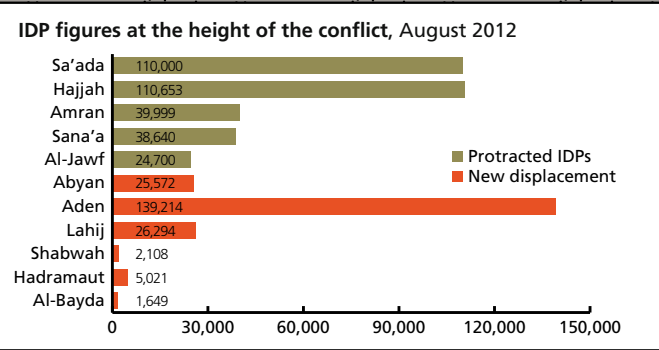
■ Capital	▨ Limited or no access
○ Governorate capital	▧ Floodings in 2006, 2008 and 2010
--- International boundary	▲ IDP camps
- - - Governorate boundary	↻ IDP movements
■ Main areas of displacement from 2004-2012	↻ IDP returns
	★ Conflict areas / urban unrest

IDMC internal displacement monitoring centre

Source: IDMC
 More maps are available at www.internal-displacement.org/maps

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IDMC.

Sources: OCHA: 28 October 2008, 12 November 2009, 3 June 2011, 19 March 2012, 25 March 2012
 ReliefWeb: 28 March 2006, 4 September 2010
 UNHCR: February 2012, August 2012



Source: IDMC

More maps are available at www.internal-displacement.org/maps

Internal displacement has taken place in the context of an increasing socio-economic crisis made worse by rising commodity prices. In 2011, conflict and civil unrest restricted access to essential government services such as health care, social welfare, education, electricity and water, and in some areas cut it off completely. This has made severe and widespread chronic vulnerabilities worse, particularly among those affected by conflict and including IDPs. Yemen is the poorest state in the Arab world, with an estimated 35 per cent of the population living below the poverty line and facing acute food insecurity and water scarcity.

Unrest in central and southern Yemen

Civil protests against the 32-year rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh began in the first week of February 2011 ([Amnesty International](#), 14 March 2011; [Reuters](#), 23 May 2011; [ICRC](#), 5 May 2011; [HRW](#), 9 March 2011; [OCHCR](#), 31 May 2011; [HRW](#), 6 February 2012). Sana'a, Taiz and the neighbouring governorate of Ibb witnessed some of the largest protests and the fiercest clampdowns ([UNHCR](#), 13 February 2012; [OCHA](#), 7 June 2011). As the social unrest spread Saleh's support base began to crumble, with increasing defections from the armed forces and tribal factions formerly loyal to the president.

Intense fighting between the rival factions in Sana'a and several other urban areas, particularly Taiz, forced an estimated 10,000 people to flee their homes during the second half of 2011 ([Al-Jazeera](#), 25 May 2011; [IRIN](#), 27 May 2011; [OHCHR](#), 31 May 2011; [ADRA](#), June 2011). Around half of them were displaced from Sana'a and the surrounding districts of Arhab and Nihlin. Entire neighbourhoods such as al-Hasba in Sana'a, the stronghold of the opposition leader Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar, became conflict zones, causing thousands to flee. Among those displaced were refugees and IDPs who had sought refuge in the

capital and were forced into secondary displacement. In Taiz, nearly 3,000 people remained displaced as of the end of 2011 and more than 2,000 were living in partially destroyed homes ([OCHA](#), 13 February 2012).

In November 2011, Saleh signed an agreement brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and backed by the UN, paving the way for a transfer of power to Vice-President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi as leader of a coalition of government and opposition parties⁴. Hadi's mandate, and that of the newly-formed government of national unity was reconfirmed in presidential elections held in February 2012. Under the terms of the GCC agreement, Hadi and the new government were given two years to restructure the military and security apparatus, address issues of transitional justice and hold an inclusive national dialogue conference with the aim of revising the constitution before new elections in February 2014 ([ICG](#), July 2012; [USAID](#), 19 July 2012).

The agreement relieved tensions somewhat in the capital, but intermittent clashes and urban protests continued until February 2012. As of late 2011, some parts of the country were under the effective control of armed opposition groups. In early 2012 the Yemeni authorities sought to retake them. Sana'a remained divided into three zones controlled by the government, opposition factions including sections of the army which had defected, and other tribal groups ([ICG](#), July 2012). Most of the barricades in the city had been removed by late March 2012, but tensions persisted and sporadic clashes were reported in Arhab. Tensions also remained in other towns and cities ([ICG](#), ICG, July 2012; [IDMC](#), interview June 2012; [Yemen Times](#), 25 June 2012; [Yemen Times](#), March 2012; [Yemen Times](#), 19 July

⁴ The Gulf Cooperation Council, also known as the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf is a political and economic union made up of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Led by Saudi Arabia, it has played an instrumental regional role as a power broker in Yemen.

2012). Though many of those displaced by the civil unrest in 2011 were said to have gone back to their homes, ongoing clashes and insecurity from other sources of conflict continued to cause new displacement both in the north and the south, and to hamper returns and reconstruction efforts.

Unrest and conflict in southern Yemen

Civil unrest in southern Yemen was compounded by an intensification of Islamic militancy, with the militants gaining considerable ground during 2011. It also took place in the context of political upheaval that predates the Arab spring. Until 1990, Yemen was divided into two states - the Yemen Arab Republic in the north and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south. The two countries fought three short wars in 1972, 1979 and 1988. In 1990, reconciliation led to the creation of the unified Republic of Yemen with Sana'a as its capital, but civil war broke out in 1994, leading to the displacement of 53,000 people ([UN SC](#), 12 July 1994; [UN SC](#), 27 June 1994). The 70-day conflict ended with the defeat of the southern separatist movement and Sana'a re-assumed control of the south. Tensions persisted, however, as grievances held against the national government went unresolved. These included its large military presence, the alleged appropriation of southerners' land and the introduction of policies that failed to respond to southerners' needs.

From 2006, the tensions led to regular mass protests across the southern governorates of Lahj, al-Dahle, Hadramout and Abyan ([HRW](#), 15 December 2009), and in 2007 a loose coalition of opposition groups established the Southern Separatist Movement or Harak al-Salmi al-Ganoubi. Despite the movement's call for secession from the north by peaceful means, fierce clashes broke out between southern militants and the security forces. The fighting led to hundreds of families

being displaced in Lahj and al-Dahle during 2010 ([Southern Observatory for Human Rights](#), June 2011). Protesters continued to take to the streets throughout 2011, their call for an end to Saleh's rule adding to those of their counterparts in the north. The clamour for secession also continued to grow ([Yemen Post](#), 16 April 2012; [The Guardian](#), 22 May 2012; [ICG](#), July 2012).

These tensions, however, were overshadowed in 2011 by an intensification of Islamic militancy in the vacuum created by social unrest elsewhere in the country. As the security forces in the south were redeployed in response to the situation in Sana'a, Ansar al-Sharia (which translates as Partisans of Islamic Law) - a group associated with al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula - rapidly extended its influence in Abyan. Sporadic fighting between counterinsurgency forces and the militants had already taken place in previous years, and in September 2010 it led to the temporary displacement of nearly 6,000 people in Shabwa governorate ([ICRC](#), October 2010; [IRIN](#), 30 September 2010; [UNHCR](#), 24 September 2010; Southern Democratic Assembly, 3 July 2010).

In March 2011, Ansar al-Sharia declared Abyan an "Islamic emirate" and fought government forces for the capital Zinjibar ([NY Times](#), 29 May 2011). Two months later, the militants seized control of the city along with the towns of Ja'ar, al-Kud, Khanafar and Shuqrah and some parts of neighbouring Shabwa governorate, displacing tens of thousands of people in the process ([Committee for Humanitarian Assistance to IDPs of Abyan](#), 6 June 2011; [OCHA](#), 7 June 2011; [OCHA](#), July 2011; [AlertNet](#), 4 July 2011).

As of early May 2012, the number of people displaced by the ongoing conflict in Abyan who fled to the neighbouring governorates of Aden, Lahj, Shabwa, Hadramout and al-Bayda was put at more than 210,000. A further 100,000 people were believed to be unable to flee Abyan and at

serious risk ([ICRC](#), 6 June 2012; [UNHCR](#), May 2012; [UNHCR](#), 14 April 2012).

In April 2012, the security forces in coordination with the Abyan popular defence committees - led mainly by tribal factions - launched a campaign to retake control of territory from Ansar al-Sharia. They recaptured Zinjibar, Ja'ar and Shuqrah in June 2012, and many militants reportedly fled to neighbouring governorates. The conflict was marked by intense fighting in urban areas, including extensive aerial bombardments. Preliminary assessments revealed substantial destruction, particularly in Zinjibar, which was left without electricity and water. The widespread presence of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and landmines constitutes a further risk to displaced populations hoping to return.

Between July and November 2012 more than 80,000 IDPs were reported to have returned to Abyan; however neighbouring governorates and areas within Abyan continue to host close to 120,000 ([OCHA](#), 19 November 2012; [USAID](#), 30 September 2012). Humanitarian agencies expect returns to continue in the coming months, despite ongoing concerns such as UXO and landmines, extensive damage to infrastructure and a lack of security, basic services and livelihood opportunities.

The effects of the conflict have spilled over into the south of the country as a whole. As of October 2012, the situation in several southern governorates remained fragile, with some areas, especially Abyan and Shabwa, experiencing continued civil unrest, localized violence and lawlessness ([Yemen Times](#), 25 October 2012). Some of the insecurity stems from the protracted period of Ansar al-Sharia control, but it is also linked to the complexity of tribal structures in the south and the ongoing sensitivity of the north-south divide. Many of these issues are interlinked, and play out against a backdrop of the collapse of public services including health care, education, water and sanitation ([OCHA](#), 5-12 July 2012)

Intermittent conflict in northern Yemen

The al-Houthi movement has been engaged in successive rounds of armed conflict with the Yemeni army and government-backed tribes in Sa'ada governorate since 2004. The group, however, developed into an opposition movement, and there have been six rounds of fighting, the last from August 2009 to February 2010, when a ceasefire was reached.⁵ The ceasefire remains in force, but intermittent clashes between al-Houthi and tribal groups continue to take place ([Yemen Post](#), 22 September 2012).

The conflict began in 2004 with isolated clashes in Sa'ada, but by February 2010 it had spread to the governorates of Amran, Hajjah, Sana'a and al-Jawf, and the south-western Saudi border province of Jizan ([Rand Corporation](#), 3 May 2010). The intensity of the conflict increased with each round of fighting and the Saudi Arabian armed forces became directly involved in the last outbreak, which saw fierce clashes in heavily-populated towns ([HRW](#), 7 April 2010; [HRW](#), 19 November 2008; [Irish Times](#), 13 November 2009). Human rights organisations have reported violations perpetrated by all parties to the conflict, including indiscriminate shelling, the recruitment of children and forced disappearances ([HRW](#), 19 November 2008; [HRW](#), October 2008; [AI](#), 2 December 2009).

More than 320,000 people were reportedly displaced across the northern governorates ([Yemen Post](#), 28 June 2010; [IRIN](#), 24 June 2010; [OCHA](#), 14 June 2010).

⁵ There are no clear figures available for the number of IDPs in the first four rounds of conflict in northern Yemen (2004-2007). Estimates suggest as many as 50,000 were displaced. In late 2008, during the height of the fifth round of conflict, the UN Emergency Preparedness and Response Team (UNEPRT) put the figure at between 120,000 and 130,000. In the latest round of conflict from August 2009 to February 2010, the severity of the conflict led to an estimated 342,000 IDPs as of July 2010. There have been six successive rounds of conflict: (1) 18 June to 10 September 2004; (2) 19 March 2005 to 12 April 2005; (3) 12 July 2005 to 28 February 2006; (4) 27 February to 14 June 2007; (5) 5 May to 17 July 2008; and (6) 12 August 2009 to 11 February 2010.

Checkpoints manned by all parties have restricted return movements, as have the extensive damage to property and infrastructure and the presence of land mines. Villages within 15 km of Yemen's northern border with Saudi Arabia were reportedly rendered inhabitable, with thousands of people displaced. In Jizan, more than 30,000 people were displaced ([Reuters](#), 13 November 2009; [Al Shorfa](#), 15 September 2010; [Al Shorfa](#), 20 March 2012).⁶ Following the February 2010 ceasefire, large areas of Sa'ada remained under al-Houthi control, though the government retained Sa'ada city. In June 2010, the two sides signed a reconciliation agreement to reinforce the ceasefire and encourage IDPs to go back to their homes ([Shabwar Today](#), 7 July 2010; [Yemen Post](#), 19 June 2010; [UNHCR](#), 23 July 2010). Returns, however, have been negligible.

By April 2011, as a consequence of the government's focus on the civil unrest in Sana'a and other areas, al-Houthi had taken complete control of Sa'ada city, along with the majority of al-Jawf, almost half of Amran and large swathes of Hajjah governorates. An all-out conflict was averted and the central tenets of the February 2010 ceasefire seem to remain intact, but localised armed clashes have continued ([OCHA](#), 16 August 2011; [USAID-DCHA](#), 10 August 2011; [IRIN](#), 23 March 2011). Sporadic fighting has been reported in the governorates of Sa'ada, Hajjah, Amran and al-Jawf between al-Houthi on the one hand, and Salafist militants and members of the al-Islah party on the other. Both groups are closely aligned with the government and were staunch supporters of President Saleh.

The clashes took on a sectarian character in late November 2011 as fighting intensified between

al-Houthi and the Salafists, leading to the displacement of around 50,000 people in Sa'ada and Hajjah governorates ([IRIN](#), 31 January 2012; [IRIN](#), 16 February 2012; [OCHA](#), 13 February 2012). In February 2012, the two sides reached a fragile truce, but clashes have continued, leading to further displacement ([IRIN](#), 8 May 2012; [Yemen Times](#), 23 April 2012). The al-Houthi movement has raised concerns that neighbouring countries and the government in Sana'a were intending to re-launch the war for Sa'ada and has warned against a seventh round of fighting. That said, after months of hesitation it agreed in June 2012 to take part in the national dialogue launched by the transitional government, though its full-fledged support for the process remains fragile.

Profile and distribution of IDPs

National authorities only began to collect data on the number of IDPs and their living conditions in late 2009. There are large information gaps about the situation in conflict-affected areas in terms of civilian casualties, humanitarian needs, the number of IDPs and damage to property and infrastructure. With technical support from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the government launched a national registration system for IDPs in February 2010. The process, however, has been plagued by a lack of resources, intermittent conflict and difficulties in access to IDPs.

The Yemeni government has lacked a reliable and inclusive system of data collection. Lack of access and resources has often hampered registration of IDPs. Some registration has taken place in accessible areas, but it often neglected to take family size into account, leaving larger families with inadequate food supplies. IDPs' loss of documentation during their flight has also been an obstacle. A turning point was reached following the 2010 ceasefire agreement, but registration continued to be plagued by security concerns or strained resources and in March 2010 it was suspended on

⁶ During the sixth round of fighting, the conflict extended into Saudi Arabia's south-western province of Jizan, which borders Sa'ada governorate. In November 2009, the Saudi authorities resettled 5,000 families living in villages close to the conflict-affected areas. The first phase of the resettlement programme was completed in March 2012, when the construction of 200 housing units – of a planned 6,000 – was finished.

Natural disaster related displacement in Yemen

Yemen is prone to disaster-induced internal displacement caused by both slow and sudden-onset natural hazards ([World Bank](#), September 2012; [UNHCT](#), 2012). Its arid climate, mountainous terrain in the east and large areas of low-lying coastal plains make it highly susceptible to drought, desertification, flash floods, earthquakes and landslides. In October 2008, flash floods in the eastern governorates of Hadramout and Mahra killed 80 people, displaced more than 20,000 and affected more than 100,000. More than 10,600 households had their homes destroyed or damaged, and more than 5,100 households lost means or assets contributing to their livelihoods ([World Bank et al](#), January 2009; [WFP](#), December 2008). Recovery continues to this day ([SabaNet](#), 17 March 2012).

Natural hazards also increase protection risks for IDPs displaced by other causes, and makes them vulnerable to further displacement. In early 2010, severe storms destroyed or damaged hundreds of IDPs' shelters in camps in Hazzrah, stretching already limited resources ([IDMC](#), August 2010). In April 2012, flash floods inundated settlements affecting at least 76 internally displaced families, including 200 children ([UNICEF](#), September 2012; [Yemen Post](#), April 2012).

Yemen is one of the world's most water-stressed countries. It suffers severe shortages in several urban areas, including Sana'a, and in the drier western and southern regions ([IRIN](#), 13 August 2012; [Climate Investment Funds](#), October 2011). UN estimates in 2012 put the number of people facing acute water shortages at 13 million, and the number facing food insecurity at ten million ([OCHA](#), 20 October 2012). Information on internal displacement related to drought and desertification is sparse, however ([Yemen Times](#), August 2009), and the number of people affected or at risk is unknown. That said, the livelihoods of subsistence farmers are highly vulnerable and displacement has been reported: for example, in Mahwit governorate, north-west of Sana'a, an extensive year-long drought in 2008 caused the displacement of thousands of households from their mountain villages ([OCHA](#), May 2011; [IRIN](#), May 2008).

Existing legislation and policy frameworks relevant to disaster-induced internal displacement are far from comprehensive. Some proactive measures have been taken towards setting up national frameworks for disaster management, and in integrating disaster risk reduction into development programmes, but significant gaps remain in terms of resource allocation and capacities ([Government of Yemen](#), 17 April 2011; [World Bank et al](#), January 2009). The inclusion of disasters as a cause of displacement and an aggravator of risk for vulnerable IDPs in the current drafting of a national IDP policy would provide a framework within which to respond to such situations. Understanding displacement risks, including displacement associated with slow-onset disasters, and IDPs' concerns should also be included in the efforts of major donors such as the World Bank and UN agencies including UNHCR, which are currently working in partnership with the Yemeni authorities to build national capacity for disaster risk management, improve urgently-needed water governance practices and plan for climate change adaptation.

the grounds that a lack of assistance to distribute rendered it difficult to continue (LSE-[Brookings](#), November 2011).

The government's Executive Unit for IDPs, along with UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) began a verification process in January 2012 with the aim of updating and improving the accuracy of figures gleaned from registration, and so provide a better understanding of the scale of displacement and the locations of IDPs. At the time of writing, the process was nearing completion with updated figures expected before the end of 2012.

New displacements have taken place on top of protracted situations caused by the successive conflicts in Sa'ada. In August 2012, there were an estimated 324,000 IDPs in the north: 111,000 in Hajjah, 110,000 in Sa'ada, 40,000 in Amran, 24,700 in al-Jawf and 38,600 in Sana'a. In the south, there were around 200,000, most of them displaced from Abyan: 140,000 in Aden, 25,900 in Lahj, 5,000 in Hadramout, 2,100 in Shabwa, 1,600 in al-Bayda. An additional 25,000 were displaced within Abyan (IDMC correspondence with UNHCR, September 2012; [OCHA](#), 5 - 12 July 2012, [USAID](#), 19 July 2012).

Around 40 per cent of total number of IDPs, or more than 200,000 people, were newly displaced as result of civil unrest and sporadic conflict in both rural and urban areas of central, northern and southern Yemen. The majority of new IDPs fled insecurity in Abyan governorate in the south, but the figure also includes an estimated 50,000 from the northern governorates of Sa'ada, Amran and Hajjah ([UNHCR](#), 14 April 2012; [OCHA](#), 13 July 2012). Nearly 8,000 people were temporarily displaced from urban areas in 2011: 5,500 from Sana'a and surrounding districts and more than 2,000 from Taiz.

By November 2012 105,000 IDPs were estimated to have returned to their places of origin ([OCHA](#), 11 November 2012). Roughly 80,000 of the

returned IDPs went back to the southern governorate of Abyan, and an estimated 25,000 returned to the northern governorate of Hajjah.

The majority of IDPs in the north are Shia, but members of both Sunni and Jewish communities have also been displaced. In the south, Sunnis make up the majority of both IDPs and the general population ([UNHCR](#), 14 April 2012; [Yemen Times](#), 8 April 2009; [Yemen Times](#), 9 February 2009). The displaced population in both the north and the south includes a considerable number of vulnerable poor and members of the marginalised al-Akhdam community. In all parts of the country there have been secondary and tertiary internal displacements, and secondary displacements of refugees and asylum seekers. During the height of the crisis in mid-2011, IDPs who had fled conflict in the north, as well as Somali and Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers, were forcibly displaced from Sana'a as a result of urban violence.

The majority of IDPs live in host communities. Less than ten per cent live in camps, principally in the northern governorate of Hajjah ([UNHCR Global Protection Cluster Retreat](#), February 2012). Many have chosen not to live in camps because of the lack of livelihood opportunities, and cultural norms that dictate that women are not allowed to be seen by men other than their close relatives. Most IDPs live in rented and overcrowded housing – sometimes up to five families sharing one home – or in makeshift shelters, schools, clinics and informal settlements ([DRC](#), December 2010; [CARE International and OCHA](#), 20 December 2009; [DRC](#), July 2012; [IRIN](#), 12 November 2009). There are around 600 informal settlements outside IDP camps in Hajjah.

In Aden, more than 20,000 IDPs used 76 public schools (of 135 in the city) and other public buildings as temporary shelters from May 2011 until mid-2012 ([OCHA](#), 04 – 12 June 2012; [AlertNet](#), 19 October 2011). Since then, an increasing number have either returned to their places of origin or

found alternative shelter. By October 2012, 26 of the schools occupied by IDPs in Aden had been vacated, while eight had been selected to host those who still require shelter. In neighbouring Lahj, all 39 schools used by IDPs have been vacated ([OCHA](#), 23 October 2012).

IDPs' protection and humanitarian needs

IDPs' protection and humanitarian needs are significant and in many cases interconnected. UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies have undertaken field monitoring, surveys and profiling, which have identified a wide range of issues faced by IDPs and returnees. These include a lack of documentation, which affects their ability to access to services such as education and health care, and gain employment; the lack of physical security in areas of displacement and potential return; exposure to gender-based and domestic violence; family separation; food insecurity; the inability to procure basic necessities; and difficulties in securing accommodation ([DRC](#), December 2010; [CARE and OCHA](#), 20 December 2009; [Yemen IDP Profiling and Protection Monitoring 2011](#), [DRC](#), July 2012).

Physical security and integrity

Civil unrest and armed conflict throughout the country has exposed both the displaced and the general population to violence, injury and death. The generally indiscriminate nature of the various conflicts has placed civilians at risk whether they flee or remain in conflict-affected areas. The international community, including the UN Security Council and human rights organisations, have repeatedly condemned violations of humanitarian and human rights law committed by all parties to the conflict ([OHCHR](#), September 2012; [UN SC](#), 12 June 2012; [UN SC](#), 21 October 2011).

The widespread destruction of civilian property and infrastructure such as housing, schools and

wells in areas including the outskirts of Sana'a, Zinjibar and Sa'ada suggests significant indiscriminate targeting. Urban areas such as Zinjibar were subjected to aerial bombardments in successive attempts to recapture the city.

More than 150 schools and 25 hospitals and clinics were reportedly attacked across the country during 2011. In some cases, armed groups then used them as military posts ([UN SC](#), 26 April 2012). In Sa'ada, which has suffered six rounds of conflict in the past seven years, the level of destruction has been particularly acute, with more than 200 schools reportedly damaged or destroyed. According to the Abyan authorities, an estimated 80 per cent of homes were damaged in Zinjibar, as were more than 50 schools across several districts ([UN HCT](#), August 2012).

Thousands of civilians have been prevented from fleeing conflict or seeking humanitarian assistance. Obstacles to movement have included clashes and insecurity; tribal, militant or other restrictions; the presence of landmines; and simple lack of means. In Abyan, tens of thousands of people were at risk of displacement from conflict-affected areas but unable to flee ([OCHA](#), 23 May 2012). Similarly, in the sectarian clashes that broke out in November 2011 in parts of Sa'ada and Hajjah, communities were trapped under siege ([IRIN](#), 31 January 2012).

All parties to the various conflicts have made widespread use of anti-personnel mines, placing civilian lives at risk and hindering returns. The use of mines has been particularly prevalent both in the Sa'ada conflict in the north and the Abyan conflict in the south. In two districts of northern Hajjah affected by conflict in 2011, 27 people were killed and 36 injured by mines and UXO in the first few months of 2012. In Zinjibar, the capital of Abyan more than 90 people - including recent returnees - were killed or injured by landmines and UXO left behind by retreating Islamic militants in June 2012 alone ([IRIN](#), 27 June

2012; [ACAPS](#), 9 October 2011; [MSF](#), 13 July 2012; [UNICEF](#), 13 July 2012).

IDPs have faced various protection challenges including exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, child recruitment, arbitrary arrest, the confiscation of personal identification documents, the looting of personal property and the separation of families ([IRIN](#), 17 November 2009). This was particularly the case in the Sa'ada conflict, where certain communities were placed at increased risk because of their alleged allegiance to one party to the conflict or another ([Yemen Post](#), 28 July 2008; [Yemen Times](#), 15 June 2008). Similar concerns have been raised about communities in areas such as Abyan, where displaced and non-displaced people alike may be at risk of intimidation or reprisals for their perceived allegiance to Ansar al-Sharia.

Significant child protection issues continue to affect both IDP and host communities. Many parties to the various conflicts have recruited children, while others continue to be killed and injured by mines or in clashes ([UN SG](#), 26 April 2012; [UN SG](#), 13 April 2010). In fact, local NGOs reveal that children may make up more than half of some tribes' armed forces, both those fighting with the government and those allied with the al-Houthi rebels ([IRIN](#), 20 July 2011). According to the UN, the number of child soldiers increased in 2011 as pro and anti-government military units recruited tribesmen into their ranks ([UN SG](#), 26 April 2012). Exposure to violence has also led to high rates of trauma and anxiety among women and children ([IRIN](#), 5 April 2011; [Yemen Post](#), 26 July 2011).⁷ In Aden and Lahj, almost all internally displaced children from Abyan showed signs of psychological distress or trauma upon their arrival. Involuntary urination, nightmares and bed-wetting were common complaints. An assessment of schools in Aden in late 2011 revealed a number

of child protection issues such as recruitment, violence, sexual abuse and a relatively high incidence of child marriage ([IRIN](#), 13 September 2011).

Coping strategies, livelihoods and basic necessities
For both the displaced and general population and whether in the north or south, the socio-economic crisis combined with civil unrest has placed serious strains on household coping strategies ([WarScapes](#), May 2012; [OCHA](#), 23 July 2012). Rising food and fuel costs are placing significant pressure on vulnerable displaced households and their host communities. From anecdotal reports, newly displaced households revealed a high rate of dependency on aid, including financial assistance, housing, food and non-food items ([Intersos](#), January 2010; [ACAPS](#), 9 October 2011; [Committee for Humanitarian Assistance to IDPs of Aden](#), 6 June 2011; [ADRA](#), June 2011).

In the north, families' vulnerability has increased over the course of their displacement as they exhaust their limited assets ([DRC](#), December 2010; [ACAPS](#), March 2012). Prolonged displacement has aggravated the poverty of many IDPs in Sa'ada, Amran, al-Jawf and Sana'a, where income is limited and savings have been used up (UNOG, 12 April 2010; [IRIN](#), 2 May 2010; [IRIN](#), 9 June 2011). Many displaced households rely on scarce daily labour, and access to land for agriculture or pastoral activities is limited. The sale of assets including jewellery and livestock has been a major coping strategy, and many IDPs have been forced into debt.

The humanitarian community has highlighted an acute need for adequate housing, suitable food, drinking water, livelihoods and access to basic services such as health care and education ([OCHA](#), 3 August 2011; [Yemen Times](#), 17 July 2011; [OCHA](#), 13 June 2012; [IRIN](#), 19 March 2012). For many IDPs in host communities and informal settlements, adequate housing is a high priority. In Aden and Lahj, settlements in schools have been of particular concern as these prevent local children from accessing education. Schools are also unsuitable

⁷ See also, [Field Study on the Behavioral and Psychological Impact of Sa'ada war on Children](#), Seyaj, April 2010

as settlements as they lack adequate sanitation facilities and overcrowding creates tensions among IDPs, while the use of schools prevents local children from accessing education (OCHA 13 June, 2012; [Yemen Times](#), 17 July 2012; [UNHRC](#), 2 February 2012)⁸.

Less fortunate IDPs are compelled to live in open or makeshift shelters in informal settlements such as those in Abyan, Hajjah and Sa'ada, where humanitarian access is at best intermittent ([UNHCR](#), 14 April 2012; [DRC](#), July 2012; [AFP](#), 23 May 2012). These communities are often dispersed over wide areas and people live in unsanitary conditions, often without access to basic services. In Arhab in Sana'a governorate, some IDPs have resorted to living in caves ([IRIN](#), 2 November 2011).

At the height of the conflict in Abyan, thousands of people remained at risk in conflict-affected areas, unable or unwilling to move far because of restrictions on their movement or concerns about their property and livestock. They took refuge in public buildings, schools or other more inhospitable places where the delivery of basic services had been severely disrupted or ceased altogether ([ICRC](#), 6 June 2012; [ICRC](#), 3 May 2012; [ICRC](#), 19 July 2011; [IOM](#), May 2012). As of November 2011, displaced families were using all 21 schools in Zinjibar and 22 out of 72 schools in nearby Khanfar district as shelters ([OCHA](#), 2 November 2011).

Food insecurity among both the displaced and general population remains a significant concern. In May 2012, CARE and several humanitarian NGOs warned that many Yemenis were on the brink of exhausting their assets, with a quarter of the population forced into debt to feed their fami-

lies ([CARE](#) et al, 23 May 2012; [WFP](#), May 2012). This, along with the limited access to food assistance and livelihood opportunities, has put considerable strain on IDP communities ([DRC](#), July 2012).

Most of Abyan was inaccessible throughout 2011. In the north, access improved slightly, but significant obstacles remained. In Sa'ada around 14,000 households in need of food assistance in July 2011 could not be reached ([OCHA](#), 25 July 2011). During May and June 2012, the humanitarian community was only able to assist 47 per cent of the IDPs and other people affected by conflict.

Lack of access to education remains a significant problem throughout the country for both IDPs and the general population. Around 200,000 children in the governorates of Sana'a, Taiz, Lahj, Abyan, Adan and Sa'ada have no access at all as armed factions or IDPs have taken refuge in their schools. This is particularly true in the southern governorates of Adan and Abyan, and in Sana'a. A further 100,000 are unable to go to school as their facilities have been damaged or destroyed. With more than 200 schools and at least 170,000 children affected, Sa'ada is the worst-affected governorate. A Ministry of Education report published in March 2012 revealed that an estimated 902 schools in 12 governorates were damaged as a result of the 2011 conflict. ([OCHA](#), April 2012; [IRIN](#), 8 November 2010).

Vulnerable groups including single mothers, girls and people with disabilities are particularly at risk. Many internally displaced children in vulnerable households have been compelled to work to complement family incomes by begging, smuggling or collecting rubbish. ([DRC](#), July 2012; [CARE and OCHA](#), 20 December 2009). The vulnerability and poverty of such families has led to concerns about child trafficking and early marriages, but information on the situation is lacking ([IRIN](#), 13 June 2010; [IRIN](#), 6 July 2010; [Seyaj](#), 10 July 2010). Women have faced particularly difficult situations, both in places of displacement as a result of inadequate

⁸ In Aden, the UN has appealed to local authorities to relocate IDPs from schools to around 17 public buildings in an effort to address the shelter shortage. The authorities, however, have been reluctant. Ansar al-Sharia's recent retreat from urban areas of Abyan might regrettably place this strategy on hold as local authorities seek IDPs' return. Conditions in return areas, however, are likely to dissuade any spontaneous movements for some time.

shelter and assistance, and in conflict-affected areas where they and their children are exposed to violence and abuse ([DRC](#), December 2010; [IRIN](#), 27 March 2012; [ICRC](#), 8 October 2009).

Discrimination and tensions between IDPs and their hosts have been reported in Amran, Sana'a and elsewhere, as displacement becomes protracted and resources more scarce. In Hajjah, two women were killed and several injured in October 2011 in violence between IDPs and their host community. More than 100 families were displaced ([OCHA](#), 14 October 2011; [OCHA](#), 2 November 2011). Such tensions have been less serious in the south. That said, local residents attacked IDPs on several sites in Aden in late 2011 ([OCHA](#), 14 October 2011). Tensions there arose over IDPs' occupation of public schools, which was restricting access to education for the host community's children.

Durable solutions and settlement options

The achievement of durable solutions to displacement can take the form of return, local integration or settlement. Durable solutions also imply that needs attributed to displacement no longer exist. For the majority of IDPs, however, no durable solutions have been possible. Only within certain local areas have a relatively small number of returns taken place, and there has been little or no integration or resettlement.

The government has made return its preferred option, and the humanitarian community has sought to provide support where possible to ensure that returns are voluntary and carried out in safety and dignity. It has also tentatively explored other settlement options with the government for those who do not wish to return. The majority of IDPs in both the north and south have expressed a wish to go back to their places of origin. Most, however, have been reticent to do so to date given prevail-

ing insecurity, limited reconstruction efforts and a lack of livelihood opportunities.

A profiling exercise carried out in the north in 2010 and an inter-agency assessment undertaken in 2011 revealed that more than 70 per cent of IDPs hoped to return to their places of origin, but only once they could be confident of lasting peace and security ([DRC](#), December 2010; [CARE and OCHA](#), 20 December 2009). Their intention was echoed by IDPs in Sana'a, who have called on the government to address their plight and facilitate their return ([Al Akhbar Al Youm](#), 11 March 2012; [Al-Sahwa](#), 9 March 2012). A profiling exercise undertaken in the south in 2011 and a survey in mid-2012 also revealed that the overwhelming majority of IDPs wished to return on the condition that security was restored and assistance with reconstruction provided ([DRC](#), July 2012).

Returns have been negligible in the north ([Yemen Times](#), March 2012; [UNHCR](#), 14 April 2012; [OCHA](#), 13 July 2012). In Sa'ada and neighbouring governorates, returns since the end of the sixth round of fighting in February 2010 have been modest and difficult to verify because of lack of access. Around 28,000 IDPs, or less than ten per cent of those registered, are recognized as having returned since the ceasefire, most of them doing so in 2010 ([UNHCR](#), 23 November 2010, [IRIN](#), 22 November 2010, [IRIN](#), 29 March 2010; [OCHA](#), 14 June 2010). Government figures published in May 2010 put the number of returns far higher, but the registration process for returning IDPs has been called into question, given the likelihood of secondary displacement and other doubts about the sustainability of returns⁹. In some cases, returnees have gone back to their places of displacement in order to access humanitarian assistance.

⁹ IDMC interview, June 2010 and May 2012 with humanitarian workers in Yemen, Sa'ad Update on Humanitarian assistance to IDPs in Sa'ada Governorate, WFP, 20 June 2010 (Unavailable online).

Intermittent clashes in parts of Hajjah and Sa'ada, particularly in late 2011 and during 2012, the widespread presence of landmines and UXO, damage or destruction of property and infrastructure, fear of reprisals, forced recruitment and lack of livelihoods all continue to be obstacles to returns ([UNHCR](#), 14 April 2012; [Yemen Times](#), 27 February 2012; [IRIN](#), 16 February 2012; [Yemen Post](#), 22 September 2012).

The government's Sa'ada Reconstruction Fund (SRF) reported in mid-2010 that more than 6,500 houses and farms were in need of reconstruction in Sa'ada and Harf Sufyan ([Al-Jazeera](#), 6 February 2012; [Mareb Press](#), August 2008; [IRIN](#), 5 April 2009). In early 2010, 70 per cent of health care facilities in Sa'ada were reportedly either destroyed or being used as military installations, and around 220 of the governorate's 725 schools destroyed, damaged or looted. These estimates do not include villages along the border with Saudi Arabia which were badly damaged during fighting in the area. Reconstruction efforts in Sa'ada and the surrounding governorates have stalled since the ceasefire ([Yemen Times](#), 5 March 2012; [Yemen Online](#), 20 July 2008; [Reuters](#), 13 November 2009).

Where returns have taken place on a more substantial scale, there has been no system in place to ensure that the process is sustainable.¹⁰

In southern governorate of Abyan, returns were hampered by continuing hostilities, damage and destruction of property and infrastructure, the widespread presence of mines and UXO and a general lack of security and rule of law. Rapid assessments carried out in August 2012 following the end of hostilities revealed a return rate among IDPs of 20 to 30 per cent in safe areas, particularly

in Ja'ar and Khanafar, while there were relatively few returns in and around Zinjibar ([OCHA](#), 16 August 2012).

As of November 2012, an estimated 80,000 IDPs had returned to Abyan, including 39,000 who returned spontaneously ([OCHA](#), 23 October 2012; [OCHA](#), 24 November 2012). Reports indicate that most IDPs in the south want to return to their homes, but only if the government can guarantee security and basic services such as health care, education and water. It is unclear whether those returns that do take place will be sustainable. In July 2012, some IDPs that had returned to a number of towns including Zinjibar soon left again because of the extent of the destruction ([OCHA](#), 19 September 2012).

Reports provided by humanitarian agencies and IDPs visiting their homes highlight the extent of the damage and destruction, which has affected electricity and water supplies in Zinjibar and other towns such as Ja'ar and Lawder ([HCT](#), July 2012; [OCHA](#), August 2012; [UNHCT](#), August 2012; [IOM Field report](#), May 2012; [IRIN](#), July 2012). Rapid assessments also revealed high levels of vulnerability among conflict-affected communities unwilling or unable to flee. The security situation remains extremely fragile, and the widespread presence of mines and booby traps has killed or maimed 90 persons since July 2012, mainly children ([OCHA](#), 24 November 2012; [IRIN](#), 27 July 2012; [MSF](#), 13 July 2012; [UNICEF](#), 13 July 2012).

The government has been promoting voluntary returns following its recent offensive in Abyan, but the humanitarian community has cautioned against such an approach. Several agencies have stressed the need to ensure adequate investment in rehabilitation and reconstruction, and to address immediate concerns about the presence of mines and UXO, the lack of access to basic services and livelihoods in IDPs' places of origin, and the need for the rule of law to be restored.

¹⁰ In al-Menzalah on the border with Saudi Arabia, half of 6,000 residents returned to find houses, wells, schools and health centres damaged or destroyed ([OCHA](#), 8 February 2011). As of February 2011, the town had still not been rebuilt. The area was also heavily mined, but no demining operations appeared to be taking place.

In July 2012, the Yemeni Council of Ministers approved the establishment of the Abyan Reconstruction Fund (ARF) with an initial capital of \$47 million, made up of contributions from government, donor states and Yemeni civil society ([IRIN](#), 16 July 2012; [Council of Ministers](#), 10 July 2012).

ARF's work runs parallel to that of the government in promoting returns to Abyan ([Council of Ministers](#), 7 August 2012.) The Yemeni authorities provide transport, food and financial support worth around \$70 for each returnee household. Those who accept such assisted returns are subsequently de-registered as IDPs. The humanitarian community established two operational hubs in Zinjibar and Khanfar district to support returnees, but it is still too early to assess the extent to which their needs are being addressed or the sustainability of the process.

As the hostilities in Abyan abated, the UN Humanitarian Country Team (UN HCT) launched the Abyan and South Inter-Agency Response Plan (ASRP) in July 2012, in consultation with the government and complementing its own initiative ([OCHA](#), August 2012; [UNHCT](#), August 2012; [IRIN](#), 16 July 2012). ASRP aims to respond to the humanitarian needs of displaced and host communities alike, and to address early recovery issues which would increase the sustainability of returns. It assumes a rapid return of more than 70 per cent of IDPs by the end of 2012. More than 80 per cent of the targeted beneficiaries are internally displaced or returnee households.

In contrast to the situation in the north and south of the country, displacement caused by political unrest in towns and cities such as Sana'a and Taiz has for the most part been temporary. It is unclear to what extent the needs of those who remain displaced are being met. In the Arhad district of Sana'a governorate, around 80 per cent of IDPs have reportedly returned to their homes, but they found extensive damage to property and livelihoods, and were unable to irrigate their

farmland because wells had also been destroyed. The extent of the damage - around 500 homes were destroyed - and sporadic clashes between the security forces and opposition factions are likely to hamper further returns ([Yemen Times](#), 26 January 2012; [Yemen Times](#), March 2012; [IRIN](#), 6 March 2012; [Yemen Times](#), 25 June 2012).

Throughout Yemen, but particularly in the north and south, the sustainable return of IDPs to their places of origin will also depend on national and local reconciliation efforts. For several years in the north, the al-Houthi movement has redistributed property and land under its control. It has also established its own school curriculum and consolidated its authority along tribal and sectarian lines. In the south, Ansar al-Sharia has controlled the vast majority of Abyan for the past year, redistributing property and enforcing Islamic law.

In such areas, the process of return is likely to cause tensions, given that IDPs' homes and land are among the property redistributed, appropriated or occupied. Reconciliation and conflict mitigation strategies will be indispensable. Other issues, such as the fear of retribution for alleged allegiance to one party to the conflict or another will also have to be addressed¹¹.

The emphasis on return should not be at the expense of local integration or settlement elsewhere for those IDPs who wish to pursue other settlement options. Information available from surveys undertaken in 2011 suggests that as many as 25 per cent of IDPs from the north would prefer a durable solution other than return. The Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs (RSG) suggested in mid-2010 that the government should take such preferences into account ([UN SG](#), 11 August 2010), but there has been a reluctance to provide alternatives to return.

¹¹ IDMC interview with humanitarian worker in Sana'a Yemen, July 2012

There have, however been exceptions. In 2009 and 2010 the government undertook efforts to resettle Jews from northern Yemen who were reportedly threatened and subjected to harassment and violence by Salafists and al-Houthi. Several hundred people were relocated to Sana'a and provided with limited assistance ([IRIN](#), 31 March 2009; [Yemen Times](#), 17 December 2008; [The Jewish Daily Forward](#), 15 January 2010).

The government has since taken part in information and advocacy programmes in northern Yemen to raise IDPs' awareness of the different settlement options available and their right to choose. The Executive Unit on IDPs together with the UN ran an extensive awareness campaign in 2010 and 2011. Under UNHCR's lead and in collaboration with the Yemeni authorities, the UN began in March 2011 to examine ways to better support returns and local integration, particularly in urban areas such as Sana'a, Sa'ada and Amran.

The initiative, however, was forestalled by the dramatic increase in violence in these areas in mid-2011, and the humanitarian community's subsequent focus on new displacement from Abyan. The changed scenario in Abyan as of June 2012 has rendered progress towards durable solutions, especially in return areas, a priority and a distinct possibility for many IDPs. There is a danger though that the focus on Abyan and surrounding areas may overshadow the needs of those in protracted displacement in the north, and the pursuit of durable solutions for them¹². UNHCR and the humanitarian community continue to raise awareness on the situation in Sa'ada and the need to address protracted displacement there ([Yemen Observer](#), September 2012).

With technical assistance from UNHCR, the government has also been developing a national policy on IDPs, which includes different options

for durable solutions such as return, settlement and integration. The policy also seeks to address the needs of those currently displaced, prevent any further arbitrary displacement and ensure preparedness for future displacement caused by conflict or disasters.

The adoption of a national policy that conforms to international standards would considerably strengthen efforts to achieve durable solutions for IDPs in Yemen. Implementation, however, will be a considerable challenge requiring significant long-term commitment, adequate resources and parallel efforts towards national reconciliation.

Humanitarian access

Humanitarian agencies have faced a lack of access to those affected by conflict throughout the country, and this has constituted a key obstacle to addressing IDPs' situations and assisting in their attainment of durable solutions.

That said, the transitional national government has, in contrast to previous years, made significant efforts to improve humanitarian access. It has eased the requirements placed on humanitarian agencies wishing to operate in the country, facilitating the entry of 17 NGOs, though the registration process continues to be slow and laborious ([OCHA](#), 13 July 2012). There are currently more than 50 humanitarian organisations including seven UN agencies and 23 international NGOs in the country, working with 16 national NGOs and five government agencies.

The government has also made commitments to ensuring civilians' protection and freedom of movement ([Government of Yemen](#), 2012), but many obstacles to humanitarian access remain in both the north and the south of the country ([OCHA](#), 13 July 2012). Intermittent conflict, insecurity, checkpoints operated by all parties to the conflict and ongoing violence have limited

¹² IDMC interview with humanitarian worker in Aden, Yemen, May 2012

humanitarian access and space whether in Abyan and Sa'ada and neighbouring governorates, or even in Sana'a, Taiz and other urban areas during periods of unrest (OCHA, February 2012; ACAPS, March 2012; HRW, 19 November 2008).

National and international humanitarian agencies have also faced significant risks for many years, and continue to do so. These include killings, kidnappings, the hijacking of vehicles and the diversion and targeting of aid convoys (Yemen Times, 24 June 2009; IRIN, 17 June 2009; IRIN, 17 June 2009; IRIN, 28 April 2010).¹³ In late 2011, security concerns led to a significant number of humanitarian personnel working for UN agencies and national and international NGOs and organisations being temporarily evacuated. Such incidents inevitably reduce humanitarians' capacity to respond to the needs of both the displaced and the general population, and contribute to what was described in latter part of 2011 as the "ever-shrinking humanitarian space" in Yemen (ProCap, June 2011).

Between 2010 and 2011, several thousand incidents affecting access ranging from security issues to restrictions were reported (OCHA, February 2012). Between November 2011 and mid-2012, two relief workers were killed, two wounded, and 12 kidnapped.

Despite the volatile security situation, the humanitarian community has committed to strengthening its ability to deliver assistance throughout the country, and continues to negotiate for better access with all parties to the various conflicts. Between May 2011 and June 2012, the number of projects undertaken by the humanitarian community increased by more than 80 per cent (OCHA, 20 October 2012).¹⁴ It is also increasingly using

local partnerships to improve operational capacity and access (OCHA, February 2012; IRIN, 30 May 2012; HCT, 2012), with modest success particularly since mid-2012.

In the south, humanitarian agencies have gained wider access in recent months, but they continue to face obstacles (IRIN, 30 May 2012). In central and southern Yemen, access has been limited in parts of Sana'a, Taiz, Shabwa and Abyan governorates. There are currently around 25 national and international organizations operating in the south, but most were limited until recently to activities in the city of Aden (OCHA, 5-12 July 2012). During the conflict only around six humanitarian organisations were granted access to Abyan, and their work, like that of others operating elsewhere in the region, was hampered by unrest, insecurity and ongoing conflict (IRIN, 16 July 2012; ICRC, 6 June 2012). Only six humanitarian organisations had access or some presence in Abyan during the conflict. They were the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the French and Spanish branches of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the Yemeni Charitable Society for Social Welfare.

At the height of the fighting in mid-2012, both the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UNHCR raised serious concerns that more than 100,000 people faced internal displacement because their urgent needs were going unaddressed (ICRC, 3 May 2012; ICRC, 16 May 2012). ICRC has repeatedly highlighted the fate of civilians trapped in Abyan by ongoing fighting.

Following the rout of Ansar al-Sharia in mid-2012, more agencies have been able to gain access and operate in Abyan. As of September 2012, there were 25 national and international agencies working there, though they continue to face difficulties as the security situation remains very fragile (IRIN, 23 March 2010).

¹³ In June 2009, after a series of kidnappings in northern Yemen, three humanitarian workers were found killed and several were missing, suspected killed.

¹⁴ In May 2011, humanitarian country team was implementing over 100 projects; by June 2012, this number had increased to 180 projects.

In the north, access has been more limited. Most humanitarian agencies began working in Sa'ada after the end of the fourth round of conflict in 2007 ([HRW](#), 5 October 2009; [Islamic Relief](#), 2 October 2009), but few maintained a presence during the subsequent rounds of fighting, when there was virtually no access to most of Sa'ada or parts of Hajjah, Amran, Sana'a and al-Jawf governorates ([HRW](#), 19 November 2008; [HRW](#), 7 April 2010; [News Yemen](#), 30 September 2009). Following the 2010 ceasefire, agencies were able to increase their access and provide emergency assistance, but reaching IDPs in host communities and conflict-affected areas remained problematic. In Sa'ada, access did not extend further than seven kilometres from the capital, but humanitarian organisations were able to operate in Hajjah and areas of Amran and al-Jawf ([IRIN](#), 17 August 2010; [IRIN](#), 29 April 2010; [IRIN](#), 2 May 2010; [IRIN](#), 20 April 2010; [IRIN](#), 6 April 2010).

In January 2011, following concerted UN advocacy, the al-Houthi movement signed a declaration on humanitarian access. The declaration, which was subsequently acknowledged by the national government, set out the principle of unimpeded humanitarian access at all times, and since taking control of Sa'ada in April 2011 the movement has indeed facilitated wider access¹⁵. That said, sporadic fighting continues to restrict humanitarian access in some areas ([IRIN](#), 16 February 2012, [OCHA](#), 7 June 2011).

In September 2011, the al-Houthi leadership announced new, more restrictive conditions under which all humanitarian organisations were required to operate in Sa'ada, and limited access to communities under siege in Dammaj. In June 2012, however, the movement agreed to

undertake a joint assessment with humanitarian agencies on the situation in Sa'ada governorate as a whole. This was due to be carried out in September 2012 but was still awaiting final authorization at end of year ([OCHA](#), October 2012). If it is, it would be an important step towards addressing communities' needs and facilitating durable solutions ([OCHA](#), 17 September 2012; [OCHA](#), 13 July 2012; [Yemen Times](#), 26 March 2012).

Despite being the governorate possibly worst affected by years of protracted conflict, Sa'ada is one of the areas least assessed because of access restrictions. There are currently only seven humanitarian organisations, including national NGOs, with a presence in the area, which is still under de facto al-Houthi control. In neighbouring Hajjah, 25 are present ([OCHA](#), 15 September 2012). Several international NGOs including *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF), *Médecins du Monde* (MDM) and Relief International have left Sa'ada either because of insufficient funding or the inability to maintain operational independence ([OCHA](#), August 2012; [OCHA](#), 17 September 2012). Though access has improved slightly, restrictions continue to hamper the delivery of assistance. Between May and June 2012, only 47 per cent of IDPs and other conflict-affected people in need were assisted.

National response

Efforts to address displacement in Yemen over the years have been belated, sporadic and subject to political developments and external factors. Following the fifth round of fighting in northern Yemen in May 2008, the national government acknowledged the existence of internal displacement and its responsibility to address it ([LSE-Brookings](#), November 2011)¹⁶. At the start of the

¹⁵ For years, the Yemeni government did not acknowledge displacement as an issue, but this changed following the fifth conflict. In 2010, Saleh reportedly ordered local authorities in Sa'ada and Amran governorates to facilitate the safe return of IDPs and the reconstruction of affected areas.

¹⁶ The Executive Unit for IDPs replaced the health ministry as the institutional focal point. The mandate previously restricted to conflict-induced IDPs in camps was also subsequently revised.

sixth round in August 2009, it established a senior inter-ministry committee for relief operations. The committee is headed by the health minister and supported by the Executive Unit for IDPs, which is in charge of the national response to displaced communities' needs ([LSE-Brookings](#), November 2011)¹⁷. The government reaffirmed its commitment to address IDPs' needs following the February 2010 ceasefire, and again in the reconciliation agreement it signed with the al-Houthi movement in June 2010, in which both parties also promised to facilitate returns.

Ministerial decree number 38 of March 2012 renewed the Executive Unit's mandate and reinforced the transitional government's intention to facilitate returns and address IDPs' needs in Abyan, Sa'ada, al-Jawf and other affected governorates ([Council of Ministers](#), 22 March 2012 [Council of Ministers](#), 22 March 2012). There is, however, no national framework to address displacement beyond the cabinet's executive decrees. The most recent highlights the need to systematically examine the obstacles to return and the provision and coordination of humanitarian assistance, including the management of displacement camps. The decrees, however, make no reference to national legislation as it pertains to IDPs' rights, nor do they address durable solutions other than return. The insistence on return, and the lack of attention to integration and resettlement as options for IDPs in protracted displacement, has been a major shortfall of the government's approach to date. The lack of a national policy on IDPs weakens the government's capacity to respond and leads to ad hoc policy-making and confused responses ([ProCap](#), July 2010).

In April 2010, Representative of the United Nations Secretary General (RSG) visited Yemen to assess the situation and recommend steps

forward, which included support for the development of a national policy ([UNOG](#), 12 April 2010; [UN](#), 11 August 2010). Efforts to endorse one have stalled, however, as a result of a lack of political commitment. The UN continues to advocate for a national policy, a position the international community has echoed, most recently in the Human Rights Committee's review of Yemen in March 2012 ([UN Rights Committee](#), March 2012).

At the request of the Executive Unit for IDPs, UNHCR has been assisting the transitional government in redrafting a national policy on internal displacement since early 2012. The work has included the development with the government and its international humanitarian partners of a joint framework for responding to new IDPs, but it does not address the needs of those living in protracted displacement.

Since its establishment, the Executive Unit for IDPs has sought to coordinate and facilitate humanitarian access and has issued appeals for assistance. It has set up branches in several northern and southern governorates with the aim of addressing IDPs' situations and promoting and facilitating returns ([IRIN](#), 16 July 2012; [News Yemen](#), 7 June 2010). The unit is responsible to the Council of Ministers, and is mandated to work with a number of ministries including defence, interior, international cooperation and health, and with authorities at the governorate level. The fact that it is mandated to work closely with some of these ministries has raised concerns about its independence and the possible encroachment on humanitarian space ([LSE-Brookings](#), November 2011).

The national government's lack of capacity to address the issue of displacement and its inability to respond effectively to IDPs in areas of the country outside its control are the main limitations on the unit's work. Difficulties also arise at the governorate and district level, where local authorities are responsible for addressing displacement but face many obstacles, including a lack of funds,

17 Reconstruction Fund Assessment Report, Saada Reconstruction Fund, Government of Yemen, April 2009 (Unavailable online).

clear policies and institutional capacity. There have also been allegations that funding intended to benefit IDPs has been misdirected ([LSE-Brookings](#), November 2011).

The government has allocated funds to respond to internal displacement, but they fall far short of meeting IDPs' needs. Financial support is focused on reconstruction, mostly through funds established by the Council of Ministers. In 2008, the council established SRF with the aim of providing assistance for reconstruction that facilitates return following the successive rounds of conflict ([IRIN](#), 5 April 2009; [IRIN](#), 7 August 2008)¹⁸, but restricted access, insufficient funding and intimidation have hampered its work. It has also been accused of partiality¹⁹. Following the end of hostilities in Abyan, the council established ARF in July 2012 with similar aims ([IRIN](#), 16 July 2012; [Council of Ministers](#), 10 July 2012; [Council of Ministers](#), 7 August 2012).

The national response to internal displacement has taken place in the context of continued intermittent conflict, in which vast areas of the country have fallen under the control of organisations such as the al-Houthi movement and until recently Ansar al-Sharia. Such groups have been more ambivalent towards the issue of displacement. In the north, al-Houthi established a humanitarian office in mid-2010 to support and coordinate assistance in areas under its control. It also committed to facilitate returns in the reconciliation agreement it signed with the government in June 2010 ([News Yemen](#), 7 June 2010). It remains unclear, however, how al-Houthi will address return-

ees' fears of retaliation and their needs in terms of reconstruction and property restitution. Returns, meanwhile, have been negligible in areas under al-Houthi control.

The UN and international NGOs have repeatedly negotiated with the al-Houthi executive council for wider humanitarian access, and it has recently taken steps to respond to such appeals after introducing restrictions in late 2011. In June 2012, the movement agreed to allow a UN-led inter-agency assessment across Sa'ada to identify humanitarian needs and determine response. This marked a considerable departure from previous reticence, but it remains to be seen what level of access will be granted.

In the south, Ansar al-Sharia has been unable or unwilling to respond to IDPs' needs and has refused to grant access to humanitarian agencies. It did encourage returns to Zinjibar in early 2012, but the extent of the destruction, continuing clashes and uncertainty dissuaded many IDPs from going back to their homes. Some were further put off by policies such as property redistribution and the stringent application of sharia law. Following Ansar al-Sharia's military retreat, the widespread presence of mines in civilian areas has continued to cause death and injury among both the displaced and general population.

Humanitarian response

Until the sixth round of conflict in northern Yemen, the humanitarian response was coordinated by the Emergency Response and Preparedness Team (EPRT) in Sana'a, which brought UN agencies together with national and international NGOs²⁰. WFP chaired the team and was the de facto lead agency, UNHCR was responsible for protection and UNICEF for child protection.

18 The government has allocated \$55 million for reconstruction through the fund, but most estimates agree that around \$190 million is required. Others suggest an even higher figure, especially given the reported extent of destruction in Sa'ada governorate.

19 Alongside the UN-led mechanisms, an international NGO forum was established in 2005 to facilitate and coordinate the humanitarian response alongside development-oriented approaches. The [Yemeni INGO Forum](#) currently has 33 members which work in the development and humanitarian fields.

20 See also humanitarian dashboard for latest information: [Humanitarian Response–Yemen](#), Humanitarian Country Team, 2012

In August 2009, the UN HCT adopted the inter-agency cluster approach, which facilitated coordination and response²¹. The emergency response has since been strengthened, inter-agency coordination improved and efforts to negotiate access with opposition groups stepped up. The UN response has, however, come under increasing pressure as the humanitarian community faces multiple crises that put significant strain on already stretched resources and capacity.

The Protection Cluster was set up in January 2010 and headed by the UNHCR. It initially focused on internal displacements from Sa'ada. It has since expanded its work to include other displacement situations. Within the cluster, a working group including UNHCR, WFP and the Executive Unit for IDPs was set up to revive the registration process which had been stalled since mid-2010. In May 2011, the task force developed an extensive registration programme which was subsequently halted due to increased levels of insecurity. The process was reinitiated in mid-2012 following the end of hostilities in the north and south ([ProCap](#), June 2011)²². The aim of the registration was to clearly establish the number of IDPs, their location and a basic profile of their needs and intentions in terms of durable solutions.

In mid-2010, with the support of RSG, the Protection Cluster commissioned a profiling study of IDPs and the drafting of a national strategy, including a framework for durable solutions. The government, however, did not endorse the draft. During 2012, UNHCR collaborated with the gov-

ernment in redrafting a national policy to address and resolve internal displacement, including a national action plan to define a response to new displacement. It has also supported the Executive Unit for IDPs with technical assistance and capacity building initiatives on registration and verification, training on international frameworks and standards, and the reinforcement of the unit's field offices²³.

The UN relies heavily on its partners in responding in areas where it has limited access and capacity. National NGOs such as the Charitable Society for Social Welfare (CSSW) and the Society for Humanitarian Solidarity (SHS), many of whom are members of the Protection Cluster, have played a key role in responding to IDPs' needs. International NGOs such as the Danish Refugee Council, INTERSOS, Islamic Relief and Save the Children have taken part in profiling exercises, camp management and emergency response. ICRC in partnership with the Yemeni Red Crescent Society (YRCS) has played a significant role in the emergency response in conflict-affected areas.

National NGOs, civil associations and host communities have made important contributions to addressing IDPs' needs throughout the country. Some - such as the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance to IDPs in Abyan - work on the local level, while others - such as YRCS, the al-Amel Association, Seyaj for Child Protection, SHS and CSSW - operate nationally. These organisations generally have better access than their international counterparts, and have played an essential role in the provision of humanitarian assistance in both the north and the south, including Abyan. They have, however, faced numerous constraints as a result of their lack of capacity and resources²⁴.

21 The national strategy on IDPs was drafted and endorsed by the UN in July 2010, but not endorsed by the government.

22 UNHCR has conducted a series of protection workshops, and training sessions on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the Framework for National Responsibility for Addressing Internal Displacement and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Framework for Durable Solutions to International Displacement. UNHCR also collaborated with RSG on the initial drafting of national policy on IDPs in 2010 and in supporting training sessions provided by NGOs such as IDMC.

23 Some national NGOs have also been accused of lacking impartiality and neutrality. In 2009, a YRCA branch in Sa'ada was criticised as such. [Sa'ada refugees complain of ill-treatment by YRCA employees](#), Yemen Times, 14 January 2009

24 In early 2010, WFP was forced to reduce food rations and by May 2010 had cut them by 50 per cent.

Restricted access and a shortage of funding are among the most serious issues the humanitarian community has faced in recent years. Organisations have repeatedly warned of the gravity of the “underfunded emergency” in Yemen, and in May 2012 they called for greater international attention and commitment, stressing that failure to secure adequate funding could cause a major humanitarian crisis and trigger further instability (See [HCT](#), August 2012; [CARE](#) et al, 23 May 2012; [OCHA](#), 23 May 2012; [UNOG](#), 12 April 2010).

Funding for the response to the Sa’ada conflict since 2007 has been a source of particular concern. Shortfalls and delays have had significant repercussions, causing dissatisfaction and tensions among IDPs and national and local authorities, and at times causing open conflict in displaced communities ([ProCap](#), June 2011; [News Yemen](#), 15 April 2010). In 2011, IDPs’ food rations were reduced to 75 per cent in an effort to maximise the number of people receiving assistance. Protection, psychosocial and legal support were also cut back drastically ([OCHA](#), 23 July 2012; [ProCap](#), June 2011).

The Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP) for 2012, which was recently revised, calls for total funding of \$585 million and targets six million people. This is a twofold increase in the amount requested in previous years and reflects the scale of the needs identified. An additional \$92 million was requested for the UN HCT’s Abyan South Response Plan (ASRP), which was launched in July 2012 ([OCHA](#), August 2012; [OCHA](#), 23 July 2012).

Current funding for YHRP stands at 56 per cent of requirements ([FTS](#), 5 December 2012). This is not an unreasonable mid-year figure, but the majority of contributions are destined for improving food security and a very significant shortfall remains for protection, early recovery, education, water, sanitation and health care projects – all of which are indispensable in ensuring that the humanitar-

ian needs of IDPs and other communities are met and progress is made towards durable solutions ([OCHA](#), 23 July 2012; [FTS](#), 5 December 2012). In its mid-year review of YHRP, the UN HCT reiterated the importance of early recovery programming in accessible conflict-affected areas.

YHRP for 2012 does not focus on particular conflict-affected groups such as IDPs or returning IDPs as it has in previous years. Rather it focuses on needs rather than categories, highlighting the gravity of the overall humanitarian situation. It targets a total of around six million people, the majority of whom are severely food insecure ([OCHA](#), 15 November 2011). It is fundamentally important that YHRP’s scope be broadened, but it is also imperative that the humanitarian response should not neglect the specific needs of IDPs and returning IDPs such as access to basic services, housing and land, particularly given the magnitude of displacement in the north.

ASRP is 25 per cent funded to date, and more than 60 per cent if international donors’ pledges are included. It primarily addresses the situations of IDPs, returnees and other communities in Abyan ([OCHA](#), 17 August 2012; [IRIN](#), 16 July 2012; [OCHA](#), 17 September 2012) and aims to target more than 320,000 of the 450,000 civilians affected by the conflict over the six months to December 2012. More than 80 per cent of the targeted beneficiaries are internally displaced and returning IDP households. ASRP seeks to address immediate humanitarian needs, but also places significant emphasis on early recovery.

Need for continual national and international engagement

There are currently significant opportunities to shore up and improve the national response to internal displacement. The government has reiterated its continued engagement with the issue, pledged resources for reconstruction efforts in

conflict-affected areas and is developing a national IDP policy. Significant changes on the ground in recent months, most notably in Abyan, mean new opportunities to address displacement and to support durable solutions for IDPs, particularly voluntary return.

Opposition groups such as the al-Houthi movement have also continued their engagement with UN and allowed better access, while cautiously taking steps to participate in national dialogue and reconciliation processes with the government.

At the same time, the stances taken by national parties have not always been consistent, and may have been adopted out of political opportunism rather than a genuine interest in addressing the issue of displacement. There have also been frequent reversals, and reluctance to address key issues pertinent to durable solutions for IDPs.

The key challenge lies in strengthening the institutional framework within which internal displacement issues can be comprehensively addressed. Such an approach would be helped by the adoption of a national policy.

More fundamentally, there is a need for an end to hostilities and a peace process leading to reconciliation. The achievement of durable solutions for IDPs depends on these developments taking place. Existing ceasefire agreements are tenuous and do not establish lasting peace. Reconciliation efforts and conflict mitigation strategies in areas where access has been provided have been modest at best.

Return has often been prioritised over integration and settlement elsewhere, often as a way of showing that conflict has been resolved. IDPs have often returned to face inadequate living conditions, secondary displacement or worse.

The insistence on return before reconciliation, and the reluctance to adopt policies on integration or settlement elsewhere in the country, represents

a failure to recognise the responsibility of each party to the conflict to ensure the wellbeing and dignity of those living in areas under their control. As such, reconciliation efforts remain paramount at both the national and local level.

Even once a conflict has been fully resolved, it can take years to implement a peace agreement and achieve durable solutions. Reconstruction, the addressing of IDPs' housing, land and property issues and the re-establishment of livelihoods and access to public services will all take time and will require a long-term commitment by all stakeholders.

The tasks ahead are daunting, and many IDPs are likely to remain in protracted displacement pending developments on the ground. This implies significant humanitarian and protection needs which must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The national government has made significant efforts in areas affected by conflict and natural disasters, but its capacity and resources fall far short of being able to meet the needs of all concerned. As such, the engagement of the national and international humanitarian communities continues to be vital.

Wary of the lack of peace agreements and fearing that conflicts will resume, the international community has in the past shied away from providing adequate funding. This has often led to a vicious circle in which IDPs in protracted displacement are subjected to further suffering.

The international community has a significant role to play in funding the humanitarian response for those living in displacement, encouraging continued engagement on the issue, and supporting efforts at national reconciliation needed to pave the way for durable solutions.

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was established by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 1998, upon the request of the United Nations, to set up a global database on internal displacement. A decade later, IDMC remains the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement caused by conflict and violence worldwide.

IDMC aims to support better international and national responses to situations of internal displacement and respect for the rights of internally displaced people (IDPs), who are often among the world's most vulnerable people. It also aims to promote durable solutions for IDPs, through return, local integration or settlement elsewhere in the country.

IDMC's main activities include:

- Monitoring and reporting on internal displacement caused by conflict, generalised violence and violations of human rights;
- Researching, analysing and advocating for the rights of IDPs;
- Training and strengthening capacities on the protection of IDPs;
- Contributing to the development of standards and guidance on protecting and assisting IDPs.

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

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