

### **IDPs Outside of Camps**

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- The ICRC, in a landmark 2009 report on the challenges of responding to internal displacement, emphasized: “**camps deflect the world’s attention from the harsh truth of internal displacement.**”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, when I think of my visits to IDPs over the years, sometimes this has been to a camp, but just as often it has been to places such as an abandoned factory, a cubby hole under the stairwell of a hospital, a stable, an empty swimming pool, a shantytown, an apartment building (living with another family or on their own), makeshift shelters in the bush or jungle, dug-out caves, and people still on the run.
- Increased attention recently – by the IASC, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs, and the GPC through this panel – to IDPs outside of camps therefore is most relevant. For, **if IDPs outside of camps do not receive attention, protection and assistance, then most IDPs in the world are not protected and assisted.**
- Certainly, this is true in Yemen, where of the nearly half a million (465,000 registered) IDPs, the **overwhelming majority of IDPs (almost 90%) live outside of camps.**
- The **reasons** why so few IDPs in Yemen live in camps are mostly cultural. Specifically, cultural norms dictate that it is inappropriate for women to be living in close quarters with men and adolescent males who are not relatives or even among adolescent and adult male relatives to whom they are not married. In other words, privacy concerns are paramount.

#### **Typology of situations of IDPs outside of camps in Yemen**

For the vast majority of IDPs who are outside of camps, several different scenarios exist. The **typology of IDPs outside of camps** in Yemen includes at least 6 different categories, each of which presents specific operational constraints:

1. Especially in the initial phase of displacement, some IDPs managed to find accommodation with **host families**, usually with relatives.

*However*, with displacement becoming protracted, the hospitality of host families, who themselves often are suffering economic hardship, increasingly is under strain.

To ease the burden, some **support to host families** has been provided to the extent possible, but it’s not enough to ease the inevitable pressures, especially beyond the emergency phase. Moreover, in any case, overcrowding and privacy concerns remain.

2. Those IDPs can afford it are **renting apartments, or just rooms**, to house their family.

*However*, with displacement becoming protracted and with the economic downturn, IDPs are finding it more and more difficult to meet their rental payments and thus are at heightened risk of eviction.

**Rental subsidies** have been provided to IDPs in some locations, to help them stave off this risk. Yet, resource constraints mean this is not possible for all IDPs or host families; nor is this support sustainable over the long-term.

3. **Collective centres**, mainly in schools, have arisen throughout the country, especially in the emergency phase of displacement. This phenomenon has been especially prevalent in Aden,

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<sup>1</sup> ICRC, *Internal Displacement in Armed Conflict: Facing Up to the Challenges* (ICRC, 2009), p. 13.

where with the new displacement crisis in the south that began in late May 2011, initially more than 110 schools were used as emergency shelter for IDPs. At the time, the schools were out of session and the displacement was expected, including by IDPs, to be temporary.

*However, it's now been more than 9 months and there are still some 20,000 IDPs still living in 80 schools in Aden. Establishing a camp for these IDPs initially had been proposed by the Government, and continues to be called for by some, especially within the host community. Yet, the idea of a camp continues to be adamantly rejected by IDPs, based on cultural norms. Echoing the views of IDPs, the humanitarian country team consistently has advocated that a camp must be a last resort, to which the Government agrees.*

**Alternative shelter** options for IDPs in the schools have been advocated and identified since last summer. However, a decision has not yet been taken by the Government. One of the concerns of the host community is that if IDPs are moved into alternative buildings with adequate services, as opposed to a camp, "they may never leave". At the same time, and despite mitigating measures, the schools are neither fully functional as learning institutions, nor do they provide adequate shelter for IDPs.

4. Many, if not most, IDPs are living in **informal settlements or "outside" settlements**. This is a broad category: it includes everything from spontaneous settlements comprised of rudimentary makeshift shelters, to a former camp that retains a number of the vestiges and services (eg. government security) of a camp.

These settlements **range in size** from several hundred to just a handful of people. **Many such settlements exist**; in the northern governorate of Hajjah alone, there are estimated to be more than 600 such settlements.

The large number of these settlements dispersed across a vast area poses obvious **logistical and access constraints**. These informal settlements are found both in semi-urban areas as well as in extremely remote areas, which in some cases are not accessible by road. With limited staff and resources, it simply is not feasible to undertake direct regular field monitoring in these settlements. **Insecurity**, leading to restrictions on road travel, also is a major constraint. Moreover, a number of these settlements as the population is mobile, which further complicates planning and response.

Even where settlements are more established, **lack of clarity as to who owns the land** often poses complications for assisting IDPs, and on virtually every issue: from providing landfill to level what is essentially a pit where IDPs are living and which gets flooded every rainy season, to building more durable shelters, to implementing self-reliance project.

5. **Caves**: Several IDP families have been living for months in caves, where they sought shelter from shelling. These IDPs had no other place to go. As one IDP woman living said: "*We don't have relatives to live with, nor do we have enough money to rent our own apartment like other IDPs*". Her family of 6 lives in a cave measuring 18 sq.m<sup>2</sup>, together with their cow, three goats, and four sheep. Living conditions in the caves are extremely poor especially in regarding sanitation and hygiene. Access often has been difficult due to insecurity: for several months, these IDPs essentially were essentially invisible and cut off from assistance.
6. **Nomadic** populations: Among IDPs are also populations which were nomadic prior to displacement and still are mobile, including some not even having stayed in one place long enough to be registered as IDPs. Settlements sometimes appear and disappear overnight.

In short, when we say IDPs "outside of camps", **a complex range of situations** is actually at issue.

A common feature, however, is that with the exception to some extent of those IDPs in collective centres, **protection and assistance has been much less consistent** to IDPs outside camps.

## Operational constraints and specific protection concerns of IDPs outside of camps

National legal and institutional framework: Paradoxically, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of IDPs in Yemen are outside of camps, there exists a **general predisposition towards camps** among key stakeholders, in particular the Government and host communities. In fact, this towards camps is reflected in the national legal and institutional framework. Specifically, the national institutional focal point for IDPs is entitled the “Executive Unit for IDP Camps”. Beyond the title, the assumption of IDPs being “in camps” infuses the legal mandate of the institution. Indeed, the first response of the Government to new displacements has tended to be to advocate the establishment of camps; for instance, in response to the new IDP crisis in the South in summer 2011. Moreover, at one stage in 2009-10, the Government had advocated that humanitarian assistance should be provided only to IDPs in camps.

- The **national IDP policy** currently being developed by the Government of Yemen, with UNHCR support, will formalize what in practice is a more comprehensive scope of the Executive Unit’s mandate, to cover also IDPs outside of camps.

Physical Access: The **number** of non-camp settlements, the **distance** to travel to them, sometimes in areas inaccessible by road, in a highly unpredictable **security** environment, inevitably makes physical access to these IDPs challenging.

- Under such circumstances, supporting IDPs’ own coping mechanisms and working through community-based networks therefore is especially important.

Access to Information: Access constraints also make data collection, assessments, and critical activities like IDP registration and regular protection monitoring also much more difficult.

- Regarding protection monitoring, UNHCR has set up 66 **community-based protection networks** throughout the country, to complement its own field monitoring. The CBPNs are made up of volunteers from the IDP and local community to monitor and report on IDP protection concerns, via mobile phone. UNHCR plans to double the number of CBPNs in Yemen in 2012, with priority given to those areas where insecurity limits UNHCR’s direct access; this expansion in our community-based protection monitoring inevitably will expand our reach to more IDPs outside of camps. UNHCR also has established 5 **community centres** outside of camps, where IDPs can come to report their concerns, receive legal and psycho-social counseling and for particularly vulnerable cases, receive small-scale one-time assistance. On average, these centres receive 60-70 IDPs a day and sometimes as many as 200 a day. UNHCR plans to expand the number of these centres.

Assistance delivery: Whereas IDPs in camps have reliable access to assistance and services meeting minimum standards for emergency assistance, this is not the case for all IDPs outside of camps. In the informal settlements, **water and sanitation** is especially inadequate. At the same time, the large number and sometimes temporary nature of these settlements means that it is not feasible, due to resource constraints, to build wells everywhere. Health issues inevitably arise. At the same time, especially in settlements in remote areas, IDPs emphasize in participatory assessments that lack of **access to health services**, due to inability to cover transportation costs, is their major concern.

Community participation: Outside of camps, the level of **women’s participation in leadership structures and decision-making** processes is, as is noted in the CAP 2012, “near to nil”. Moreover, while UNHCR has established community-based networks in a number of the informal settlements, problems arise in training as women face cultural restrictions to leave the settlements for workshops or even to attend meetings.

- While there are just too many settlements to provide individual training, smaller-scale training of groups for women members of community-based protection networks will need

to be organized and, through them, awareness raising on the importance of women having a voice in decisions affecting their and their families' lives.

SGBV: Whereas there are women's centres established in each of the 2 camps that UNHCR manages with IRY, these don't exist in the vast number informal settlements. Such support is desperately needed for non-camp IDP women who, for instance, report a much **higher incidence than camp IDPs of sexual harassment during firewood collection**. By contrast, to the extent that protection monitoring currently is undertaken in several -- but by no means all -- non-camp settlements, monitoring suggests that **domestic violence is lower among the non-camp IDPs** due to there being more space in the non-camp settlements and thus more privacy between households. This underscores the rationale of IDPs to be outside of camps as a coping mechanism to mitigate their protection concerns. At the same time, however, it must be said that less regular protection monitoring outside of camps and CCs, means that victims have less access to report incidents.

- To help address limitations on the reach of protection monitoring to all non-camp IDPs, besides the community-based protection networks and community drop-in centres, UNHCR has set up a **SGBV hotline** where IDPs, even in remote areas, can ring in to report concerns.

Education: Even before displacement, and especially in the north, access to education was limited among the general population. For IDPs in the camps, there are schools in the camps or close by. By contrast, for IDPs in a number of the informal settlements, the **distance to local schools is considerable and safety issues** arise regarding cases of pedestrian children being seriously injured and concerns about girls' safety, both walking to school and concerns regarding the lack of female teachers in the local schools. The IDPs have requested a bus, but resource constraints are an impediment. For adult men and women, regular literacy classes are available only in the camps.

- UNHCR has been advocating with the IDP community to organize patrols of older children or adults to accompany the children on the walk to school. SCF has installed speed bumps along the major roads, to reduce traffic speed and thus the risk of pedestrians being hit.

Risk of eviction: As displacement has become protracted, the **risk of eviction has heightened** for IDPs. IDPs renting rooms find it increasingly difficult to pay their rent. Those staying with host families find that the welcome they initially received is wearing thin, especially as the host families themselves are struggling under increased economic hardship. IDPs living in informal settlements have no formal right of stay, even temporary, so could be compelled to leave at any time.

- Partial **rental subsidies** to IDPs and to host families have been provided for some IDPs, but are not a sustainable solution. Support for income-generating and **self-reliance** activities is critically important, and for this the active engagement of development and early recovery actors is essential. Formalizing **right of stay agreements** with landowners is being explored.

Tensions with host community: In the context of one of the poorest countries in the world, made all the worse by the global economic crisis, of course it is not only the IDPs who are suffering. Providing assistance to IDPs but not also to vulnerable persons in the host community would be inhumane and would only create tensions with and protection risks for IDPs.

- Addressing the specific vulnerabilities and risks faced by IDPs is critical, but must also be done through **community-based approaches**. Doing so requires the engagement of a broader range of humanitarian and development actors, to address fundamental issues of poverty, inequality, and socio-economic marginalization.

In Yemen, a number of efforts are being made, both in terms of advocacy and operational response, to ensure attention to IDPs outside of camps, to address the complex typology of situations in which they are found, and to address the specific protection concerns that these IDPs face. Even so, the operational challenges mentioned make such efforts challenging. More attention and support to these IDPs is needed. Good practices, lessons learned and practical guidance from other experiences therefore would be welcomed.