

Local perspectives on vulnerability and capacity in Ma'rib City

OVERVIEW

More than nine years of conflict in Yemen has left 18.2 million people in need of assistance in one of the largest and most complex humanitarian responses in the world (OCHA 01/02/2024 a). The pervasiveness of needs and protracted nature of the crisis have spawned repeated cycles of emergency humanitarian assistance providing life-saving support to a large population in need. These cycles have focused on meeting immediate needs rather than reducing overall levels of vulnerability levels to man-made and climatic shocks.

At the same time, conditions in Yemen are changing. Since the truce between April–October 2022, major clashes have largely ceased. Although tensions remain, confrontations between conflict parties have markedly fallen (Rand 13/12/2023; ACLED accessed 01/03/2024).

Since the humanitarian crisis is considered to be at a critical juncture, there is an opportunity to focus beyond immediate needs to consider their drivers and reasons for persisting (OCHA 01/02/2024 b). A durable settlement to the conflict remains elusive, but there is growing recognition of the need to focus on assistance that not only meets immediate needs but also enables stability and development.

About this report

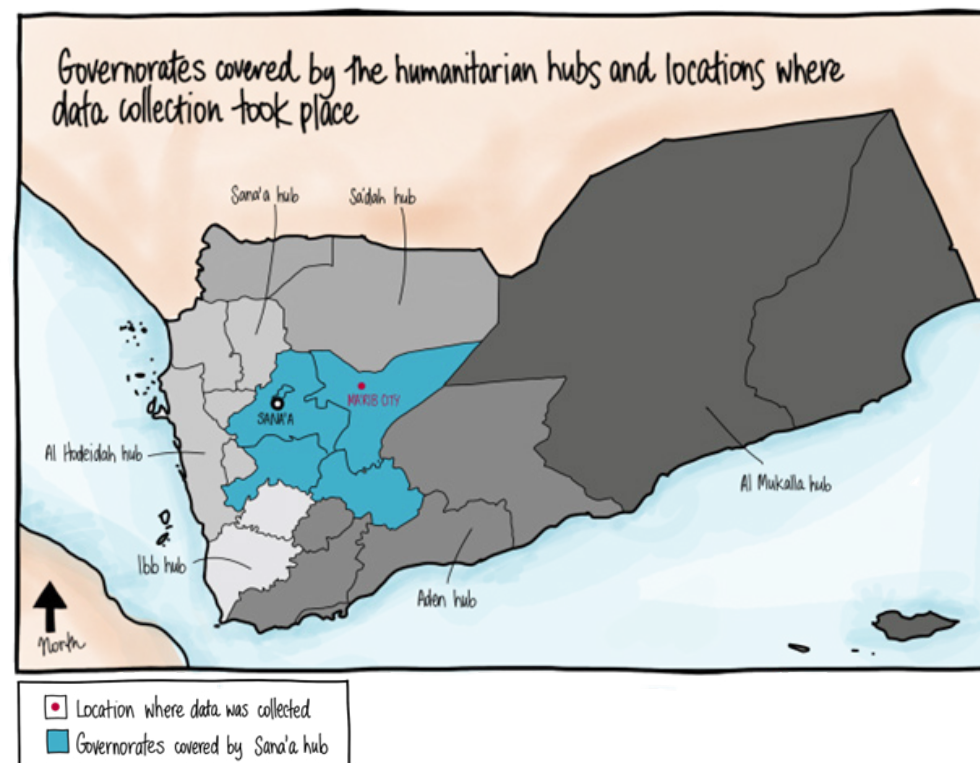
This report is the third in a series of six localised studies. Primary data collected in the different locations aims to identify potential entry points for enabling capacity for broader stability and development outcomes by:

- providing insights into the drivers of multidimensional vulnerability
- highlighting local perceptions about which categories of people are most vulnerable to being unable to meet their needs
- contributing to understanding how people are coping with challenges and meeting their own needs.

This approach is based on the idea that understanding how households meet their needs can inform ways of enhancing these capacities, avoiding their degradation, and, where appropriate, providing alternatives to strategies that may have negative outcomes.

The localised approach aims to identify location-specific causes and manifestations of vulnerability and to improve understandings of how people face these issues. Understanding the causes of vulnerability and available capacities by location may reveal differences that can inform programming, making interventions more context-specific and impactful. The areas selected for the studies are based on the location of the humanitarian hubs established for coordinating the response in Yemen. This study reflects findings from Ma'rib City.

Map 1. Areas covered by humanitarian hubs in Yemen



Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA (04/06/2018)

KEY FINDINGS

- **People in Ma'rib face vulnerability that is almost always multidimensional and cannot be separated along sectoral lines.** Factors that drive vulnerability affect multiple aspects of people's lives, and vulnerability in one area frequently accompanies vulnerability in others.
- **Six main drivers of vulnerability were identified:**
 - **Economic conditions** are linked to price inflation, with respondents highlighting food price increases and expensive housing as their primary economic concerns.
 - **Mass displacement** contributes to competition over services and housing. Displacement has also resulted in loss of civil documentation, further challenging aid access.
 - **Housing access** is another concern, with limited housing stock and significant competition due to the city's massive recent growth. Many families are unable to find homes, and those who do struggle to pay the high rent prices demanded by landlords. Some renters are forced to pay a full year's rent upfront.
 - **Education gaps**, including those driven by displacement and overcrowding in government schools, aggravate inequalities based on displacement and gender norms, with girls experiencing worse access to education.
 - **Conflict-driven insecurity** stemming from Ma'rib's proximity to conflict front lines. Despite a general reduction in heavy fighting since 2022, respondents noted a fear of kidnapping and being caught in the crossfire.
 - **Climate and environmental risks**, including extreme heat and sand and dust storms, complicate work conditions and aggravate respiratory illnesses, posing a particular threat to older people.
- **People rely heavily on family as a source of support.** Neighbours are seldom relied on, and respondents described the fraying of traditional social bonds, including the breakup of families, linked to mass displacement.
- **Tribal mediation** and social support by the neighbourhood aqil are important conflict-mediation and problem-solving mechanisms that have contributed to Ma'rib's relative stability despite the absorption of a large IDP population from across Yemen.
- **Humanitarian assistance can foster greater social cohesion.** Respondents identified both a need and a desire for activities to break down barriers between groups.
- **Six groups were consistently identified as most vulnerable to having unmet basic needs in Ma'rib.** Individuals may belong to one or more of these groups simultaneously.
 - **IDPs** comprise the majority of Ma'rib's population and face pronounced barriers to accessing education, state services, aid, and transportation.
 - **Al Muhamasheen** face multidimensional vulnerability given social norms and economic conditions, which limit their potential to generate income and leave them exposed to greater environmental risk.
 - **People with disabilities** are particularly vulnerable given reduced access to healthcare services and limited freedom of movement.
 - **Older people** are highly vulnerable to climate and environmental risks, particularly heat.
 - **Asylum seekers and refugees from outside Yemen** face reduced access to the labour market and services, including education, because of discrimination and linguistic difficulties.
 - **Women** face mobility restrictions and limited freedom of movement, underpinned by restrictive gender norms and restricted access to some sources of capacity, such as financial capital.

Aim

This analysis intends to support the planning and implementation of humanitarian assistance by enhancing the understanding of the factors affecting the overall vulnerability of people in Ma'rib and their capacity to meet their own needs. This report is intended to be a tool to support the identification of programmatic entry points by providing insights on three questions.

What are the main drivers of vulnerability?

Which categories of people are perceived to be at a heightened risk of vulnerability (i.e. those that are most likely to have unmet basic needs)?

What capacity do people and communities have to overcome vulnerability?

Table 1. Definitions of concepts used in the report

KEY CONCEPTS	
Vulnerability	This research defines vulnerability as a situation in which people are likely to have their basic needs unmet, experience harm, or have their interests overlooked (ICRC 01/03/2018).
Multidimensional vulnerability	Multidimensional vulnerability describes a state of vulnerability existing across more than one of the dimensions of vulnerability considered in this analysis. In this report, it describes the way in which vulnerability in one area has an impact on vulnerability in others.
Category (of people)	Here, we use categories of people to refer to individuals similar to one another in a certain way – e.g. having the same ethnicity, gender, religion, or nationality. We use it to differentiate between a category of people and a social group, which refers to “two or more people who regularly interact on the basis of mutual expectations and who share a common identity” (UC Davis accessed 14/03/2024). People may be in the same category, e.g. women, and not necessarily have common beliefs or ideas.
Capacity	Capacity in this report describes the resources, tools, knowledge, or structures used to overcome a circumstance of vulnerability.
Resilience	Resilience is the capacity to withstand, overcome, or circumvent the conditions shocks of any kind can bring about (OCHA 11/05/2013).
Basic needs	Basic needs is a term often used in refugee and displacement contexts, and it references access to protection and other “basic services and assistance in health, nutrition, WASH, food, shelter, energy, education, domestic items, and specialised services for people with specific needs” (UNHCR 20/04/2017). As well as, protection.
Safety net	Safety net indicates a system of informal support at the local level based on social connections and understood by those included (FIC 04/2022).

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BACKGROUND

Ma'rib City

This analysis is based on data collected in Ma'rib City from December 2023 to early January 2024. Ma'rib City lies in the eastern half of the OCHA-designated Sana'a operational hub, which is divided by conflict front lines. Only eastern Ma'rib governorate is under the uncontested control of forces aligned with the Internationally Recognized Government of Yemen (IRG). The mountain highlands and Yemen's international capital, Sana'a, in the west are under the control of the de-facto authority (DFA) (also known as the Houthis), as is much of the rest of the area. DFA advances threatened Ma'rib City in 2021 but were halted after a counteroffensive in 2022 by the United Arab Emirates-backed Southern Giants Brigade. These confrontations solidified the current front lines, making Ma'rib City and the east of the resource-rich governorate the last bastion of IRG control in Yemen's north (ACLEDA accessed 08/04/2024).

Founded around 3,000 years ago, Ma'rib City is one of the fastest-growing urban centres in the Arab region thanks to its relative stability, making it a safe haven for IDPs from elsewhere in Yemen. This stability is a result of a constellation of factors, the most important being the presence of extensive gas reserves in the governorate's eastern deserts. This, along with inclusive, tribally led governance, Saudi investment, and a growing tax base from new business formation, has allowed Ma'rib City to maintain service provision and the payment of public sector salaries throughout the war (UN-Habitat 03/2021). Of the estimated 687,800 people in Ma'rib as at 15 April, almost 645,900 were IDPs – up from an estimated 40,000 in 2014 – creating unique challenges for services, social cohesion and integration, and governance and aid delivery (OCHA 30/06/2023; UN-Habitat 03/2021).

Methodology

This report is based on an analysis of primary data collected from December 2023 to early January 2024, supplemented by, and triangulated with, secondary data and expert opinions where possible. Primary data collection was through semi-structured interviews with respondents representing their households, focus group discussions (FGDs) with men and women from the communities, and semi-structured interviews with individuals about experiences in their communities. Respondents were selected purposively to focus on groups and categories of people understood from pre-existing research to be at high risk of having unmet basic needs. Data was collected in person in Ma'rib City.

Table 2. Summary of primary data collection methods and samples

PRIMARY DATA SOURCE	NUMBER	DETAILS, INCLUDING INDICATIONS OF POSSIBLE VULNERABILITY
Semi-structured household interviews	20 in total	10 household interviews with men 10 household interviews with women 18 IDP households 6 households including a member with a disability 0 households that self-identified as Al Muhamasheen 2 households that self-identified as being economically vulnerable before the war 20 individuals representing approximately 132 individuals (including women, men, girls, and boys based on the average number of household members in Ma'rib according to the most recent data from 2016) (IOM 13/11/2022)
FGDs	10 in total	Approximately 4–5 people per focus group Approximately 45 people in total
Semi-structured interviews with individuals regarding their experiences in their community	5 in total	3 interviews with men 2 interviews with women
Total number of individuals consulted		Overall, approximately 70 individuals in Yemen were consulted in developing this report. The household discussions reflected the experiences of all members of the households, not just the individual responding. Overall, the information reflects the experience of approximately 182 people.

Semi-structured interview guidelines and questionnaires included a combination of open, closed, and ranking questions. The data collection tools were designed to support consistent data collection across locations informed by lessons from previous ACAPS studies and secondary sources. The content of the questions focused on seven key dimensions related to vulnerability relevant across Yemen (Table 3). These dimensions were selected after consultation with aid practitioners and conflict analysts and based on topics that avoided sensitive questions related to gender-based violence and other protection concerns. Information on protection issues was gathered from secondary data sources, including recent gender- and protection-focused reports developed by ACAPS Yemen.

Table 3. Seven key dimensions relating to vulnerability in Yemen

ANALYSIS DIMENSION	ISSUES TO UNDERSTAND
Healthcare access	Has healthcare changed during the conflict? If so, how? Have the changes affected people's capacity to access healthcare? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people have the hardest time accessing health-care (i.e. who are the most vulnerable to reduced healthcare access and unmet needs in relation to health)?
Access to sufficient food (both quality and quantity)	Has food access changed? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people are most vulnerable to not having sufficient food and why?
Education	Has access to education changed in the community (e.g. how do children get to school)? If so, how? Are there any new or existing obstacles preventing children from attending school? Which groups and categories of children are at the most risk of reduced or no access to education, and what barriers do they face?
Freedom of movement and access to transport	Are there barriers to movement and transportation? If so, what are they? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest difficulty in moving freely and why? Do impeded freedom of movement and access to transport affect people's ability to meet basic needs? If so, how?
Access to key utilities (Basic services indicate the key utilities of water, electricity, and communication networks.)	Has access to and the availability of key utilities changed during the conflict? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest difficulty in moving freely and why? Does the reduced access to and availability of key utilities affect people's ability to meet basic needs? If so, how?



Housing and shelter	Have housing and types of dwellings changed during the conflict (e.g. the impact of displacement, household size, etc.)? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest challenges in terms of living conditions and why?
Climate and environmental risk	Have climate or other environmental changes, including natural hazards, affected people's lives? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest challenges related to climate and environmental risk and why?

Limitations and considerations when interpreting findings

This report presents the perspectives of a selected group of Yemeni men and women. Its value lies in the context-specific information provided on the specific locations covered. It can inform further assessments and support the granular analysis required for programme design. The report may also provide insights relevant to categories of people and communities living under similar conditions. The report is not intended to be representative of all locations or populations covered by the Sana'a humanitarian hub, and localised protection analysis is required to inform implementation in other areas. As a qualitative study of perceptions based on a small purposive sample, the data is not necessarily representative and cannot be disaggregated by group.

It should be noted that the groups and categories of people used in this report are not rigidly defined and can overlap. They should not be interpreted as monolithic or fixed.

This report is based on data collected prior to the hostility escalations in Yemen over the Red Sea maritime shipping blockade. As a result, this report does not address the potential future impacts of hostilities should they continue or escalate (WFP 18/01/2024).

DRIVERS OF VULNERABILITY

Single-sector humanitarian action is not sufficient to address multidimensional vulnerability. Multiple factors drive vulnerability, and vulnerability in one area often leads to vulnerability in others. Challenging economic conditions lie at the heart of households being unable to meet needs. At the same time, the strategies that households use to address needs in one dimension can contribute to vulnerability in another. This points to the need for multisectoral programming and area-based approaches that address household and community circumstances holistically, not in silos built around individual sectors.

Respondents indicated five main drivers of multidimensional vulnerability in Ma'rib City:

- economic conditions, including food and goods prices and a work shortage
- mass displacement

- housing access challenges
- gaps in the education system
- climate and environmental risk
- social norms.

Deteriorating economic conditions, including rising food and housing costs

Deteriorating economic conditions have long been recognised as among the foremost challenges facing Yemenis, with currency depreciation and intense inflation among the most significant and widely observed factors worsening humanitarian needs. In large part because of a 300% rise in food prices in the past five years, Ma'rib is classified as facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity levels (Action for Humanity et al. 02/10/2023; NRC 08/12/2023; IPC 05/02/2024). Although Ma'rib has experienced relative economic stability compared to other parts of Yemen, the rising cost of goods, including food, is a major concern. As a result, Yemenis have resorted to adjusting their food consumption by eating less and lower-quality food, often prioritising children's nutritional needs, relying on credit, and resorting to coping strategies with potentially detrimental consequences, such as child labour and the sale of assets (ACAPS 09/02/2024). When reflecting on the situation in Ma'rib City, respondents identified food affordability as a major factor driving vulnerability. All 20 household-level respondents identified food costs as among their most significant household expenditures; 12 also selected healthcare. 15 of 20 households indicated that the primary way they coped with increased food prices was by eating less expensive foods. This is in line with findings across Yemen that rising food costs, not limited availability, are driving food insecurity (REACH accessed 15/04/2024; WFP 08/04/2024; IPC 05/02/2024).

The high prices of goods and limited income were also identified as drivers of vulnerability in numerous dimensions of analysis. Research conducted by IOM's DTM in September 2022 found that less than half (45%) of IDPs in Ma'rib reported working (IOM 13/11/2022). One FGD participant said that the most important factor in meeting needs is "the presence of a source of income and finding labour to ensure the family's essential needs are met" (FGD 29/12/2023). Similarly, another said that families experiencing economic vulnerability are among the most vulnerable because they are unable to afford essential goods (FGD 01/01/2024). FGD participants also identified high costs as a factor preventing access to civil documentation (FGD 29/12/2023). Cost was also identified as a barrier to accessing housing and healthcare services, with 15 of 20 household-level respondents saying that they delayed care as a coping strategy to overcome high costs.

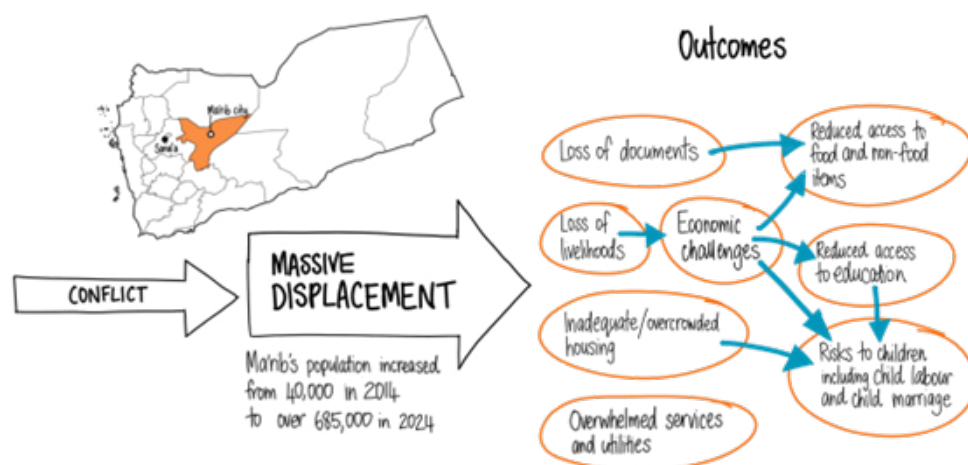
Yemeni households often take out loans and purchase essential items on credit (Nevola 2015; ACAPS 22/05/2022). That said, only 4 of 20 household-level respondents in Ma'rib identified

paying off debt as a major household expense, and few research respondents referenced debt, either as a coping strategy in itself or as a burden because of debt load. This may be because of several factors, including the social fragmentation described by respondents, the preponderance of IDPs in Ma'rib, and the relatively robust presence of aid organisations.

Mass displacement

IDPs comprise more than 93% of Ma'rib City's population, straining existing public services, aid resources, and social ties (ACLEDA accessed 08/04/2024). Respondents consistently identified displacement as a major driver of vulnerability for both IDPs and members of the host community (given the knock-on effects of displacement). Among IDPs, the loss of vital records and civil documentation because of displacement and conflict is a major driver of vulnerability, affecting access to education, aid, services, and housing, as well as freedom of movement (KII 23/12/2023; KII 26/12/2023; KII 29/12/2023; FGD 30/12/2024; Protection Cluster et al. 15/01/2024). One participant explained that IDPs were especially vulnerable to issues related to documentation because of the risks and difficulties they faced in returning to governorate centres to renew lost, damaged, or destroyed documents (FGD 01/01/2024). The consequences of lack of documentation can be severe. One participant said that people wounded in war who lacked the necessary documentation to cross checkpoints or travel abroad to access medical care could face "death or the amputation of limbs" (FGD 29/12/2023).

Figure 1. Conflict and displacement are considered major drivers of vulnerability



Source: ACAPS

Other effects of mass displacement include the lack of social cohesion given the influx of people from other regions, the strain on existing resources, and difficulties around socially integrating such a large IDP population (KII 23/12/2023). One FGD participant explained: "Communities have been shattered by displacement and the erosion of infrastructure and the general economy" (FGD 29/12/2023). The large IDP presence in Ma'rib has strained services, specifically healthcare and education, while the limited availability of housing has created competition and spiralling prices. Making matters worse for individual households, some IDPs described protracted displacement approaching a decade in duration, testing families' capacity to endure shocks given the length of time they have practised various coping strategies (FGD 01/01/2024).

Housing access challenges

Access to housing is a major concern that respondents identified consistently. They noted that suitable houses are in short supply. This is compounded by competition given the large number of renters and the influx of IDPs into the governorate. As a result, housing costs have increased and become one of the three household expenses most identified by household-level respondents; among the respondents who provided a response, rent accounted for 57% of their monthly household income, and 7 of 12 renters said they did not pay their rent on time.

The challenge of finding suitable housing poses social cohesion and exploitation concerns. Respondents said landlords were suspicious of tenants and fearful of non-payment, sometimes requiring tenants to pay at least six months or sometimes a year of rent upfront (FGD 30/12/2023). Many are unable to pay landlords either considerable upfront costs or high rent prices. As a result, many renters accumulate rent debts that they are unable to pay because of limited income generation opportunities (KII 28/12/2023). Eviction has become more common, and respondents say they borrow money to cover upfront rental costs, temporarily resort to tents while searching for a home, or seek the intervention of an aqil as an informal guarantor (KII 26/12/2023). Some respondents said that suitable shelter was simply unaffordable, driving residents to reduce the cost of housing by seeking shelter in camps, downsizing to smaller homes, or moving their businesses to smaller or less expensive locations, a coping strategy likely to affect their income potential (FGD 29/12/2023; UN-Habitat 03/2021). Another strategy adopted to reduce spending on rent is living with family members, which reduces financial costs but creates other challenges, such as public health risks and reduced privacy (Chipeta et al. 03/08/2022). Among the FGD participants, as many as seven families shared a single dwelling.

IDPs face particular housing risks because of the precarious shelter stock. An estimated 38% of displaced people lived in 278 IDP sites across the governorate. In the governorate as a whole, IDPs predominantly comprised women, children, and older people, and long-term shelter solutions have struggled to keep pace with the most challenging localised displacement conditions in the country (Protection Cluster et al. 13/08/2023).

Gaps in the education system

Overcrowding at government schools and variable education access among different student populations are key drivers of multidimensional vulnerability in Ma'rib City. The barrier to education access most frequently noted by household-level respondents was school overcrowding, attributed to IDP influx. This was noted by all semi-structured interview respondents and participants in at least one FGD (FGD 29/12/2023). Access also hinges on families' access to financial capital; one FGD participant explained that children's ability to attend school "depends on the families' capabilities and living conditions". Another noted that school supplies are too expensive for families with limited incomes or multiple children (FGD 01/01/2023). Improved and expanded facilities and more incentives to recruit qualified teachers are measures that have been proposed to boost outcomes in the education sector (BFD et al. 09/04/2022).

Students who struggle to access school face a range of negative potential outcomes. Respondents were divided on whether boys or girls were more at risk of not attending school. Those who said that boys faced greater difficulty accessing education noted that financial pressure forces boys to drop out in order to contribute to household incomes (KII 28/12/2023). By contrast, two semi-structured interview respondents said that girls had a harder time accessing education because of customs, traditions, and the pressure for early marriage (KII 23/12/2023 a; KII 23/12/2023 b). It is estimated that 9% of Yemeni girls marry by the age of 15 and 32% by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides accessed 08/04/2023). One participant said that girls in Ma'rib are generally educated until grade six, while boys are generally enrolled until grade nine. Gender-based barriers may also overlap with other drivers of multidimensional vulnerability. For instance, several respondents noted that girls' schools are located at greater distances from their homes, making it harder for them to attend school given poor roads, transit conditions, and insecurity. Another participant said that girls' access to school "varies from tribe to tribe, region to region" (FGD 29/12/2023). Many participants said that school-age children also faced enrolment challenges because of the loss of birth certificates and other vital documents (FGD 29/12/2023; FGD 30/12/2023; FGD 01/01/2024). One participant noted that some students struggled in school because of language barriers, likely a reference to migrants and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa who may not speak Arabic (FGD 29/12/2023).

Conflict-related insecurity and instability

Ma'rib governorate witnessed heavy fighting from 2021–2022, and respondents consistently identified conflict-related insecurity as a driver of multidimensional vulnerability. Conflict conditions across the country are the primary driver of displacement, a major factor in vulnerability in Ma'rib. Within Ma'rib City, one FGD participant said that camps used by IDPs are "constantly exposed to the danger of stray bullets because of the war". The same participant said that such living conditions get in the way of psychological stability, a view echoed by another participant who described fear and concern over the war as primary concerns, suggesting the utility of mental health and psychosocial support for affected populations (FGD 29/12/2023). Assassinations and targeted attacks on armed groups outside Ma'rib City are also a pronounced concern (KII 07/04/2024). One participant noted that fear of kidnapping leads them to "walk the children halfway to school to ensure they're safe from danger" (FGD 29/12/2023). Clashes in Ma'rib governorate also often overlap with inter-tribal conflict. Although tribal mediation is critical to the region's overall stability, lower-level disputes have been identified as a cause of security incidents that interrupt mobility and transportation access throughout the wider Ma'rib region (KII 23/12/2023 a; KII 23/12/2023 b; KII 26/12/2023 c).

Climate and environmental risk

Respondents in Ma'rib City indicated that climate and environmental risks are significant drivers of vulnerability, with a particular emphasis on health impacts. 17 of 20 household-level respondents said that their most significant environmental concern was extreme heat, 14 said sand and dust storms, and 10 said flooding. These findings were echoed in the FGDs and semi-structured interviews. More than three-quarters of household-level respondents said that health impacts were the most important consequence of environmental challenges. One FGD participant described the multidimensional effects of extreme heat and sand and dust storms, including lost income because of work interruptions, difficulty breathing, and the aggravation of underlying health conditions, such as asthma (FGD 30/12/2024). The consequences of climate and environmental risk do not affect all populations equally. Two respondents said that summer heat increases the risk of fire from faulty wiring and inadequate electricity provision in IDP-heavy areas (KII 23/12/2024 a; KII 28/12/2024). Similarly, while flooding was not reported to be a concern for people living in stone houses, it greatly affects those with mud homes or tents (FGD 29/12/2023). Another participant said that IDPs and AI Muhamasheen bear most of the impact of environmental risks (FGD 29/12/2023; ACTED et al. 21/03/2023). This reflects the findings of previous research indicating that IDPs and AI Muhamasheen are more likely to reside in substandard housing conditions or marginal areas outside urban centres (ACAPS 14/04/2023). Other respondents suggested that those

with limited access to financial capital suffer the most. Two semi-structured interview respondents said that they coped with vulnerability resulting from climate risk through ad hoc and improvised measures, including shelter rehabilitation and home remedies for the health effects of extreme temperatures (Household interview 24/12/2023 a; Household interview 24/12/2023 b). That said, half of the household-level respondents said that they sought support from aid entities, civil society organisations, or other stakeholders to cope with environmental shocks.

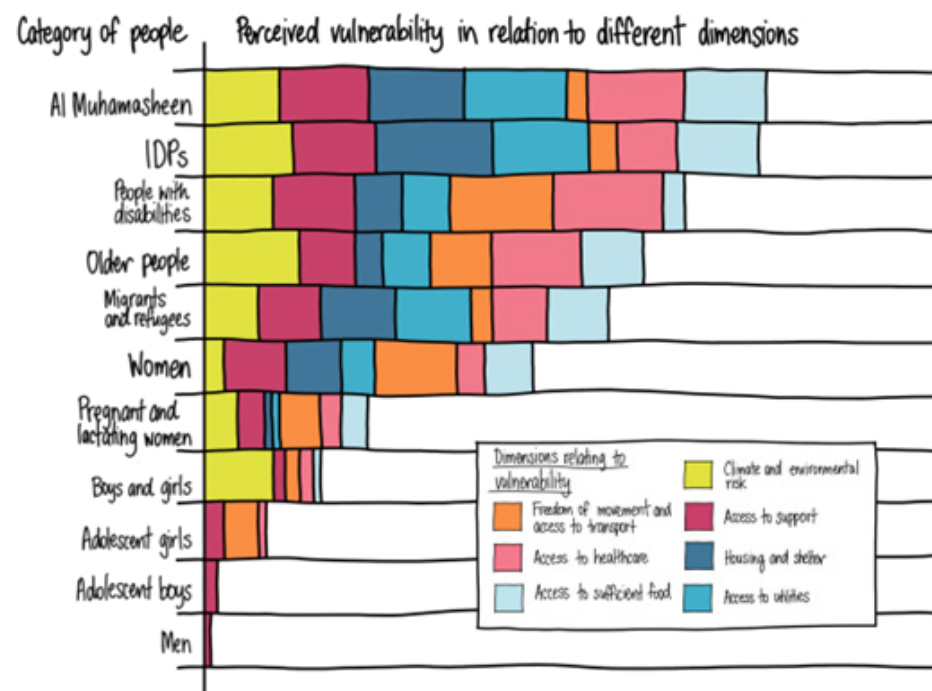
CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE PERCEIVED TO BE MOST VULNERABLE

Underlying social hierarchies, disparities based on displacement or social status, and divergent access to sources of capacity mean that the drivers of vulnerability discussed above do not affect all individuals and groups equally. Household-level respondents consistently identified the following categories of people as the most vulnerable in Ma'rib City:

- IDPs
- Al Muhamasheen
- people with disabilities
- older people
- asylum seekers and refugees from outside Yemen
- women and girls.

All segments of Yemeni society face drivers of multidimensional vulnerability, and the categorisations above are not exhaustive. The section below analyses the most significant contributions to multidimensional vulnerability among the groups most frequently identified by respondents as most vulnerable. For each of the key dimensions used to frame the analysis, household-level respondents were provided with a list of different categories of people. Some of these categories purposefully overlapped to dissect the extent to which age and gender affected perceptions of vulnerability. The respondents were then asked to identify up to five categories they considered most vulnerable to not having their basic needs met for each of the key dimensions. Although education access was included as a dimension of analysis for data collection purposes, it was excluded from the overall analysis, as it applied only to school-age children and families with children. The impact of gender norms on school access for children is discussed below.

Figure 2. Categories of people perceived to be most vulnerable in relation to different dimensions



Source: ACAPS

Figure 1 shows the comparative vulnerability of groups identified by the household-level respondents in Ma'rib City across the key dimensions of analysis. It represents a consolidation of the perceptions of a small sample and does not account for intersecting vulnerabilities, such as the fact that some people are members of multiple categories (e.g. a displaced adolescent girl with a disability or an older Muhamasheen man).

IDPs

Displacement status is a key driver of multidimensional vulnerability in Ma'rib City. Household-level respondents identified IDPs as the most vulnerable in terms of shelter and food access (the ranking exercise placed them as equally vulnerable as AI Muhamasheen in this area).

FGD participants and semi-structured interview respondents consistently identified displacement as the most significant driver of multidimensional vulnerability, and it affects by far the greatest number of people; more than 93% of Ma'rib City's population are IDPs. Many of these IDPs have fled from DFA-controlled areas adjoining Ma'rib's west and north. Shelter access is inhibited by the limited supply of homes and the proliferation of displacement sites, while available properties are often priced out of reach for IDPs, who face the additional burden of lost documentation required for renting a home (FGD 01/01/2024). IDPs, in many cases, face the additional economic impact of losing essential household furnishings, mattresses, and other items, leading several research participants to indicate that support for shelter and household items for IDPs is needed on a mass scale (KII 23/12/2023; KII 26/12/2023; KII 29/12/2023). As with shelter, food access is hampered by a lack of income because of limited work opportunities, a factor mentioned in seven FGDs.

The severe documentation challenges outlined above are among the consequences of conditions that prevent IDPs from safely crossing the front lines to acquire new documentation (UN-Habitat 03/2021). As a result of displacement-related documentation challenges, IDPs face barriers accessing education, state services, and aid, as well as limited freedom of movement, contributing to greater multidimensional vulnerability among the displaced. Respondents said that displaced families faced pressure related to separation – as main breadwinners go abroad or elsewhere in Yemen for work – with one FGD participant saying: “The most important challenge that faces [displaced] families is to remain resilient” despite the breakup of families across conflict lines and nine years of displacement (FGD 30/12/2023).

AI Muhamasheen

Social norms affecting livelihood access and social status play a role in the multidimensional vulnerability of AI Muhamasheen. In Ma'rib City, household-level respondents identified AI Muhamasheen as the most vulnerable category in relation to three key dimensions of analysis – more than any other group – with related factors driving vulnerability in:

- access to services
- access to support
- access to food (in which they were equally vulnerable as IDPs).

Social exclusion is an important factor in the vulnerability of AI Muhamasheen, with one semi-structured interview respondent describing AI Muhamasheen as particularly vulnerable because of the lack of societal acceptance (KII 23/12/2023 b). Another respondent noted that essential services rarely catered to AI Muhamasheen, leading to their needs being ignored (KII 23/12/2023 a). Another said that AI Muhamasheen had greater difficulty accessing support and aid because of limited social connections (KII 29/12/2023). Notably, several FGD participants described the shelter conditions facing AI Muhamasheen and IDPs in similar terms, characterising both categories as vulnerable because they lacked permanent housing and, in some cases, lived in temporary tents and other shelter conditions (FGD 23/12/2023; KII 26/12/2023; KII 28/12/2023). There was also the perception that climate and environmental risks greatly affected AI Muhamasheen, who are exposed to additional vulnerability because of challenging shelter conditions (FGD 23/12/2023; FGD 29/12/2023).

People with disabilities

Disability status can significantly affect a person's multidimensional vulnerability. In Ma'rib City, household-level respondents identified people with disabilities as the most vulnerable category in terms of healthcare access and mobility and freedom of movement.

More than 4.8 million Yemenis have a disability. The IRG is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but momentum to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities has been lost since the escalation of hostilities in 2015. The term 'disability' encompasses a broad spectrum, so not all people with disabilities are automatically extremely vulnerable. More targeted research is needed to assess vulnerability related to disability status. That said, it is clear that disability status has a pronounced impact on mobility and access to aid and services; 81% of Yemenis with disabilities surveyed in 2022 said that they were unable to reach humanitarian services (HI 23/05/2022). Physical, economic, and social barriers prevent people with disabilities from meeting their basic needs, impinging on their capacity to earn money and contribute to the household financially, in many cases increasing their dependence on a family member or neighbours.

Healthcare access and transportation access overlap. For instance, one respondent from a household that included a person with a disability explained that to cope with challenges around accessing healthcare, particularly the cost of travelling to medical facilities, the family “seeks medical alternatives, such as folk medicine” (Household interview 26/12/2023). Specific transportation challenges for people with disabilities included the lack of fully developed transport networks. Respondents described difficulties because of the distance between their homes or destinations and the bus routes in the public transit system (KII 23/12/2023). That said, one respondent observed that passengers generally provided assistance to people with disabilities travelling on public transport (KII 28/12/2023).

Children with special needs face particular barriers to accessing education. One respondent said that although students with special needs can attend school, they generally do not do so beyond grade six (KII 28/12/2023). Limited educational access for students with physical or mental disabilities compounds the challenges they face given a lack of access to the job market; prior to the conflict, as many as 50% of Yemeni students with disabilities did not attend school because of shortcomings in available resources and teaching methodologies (OHCHR 03/12/2022).

Older people

Among household-level respondents in Ma'rib City, older people were perceived as being among the more vulnerable groups in all dimensions of analysis. They were considered the most vulnerable in one dimension: climate and environmental risk.

Older people are estimated to make up 4.7% of Yemen's population and are particularly vulnerable to unmet basic needs because of reduced income opportunities and access to essential services (HelpAge 27/03/2023). This is particularly salient in the case of health services, including medication, which rising costs have affected. Older people were perceived as being at an elevated risk of medical and other complications because of the specific climate risks in Ma'rib, specifically intense heat and sand and dust storms. That said, respondents offered limited information regarding other factors driving vulnerability in this category.

Asylum seekers and refugees from outside Yemen

Household-level respondents and FGD participants frequently cited asylum seekers and refugees from outside Yemen as among the most vulnerable categories of people. Asylum seekers and refugees reaching Yemen via Ethiopia or from other crossings via the Red Sea are generally recognised as being highly vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and arbitrary treatment by all parties in Yemen (HRW 07/12/2022). Many become stuck in Yemen while seeking safe passage to labour markets in the Arab Gulf. Attempts to cross into Saudi Arabia at Yemen's northern border are often met with violent resistance by Saudi border forces, who have a history of opening fire on those seeking to enter the country (KII 07/04/2024; HRW 07/12/2022).

Household-level respondents identified asylum seekers and refugees as among the most vulnerable categories in several dimensions of analysis. One respondent noted that asylum seekers are especially vulnerable because of their limited social acceptance and lack of social networks (KII 23/12/2023). Another respondent stated: "There is no overcoming [their vulnerability]... It has become unavoidable except for them to adapt and accept, to practice

patience, and endure the situation" (KII 29/12/2023). Such factors create pressure on asylum seekers, who face difficulties in accessing services, including education and the labour market.

Women and girls

Gender norms have a pronounced impact on vulnerability across Yemen, with women and girls facing challenges and risks because of socially constructed norms regarding their gender and the resulting expectations. In Ma'rib City, research participants frequently identified norms that drive vulnerability based on gender, including norms surrounding labour and household responsibilities. For instance, one female household-level respondent displaced from Sana'a said that the most severe challenge for her household was "the head of the household's absence and his distance from the family" (Household interview 27/12/2023). She explained that the male household head was working abroad and remitting income. Although these remittances were a vital financial lifeline for the family, his absence was a source of difficulty both socially and emotionally and limited mobility for female household members. The displacement dynamics of Ma'rib also contribute significantly to the multidimensional pressures facing women and girls, as single women head half of all IDP households (IOM accessed 15/04/2024).

Gendered social norms also contribute to keeping women from undertaking income-generating activities outside the home and prevent girls from accessing education. For women, access to workplaces and government centres – needed to renew civil documentation – is inhibited by the need for a Mahram or male guardian. Among girls, education access was widely perceived as being worse than for boys, especially in the case of displaced families (FGD 29/12/2023). Respondents said that girls' schools were harder to reach by foot, while girls themselves faced barriers in the form of economic and social pressure for early marriage (KII 23/12/2023 b; KII 23/12/2023 c). Girls may also experience reduced education access based on gender roles in the home. One FGD participant explained that women and girls were expected to draw water from distant wells or buy it from shops when it is not available nearer to the home, reducing the time available for other activities, including paid labour or education (FGD 30/12/2023).

Limitations on women's ability to access key support mechanisms and income generation opportunities are confirmed by other research on gender roles in Yemen (ACAPS 11/04/2023). This means that if anything happens to male household members, such as injury, death, or absence from the family, women's vulnerability may increase. The negative impact of reduced economic opportunities on women's subsequent security has been observed in the broader context of Yemen (ACAPS 23/11/2023, 30/08/2023, and 11/04/2023).

FACTORS AFFECTING LOCAL CAPACITIES TO OVERCOME MULTIDIMENSIONAL VULNERABILITIES

Communities, households, and individuals employ a range of strategies to meet their needs, some of which include relying on various social support systems or safety nets. The degree to which people can use these to meet needs and mitigate vulnerability in one or more areas depends on many factors, including the number of safety nets people have at their disposal, their robustness, how they may have changed, the number of other people relying on them, and the depth and type of need being addressed. This is in line with other research that highlights the importance of social networks and social capital in Yemen (ACAPS 09/02/2024).

Access to social capital

Respondents in Ma'rib City consistently described social networks as critical to survival, providing greater access to in-kind resources, such as food and money, improving households' access to aid, and addressing the drivers of multidimensional vulnerability.

Family was the most commonly identified source of capacity by household-level respondents. 12 of 20 household-level respondents said that family was a key source of support. One FGD participant explained: "A relative who owns a farm invited us to erect tents and eat his produce; he hosted us despite the losses he suffered" (FGD 29/12/2023). On that note, respondents consistently said that a lack of familiarity with neighbours prevented people from working together to collectively solve problems. Another respondent described the harmful effects of "social disintegration among the city population" (KII 23/12/2023). These perceptions are explained by Ma'rib City's overwhelming majority-IDP population. That said, the respondents did express a general willingness to take part in collective action and suggested that community-based initiatives that foster greater cooperation are possible (KII 23/12/2024; KII 24/12/2024).

Respondents cited the importance of traditional mediation forms, with several noting that the aqil, a neighbourhood authority with religious responsibilities, acts as a mediator: "People go to the sheikh or the aqil of the area to solve [problems]" (Household interview 28/12/2023). Tribal mediation is also perceived as critical to overcoming disputes. One respondent explained, "During tribal conflict in the region, community committees are formed among tribal sheikhs and key figures in conjunction with local powers and work toward solving the problems" (KII 23/12/2023). Ma'rib City's host population is predominantly tribal in character, and the involvement of tribes in day-to-day governance, resource allocation, and mediation has been credited with preserving the relative calm that has made the region attractive to Yemenis displaced from other parts of the country (UN-Habitat 03/2021). IDPs may not have the same level of access to tribal mediation as the host community, a factor that reduces their

ability to withstand shocks, but other systems of dispute resolution also exist among their communities. These systems include camp committees, while tribal leaders are sometimes displaced with the broader communities, keeping the social structure intact (KII 23/12/2023).

Access to livelihoods and labour markets

Respondents frequently associated capacity with access to income. At least seven FGD participants specifically described work (or the lack thereof) as necessary for overcoming vulnerability (or driving it). One respondent described his household's capacity in the following way: "We beg God and we do any work [we can]" (Household interview 25/12/2023). Another described a general demand for economic and livelihood support, including skills training and economic empowerment (KII 28/12/2023). Given the emphasis placed on financial challenges as a driver of multidimensional vulnerability, it is unsurprising that respondents indicated a strong desire to improve their economic conditions through access to the labour market and remittances from work abroad (Household interview 27/12/2023). The pressure to increase labour income also has potentially negative impacts. Respondents frequently mentioned the pressure for boys to withdraw from school to contribute to the household income. One respondent said that some households send their sons to the army despite their age to meet the household's financial needs (Household interview 25/12/2023). Similarly, girls face pressure to leave school and marry at a young age to reduce household expenses (KII 23/12/2023). People who leave school and begin work early may be confined to unskilled, low-wage jobs in the future. Prevailing social norms also restrict certain categories of people, including women, people with disabilities, older people, IDPs, and Al Muhamasheen, from accessing all parts of the labour market, particularly high-prestige jobs. For instance, many Muhamasheen in Ma'rib City work in construction, a sector which has remained relatively robust, although first-hand accounts indicate that the wages are modest. IDPs who are not Al Muhamasheen also enjoy greater access to labour, particularly if they have prior valuable work experience or higher social status (UN-Habitat 03/2021).