

Social impact monitoring report: October–December 2022

OVERVIEW

The six-month truce between the Internationally Recognized Government of Yemen (IRG) and the de-facto authority (DFA) in the north of Yemen (also known as the Houthis) ended on 2 October 2022. From October–December, conflict incidents did not re-escalate, and international stakeholders continued to lead diplomatic efforts towards renewing the truce (OSESGY 02/10/2022).

A data review reveals that social control, regional and global economic conditions, deteriorating access to healthcare, and reduced purchasing power were key drivers of humanitarian needs in Yemen throughout the reporting period. These factors are not new, and although they affected all Yemenis to a degree, groups such as women, children, people with chronic illnesses, and Yemeni and non-Yemeni migrant workers felt them more acutely.

This edition of the Social Impact Monitoring Report (SIMP), covering October–December 2022, focuses on the social impact of three areas that we monitored in 2022:

- continuing restrictions on Yemeni women and girls
- reduced access to healthcare
- migrant workers returning from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

About the report

This SIMP report identifies events and themes that emerged from October–December from the information landscape on Yemen that have had, or are likely to have, a social impact. Social impact is broadly defined as the effect on people and communities of a specific action or event or the lack of action to intervene in a situation. The choice of themes was based on the considered significance of their impact (or potential impact) on people. The report aims to support the understanding of the groups and people in Yemen facing the greatest challenges in meeting needs and those most vulnerable to protection concerns.

Limitations

There is limited information available that is directly related to the impact of the conflict on specific groups and categories of people who might be more exposed to certain risks and with specific needs. Most of the available information is qualitative, making it difficult to compare and aggregate data continuously and countrywide. ACAPS accounted for this constraint by structuring the available information and following up or confirming through interviews, consultations with experts, and joint analysis.

Methodology

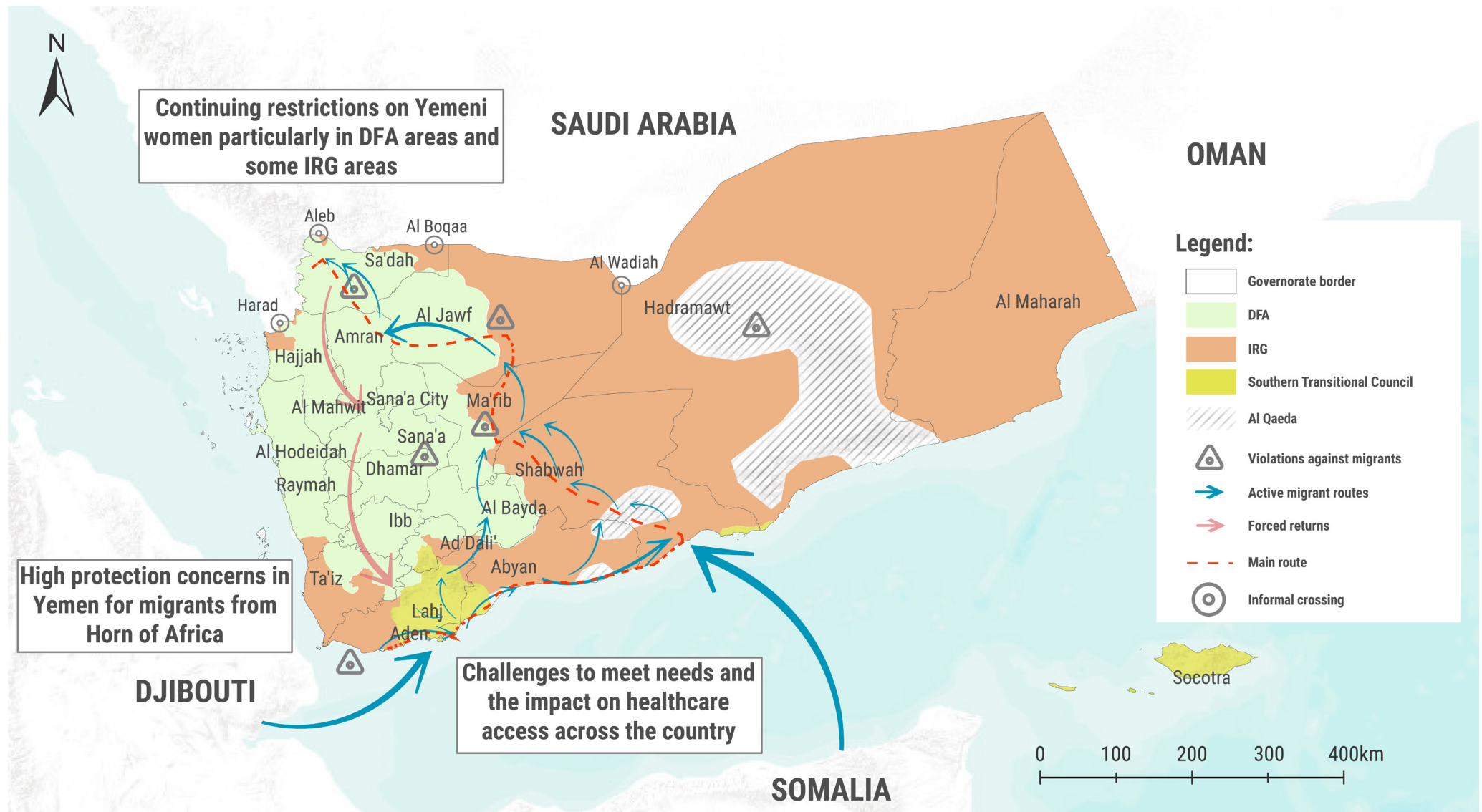
The analysis presented in this report is based on the following:

- the daily monitoring of relevant indicators logged in the ACAPS qualitative database
- analysis data from ACAPS' core dataset
- the secondary data review of documents published in and on Yemen
- key informant interviews and discussions with context experts
- a collection of small case studies through interviews with Yemeni people to capture the impressions and experiences of people living in Yemen. The people who spoke with ACAPS did so voluntarily. Their names have been changed to protect their identities (marked with * throughout the report). Interviews were carried out by phone in Arabic and translated into English.

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YEMEN: EVENTS WITH SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS BETWEEN OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2022



Disclaimer: The boundaries, names, and designation provided on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ACAPS.

Source: ACAPS using data from ISWN (accessed 27/02/2023); IOM (23/10/2022)

THEME 1: CONTINUING RESTRICTIONS ON YEMENI WOMEN AND GIRLS MANIFEST IN THE STRICT ENFORCEMENT OF THE ISLAMIC MALE GUARDIAN (MAHRAM) REQUIREMENT AND THE IMPOSITION OF DRESS CODE RULES.

Key points

- The enforcement of the Mahram requirement, which humanitarians have noted as a concern since 2017, has intensified (AI 01/09/2022).
- Women cannot travel without a Mahram across all DFA-controlled areas, including when leaving Yemen from Sana'a airport. Some parts of IRG-controlled areas also insist on Mahram permission for women to travel.
- The DFA have codified Mahram rules for the first time in a document shared with transport providers. This document, from the DFA Ministry of Interior, requires providers to ensure that women travelling on their services comply with the Mahram requirement (KII 01/02/2023).
- The requirements make it almost impossible for women and girls to travel by air or public and private transport without the approval of male family members. These restrictions are extremely problematic for women without supportive male relatives. Even when male relatives are supportive, the requirements create extra administrative and financial burdens for women and girls to travel, making it time-consuming, resource-intensive, and expensive.
- DFA representatives have visited businesses making and selling abayas to instruct them on specific rules related to the design of the garment, which has been limited to being black, long, and devoid of embellishment.

Continuing Mahram restrictions

DFA-controlled areas continue to enforce the Mahram requirement. The requirement bans women from travelling unless accompanied by or without the written approval of a male guardian in governorates under DFA control, including when they travel outside the country from Sana'a airport (AI 01/09/2022). Some influential tribal leaders in IRG-controlled areas have also been enforcing the Mahram requirement, with reports of it being used in Abyan, Lahj, and Ma'rib governorates (OCHA 01/08/2022).

The written consent of a Mahram is not legitimate unless the community leader (the Aqil) or government officials certify the document. Government officials can include the Ministry of Interior for internal travel (between governorates) or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs if travelling outside the country (SCSS 15/01/2023; KII 01/02/2021). There are reports that authorities often

do not accept written consent and typically require the physical presence of a Mahram for a woman to travel (YF 13/11/2022).

In December, DFA authorities released the first document about the Mahram requirement and its implications on travelling for women (KII 01/02/2022; HRW 06/02/2023). The DFA Ministry of Interior shared this document with transportation providers, such as bus companies, so they could adhere to the rules regarding the movement of women. The DFA has not circulated this document publicly. Before the circulation among transport companies, local authorities in DFA-controlled areas were already enforcing the Mahram requirement, but the public had not received clear and uniform written instructions. Sharing this document indicates that the authorities are making travel companies responsible for checking the compliance of passengers, and it is likely that these companies will face consequences if they fail to monitor passengers accordingly. The document explains that women can only travel without a Mahram if they have the appropriate documentation (SCSS 15/01/2023). To travel without a Mahram, women must have documentation indicating that they meet the following criteria:

- are above 50 years old
- have a critical health issue that they are seeking treatment for
- are in the company of their children
- are originally from the south of the country and occasionally travel to the north to visit family and for official work
- have spouses residing outside of Yemen.

While travelling, women must be able to prove their relationship to their accompanying Mahram when required at checkpoints along the journey. If women don't have the required documentation, authorities may detain them until a Mahram with acceptable documentation proving their relationship arrives to collect her. There are reports that women who are thought to be political activists, employees of local or international NGOs, or affiliated with groups opposing the DFA are detained for days. In these cases, they are only released into the supervision of their Mahram after he pays a fine and signs a pledge that it will not happen again (SCSS 15/01/2023; YF 13/11/2022).

Obtaining approval exposes women to protection concerns and incurs costs many households would struggle to afford (ACAPS 03/08/2022). For example, the need for an Aqil to authorise a Mahram's written travel permission exposes travel plans that the family may not want to make public. Obtaining documents and authorisation takes time, which is significant in cases such as medical emergencies, and opens up the possibility for authorities to request payments to facilitate different parts of the process, creating an economic burden on families. Reports indicate that it takes up to ten days to acquire the appropriate documents for a woman to travel (KII 30/01/2023; SCSS 15/01/2023).

Even when women have the appropriate documents, authorities can stop them at checkpoints during travel. These checks create opportunities for harassment and discomfort as armed personnel question them. According to Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies' recent report, women frequently experienced harassment while travelling, with some reporting that they "feel violated" when male police officers searched their purses and suitcases (SCSS 15/01/2023).

Overall, these processes will likely make women and girls hesitant to travel. Given the conservative Yemeni society, they may also make male family members less likely to support their travel plans because of the extra time, effort, and expenses involved and the concern that they will be exposed to protection threats. These changes put women and girls at risk of missing out on healthcare services, humanitarian assistance, and employment opportunities. It also increases the dependency of women and girls on male family members to access goods and services. In turn, this means that women without male family members to represent them in the community are disadvantaged.

ACAPS has discussed the shrinking civil space and reduced freedom for women in previous reports, which can be found [here](#).

A stricter dress code in DFA areas

Movement restrictions are not the only ways the Houthis impose their ideology on women. DFA authorities met in December with proprietors of abaya shops across Sana'a city to present them with directives about the required design of women's attire. The new regulations mandate that only loose-fitting abayas may be sold. The garment must be black and devoid of any embellishment, including frills, embroidery, and lace. The regulations strictly prohibit the production and sale of colourful or shortened versions of the abaya (Al-Monitor 17/01/2023).

DFA authorities have not fully implemented the regulations, and some women continue to wear colourful abayas. More conservative areas, such as Amran, Hajjah, and Sa'dah, have either accepted these new regulations or did not necessitate the need to negotiate them, as women there were already dressing conservatively. In the comparatively more open city of Sana'a, there are signs that even the boldest Yemeni women are beginning to feel pressured to conform to the rules and not draw uncomfortable attention to themselves (KII 30/01/2023).

#YemenIdentity: Yemenis campaign against strict dress code in DFA areas

Once knowledge of the DFA meetings with abaya retailers became public, Yemeni women and men throughout January 2023 began spontaneously posting on social media in Arabic using the hashtag #YemenIdentity. There were approximately 36,000 uses of the hashtag, alongside smiling pictures of Yemeni women wearing traditional outfits from different regions of the country. Some pictures also included men in traditional clothing beside women. The campaign was at its height between 13–16 January (Meltwater accessed 23/02/2023; Arab News accessed 16/01/2023).

"The day we heard about imposing strict measures on abayas, women started to wear colourful abayas more than before to object the restriction."

—Salwa*

While social media may have been a safe place to share these images and to give women in Yemen and abroad the opportunity to peacefully protest the rules, on the streets and in public, it was only in Sana'a that women wore their colourful outfits on the streets (KII 01/02/2023).

THEME 2: REDUCED ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Key points

- Affordability is a main factor in people not accessing healthcare.
- Households are incurring debts and selling important assets to pay for healthcare.
- Hospitals and pharmacies have begun offering credit to people who cannot pay upfront for procedures and medications.
- The new credit system may indicate that there is less social capital to turn to in case of need.

Since the truce commenced in April 2022, the Yemeni rial has remained stable across the country. Despite this, purchasing power remained low, and households struggled to meet basic needs as prices rose. There has been no change in the challenges public sector workers face regarding the irregular payment of salaries, which have not been adjusted to compensate for the increased cost of living (ACAPS accessed 20/02/2023).

Key goods and services continue to become less affordable, and this trend, when combined with additional shocks associated with the war, further exhausts people's coping strategies. One way this manifests in people's lives is through challenged access to healthcare, with households either going without important care and medication or going into debt or selling important assets to afford medical services. The challenges of accessing healthcare, combined with the overall economic situation, mean that many households have stopped seeking healthcare unless it is for an emergency. Reports and observations indicate that many seek healthcare only when the situation is critical, and this often comes too late for the patient to be saved (KII 17/01/2023).

People across the country struggle to access healthcare. Of a population of 31 million, over 20 million Yemenis are predicted to need health assistance in 2023. Shortages of staff, funds, equipment, electricity power, medicine, and other essential supplies are the main reasons that 49% of health facilities are partially functional or non-functional (OCHA 20/12/2022). People face multiple challenges to obtain the healthcare they need, with the main ones being:

- unaffordability because of economic vulnerability
- long distances to health facilities
- the unavailability of specialised medical services, such as burns units, rehabilitation centres, and doctors specialised in autoimmune diseases and cancer.

Yemeni households mentioned the importance of humanitarian assistance to help them meet their basic needs. They do not always consider it sufficient to meet all needs, especially

because of the rising costs of commodities and services. Households indicated the importance of assistance in further addressing healthcare needs (KII 17/01/2023).

"People wait until [their] situation is critical to get healthcare, and sometimes, it is already too late. Since the war started, there has been an increase in people coming to see us once critical illnesses such as cancer and autoimmune diseases have progressed as compared to before the war. In some cases, the facilities and doctors don't have the ability to treat these patients."

"People's purchasing power is weak. When people come to the hospital, they only have money for the consultation with the doctor but not for blood tests or other tests to diagnose the disease or to purchase medication."

—Dr. Samia*

Pharmacies and hospitals are increasingly offering credit services to address health needs. While being embedded in a network of debts and credits is common in Yemen, credit from healthcare providers appears to be new. The system in pharmacies works similarly to the credit that has long been common with small neighbourhood grocery stores, as it is based on personal connections where the pharmacist knows the family and understands their situation and capacity to pay back the debt. In hospitals, people put down an expensive belonging, such as a car, gun, dagger, or a piece of gold, as surety until they can repay medical fees in total. Credit for healthcare makes economic sense for the providers, as much as it is required for the consumers, as it enables these services to continue (KII 15/02/2023). An Oxfam report indicates a 44% increase in debt on credits since the war started in Yemen compared to before the war (OXFAM 18/02/2022; KII 15/02/2023).

"Overall, the economic situation in the country is very dire. Hospitals and pharmacies give people treatment and medication on credit because these businesses need to keep running."

—Dr. Samia*

As businesses, instead of individuals, become the key sources of credit, the repercussions of being unable to repay loans and the longer-term impacts on social structures, social capital, and connectivity are unclear. Reciprocity in supporting one another, lending and borrowing money, sharing food and goods, and participating in important occasions are key features of Yemeni society and of creating and maintaining social capital. The changes may mean that households are less able to help each other and, in turn, that there is less social capital to rely on in times of need.

THEME 3: MIGRANT WORKERS RETURNING FROM THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Key points

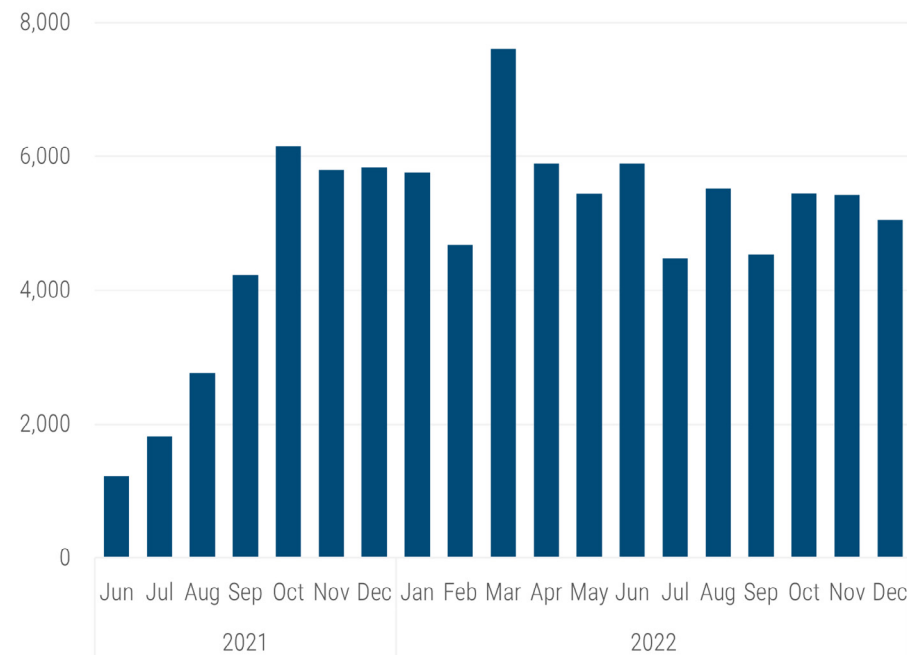
- Economic conditions and changes in work regulations are forcing migrant workers out of the KSA, including Yemenis returning to Yemen and non-Yemenis, mostly from the Horn of Africa.
- Migrant workers and asylum seekers sometimes use dangerous routes through and into Sa'dah governorate, putting them at risk of detention, harassment, ransom, and other protection risks.
- When expelled or forcibly returned, Yemeni and non-Yemeni migrant workers are deposited in a deserted area about 10km from the Yemeni border without access to services.

Yemeni migrant workers

Over 13 million migrants are estimated to be working in the KSA, including one million Yemeni migrants (GMI 10/01/2023). Between October–December 2022, over 15,900 Yemeni migrants returned home, bringing the total number of returnees in 2022 to 65,700 (IOM accessed 26/02/2023).

Precise reasons for the returns are unknown but likely to include deportation resulting from the absence of legal work documents, as well as voluntary returns as changes in KSA regulations and employment policies make it harder to find work. The number of Yemeni returnees has been increasing since June 2021, attributed to labour reform initiatives in the KSA (ACAPS 15/10/2021). Most migrant workers are returning to Al Bayda, Al Hodeidah, Al Mahwit, Amran, Hajjah, and Lahj governorates (IOM accessed 26/02/2023).

Number of Yemeni migrants returning from the KSA



Source: IOM (accessed 27/02/2023)

Changes in employment regulations within the KSA are the main reason for the increase in returnees. These changes are accompanied by a reclassification process for migrants and visa restrictions for some work categories, both of which went into force in March 2021 (NLC 12/12/2019; ACAPS 15/10/2021). As a result, many companies can no longer hire new migrant workers or renew work permits for their employees. The increased cost of living and decreased salaries accompanying economic changes globally have also made it difficult for many migrant workers to afford residency permits, health insurance, rent, and other necessities. These changes also result in KSA citizens taking some of the jobs previously left to migrants (ACAPS 15/10/2021).

Although the number of Yemeni migrant workers returning from the KSA has increased, economic experts believe that remittances are still stable. It is important to note that the information used to track remittances only monitors formal financial transfer channels. The section of the migrant workforce most likely to return, the lowest-paid and most informal workers, are less likely to use these formal channels (KII 08/02/2023).

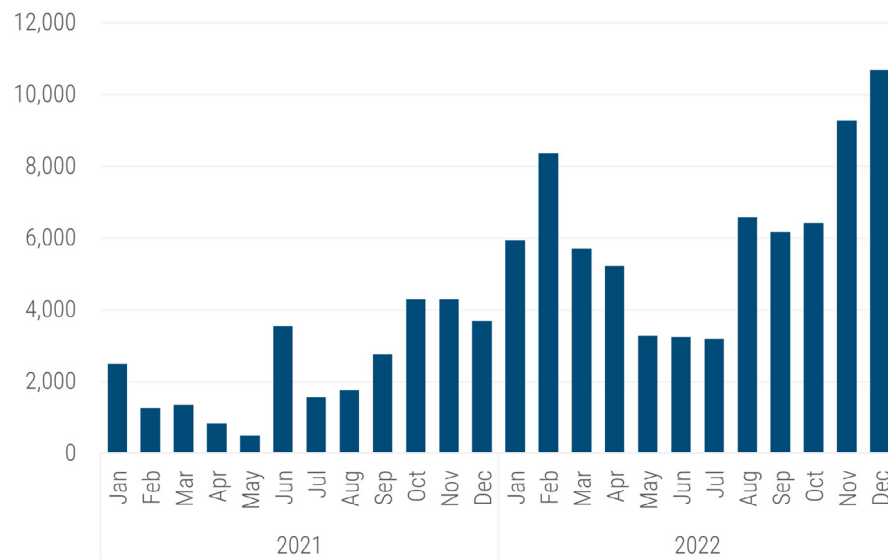
High protection concerns in Yemen for migrant workers and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa

Migrants and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa continue arriving in Yemen hoping for a better life but face unpredictable protection threats, such as detention and forced relocation under inhumane conditions, and have limited access to humanitarian assistance (ACAPS 16/11/2021).

The fourth quarter of 2022 (October–December) saw the entry of the highest number of migrants and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa into Yemen in 2022, with 26,400 arrivals compared to 15,900 in the third quarter (IOM accessed 10/02/2022). A large number of migrants and asylum seekers entering the fourth quarter headed to Hadramawt (72%) and Shabwah (65%) coasts because of favourable weather conditions across the Gulf of Aden and lessened coast guard patrolling (IOM 12/01/2023).

The number of migrants arriving in Yemen in 2022 (74,100 people) doubled compared to 2021 (28,400 people). The numbers could be underestimated, as many, such as smuggled migrants, are not registered.

Number of non-Yemeni migrants arriving in Yemen between January 2021 and December 2022



Source: IOM (accessed 27/02/2023)

The conflict and deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Yemen result in greater protection threats for migrant workers in transit to the KSA, especially because smugglers and traffickers control the primary migration routes where there is limited, if any, humanitarian presence. They lack access to basic public services, including healthcare and protection, and face the risk of detention, extortion, forced or unpaid labour, and rape, among other forms of abuse (HRW 07/12/2022). Reports also indicate that smugglers and traffickers continue to prevent the entry of migrants and asylum seekers to locations where they can receive assistance (IOM 23/10/2022).

Anecdotal information indicates that a network of smugglers operates across the country. The network has connections within different spheres of influence, including military officials, local sheikhs, and members of local authorities. Despite advocacy campaigns to raise awareness of the protection concerns migrants are facing, the issue gets very limited attention, with some saying that the issue continues to be ignored as a result of the involvement of high-ranking individuals (ISS 01/11/2017).

Observations indicate that migrants and asylum seekers are willing to work for less money and end up taking jobs that could have been available to vulnerable people in Yemen, such as IDPs. Migrants work for less than the local daily wage in restaurants, farms, and as cleaners in hospitals. These jobs are typically associated with migrant workers, but in the current situation, they have become acceptable to IDPs, who are grappling with a lack of income, depleted resources, and multiple displacements, resulting in tensions between Yemenis and foreigners. The competition for jobs could also further lower wage rates for both groups (KII 19/02/2023).

The migrant situation in Yemen and the challenges in moving towards the KSA mean that many migrants opt to return to the Horn of Africa. A total of 7,440 migrants spontaneously returned from Yemen to Djibouti in 2022. Spontaneous returns in 2022 were almost half compared to all spontaneous returns tracked in 2021. That migrants decide to journey back to Ethiopia by their own means may explain this decrease. Many attempting to return home face the same protection risks reported on the outbound journey, including blackmail, abuse, torture, and sexual violence (IOM 10/02/2023).

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VULNERABLE GROUPS OR CATEGORIES PARTICULARLY AFFECTED, OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2022

ISSUES AND THEMES EMERGING FROM QUALITATIVE DATA MONITORING	GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION	VULNERABLE GROUPS OR CATEGORIES PARTICULARLY AFFECTED													
		IDPs	Yemeni migrants and their families (supported by remittances)	Primary producers (agriculture and fishery)	Northerners living in the south	Migrants living in the south	Prisoners and detained people	Marginalised ethnic, tribal, and religious groups (Al Muhamashreen, Al Mazayma, Jews, Christians, and Bahais)	People with disabilities, the elderly, and chronically ill	Men (unemployed, without access to livelihood)	Women (unemployed, without access to livelihood)	Widows and female-headed households	Pregnant and lactating women and girls	Children (girls and boys)	
Conflict and associated impact	Nationwide or across frontlines							Info gap							
Reduced purchasing power	Nationwide														
COVID-19 situation	Nationwide, but the DFA-controlled areas are potentially the most affected and where information is the most limited	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap
Vaccine rollout	Nationwide, but the DFA-controlled areas are potentially the most affected and where vaccine rollout is limited to health and aid workers	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap
Religious control (cultural control)	DFA-controlled areas		Info gap			Info gap	Info gap	Info gap							
Fuel crisis (current)	Nationwide														
Seasonal rain (between April-October)	Nationwide														
Shrinking civic space (cultural and religious control)	Nationwide, but the DFA-controlled areas are potentially the most affected					Info gap		Info gap							
Civil unrest	IRG- controlled areas														

This table is based on qualitative monitoring. Key information:

Very negative	Negative	Somewhat negative	No impact	Somewhat positive	Positive	Very positive	Information gap	Not applicable or no specific impact

