



**Conference on Approaching Religious Literacy in International Affairs**

**Panel 3**

**Religious Literacy in Conflict Resolution**

— A Case Study of the Conflict in Yemen —

**Sponsored by:**



Since 2015, civil war in Yemen has put the country into a state of complex humanitarian emergency. More than 10,000 people have died, over 3 million are displaced, and over 17 million are facing severe food insecurity. How can religious literacy improve analysis of the conflict in Yemen and inform effective conflict resolution initiatives?

This panel will partner practitioners of conflict resolution currently working on the conflict in Yemen with academic experts from this field. Panelists will discuss how meaningful engagement with religious actors and analysis of religious dynamics can benefit conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

**Relevant Documents:**

- Search for Common Ground, "Pathways for Peace & Stability in Yemen"
- UN OCHA, "Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview: Part 1"
- Religious Literacy Project, "Our Method"
- "The Peacemaker" - Al Jazeera Documentary ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=zKkVm0htsuU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=zKkVm0htsuU))

Panelists will have 7 minutes each to give their response to the case study and the state of Religious Literacy in Conflict Resolution. This will be followed by a moderated discussion and questions from the audience via the Pigeonhole platform. (Pigeonhole URL, t.b.a.)

**Moderator:**

- Joyce Dubensky, CEO of Tanenbaum

**Panelists:**

- (Video Submission) Sheik Abdulrahman Al-Markwani, Founder of Dar Al-Salaam Organization in Yemen and Tanenbaum Peacekeeper in Action
- Father J. Bryan Hehir, Professor of Religion and Public Life at the Harvard Kennedy School
- Eileen Babbitt, Professor of Negotiation and Conflict Resolution at The Fletcher School
- Darko Mocibob, Deputy Director of the Middle East and West Asia Division of the United Nations HQ

# PATHWAYS FOR PEACE & STABILITY IN YEMEN

SHOOQI MAKTARY

KATIE SMITH



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# **PATHWAYS FOR PEACE & STABILITY IN YEMEN**

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## **Search for Common Ground**

Search for Common Ground (Search) is an international organization committed to conflict transformation. Since 1982, Search has led programs around the world to help societies transform the way they deal with conflicts, away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions. Our programs reach 4.2 million people each year, with more than 600 staff and 1200 partners in 43 countries around the world. Using our Common Ground Approach, we work in many of the world's most difficult conflict environments, including situations of widespread violent conflict, to prevent and mitigate violence empower local and national actors to build peace, and support reconciliation. We do this by supporting inclusive dialogue and dispute resolution processes, developing media programs that promote fact-based public information and tolerance, and strengthening collective and community actions that solve local challenges.

## **Search for Common Ground in Yemen**

Search has worked in Yemen since 2010, with an all-Yemeni team based in Sana'a working throughout the country to build sustainable peace, facilitate constructive dialogue, and increase local capacity for non-violent solutions. We primarily work with civil society organizations, youth, teachers, and media professionals, empowering them to bridge divides within their own communities and promote social cohesion at the local level. Search-Yemen's project *Unifying Yemen to Stand Up Against Violence* has received international praise and was a finalist for the Classy Award for the top 100 most innovative non-profits and enterprises of 2016. Since the outbreak of war in 2015, Search has continued its support and programs to local organizations committed to peace. As one of the few international peace and conflict organizations still working on the ground in Yemen, Search connects local-level initiatives and expertise with national and international policymakers and experts to ensure that local voices and local solutions are at the forefront of decision-making. Search-Yemen promotes recognition of opportunities for positive action to reduce divisions and promote peace despite the ongoing conflict, and creates pockets of stability through its programs that sow the seeds for peace.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2015, Yemen has experienced an escalating armed conflict and complex humanitarian emergency, killing more than 10,000 Yemenis and displacing over 3.1 million people of a total population of 27 million. An untold number of Yemenis have died from second-order effects, including the collapse of the health system and shortages of food, water, and medicine. The United Nations estimates that an average of 75 people are killed or injured every day since the start of the conflict.<sup>1</sup> As of May 2017, over 17 million people are facing crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity as a result of the conflict, a 10 percent increase in just five months,<sup>2</sup> and more than 40,000 suspected cholera cases have been reported, with estimates that the total number could escalate to more than 300,000 cases by the end of 2017.<sup>3</sup> The war in Yemen is defined by four major conflicts over political control between the national, regional, and international forces: 1) the national conflict between the Houthis and the Hadi government; 2) the regional fight between Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners and Iran; 3) the violent extremist organizations that are taking advantage of the conflict to entrench themselves in local communities across Yemen; and 4) the sectarian and tribal divides that are affecting local power dynamics.

Yemen's national conflict is straining relationships within communities, entrenching divisions along pre-existing lines while also creating new ones. Prior to the current war, tensions existed between different tribal groups, political parties, and between north and south Yemen. While these divisions are not new, the violence has reinforced suspicion and mistrust from conflicting groups. Local gangs and militarized groups have restricted movement on roads between north and south Yemen to those born outside the region. In Aden, frustration with the lack of stability and continued feelings of marginalization from the central government has renewed calls for southern separatism. Other, new divisions are emerging, as well. Divisions between Sunni and Shi'a Muslim sects in Sana'a, for instance, have grown increasingly prominent and divided Muslim communities. Community gatherings in mosques had previously united individuals from differing social and religious affiliations, but political associations with sects (e.g. Zaidi Shi'a Muslims with the Houthi movement) have made worship exclusive affairs held in separate locations for different sects. In Taiz governorate in the south, conflicts over humanitarian assistance and access to local services between IDP and host communities have resulted in violence and reinforced regionalist or tribal affiliations as a source for conflict.<sup>4</sup> Region of birth, religious belief, and tribal affiliation are core beliefs and affiliations tied to an individual. When these perceptions and divisions turn violent, they entrench ingrained identity disputes at the heart of the conflict,

1 United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview." *Reliefweb*. United Nations, Jan. 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <[http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/YEMEN%202017%20HNO\\_Final.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/YEMEN%202017%20HNO_Final.pdf)>.

2 United Nations. "Briefing by the Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs." 10 Mar. 2017. Web. <[http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_pv\\_7897.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_7897.pdf)>; USAID. "Yemen Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #10 | May 25, 2017 | U.S. Agency for International Development." *USAID*. N.p., 25 May 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/05.25.17%20-%20USG%20Yemen%20Complex%20Emergency%20Fact%20Sheet%20%2310.pdf>>

3 USAID, 2017., Miles, Tom. "Yemen Cholera Cases Could Hit 300,000 within Six Months: WHO." 19 May 2017. *Reuters*. Web. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-cholera-idUSKCN18F0Z3>>.

4 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Al-Shamayatein District, Taiz Governorate, July 2016. Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Al-Ma'afer District, Taiz Governorate, July 2016.

further undermining peace and stability.

Despite growing divides, there remain possibilities for peace. All four major conflict dimensions must be addressed to bring peace to Yemen, but right now, **the most promising avenue for change is to address the deepening sectarian and tribal divides at the local level.** Attempts at politically negotiated peace have not reached agreement and militarized groups benefit off instability. Yet, Yemenis cite frustration with enduring the incessant conflict and violence and express their exhaustion as a motivator for peace.<sup>5</sup> Even in situations of tension between IDPs and host communities in Taiz, Amran, and Ibb, host communities express sympathy for the plight of the displaced.<sup>6</sup> New actors are also emerging that can bridge divides. Women maintain connections across tribal, religious, and political divides given their shared status as women and are key influencers in the formal and informal education of youth. As the conflict grows in intensity and money becomes more scarce, women are growing in their household status as they bring in much needed incomes.<sup>7</sup> State functions, such as managing resources and liaising with humanitarian organizations, have largely been undertaken by cities, Local Councils, and civil society organizations in the absence of central control. Local civil society organizations and traditional leaders can help bridge operational difficulties as they are already present in society and hold authority within their communities. The international community has the opportunity right now to build inclusive platforms for peace. Even as the national and international conflict dynamics persist, communities can choose to reject violence and protect themselves from descending into a perpetual cycle of conflict.

Any successful attempt at peace and stability in Yemen must then depend on the status of three factors: 1) the degree of popular acceptance for peace and coexistence; 2) the degree to which representative mediators and interlocutors work to implement the deal within their community and provide services; and 3) the degree to which the public accepts the validity of a peace deal. Despite ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis, this type of work cannot wait until after a political agreement is settled. If local conflicts and communal divisions continue to escalate, then there will be no constituency for an end to the conflict. A high-level peace arrangement that achieves political agreement will not resonate with divided communities, leaving a peace process but limited prospects for peace. Previous attempts at peace in Yemen have failed to prepare and include communities and were ultimately unsuccessful. Local mediators and interlocutors can both respond to local needs and grievances, but also bridge the divide between national and local to reflect interests at a higher scale. Addressing the growing divides within communities now and working to reconcile differences on the local level will engage conflicting groups to peacefully coexist, identify mechanisms and leaders for handling disputes, and create the channels to feed local interests and concerns into national processes.

5 Search for Common Ground. Focus Group Discussions in Sana'a, Aden, and Ibb Governorates. April 2017.

6 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Al-Shamayatein District, Taiz Governorate, July 2016.

7 CARE, 2016. "No Future for Yemen Without Women and Girls - Policy Brief: October 2016." 2 Dec. 2016. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/no-future-yemen-without-women-and-girls-policy-brief-october-2016>>



## Recommendations:

*To promote popular acceptance for peace and coexistence:*

- **Empower local leaders to work across dividing lines to manage disputes.** Yemen has strong formal and informal leaders across society engaged in a variety of social issues. Tribal sheikhs, religious leaders, local governance actors, and local civil society organizations (CSOs) hold considerable authority and more resonance with peers than actors perceived to be representing an outside entity. The international community should provide financial and political support to these civilian leaders to listen to complaints and grievances and develop mechanisms for inclusive and transparent responses. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) can play critical bridging, convening, and technical capacity-building roles. Local leaders can leverage the capacity of INGOs as international civil society institutions to enhance skills, provide unique opportunities to influence change, and connect networks of like-minded practitioners across the country.
- **Support local level peacebuilding as a tool to address local drivers for violence and prevent escalation of violence.** As the international community responds to the crisis in Yemen, there must be multi-faceted support to address the drivers and consequences of the war. The impacts of the current war have resulted in the absence and/or weakening of the central government and the ability of government structures to manage conflict and violence. Current strategies prioritize response via humanitarian assistance but do not provide enough support to stopping the crisis in the first place and ensuring that further divides are not entrenched, paving the way for more conflict in the future. The United States, United Nations, and World Bank, and other donors should support a holistic assistance strategy that includes funding for conflict transformation, community dialogue and mediation, and cultural exchange for local leaders within the country to engage communities across dividing lines to resolve disputes and preserve amiable societal relationships.
- **Support to media to promote neutral reporting and to promote non-militarized norms for governance and security.** There needs to be greater support to supporting those neutral reporting agencies that exist, enhancing their skills and reach, and promoting new sources of unbiased reporting. Social media can provide space for exchange, particularly among youth, to create connections across divides and geographical distance. It also enables people to access reliable information about conflict and possibilities for engagement with government and humanitarian actors. In addition, programming such as media programming, participatory theater, and cultural exchanges, which promote cross-cultural understanding, can help to dismantle growing sectarian, tribal, political, and regional divides at the community level.
- **Preserve the education space for learning and development of the new generation.** International donors can support the Ministry of Education to continue the provision of education services and to adopt a curriculum based on non-violent conflict resolution. The Ministry of Education remains one of the better functioning ministries and continues to support schools throughout the country. Many schools have been coopted by IDPs for housing, commandeered by fighting groups, or destroyed by the conflict and thus no longer function as education facilities. Moreover, schools that were previously

neutral community gathering places are being infiltrated by violence as the greater communal divides are being replicated within classrooms. The generation of youth will be the leaders of peace in Yemen, but are being absorbed into a culture of violence and denied a chance to continue learning.

*To promote local mediators and interlocutors within communities:*

- **Distribute humanitarian assistance with transparency and accompany with peacebuilding and dialogue forums.** The distribution of aid continues to be a source of conflict that further entrenches societal divisions. As the humanitarian crisis endures, humanitarian responders must ensure that the provision of aid is conflict-sensitive and does not exacerbate local conflict dynamics across geographic, sectarian, or political divides. Humanitarian actors should look to not only prevent the escalation of violence, but also use humanitarian assistance as an entry point for peacebuilding. The provision of aid can be a major opportunity to bring communities together when done correctly.
- **Support inclusive and responsive local governance structures.** In the absence of centralized governmental control, many institutions, such as Executive Units, Local Councils, and civil society, have come forth to fill the void to deliver services and manage disputes at the local level. As local governance structures struggle to fulfill basic duties and are challenged by varying perceptions of legitimacy from local communities, systems must be developed to continue the provision of services while also strengthening inclusive decision-making processes and accountability mechanisms in cooperation with local communities. International actors, such as the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union can help create referral and reporting systems between civil society, local governance authorities, and national and international NGOs to manage coordination of service delivery.

*To promote public acceptance of negotiated peace arrangements:*

- **Ensure that peace processes are inclusive, participatory, and representative.** As the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union, among others, host and support dialogues and negotiations at the national and international level, they should ensure that a peace process is participatory and representative across society. Human rights organizations and other international institutions should support impartial social and traditional media to report on the status of negotiations to the community-level.
- **Feed grassroots reconciliation and peacebuilding into national peace dialogues.** An international, negotiated ceasefire and/or peace process will not guarantee peace and stability across the country. Previous peace attempts in Yemen, most recently the National Dialogue Conference in 2011, did not adequately incorporate local groups into the process and ultimately was unsuccessful in establishing peace. As international donors host and support dialogues and negotiations at the national and international level, they must be paired with simultaneous community dialogues, town hall meetings, and other civic education and engagement platforms to sensitize and engage communities, if they hope to be successful at ending the war and building a stable Yemen. Bottom-up approaches to peace that build trust and stability at the local level can meet top-down political negotiations led by national and international actors to form a sustainable approach that Yemenis believe in.

# INTRODUCTION

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Yemen has experienced two years of civil war. Violence and the humanitarian crisis now reach all Yemenis, diplomatic attempts at peace negotiations and ceasefires in 2016 were unsuccessful, and social cohesion<sup>8</sup> at the local-level continues to disintegrate. Yet the current situation in Yemen is not ripe for a military or high-level diplomatic solution to take hold because it will be undermined by the existing and deepening conflicts at the local level. Societal divides – tribal, sectarian, regional, and political – are deepening and remain the critical lever for peace and stability. No national or international process can be successful and sustainable without targeted support to local level efforts to address these divides.

## Context

Yemen is a mountainous country on the Arabian Peninsula that borders Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the Red Sea. As one of the longest continuously inhabited countries in the world, Yemen has evolved into a diverse population of 27 million people with layers of shared history. From antiquity through the modern age, Yemen has been parceled and ruled by succeeding empires, caliphates, and tribes. The modern regional and social divisions between North and South, however, are rooted in the early twentieth century when the Ottoman and British empires divided Yemen into separate spheres of influence under each of their control, effectively creating an Ottoman North and a British South. From this point, the two regions moved along very different political and economic trajectories through the twentieth century, solidifying this division through the development of different social structures. Briefly, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Northern Yemen transitioned to a Zaidi Kingdom,<sup>9</sup> which ruled until the establishment of an Arab Republic in 1962. In South Yemen, the British maintained control until 1967. Following British withdrawal, the socialist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen formed with Soviet support. The divergent path – between a Kingdom turn republic, and a colony turn socialist state – set the template for the regional divisions seen today.

Control of Yemen remained split along this geographic division until 1990 when the North and South adopted a constitution, which unified the two states under President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the former leader of North Yemen. The two states came together to explore natural resources and to demilitarize the border; however, this unity was short-lived. Disputes over power sharing in the new government prompted southern leaders to declare the south a separate state once again and civil war erupted in Yemen in 1994 over southern secession.

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8 Social cohesion is the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other towards common goals to survive and prosper.

9 The Zaidi Shi'a sect of Islam emerged in the eighth century. Shi'a Islam is divided into three main groupings: Twelvers, Ismailis, and Zaidis. Zaidi Shi'a Muslims believe that there are five Imams who are the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, opposed to the seven believed by Ismailis, and the twelve believed by Twelvers. Modern Zaidism is considered close to Shafi'i Islam in its current practice. Salmoni, Barak A., Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells. "Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon." *RAND National Defense Research Institute*. RAND Corporation, 2010. Web. 19 June 2017. <[http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND\\_MG962.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG962.pdf)>

Over the centuries, the influence of the tribes on its members has fluctuated in response to the various incursions of outside actors and from internal political movements. The rise of conflict in the 1990s reinforced the regional division between north and south, but also revived the role of tribal authorities and structures in relation to or in absence of the central state. In the north, the central state had limited influence outside of the major population centers, so most tribal areas maintained many of their own governance structures. In southern governorates, where the implementation of socialist ideology repressed and dismantled many tribal allegiances prior to unification, regional identity became the coalescing factor. However, since the end of the 1994 civil war, tribal repression has subsided allowing new Sheikhs (i.e. tribal leaders) and past tribal histories to emerge, as well as reigniting old grievances. Tribal identity is recapturing its foothold, often fulfilling state functions, such as social order, dispute resolution, and economic support, in the absence of state control.

Despite the resurgence of tribal identity in the south, there is a marked difference between the tribal structures in Yemen's governorates today. Governorates with stronger tribal affiliations, such as Sa'adah, Amran, Al Jawf, Ma'arib, Al Bayda', and Ad Dali', correspond with historical North Yemen. In other governorates, especially those in the south such as Al Hodeidah, Ibb, Taiz, Hadramawt, and Al Mahrah, tribal structures are still recapturing their traditional position and while tribal leaders hold authoritative roles in society, Yemenis in these governorates are more likely to align with a regional identity rather than their tribal affiliation.



FIGURE 1: Map of Yemen, April 10, 2017

Religious identity often correlates with regional and tribal identity in Yemen. Approximately thirty percent of the Yemeni population are Zaidi Shi'a Muslims, who are mostly grouped in the northern part of the country. Zaidi Shi'a Muslims, who subscribe to a type of Shi'a Islam that more closely resembles Sunnism than Shi'ism, have controlled Yemen for most of the past thousand years and make up much of the northern elite. For example, former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and his family are Zaidi Muslims.<sup>10</sup> The other 70 percent of the country are Shafi'i Sunni Muslims, who predominantly inhabit south Yemen and the areas along the coast of the Red Sea.<sup>11</sup> The theological and practical distinction between Zaidis and Shafi'is is not always evident and the division between the two is often described as an issue of lineage more than religion.<sup>12</sup> This power dynamic between Zaidi and Shafi'i Muslims highlights the way regional, tribal, and religious identities are interwoven in Yemeni society.

Yemen is currently in a violent conflict that escalated in the early 2000s. What began as a movement to address endemic corruption and perceived marginalization, has evolved into a multilayered conflict increasingly defined by identity. Beginning in the 1990s, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, a cleric of the Zaidi sect in Sa'adah governorate, launched a religious-political movement against the Yemeni Government. Al-Houthi preached about Zaidi Islamic practice and doctrine to his followers, but also discussed the inadequacies of the Yemeni Government's reach in their northern communities. As he led the Houthi movement to challenge the Government, he asserted they were defending their communities against discrimination and economic marginalization from the central government and pushed for greater regional autonomy. However, the Saleh Government alleged the Houthis were attempting to overthrow the government and impose Shi'a religious law across the country.<sup>13</sup> As the movement grew in intensity, the Government of Yemen targeted al-Houthi to be a threat after his supporters led a series of protests in Sana'a. In 2004, al-Houthi was killed by Yemeni Government forces and was succeeded by his brother Abd al-Malik. In the aftermath of his death, the Houthi movement weaponized and launched a militant strike against the Government of Yemen. Series of attacks and counter-attacks between the Houthis and the Yemeni Government persisted over the next six years.<sup>14</sup> Houthi militias utilized guerilla attacks against Government posts, including the use of land mines, and launched some attacks across the national border into Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia responded with aerial bombardment of Houthi strongholds and the Yemeni Government sent military forces into tribal lands, upsetting cultural norms whereby mediation and dialogue had served to preempt violent action.<sup>15</sup> While the conflict still revolved around autonomy claims and perceived marginalization, the conflict took on tribal and religious undertones and pulled in regional actors. These wars ended temporarily with a ceasefire agreement in February 2010, which laid out six conditions for the Houthis: clearing mines, non-interference with elected local officials, release of civilians and military personnel, adherence to Yemeni law, return of looted items, and

10 Al-Dawsari, Nadwa, and Michael Bronner. "Proxies Aside; A Closer Look at the War in Yemen." *Warscapes*. N.p., 10 Nov. 2015. Web. 16 June 2017. <<http://www.warscapes.com/conversations/proxies-aside-closer-look-war-yemen>>.

11 The Shafi'i Sunni sect of Islam emerged in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century. Sunni Islam is divided into four schools: Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Shafi'i. The Shafi'i school predominantly relies on the Quran and the Hadiths as the preminent sources of Islamic law.

12 Salmoni et al., 2010.

13 "Deadly Blast Strikes Yemen Mosque." *BBC News Middle East*. N.p., 2 May 2008. Web. 19 June 2017. <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7379929.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7379929.stm)>

14 Salmoni et al., 2010.

15 Ibid.

cessation of hostilities with Saudi Arabia. In turn, the Yemeni Government agreed to cease military operations in the northern governorates.<sup>16</sup> However, this arrangement deteriorated later that year with the rise of the popular revolutions across the region.

In 2011, the Arab Spring sent a wave of popular uprisings and revolutions across the Middle East and North Africa, upending dictatorships that had lasted decades. Yemen was no exception. Yemenis gathered by the thousands to protest the high unemployment, poor economic conditions, and widespread corruption that affected much of the country. These protests quickly escalated into calls for the removal of President Saleh, who ruled for more than 30 years, first in the North Yemen and then over the entire country after unification in 1990. 2011 was characterized by brutal attacks on anti-government protesters, defections and in-fighting within the military, and loss of government control over many areas of the recently unified country. The Houthis, for instance, took advantage of the political instability to reformatify their control of Sa'adah and the neighboring areas.<sup>17</sup>

President Saleh agreed to a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-brokered transition agreement in November 2011, in which he agreed to transfer power to his Vice President, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, in exchange for immunity from prosecution on charges of corruption and human rights violations. The orchestration of the repressive response to the widespread protests was seen to be centralized under Saleh, and Hadi managed to distance himself from the political fallout. He was named as the Interim President and officially elected to a two-year transitional period in February 2012. The transition agreement also established the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which was intended to address the grievances of the revolution period and bring together the diverse political, religious, and tribal groups to work together to rebuild the governmental structures. Part of this process involved delineating the 22 governorates into six regions based on geographical proximity.<sup>18</sup> Allotments at the NDC for women, youth, and civil society were designed to make the political process more inclusive. However, these were mainly elites from urban areas and many groups felt excluded or even unaware of the process.

In the time following the NDC, political infighting continued and most Yemenis did not feel that the Hadi had greatly improved their situation.<sup>19</sup> The Hadi Government failed to provide security and basic goods, such as electricity and fuel, and was generally seen to govern ineffectively.<sup>20</sup> The Houthis, the Southern secessionist movement, and some youth groups officially rejected the GCC-brokered peace deal and felt their interests were not represented.<sup>21</sup> As popular political dissatisfaction grew in Sana'a, former President Saleh re-entered

16 "Yemen Announces Cease-fire with Rebels." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 11 Feb. 2010. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/02/11/yemen.cease.fire/>>.

17 "Yemen Crisis: Who Is Fighting Whom?" *BBC News*. BBC, 28 Mar. 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>>.

18 The six regions are Azal, Saba, Janad, and Tahama in the north, and Aden and Hadramawt in the south.

19 Schmitz, Charles. "Building a Better Yemen." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 Apr. 2012. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/04/03/building-better-yemen-pub-47708>>.

20 Schmitz, Charles. "In Cahoots With the Houthis." *Foreign Affairs*. N.p., 19 Apr. 2015. Web. 19 June 2017. <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/yemen/2015-04-19/cahoots-houthis>>.

21 Al-Dawsari, Nadwa. "Tribal Governance and Stability in Yemen." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. The Carnegie Papers, 2012. Web. 19 June 2017. <[http://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen\\_tribal\\_governance.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_tribal_governance.pdf)>.

the political arena and instituted a pragmatic alliance with the Houthis in the hope of consolidating power to regain political control. When President Hadi proposed a new draft constitution in 2014, Houthi militias rallied weeks of anti-government protests and mounted a military takeover of Sana'a backed by Saleh's strategic logistical support, vast patronage networks, and additional fighting forces. Houthi militias took control of the presidential palace in January 2015, installed themselves as an interim government, and placed Hadi under house arrest, where he issued his resignation. About one month later, Hadi escaped and fled to Aden where he rescinded his resignation and denounced the Houthi takeover.

As the Houthi movement pushed increasingly southward towards Aden, President Hadi fled to neighboring Saudi Arabia. From Saudi Arabia, he coalesced an anti-Houthi coalition with support from Western and GCC allies to counter the Houthi advance. Backed by nine other, mostly Arab states, Saudi Arabia launched a military campaign after the Houthi capture of a strategic military base north of Aden on March 25, 2015.<sup>22</sup> This is generally considered the starting point of the current Yemen war. The Saudi-led assault has largely consisted of aerial strikes on indiscriminate or disproportionately civilian targets, naval blockades, and deployment of ground forces to areas of strategic importance, such as airports and seaports.<sup>23</sup> The Houthis, in turn, have engaged in heavy ground fighting, laid extensive land mines, and launched indiscriminate rockets into populated areas as they push to establish de facto control of Yemen's main population centers.<sup>24</sup> Both groups are responsible for extensive human rights violations.<sup>25</sup>

The war has led to intense human suffering. Over 10,000 people have been killed, and 3.1 million Yemenis have been displaced since the start of the war in 2015. However, the collapse of the healthcare system and inconsistent reporting from remote areas throughout Yemen likely conceal even higher numbers. Today, Yemen is the largest food security emergency worldwide with over 17 million people facing crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity.<sup>26</sup> As of May 2017, more than 40,000 suspected cholera cases have been reported with predictions that it could escalate to more than 300,000 cases in less than six months.<sup>27</sup>

Beyond the death and disease that is so prevalent, the relocation of the central bank from Sana'a to Aden has deeply affected the flow of currency and the reliability of funds. The war has eroded the ability of the government to operate in a centralized manner, placing the onus of basic service delivery and dispute resolution on local communities. However, many civil servants have not been paid in months and the cost of food, water, cooking gas, and other basic essential goods has skyrocketed. The aerial and naval blockade imposed on Yemen by coalition forces has restricted the flow of commercial and humanitarian goods. This situation, already precarious, stands to drastically deteriorate if coalition-proposed plans to take over the port of al-Hodeidah

22 The coalition consists of the following states: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, and Sudan. International Crisis Group, 2015.

23 "Yemen." *Human Rights Watch*. N.p., 12 Jan. 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/yemen>>.

24 Ibid

25 Ibid, "Yemen 2016/2017." *Amnesty International Annual Report*. Amnesty International, 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/yemen/report-yemen/>>.

26 USAID, 2017., United Nations News Service. "UN Envoy in Yemen Meeting with President, Senior Officials to Push for Greater Aid Access." *UN News Service*. N.p., 16 Jan. 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=55980#.WS2CgWjyvIV>

27 USAID, 2017., Miles, Tom. "Yemen Cholera Cases Could Hit 300,000 within Six Months: WHO." 19 May 2017. *Reuters*. Web. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-cholera-idUSKCN18F0Z3>>.

come to fruition. Al-Hodeidah, currently controlled by the Houthis, is a port on the Red Sea that takes in 70 percent of Yemen's food imports.<sup>28</sup>

## Violent Conflict in Yemen Today

The conflict in Yemen is ultimately defined by the struggle for political control that is playing out between the national, regional, and international forces that are involved in the war. The violence itself, however, is driven by four sets of conflicts: the conflict between the Houthis and the Hadi government; the regional fight between Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners and Iran; the violent extremist organizations that are taking advantage of the conflict to entrench themselves in Yemen; and the sectarian and tribal divides that affecting local power dynamics.

### Political Conflict between the Houthis and the Hadi Government

The Houthis currently control an estimated 40 percent of the country, with a stronghold in the north, in Sa'adah and control of major economic centers Sana'a, Ibb, and Al-Hodeidah. As their campaign continues, the Houthis have secured the most densely populated areas in Yemen, in effect governing an estimated 65 percent of the total Yemeni population.<sup>29</sup> These areas under the de facto authority of the Houthis are at lower risk of ground fighting because of the strong Houthi foothold, but they are subject to heavy airstrikes from GCC forces. There are areas where there are clashes between Houthi and resistance fighters inside primarily Houthi-controlled areas, such as Ibb, Al Hodeidah, and Sana'a, but they are somewhat limited in scope. Active groundfighting between government troops and Houthi militias are predominantly taking place the outskirts of the Houthi enclaves, where the groups fight to gain control. These areas vacillate between Houthi and Hadi-Government control and breed highly volatile social environments, characterized by the frequent dissolution of public services. Front-line governorates like Taiz, Al Dhall', Al Bayda, or Sada'a are still accessible to non-residents and humanitarian organizations, but face mobility challenges and serious safety concerns on the roads.

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28 Rutherford, Lisa. "Oxfam Warns Possible Attack on Yemen's Hodeidah Port Will Push Country into near Certain Famine." *Oxfam Great Britain*. N.p., 31 Mar. 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/blogs/2017/03/oxfam-warns-possible-attack-on-yemen-hodeidah-port-will-push-country-into-near-certain-famine>

29 This is an estimate based on current population distributions and major population centers under Houthi control. Baron, Adam. "Mapping the Yemen Conflict (2015)." *Mapping the Yemen Conflict (2015)*. European Council on Foreign Relations, n.d. Web. 20 June 2017. <[http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen\\_mapping\\_2015](http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen_mapping_2015)>.



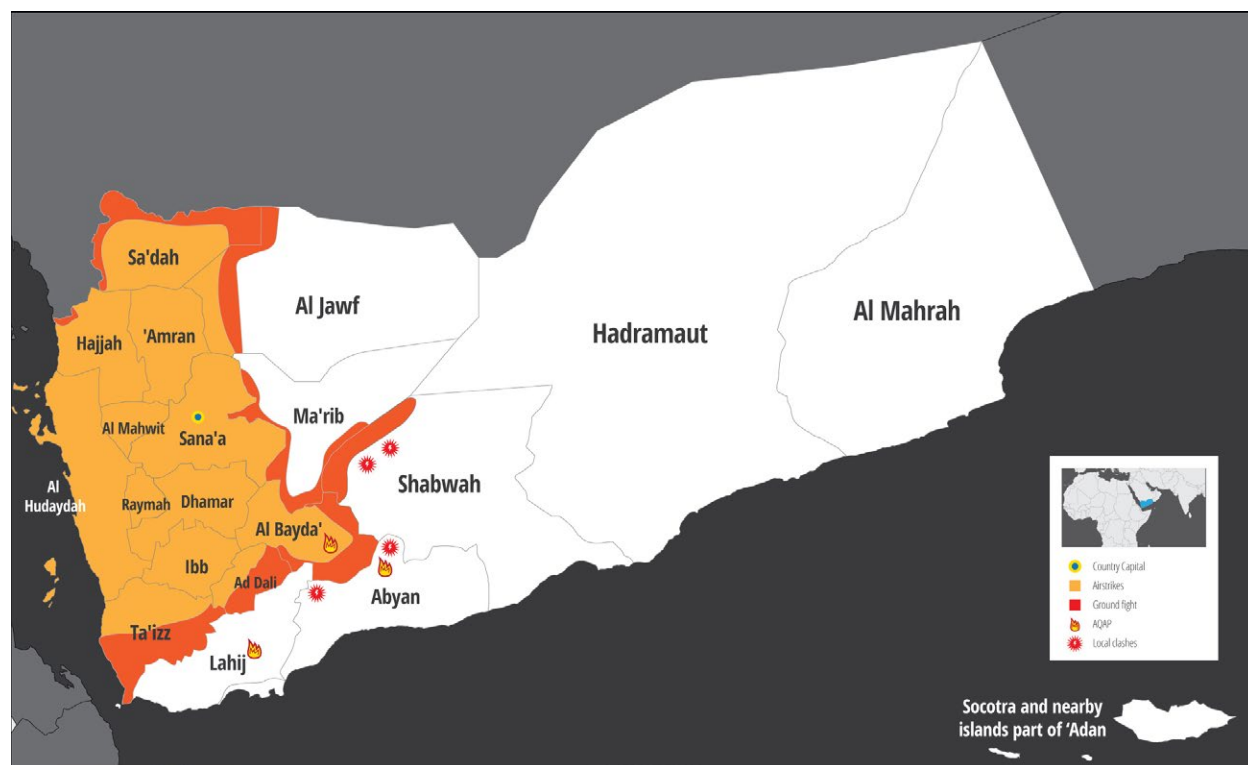


FIGURE 2: Conflict Map, April 10, 2017

Over the past two years of war, Yemen has remained divided between the Houthi movement expanding from the north and the anti-Houthi coalition, led by ousted President Hadi and his Western and GCC allied support.<sup>30</sup> The Houthis were driven by their perceived marginalization as a minority group from the central government and dissatisfaction with the GCC-brokered transition arrangements, and seized power as a political maneuver for greater autonomy and protection from political and economic discrimination. While former President Saleh had previously opposed the advance of the Houthis, he acted on growing political dissatisfaction in Yemen and instituted a pragmatic alliance with the Houthis with hopes of regaining political control. He has lent fighting forces allegiant to the pro-Saleh political cause, as well as a vast patronage network of loyal supporters, to the Houthis. The allegiance is one of political expediency. The Houthis rely on Saleh-allegiant forces to maintain their northern stronghold, and Saleh utilized the Houthis momentum to topple the Hadi government.

Hadi's political base is also fracturing. Southern leaders had initially exchanged their support against the Houthis for patronage in Hadi's government. Many of these southern militias have also been trained and funded by the United Arab Emirates to counter violent extremist organizations and hope to enjoy continued Emirati support.<sup>31</sup> They are growing weary of the instability and have renewed calls for southern secession. Massive demonstrations in Aden and renewed calls for southern secession challenge the Houthis and the

30 The forces of President Hadi, led by Saudi Arabia, are often called "coalition forces" or the "Saudi-led coalition"

31 Farrukh, Maher, Tyler Nocita, and Emily Estelle. "Warning Update: Iran's Hybrid Warfare in Yemen." *Critical Threats*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 June 2017. <<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/warning-update-irans-hybrid-warfare-in-yemen>>

Hadi government in the wake of continued instability, perceived economic and political marginalization.<sup>32</sup> The southern separatist movement has critical influence on the conflict dynamics in the south. As more influential parties promulgate in Yemen, it complicates the ability of any political solution to entice all parties and permeate to local communities.

## Regional fight between Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies and Iran

Saudi Arabia and its GCC allies have encountered several ideological and territorial disputes with Iran that have shaped the relationships throughout the region. While both Saudi Arabia and Iran are predominantly Muslim countries governed through the scriptures of Islam, Saudi Arabia is governed by a Sunni Muslim kingdom and Iran is governed by a Shia Muslim republic. Saudi Arabia and Iran have no diplomatic relations, and their differing interpretations of Islam have influenced their political agendas and allies within the region and the world. Saudi Arabia has developed close political, diplomatic, and economic ties to the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, whereas Iran has maintained these close ties to Russia and China.

After the Houthi takeover of Sana'a and as the Houthi militias pushed increasingly southward towards Aden in 2015, Saudi Arabia, with support from Western and GCC allies, launched a military campaign to counter the Houthi advance. The Houthis are a Shia sect, and Saudi Arabia considers the Houthis to be Iranian proxies and the recipient of Iranian support. As different groups act on this belief, it reinforces Houthi-Iran ties and steers the Houthis towards Iran for support.<sup>33</sup> It also intensifies sectarian divides within communities, as religious sects are becoming increasingly aligned with the broader war dynamics. While the Saudis believe Iran has taken advantage of an opportunity to counter the interests of its adversaries, there is little or unconfirmed evidence that supports the case that Iran or its allies are supporting or responsible for the armament of Houthi groups, aside from bestowing political legitimacy and positive media attention.

The perceived involvement of Iran in the conflict has also stimulated support for the Saudi-led campaign. As the involvement of international actors becomes more prevalent, the effects are felt by Yemeni civilians who suffer from international war tactics including air raids and blockades. Over one third of all Saudi-led aerial raids have hit civilian sites, such as schools, hospitals, markets, and mosques.<sup>34</sup> The ramifications of these 'proxy-war dynamics' influence the political atmosphere at the local level, entrenching sectarian and political divisions.

## Rise of Criminality and Violent Extremist Organizations

Many districts lack rule of law and effective state enforcement bodies due to the ongoing conflict and lack of financial resources. In areas controlled by militant groups, there are competing law structures and weak acceptance for the traditional governance tools. Police forces lack central government mandates and resources and damaged infrastructure prevents their effective operation. In southern Yemen, local governance has

32 Ibid.

33 International Crisis Group, 2015.

34 Yemen Data Project. "Data – Yemen Data Project." N.p., n.d. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://www.yemendataproject.org/data/>>

weakened considerably due to calls for southern separation and the perception that local governance structures are tools of the central government in Sana'a. In addition, local militant groups have emerged amid the instability and gained territory and further weakened government control. These are often local groups who have formed to fight against the Houthis. Sometimes they are ex-military personnel or leaders from the community, but they are often aligned by tribe, geographic region, or social group. In the security vacuums left by evaporated central control, conflict parties are using threat of arms to advance their respective positions. Violent crimes and crimes such as shutting down schools and blocking roads by criminals and militias have gone unstoppable by any formal authorities. Even in communities such as Bait Al-Faqeeh in Al-Hodeidah that retain somewhat effective local police and security forces, the local authorities struggle to fully exercise their power due to lack of financial resources.<sup>35</sup>

Al Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP), as well as nascent Yemeni Islamic State factions, have strengthened their foothold in Yemen in these political and security vacuums. AQAP previously established local governance structures in historically marginalized areas of Yemen, and these footholds have been primarily strengthened in the south, in areas outside of Houthi and government control. In areas they control, AQAP enforce regulations and prohibitions in line with fundamentalist teachings. AQAP and other violent extremist groups have taken advantage of the state collapse to expand their territory and influence.<sup>36</sup> AQAP showcased its operations outside government control in March 2017 through a series of photos of preaching events and rallies in Hadramawt and Abyan.<sup>37</sup> As ground fighting and aerial bombardments increasingly take civilian casualties, AQAP and other extremist organizations have positioned themselves as alternative outlets for anti-Houthi or anti-Hadi support and an opportunity to influence change. As long as the security, humanitarian, and economic conditions remain bleak, the violent extremist groups will have plentiful sources of exasperated and marginalized groups ripe for recruitment.

## Sectarian, Tribal, and Identity-Based Conflict within Communities

The breakdowns of the state apparatus and evaporation of central control has resulted in widespread shortages of basic services and the rise of new social divides. Search for Common Ground's conflict scans have shown that as disputes develop over access and equity to resources, they have been increasingly distorted by tribal, religious, and political affiliation. Some pre-existing divisions are based on tribal differences or on the previous political separation between north and south Yemen. From a national perspective, the war has entrenched regional divisions at various levels: within and among the 22 governorates; between the northern and southern governorate; and between the six regions delineated by the NDC, comprising different governorates clustered by geographical proximity and similar social structures. While these divisions are not new, they have been swept up in the violence and entrenched themselves in the distribution of resources and local level politics.

35 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Bait Al-Faqeeh District, Al-Hodeidah Governorate, February 2017.

36 Baron, Adam. "Mapping the Yemen Conflict (2015)." *Mapping the Yemen Conflict (2015)*. European Council on Foreign Relations, n.d. Web. 20 June 2017. <[http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen\\_mapping\\_2015](http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen_mapping_2015)>.

37 Towey, James. "Yemen Situation Report." *Critical Threats*. N.p., 8 Mar. 2016. Web. 19 June 2017. <<https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/yemen-situation-report/2016-yemen-crisis-situation-report-march-8>>.



*The conflict is entrenching regional divisions along pre-existing rifts as well as creating new ones, which had previously never been salient.*

Other divisions are new and have never previously been salient. Divisions between Sunni and Shi'a Muslim sects, for instance, have grown increasingly prominent and have divided previously peaceful Muslim communities. Conflicts between IDP and host communities have also resulted in violence and reinforced regionalist or tribal affiliations as a source for conflict. For instance, in Taiz and Ibb, the large influx of displaced persons has strained relationships between the host and displaced communities, creating feelings of mistrust and contempt. Host communities often feel suspicious towards incoming displaced groups coming from other regions within Yemen, and these IDPs often find refuge in medical centers, schools, and other public areas, which disrupts the already limited provisions of basic services. In addition, host communities believe they are unduly disregarded from the distribution of humanitarian services and assistance. As everyday conflicts and the ramifications of the war are increasingly tied to identity-based affiliations, they catalyze ordinary disputes into violence and foster instability ripe for the rise of militarized groups. When these political, ideological, tribal, and regional divisions turn violent, they entrench irresolvable identity disputes at the heart of the conflict, further undermining peace and stability.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO PURSUE PEACE & STABILITY

### Identity-Based Conflicts Affect and Are Affected by the War

There are many levels of the conflict in Yemen, but the most promising avenue for change is to address local conflict issues. Prospects for international and national level peace arrangements are bleak, as U.N.-facilitated peace negotiations have stagnated and national political groups are splintering. AQAP and other militarized groups have fortified their strongholds and boast their authority in several governorates in Yemen. All of these factors need to be addressed to bring peace and stability to Yemen. Local conflict dynamics have not solidified in the conflict and can be directed away from violence. The conflict in Yemen has fractured community relationships and increased divisions along family, clan, tribal, and ideological lines, yet there is an opportunity to halt these fractures and redirect communities towards peace and stability.

### Conflict is Driving Identity-Based Conflict, which in Turn Exacerbates National and Regional Tensions:

The war is entrenching regional divisions along pre-existing rifts as well as creating new ones, which had previously never been salient. Real or perceived relationships to the Houthis or the Hadi government have solidified into entrenched identity-based positions. For instance, mosques in Yemen had previously been places for any Muslim to worship. Now, Sunni Shafi'is have designated certain mosques as Zaidi mosques, and therefore avoid them due to the association with the Houthis. Community gatherings in mosques had previously united individuals from differing social and religious affiliations, but are now exclusive affairs held in separate locations for different religious sects. This becomes increasingly problematic as fear or blame are appropriated onto individuals and groups based on qualities inherent to their being – religion, tribe, or culture. The lack of interaction between conflicting parties during different phases of conflict escalation has widened gaps between them and prevents dialogue.



*Fear or blame is appropriated onto individuals and groups based on qualities inherent to their being – religion, tribe, or culture. The lack of interaction between conflicting parties deepens divides and prevents dialogue.*

The extent of social division differs from district to district. The continuation of political tensions at the national level influences the political atmosphere at the local level, entrenching sectarian, tribal, political, or regional divisions. In communities like Lawder in Abyan, disagreements between groups sharing the same water resources have escalated into reprisal attacks and killing. In Lawder, there is unequal access to the communal water well for those who live in various parts of the town. Those that cannot access the well are primarily from a different tribe and felt they have been unjustly excluded. They then sabotaged the tools and

equipment maintaining the well, creating increased scarcity of water and exacerbating societal tensions.<sup>38</sup> As these cycles of attacks become more prevalent and the sectarian face of the conflict grows, they become increasingly tied to an individual's inherent affiliations.

The suspension of schools in some locations, growing unemployment, and lack of financial flows have served as 'push' factors for youth and others to join militarized groups, including violent extremist organizations, where they find both income and purpose. Over 1,600 schools have been closed, destroyed, or misappropriated due to the ongoing violence.<sup>39</sup> The dire economic situation has forced many families to enlist their children as combatants to generate income. According to UNICEF, children are playing a more active role in combat and manning checkpoints and child recruitment increased five-times between 2014 and 2016.<sup>40</sup> In certain tribal areas, such as Dahmar, Amran, Sana'a, and Hajjah, families are routinely encouraged to enlist their children in a show of solidarity with their tribes' affiliation to conflict parties.

Despite these deepening rifts, responses from the international community have primarily been through military assistance and humanitarian aid. The United States' humanitarian response to Yemen has contributed over \$400 million to addressing humanitarian needs, second only to the United Arab Emirates as a single entity. The amount international actors have provided for non-humanitarian response, such as governance, livelihoods, and peacebuilding support to address these deepening societal fractures, has been much lower, if not completely suspended.<sup>41</sup> An approach that lacks these critical components will only deal with the symptoms of the problem rather than the causes. The need for humanitarian assistance is vast, but so too is the need for attention and support to address the deepening divides.

## Local Conflicts are Influenceable.

Identity-based conflicts can be influenced before they become woven into the social fabric. Dialogue, positive conflict resolution, and continued inter-group relationship building and exchange can help mitigate tensions and preserve communication across dividing lines. Customary conflict resolution in tribal areas provides for this. Grievance handling proceedings are highly structured and incorporate negotiation, dialogue, and transparency at an early stage of conflict to prevent the escalation of violence and ensure participation and buy-in from conflicting parties.<sup>42</sup> The incursion of violence has disrupted some of these traditional response mechanisms, however, communities have preserved ways to shelter themselves from entrenched identity conflict.

In some communities, continued respect for customary and functioning local governance proceedings provide the forum to address intensifying societal divides. In others, community members worked together to col-

38 Yemenis were hesitant to discuss conflicts of a political nature or name the parties involved in certain conflicts, for fear of reprisals. Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Lawder District, Abyan Governorate, June 2016.

39 World Bank. "Yemen Overview." *The World Bank*. N.d. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/overview>>

40 Zerrougui, Leila, and Peter Salama. "Yemen Children Bearing the Brunt of Brutal Conflict – UN." *UNICEF*. N.p., 10 Apr. 2016. Web. 19 June 2017. <[https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_90828.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_90828.html)>.

41 The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund suspended or closed most of its operations in April 2015 after the resumption of fighting and USAID has frozen its disbursement of non-humanitarian funding. "Yemen Overview." *United Nations Peacebuilding Fund*. N.p., 2016. Web. 20 June 2017. <<http://www.unpbf.org/countries/yemen/>>.

42 Al-Dawsari, 2012.

laboratively address grievances. In the Al-Ssennah sub-district of Taiz, they have dictated dispute resolution responsibilities within the Articles of Association of their sub-district cooperative council. Together through cooperation between the local community and the sub-district cooperative council, they quickly mobilize to mediate social disputes and stop conflict escalation over development-based disputes by using tribal and/or religious statutes.<sup>43</sup> In Zabeed town in Al-Hodeidah, government authorities worked to rebuild trust with residents after tensions emerged over the spread of cholera in neighboring towns and the perceived incompetence of the state agency to handle a potential outbreak. The Ministry of Health district office assuaged resident fears through the implementation of a health awareness campaign, which involved residents in identification of risk factors and quarantine areas within the community.<sup>44</sup> In Abyan, most of the population relies on income from animal herding and agriculture, so many of the conflicts revolve around access to water. In Al Wadi village and the surrounding towns, there is inadequate distribution of water, which does not reach the homes in elevated communities. The villagers pooled resources and worked together to reorganize and fix the pipeline to service the various communities.<sup>45</sup> These examples certainly exist, but they are under stress and require support to withstand the pressures of war. When communities are equipped with the mechanisms to resolve disputes, they are better able to mitigate the push and pull factors of war.

### Target Key Local Actors:

Yemen has strong local leaders from across society, and over 8,000 registered civil society organizations engaged in a variety of social issues.<sup>46</sup> These local actors have become even more critical, as regional tensions and divisions preclude the government from operating in a centralized and effective manner. State functions, such as managing resources, resolving local disputes, and liaising with humanitarian organizations, have largely been undertaken by cities, local councils, and civil society organizations.



*State functions, such as managing resources, resolving local disputes, and liaising with humanitarian organizations, have largely been undertaken by cities, local councils, and civil society organizations.*

The upheaval of war has eroded trust between civilians and local governance authority structures, disrupting pre-existing mediation structures within communities. This has prompted the emergence of many new authoritative bodies who have replaced the role once played by central, governorate, or district-level governance institutions. In many Houthi-controlled areas, Executive Units, initially created by the UNHCR to coordinate activities related to IDPs and refugees, have become the de facto decision-making bodies. Houthis have re-established these Executive Units and expanded their structure to encompass entire governorates, with local offices in each district. Through these governing bodies, Houthis have consolidated power and

43 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Al-Ma'afar District, Taiz Governorate. July 2016.

44 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Zabeed District, Al-Hodeidah Governorate. February 2017.

45 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Lawder District, Abyan Governorate. June 2016.

46 World Bank. "Supporting Constructive Engagement between the Government of Yemen and CSOs." 4 Mar. 2014. Web. <<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/525371468336576776/pdf/887750WP0P14630May2020140Box385258B.pdf>>

weakened the prominence of existing local governance mechanisms, such as Local Councils, along with other non-Houthi, governorate-level management. In some communities in southern government-controlled areas, Local Councils remain the most effective and active providers of services. In other southern government-controlled areas, new leadership is emerging from the ranks of armed groups and within the ranks of former-Hadi support. Hadi supporters are growing frustrated with the inability to bring stability to Yemen, and Hadi's support base is fracturing. Some new leaders are emerging to carry forth the idea of southern independence or greater southern representation in a unified Yemeni government.

**Table of Governance Actors<sup>47</sup>**

	WHO	WHERE	WHAT
Executive Units	Executive Units were initially created by the UNCHR to coordinate activities related to IDPs and refugees in governorates such as Amran and Al-Hodeidah. The Houthis effectively took control of the Executive Units and utilize their existing structures to govern at a governorate and district level.	Houthi-controlled governorates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Sada'a</li> <li>❖ Hajja</li> <li>❖ Amran</li> <li>❖ Al-Mahwit</li> <li>❖ Sana'a</li> <li>❖ Al-Hodeidah</li> <li>❖ Raymah</li> <li>❖ Ibb</li> <li>❖ Dhamar</li> </ul>	Executive Units exist in each governorate, with local offices in each district. Their presence in certain areas often usurps other forms of local governance, such as Local Councils. <p>Where effective, Executive Units will coordinate security services, public services – such as water distribution and garbage collection – and activities related to local and international NGOs.</p>
Local Councils	Local Councils are tied to the central government and had previously coordinated the provision of public services throughout Yemen prior to 2014.	Local Councils remain active in many areas depending on the structure and affiliation of its members. In areas where members are aligned with the ex-president, Local Councils continue to have some influence. In southern Yemen, the legitimacy of Local Councils is questioned due to their connection with a united Yemen. However, they remain functional. Local Council members belonging to strong local tribes or from the Islah party <sup>48</sup> are generally not effective, such as in Ibb.	In areas where Local Councils are still effective, they will coordinate the provision of basic public services such as water distribution and garbage collection.

<sup>47</sup> This table is based on the reflections of Search Country Staff, focus group discussions and conflict scans in six governorates. It should not be seen as exhaustive, but as an indicative example of the various opportunities to engage with these actors in particular areas. A full table of actors can be found in Appendix 1.

<sup>48</sup> The Islah party is Yemen's principle Islamic political party



Government Ministries	Government Ministries, such as the Ministry of Education (MoE), are national-level entities part of the central government.	Ministries and their sub-offices remain functional in southern governorates.	The functionality of many Ministries' is extremely low due to lack of funds and over six months of salary freezes. A few units within ministries remain functional, e.g. the Education in Emergencies department of the Ministry of Education (MoE), who work closely with INGOs implementing initiatives.
Tribal Sheikhs	In tribal areas, Sheikhs maintain an important role in community relations, high-level community decision-making, and can provide a bridge between Executive Units and/or Local Councils where all three operate collectively or in parallel.	Tribal areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Amran</li> <li>❖ Hajja</li> <li>❖ Sana'a</li> <li>❖ Ma'rib</li> <li>❖ Al Bayda</li> <li>❖ Lahij</li> <li>❖ Abyan</li> <li>❖ Shabwah</li> <li>❖ Ad Dali'</li> <li>❖ Al Mahwit</li> <li>❖ Dhamar</li> </ul>	In tribal areas, Sheikhs occupy a more significant role in local governance. Their roles are mainly designated to leading decision-making processes within their local communities.  Where Executive Units and Local Councils also operate collectively or in parallel, Sheikhs are often able to bridge divides and offer an opportunity for cooperation between differing local governance actors.

Authoritative bodies are dependent upon their constituents, and any approach to local governance requires consideration and inclusion of all conflicting parties, including women, youth, tribal leaders, religious leaders, and local authorities. Some groups that have been traditionally been perceived as unable to influence conflict and peace can be key entry points into previously marginalized areas. Youth, who are often seen as the source of violence, hold enormous potential to bring about peace in the communities. Equipping youth with peacebuilding skills and fostering a mediator mindset enables positive peer influence. Providing youth with a platform to constructively engage their communities empowers them as leaders for the future. Their participation in peacebuilding processes also promotes a positive perception of youth, which further serves to empower them as peace actors.

Women also play an important peacebuilding role and provide a key entry point into family units. Even in areas where women are not perceived to be engaged in peacebuilding, such as in AQAP-dominant areas, women hold influential positions within family structures, are key in educating children, and often inhabit spaces spanning across sectarian divides. Despite the challenges of incorporating women in peacebuilding roles in Yemen's male-dominated society, the role of women in society is also changing due to the conflict as they are increasingly engaged in the management of family affairs and contributing to household incomes.<sup>49</sup>

Their participation in peacebuilding efforts can lead to the emergence of increased female leadership at the local level, which could help affect the secondary effect of enhanced representation in governance structures.

### **Identify Access Points and Operational Feasibility:**

The lack of a strong central government – or, in certain areas, the total lack thereof – restricts the provision of goods and services and access of humanitarian organizations to provide assistance. Conflict intensity, political control, and access to resources vary from governorate to governorate, and even within districts. In recent months, freedom of movement has been limited within Yemen. Many living and working within Yemen have reported badly damaged infrastructure, treacherous roads, and restrictions on mobility based on region of birth. Local civil society organizations and traditional leaders can help bridge these operational difficulties as they are already present in society and hold authority within their communities. In cases where mobility is challenging or dangerous, platforms exist which enable the exchange of ideas and the building of relationships across these many divides. Social media and platforms such as WhatsApp can be highly effective tools to connect local peacebuilders across different governorates or between areas with difficult or no road access.

Many Yemenis trust local media channels and their friends and relatives to receive information regarding the war. The use of television, however, is very limited, and many international or regional media outlets are not considered to be neutral or independent. Radio networks have been able to fill some of the void; however, they are also becoming increasingly politically polarized. Social media has helped to convey information across regional boundaries and connect people with trusted sources. Indeed, most Yemenis will turn to social media to receive updates on current events and activities not only in their local communities, but across Yemen. Some local civil society organizations have used platforms like WhatsApp to continue sharing knowledge on conflict drivers, humanitarian need, and opportunities for peace and dialogue. Of course, these channels of communication are largely dependent on reliable electricity and sufficient funds to purchase phone credit or pay internet bills, but they do have the potential to help to break down real or perceived boundaries between groups.

## PATHWAYS FOR PEACE AND STABILITY

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The competing conflict dynamics in Yemen are mutually reinforcing. The ramifications of the sectarian, tribal, regional, and political divisions have exacerbated the social, economic, and humanitarian effects of the war and threatens the prospects of long-term peace deals and stability. However, there remains an opportunity for the international community to influence the solidification of identity-based conflict in society. Improved societal relationships at the local level may affect the course of the other conflict dynamics, but it also will preserve a foundation for peace. Any successful national peace arrangement must then depend on the status of three factors: 1) the degree of popular acceptance for peace and coexistence; 2) the degree to which representative mediators and interlocutors work to implement the deal within their community and provide services; and 3) the degree to which the public accepts the validity of the deal and a unified Yemen.

### The Degree of Popular Acceptance for Peace and Coexistence:

Despite emerging local conflicts over competition for resources, inability of government authorities to provide services, and insecurity, participants in Search for Common Ground focus group discussions cited frustration with enduring the incessant conflict and violence and express their exhaustion as a motivator for peace.<sup>50</sup> If they aren't addressed, the current fractured relationships will evolve and grow worse over time, risking new violence and cycles of conflict. However, if they are addressed, new positive relationships and mechanisms to manage disputes can emerge. By creating inclusive forums for dialogue and mutually agreed upon solutions to conflict, communities can help shrink the political vacuum where militarized groups thrive and provide alternative pathways to air grievances.

In Taiz, most conflicts surrounded competition for resources between IDP and host communities. Many IDPs had moved from Al-Waz'eiyah District to occupy local schools and health centers in Bani Mohammed, Bani Shaibah Al-Sharq, and Thubhaan. Host communities resented the disruption of basic services, such as the closures of schools and health centers, but IDPs were reluctant to leave the public spaces for fear of losing access to humanitarian assistance. While host communities perceived IDPs to pose a dangerous threat and occasionally these disputes turned violent, host communities still expressed sympathy for the plight of the displaced.<sup>51</sup> Village councils and local informal leaders have attempted to manage these disputes non-violently and procure mutually agreed upon solutions as disputes emerge. Support to collaborative and inclusive solutions like this provide a foundation for the peaceful evolution of these relationships.

Across the country, dialogue and reconciliation are cited as necessary actions to end the war.<sup>52</sup> In communities like Bait Al-Faqeeh in Al-Hodeidah, conflicts over access to water, education, and health services have not

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50 Search for Common Ground. Focus Group Discussions in Sana'a, Aden, and Ibb Governorates. April 2017.

51 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Al-Shamayatein District, Taiz Governorate, July 2016.

52 The Yemen Polling Center conducted interviews with 4,000 respondents in all governorates except Sa'adah and Socotra from February 23 to March 30, 2017. Yemen Polling Center, 2017.

turned violent and the social bonds and relationships between conflicting parties help to resolve disputes amicably, thanks to ongoing inter-group dialogue.<sup>53</sup> Direct communication and enhanced conflict resolution can help preserve these linkages and build the community's ability to nonviolently manage conflict. Peace at the national level is predicated on peace at the local level and vice versa. Community readiness to accept peaceful coexistence will be the foundation upon which any national deal succeeds.

### **Pathways to Peace and Stability:**

- **Empower local leaders to work across dividing lines to manage disputes.** Yemen has strong formal and informal leaders across society engaged in a variety of social issues. Tribal sheikhs, religious leaders, local governance actors, and local civil society organizations (CSOs) hold considerable authority and resonance with peers than actors perceived to be representing an outside entity. The international community should provide financial and political support to these civilian leaders to listen to complaints and grievances and develop mechanisms for inclusive and transparent responses. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) can play critical bridging, convening, and technical capacity-building roles. Local leaders can leverage the capacity of INGOs as international civil society institutions to enhance skills, provide unique opportunities to influence change, and connect networks of like-minded practitioners across the country.
- **Support local level peacebuilding as a tool to address local drivers for violence and prevent escalation of violence.** As the international community responds to the crisis in Yemen, there must be multi-faceted support to address the drivers and consequences of the war. The impacts of the current war have resulted in the absence and/or weakening of the central government and the ability of government structures to manage conflict and violence. Current strategies prioritize response via humanitarian assistance but do not provide enough support to stopping the crisis in the first place and ensuring that further divides are not entrenched, paving the way for more conflict in the future. The United States, United Nations, and World Bank, and other donors should support a holistic assistance strategy that includes funding for conflict transformation, community dialogue and mediation, and cultural exchange for local leaders within the country to engage communities across dividing lines to resolve disputes and preserve amiable societal relationships.
- **Support to media to promote neutral reporting and to promote non-militarized norms for governance and security.** There needs to be greater support to supporting those neutral reporting agencies that exist, enhancing their skills and reach, and promoting new sources of unbiased reporting. Social media can provide space for exchange, particularly among youth, to create connections across divides and geographical distance. It also enables people to access reliable information about conflict and possibilities for engagement with government and humanitarian actors. In addition, programming such as media programming, participatory theater, and cultural exchanges, which promote cross-cultural understanding, can help to dismantle growing sectarian, tribal, political, and regional divides at the community level.

- **Preserve the education space for learning and development of the new generation.** International donors can support the Ministry of Education to continue the provision of education services and to adopt a curriculum based on non-violent conflict resolution. The Ministry of Education remains one of the better functioning ministries and continues to support schools throughout the country. Schools that were previously neutral gathering places have been coopted by IDPs and infiltrated by violence. The generation of youth will be the leaders of peace in Yemen, but are being absorbed into a culture of violence and denied a chance to continue learning.

## The Role of Representative Mediators and Interlocutors in Supporting Peace and Providing Services:

Buy-in at the local level provides the foundation for any larger national process. Local individuals embedded within their communities carry more resonance and authority with peers and neighbors than those perceived to be representing an outside entity. At the sub-district and village level, local councils, tribal sheikhs, and influential social/economic leaders like businessmen are perceived as best able to facilitate these types of conflict resolution processes.<sup>54</sup> Locally-rooted mediators have been essential ambassadors of conflict resolution and help to develop tangible resolutions to local conflicts. Tribal leaders are often perceived to be active in their community in a positive way, especially in places like al-Jawf, Hajja, and Amran.<sup>55</sup> In Sana'a, Aden, and Ibb, some Yemenis believe that neutral leaders and influential figures can come together to build on common interests in the community, such as distribution of resources, to develop locally-rooted solutions.<sup>56</sup> Internal mediators and interlocutors are crucial to creating local level buy-in to peace in the communities and greater peace in Yemen.

Efforts to reduce conflict should enable local governance actors to effectively manage basic services while working collaboratively with community members to reflect their priorities. This strengthens social cohesion, service delivery, and the normalization of dialogue in communities. Local governance initiatives to address concrete conflict drivers, such as lack of access to potable water, can provide immediate responses to specific grievances of the community that span divides. Strengthened local-level initiatives, however, must be accompanied by leadership at the national level. Dynamics at the regional and governorate-level remain intertwined, and national leadership will be instrumental in weaving together these localized structures. Collaboration and the provision of services help rectify the trust deficit between civilians and local authorities, creating pockets of stability to withstand the effects of the war and prepare for peace.

54 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Lawder District, Abyan Governorate, June 2016. Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Bait Al-Faqeeh District, Al-Hodeidah Governorate, February 2017. Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Zabeed District, Al-Hodeidah Governorate, February 2017. Yemen Polling Center. "Perceptions of the Yemeni public on living conditions and security-related issues." Survey Findings. Sana'a/Aden. 2017. <[http://www.yemenpolling.org/advocacy/upfiles/YPCPublications\\_YPC-Data---Perceptions-of-the-Yemeni-public-on-living-conditions-and-security-related-issues---May-2017.pdf](http://www.yemenpolling.org/advocacy/upfiles/YPCPublications_YPC-Data---Perceptions-of-the-Yemeni-public-on-living-conditions-and-security-related-issues---May-2017.pdf)>

55 Yemen Polling Center, 2017.

56 Search for Common Ground. Focus Group Discussions in Sana'a, Aden, and Ibb Governorates. April 2017.

### Pathways to Peace and Stability:

- **Distribute humanitarian assistance with transparency and accompany with peacebuilding and dialogue forums.** The distribution of aid continues to be a source of conflict that further entrenches societal divisions. As the humanitarian crisis endures, humanitarian responders must ensure that the provision of aid is conflict-sensitive and does not exacerbate local conflict dynamics across geographic, sectarian, or political divides. Humanitarian actors should look to not only prevent the escalation of violence, but also use humanitarian assistance as an entry point for peacebuilding. The provision of aid can be a major opportunity to bring communities together when done correctly.
- **Support inclusive and responsive local governance structures.** In the absence of centralized governmental control, many institutions, such as Executive Units, Local Councils, and civil society, have come forth to fill the void to deliver services and manage disputes at the local level. As local governance structures struggle to fulfill basic duties and are challenged by varying perceptions of legitimacy from local communities, systems must be developed to continue the provision of services while also strengthening inclusive decision-making processes and accountability mechanisms in cooperation with local communities. International actors, such as the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union can help create referral and reporting systems between civil society, local governance authorities, and national and international NGOs to manage coordination of service delivery.

## The Need for Public Acceptance and Support of a Ceasefire and Peace Process:

The international community has the opportunity to build and maintain social platforms to support any negotiated national peace arrangement. Despite ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis, this type of work cannot wait until after a political agreement is settled. Addressing the growing divides within communities now and working to reconcile differences on the local level will foster a more durable foundation for the possibility of peace.



*Prospects and partners for peace endure even in complex situations of tension.*

Yemenis need not look too far to learn from the oversights of the past. The NDC failed to adequately involve members from across society (women, youth, civil society), and from across Yemen (many at the local level were unaware that the process was going on.) Any new approach towards peace must then require inclusion of all conflicting parties, including women, youth, tribal leaders, religious leaders, and local authorities, who are committed to the notion of a unified and peaceful Yemen. Prospects and partners for peace endure even in complex situations of tension. Yemenis have grown frustrated with enduring the incessant conflict and violence and express their exhaustion as a motivator for positive steps towards peace.<sup>57</sup>

**Pathways to Peace and Stability:**

- Ensure that peace processes are inclusive, participatory, and representative. As the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union, among others, host and support dialogues and negotiations at the national and international level, they should ensure that a peace process is participatory and representative across society. Human rights organizations and other international institutions should support impartial social and traditional media to report on the status of negotiations to the community-level.
- Feed grassroots reconciliation and peacebuilding into national peace dialogues. An international, negotiated ceasefire and/or peace process will not guarantee peace and stability across the country. Previous peace attempts in Yemen, most recently the National Dialogue Conference in 2011, did not adequately incorporate local groups into the process and ultimately was unsuccessful in establishing peace. As international donors host and support dialogues and negotiations at the national and international level, they must be paired with simultaneous community dialogues, town hall meetings, and other civic education and engagement platforms to sensitize and engage communities, if they hope to be successful at ending the war and building a stable Yemen. Bottom-up approaches to peace that build trust and stability at the local level can meet top-down political negotiations led by national and international actors to form a sustainable approach that Yemenis believe in.

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## APPENDIX 1: PARTNERS FOR PEACE

The following table discusses the opportunities to engage with various partners to promote local level peace. This information is based on Search’s programming, conflict scans, and focus groups discussions in six Yemen governorates - Sana’a, Aden, Taiz, Al-Hodeidah, Ibb, and Abyan.

Actors	Contextual Analysis	Effects on Peacebuilding
Women	<p><i>Despite facing discrimination and inequality regarding marriage rights, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, women in Yemen have historically been influential within family structures, key in educating children, and often provide open lines of communication across societal dividing lines (e.g. IDP/host communities) based on their shared experience as women.<sup>58</sup> Within Yemen’s tribal culture, the extent of women’s influence varies in each governorate and district, as well as in rural versus urban areas. For example, women in specific geographical areas under Al-Qaeda militant control (small pockets in Abyan, Labij, and Al-Bayda governorates) are subject to grave discrimination and face strict gendered barriers to societal involvement. In another instance, women in urban centers such as Sana’a or Al-Hodeidah are afforded greater flexibility within social spaces, such as more varied employment opportunities or affiliation to women’s rights groups, despite discriminatory laws and practices.</i></p>	<p><i>Women are often key in educating new generations and thus enable the normalization of peaceful approaches to conflict resolution. Their recognized participation in peacebuilding efforts leads to the emergence of increased female leadership at the local level, and potentially in governance structures at all levels. Women also greatly influence how gendered roles lead to conflict escalation or peace initiatives. For example, if violent hyper-masculinity is openly rejected by women, this in turn influences male counterparts and young boys, and promotes an environment in which men are commended for peacebuilding efforts and resorting to dialogue rather than violence.</i></p>
Youth	<p><i>Historically, young people in Yemen have not been perceived positively by the wider community. Labelled either as a nuisance or trouble-makers, children’s rights are not inculcated into school curriculums or adopted by most families, resulting in a normalization of violence towards youth, who then emulate this behavior. This has become aggravated by the ongoing conflict, adding famine, increased exposure to disease, lack of education, and recruitment to armed groups to the list of push factors towards violence.<sup>59</sup></i></p>	<p><i>Peer pressure often affects decision-making amongst young people, who in turn have an influence on younger children. Equipping teenagers and older youth under 30 with peacebuilding skills and inculcating a mediator mindset enables positive peer influence. Additionally, peacebuilding work within Yemeni schools to prevent violence has proven fruitful in equipping youth with the tools to effect positive change in their communities and enhancing resilience. Youth-focused initiatives aid in the normalization of peaceful conflict resolution in among new generations, providing more robust avenues for peace. Being active in peacebuilding processes also promotes a positive perception of youth which further serves to empower them as peace actors in Yemen.</i></p>

58 “Yemen: Events of 2016.” *Human Rights Watch World Report 2017*. Human Rights Watch, 12 Jan. 2017. Web. 20 June 2017. <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/yemen#1de7c4>>.

59 Falling through the Cracks: The Children of Yemen.” UNICEF, Mar. 2017. Web. 20 June 2017. <[https://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/PDFs/Yemen\\_2\\_Years\\_-\\_children\\_falling\\_through\\_the\\_cracks\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/PDFs/Yemen_2_Years_-_children_falling_through_the_cracks_FINAL.pdf)>. idUKKBN17J0UH>.

Actors	Contextual Analysis	Effects on Peacebuilding
Sheikhs	<p><i>Traditional leaders, such as Sheikhs, have historically been highly respected and influential among Yemeni communities. As such, they have been able to act as effective conflict mediators and are keen to foster social cohesion. Due to shifting power dynamics inherent in such a volatile and shifting conflict, some sheikhs have become relegated to second-tier leaders, with de-facto governing bodies, Executive Units and Local Councils usurping Sheikhs' previous power within some communities. However, whether in a high or relatively low position of power depending on the local environment, Sheikhs are still often able to garner support for peacebuilding opportunities and approaches, and promote the institutionalization and normalization of mediation and peaceful conflict resolution.</i></p>	<p><i>Specifically, the younger generation of local Sheikhs are increasingly open-minded to innovative conflict resolutions techniques. This can provide a strong foothold for the implementation of locally-rooted peacebuilding initiatives and an environment in which local community leaders encourage dialogue rather than divisive confrontation. In addition, depending on their level of local power vis-à-vis local governing bodies, Sheikhs are key in encouraging the involvement of marginalized groups such as women and girls, and youth, into peacebuilding initiatives. Empowering Sheikhs to develop their role as powerful community leaders and mediators will enable the strengthening of non-violent governance, presenting a viable alternative voice to militias, army units, and armed groups.</i></p>
Religious Leaders	<p><i>Historically, religious leaders have been highly respected community members. This has been used both to dispel but also foster violence and divisions within Yemen. Within the current conflict, religious leaders' influence within communities and positions on peacebuilding vary greatly between governorates and districts. It is thus imperative to scan the local environment prior to engagement with religious leaders through initiatives. In addition, the shifting balance of power and tense social environments in certain Houthi-controlled governorates have exacerbated religious divides between Sunni and Shiite sects. Although not a primary conflict driver in most areas, these sectarian divides can be successfully addressed by key religious leaders who hold influence over public opinion can garner support for peacebuilding opportunities and approaches, especially by legitimizing these through religious teachings.</i></p>	<p><i>Due to their high influence, engaging religious leaders is important but must be approached with caution due to sensitivities regarding sectarian tensions and radical religious teachings in certain areas. As such, engagement of religious leaders should be highly localized, assessing affiliation and espoused teachings. Nevertheless, religious leaders are important in many local communities in condemning violence and supporting conflict resolution processes. These leaders are especially important in calling for peaceful coexistence beyond differing religious beliefs or affiliations, which is essential for the development and maintenance of peace throughout Yemen. In addition, more progressive religious leaders can be key in encouraging the involvement of marginalized groups such as women and girls, and youth, into peacebuilding initiatives.</i></p>

Actors	Contextual Analysis	Effects on Peacebuilding
Local Governance Actors	<p><i>Local governance actors hold the positions and resources to be able to influence and resolve local conflict drivers. Who these local governance actors are, however, is now highly complex due to the shifting conflict. In certain post-conflict areas and areas under Houthis control, local governance is solidified either through local militias, tribal leaders, Local Councils, or Executive Units originally established by the UN and now re-established by Houthis: expanded to encompass governorate-level management, with localized district representation. It is thus key to identify the local governance actors prior to any local engagement. Key relationships with these actors can influence the legitimacy and implementation of a project, especially in communities where strong governing structures still exist. In localities where structures are less robust, these actors remain key in navigating access to communities both physically, administratively, and socially, but require more trust-building and communication as shifting power dynamics influences perceptions of outsiders as well as affects the turn-around rate for acting governing officials.</i></p>	<p><i>Local governance actors can unlock and identify solutions to conflict drivers. They are also often able to provide the resources to start concrete peacebuilding efforts linked to projects such as the building of a new water well, or the paving of dirt roads, alongside dialogue processes involved in project realization. Additionally, in more stable areas of governance, local governance actors are able to be trained as facilitators and thus become key local peacebuilders. This aids in normalizing an environment of non-violence and dialogue, as well as forwarding local governance structures as positive societal influencers.</i></p>
Businesspersons and Entrepreneurs	<p><i>Local entrepreneurs and businesspersons are often highly respected and influential actors within communities. Businessmen, and at times women, influence the local economy and are the gatekeepers for job opportunities, as such they contribute to local monetary wealth. These actors are able to influence peacebuilding through garnering buy-in from a community due to their stature, or provide financial incentives to instigate a project.</i></p>	<p><i>Very often, in a desire to contribute to peace and community stability, key business people can provide the financial resources necessary to support initiatives, such as youth training or buying of a water pump for a new water project. These financial contributions as well as their societal influence as successful individuals can contribute to the normalization of peaceful conflict resolution.</i></p>
Teachers	<p><i>Teachers, especially in rural areas, have historically been highly respected community members. Despite this, violence against children and youth is not uncommon in many Yemeni schools. Often, parents also encourage teachers to use violence in disciplining their students. This has led to the perpetuation and normalization of violence in schools and among the youth. The recent lack of available salaries for working teachers has further exacerbated tensions within schools and seriously affected the ability of school structures and teachers to act as hubs and mentors for peace amidst the ongoing conflict.<sup>60</sup></i></p>	<p><i>Despite sometimes unquestioned violence against youth and difficulties in earning a living within the current education system, teachers play a key role shifting local norms and the acceptance of non-violent dialogue processes to address conflicts. Teachers enable the fostering of new generations who believe in peaceful approaches to address conflict and are equipped with the skills needed to promote peace. In addition, teachers play a powerful role in not only institutionalizing peaceful conflict resolution, but also in ensuring parents and other community members are invested in promoting peace, for themselves and for their children. Finally, teachers are often able to secure the involvement of marginalized groups such as women and girls, and youth, into peacebuilding initiatives.</i></p>

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Fahmy, Tarek, and Noah Browning. "Wartime Economic Crisis Threatens Education of Millions of Yemeni Children - U.N." Reuters. Ed. Toby Chopra. Thomson Reuters, 17 Apr. 2017. Web. 20 June 2017. <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-yemen-war-education-idUKKBN17J0UH>>.

Actors	Contextual Analysis	Effects on Peacebuilding
CSOs	<p><i>The ongoing conflict has changed the landscape of CSOs in Yemen. Yemen was the Gulf state most friendly to the creation and presence of CSOs: a task which was relatively easy until 2014. Currently, many have been forced to dismantle projects due to lack of funding or personnel, and others have dissolved completely. In addition, an international focus on funding humanitarian projects has resulted in lack of funding for many CSOs, or forced them to shift activities towards providing humanitarian aid instead of social cohesion or peacebuilding. Nevertheless, CSOs remain key actors in local peacebuilding as many have already garnered the respect of local communities.</i></p>	<p><i>CSOs play a key role in connecting INGOs and international actors with community-level peacebuilding initiatives, not only by providing an entry point to these communities through local buy-in and trust already garnered, but also by being able to continue peacebuilding work after the lifespan of a specific project. CSOs are also best positioned to use INGO resources and knowledge to further tailor peacebuilding expertise to local contexts and thus ensure peacebuilding work remains relevant to the Yemeni context. CSOs also greatly influence INGOs throughout different phases of a project, providing local knowledge, and instructing INGOs on nuanced ways to engage a particular community or group.</i></p>
INGOs	<p><i>INGOs have been increasingly active in Yemen following the escalation of the conflict in 2014, primarily by providing humanitarian aid. However, many INGOs have removed staff from Yemen offices and relocated outside Yemen. In addition, many organizations working on peacebuilding and human rights have been sidelined by the logic that the conflict to date does not permit such work. This means that funding for initiatives besides humanitarian aid is sparse. Despite these realities, many organizations have been able to successfully implement peacebuilding initiatives by merging peacebuilding with humanitarian activities, and using remote management. INGOs can help to further the case for peacebuilding efforts in Yemen through donor consultations and advocacy efforts. This greatly influences the allocation and amount of funds available.</i></p>	<p><i>Conducting locally-oriented programs and implementing projects which take into consideration the recommendations of this Peace Analysis will enable successful peacebuilding work throughout Yemen. Providing feedback to other INGOs and CSOs on best practices, ensuring peacebuilding is a priority amongst donors and the international community, and developing long-term projects ensuring that Yemenis are equipped with the skills necessary for peacebuilding will expedite the reality of local and national peace. Moreover, if INGOs can bridge local and national-level peacebuilding initiatives and networks, this strengthens the coordination and presence of peacebuilding actors throughout Yemen.</i></p>

2017

# HUMANITARIAN **NEEDS** OVERVIEW

PEOPLE IN NEED

**18.8M**

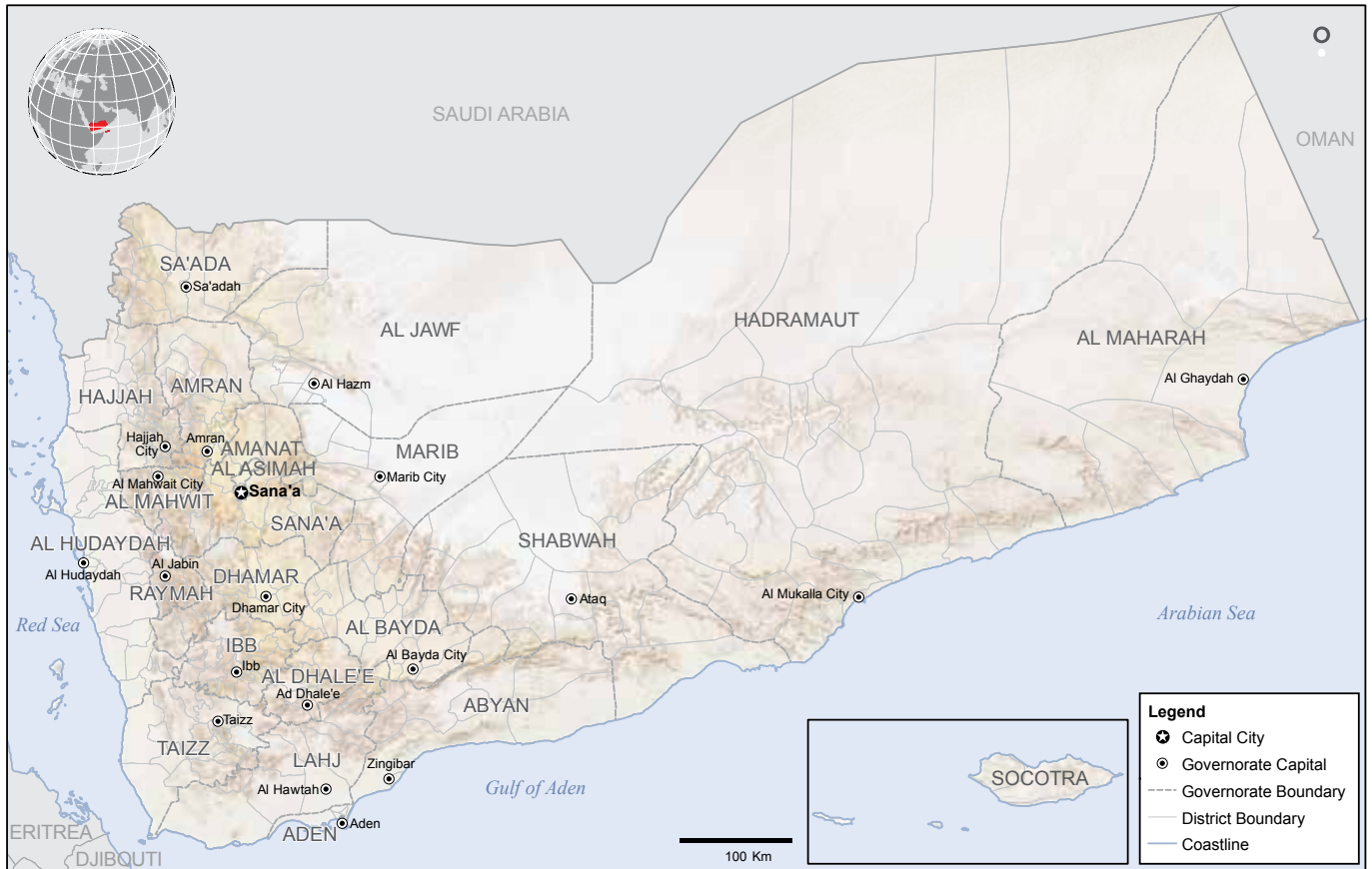
NOV 2016



**YEMEN**

Photo: Julien Harneis.

# REFERENCE MAP



This document is produced on behalf of the Humanitarian Country Team and partners. This version was published in January 2017 and corrects several typographical errors in the original edition published in December 2016.

This document provides the Humanitarian Country Team's shared understanding of the crisis, including the most pressing humanitarian needs and the estimated number of people who need assistance. It represents a consolidated evidence base and helps inform joint strategic response planning.








The designations employed and the presentation of material in the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

 [www.unocha.org/yemen](http://www.unocha.org/yemen)

 [www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/yemen](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/yemen)

 @OCHAYemen

# PART I: SUMMARY

- 
-  Humanitarian needs & key figures
  -  Impact of the crisis
  -  Breakdown of people in need
  -  Most vulnerable groups
  -  Severity of need
  -  Perceptions of affected people

# PEOPLE IN NEED

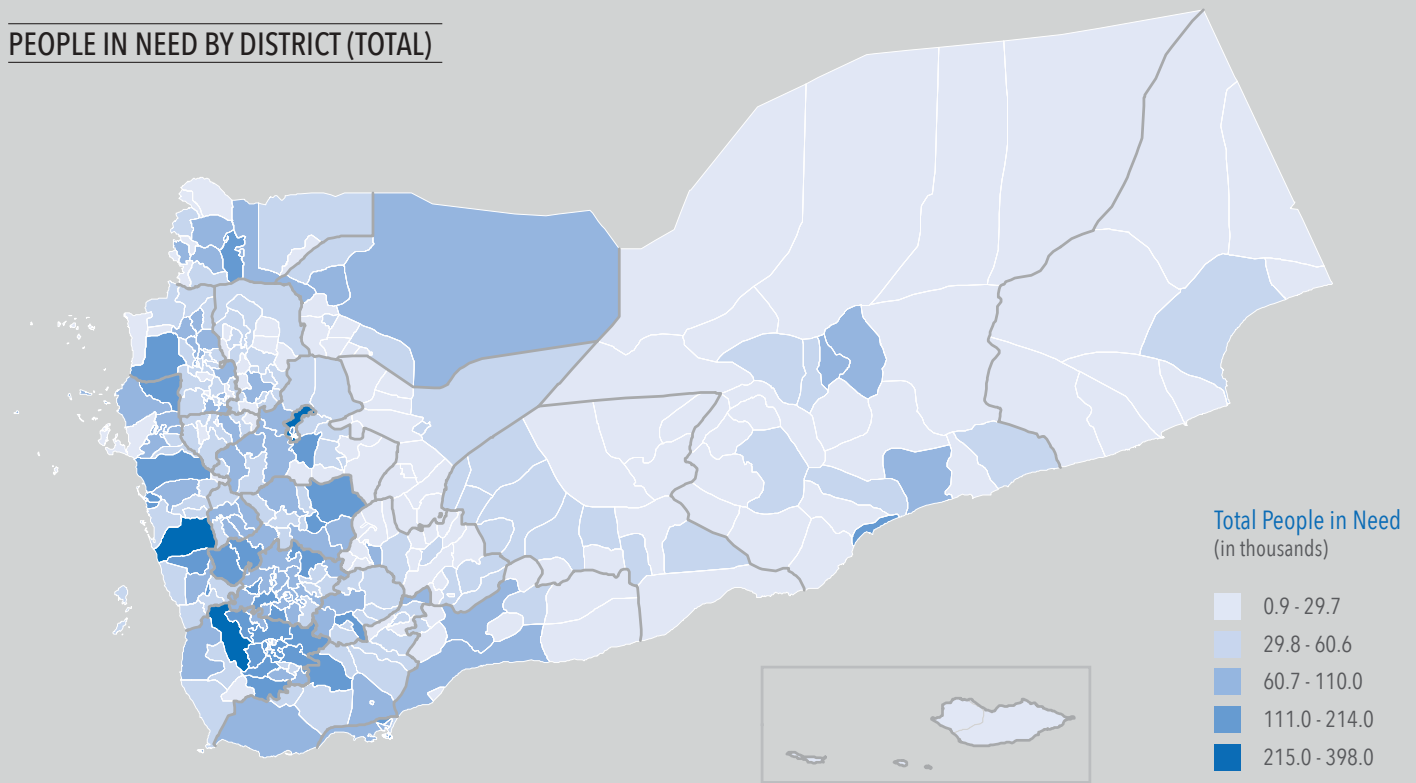


**27.4 M**  
Total population



**18.8 M**  
Total people in need

## PEOPLE IN NEED BY DISTRICT (TOTAL)

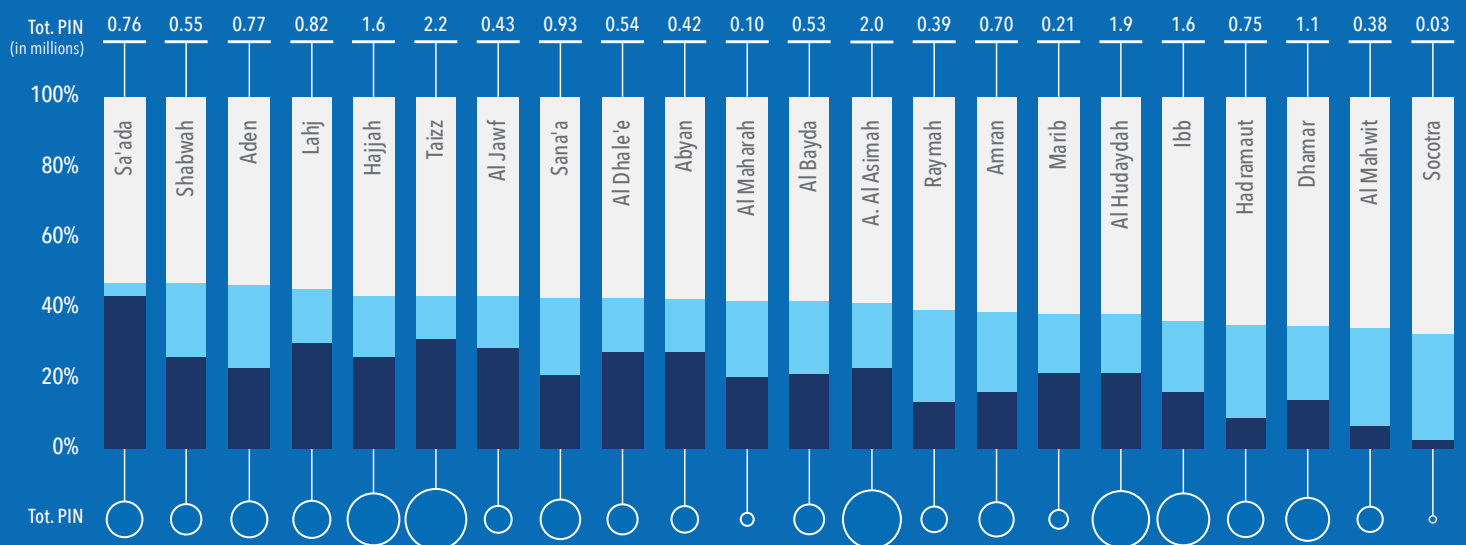


## PEOPLE IN NEED BY GOVERNORATE (ACUTE & MODERATE) \*



**10.3 M** in acute need

**8.5 M** in moderate need



Source: Task Force on Population Movement (TFPM); Clusters.

\* Acute Need: People who require immediate assistance to save and sustain their lives. Moderate Need: People who require assistance to stabilize their situation and prevent them from slipping into acute need. Barchart arranged by percentage of total population in need against total estimated population in each governorate.

Total population figures based on 2016 population projections of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) adjusted for population movements (displacements and return) as estimated in the 11th report of the Task Force on Population Movements (TFPM). For more information on the methodology used to estimate people in need and in acute need, see "Methodology" annex and individual sector chapters.



## HUMANITARIAN

NEEDS &  
KEY FIGURES

An estimated 18.8 million people in Yemen need some kind of humanitarian or protection assistance, including 10.3 million who are in acute need. Escalating conflict since March 2015 has created a vast protection crisis in which millions face risks to their safety and basic rights, and are struggling to survive.

With more quality data available than at any time since 2014, this year's analysis is based on a substantially more rigorous methodology for estimating how many people require assistance and the severity of their needs. 2017 priority needs estimates are about 10 per cent lower than last year. This decrease reflects better data collection only, and can in no way be interpreted as an "improvement" in Yemen's catastrophic humanitarian situation. For a full explanation of the methodology, including criteria for "acute need", see the Methodology annex.

## KEY HUMANITARIAN ISSUES



## 1 Protection of civilians

A severe protection crisis is under way in Yemen in which civilians face serious risks to their safety, well-being and basic rights. More than 19 months of conflict have killed or injured nearly 44,000 people and forced more than 3 million people from their homes. Parties to the conflict have attacked private and public civilian infrastructure, including 325 verified attacks on schools, health facilities, markets, roads and other sites. Rates of grave violations of child rights and gender-based violence are rising rapidly.



## 2 Basic survival

Millions of people in Yemen need assistance to ensure their basic survival. An estimated 14 million are food insecure (including 7 million severely food insecure); 14.4 million lack access to safe drinking water or sanitation; 14.7 million lack adequate healthcare; and 3.3 million are acutely malnourished, including 462,000 children who face Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM). Of 18.8 million people in need of some kind of assistance, 10.3 million are in acute need.



## 3 Essential services & infrastructure

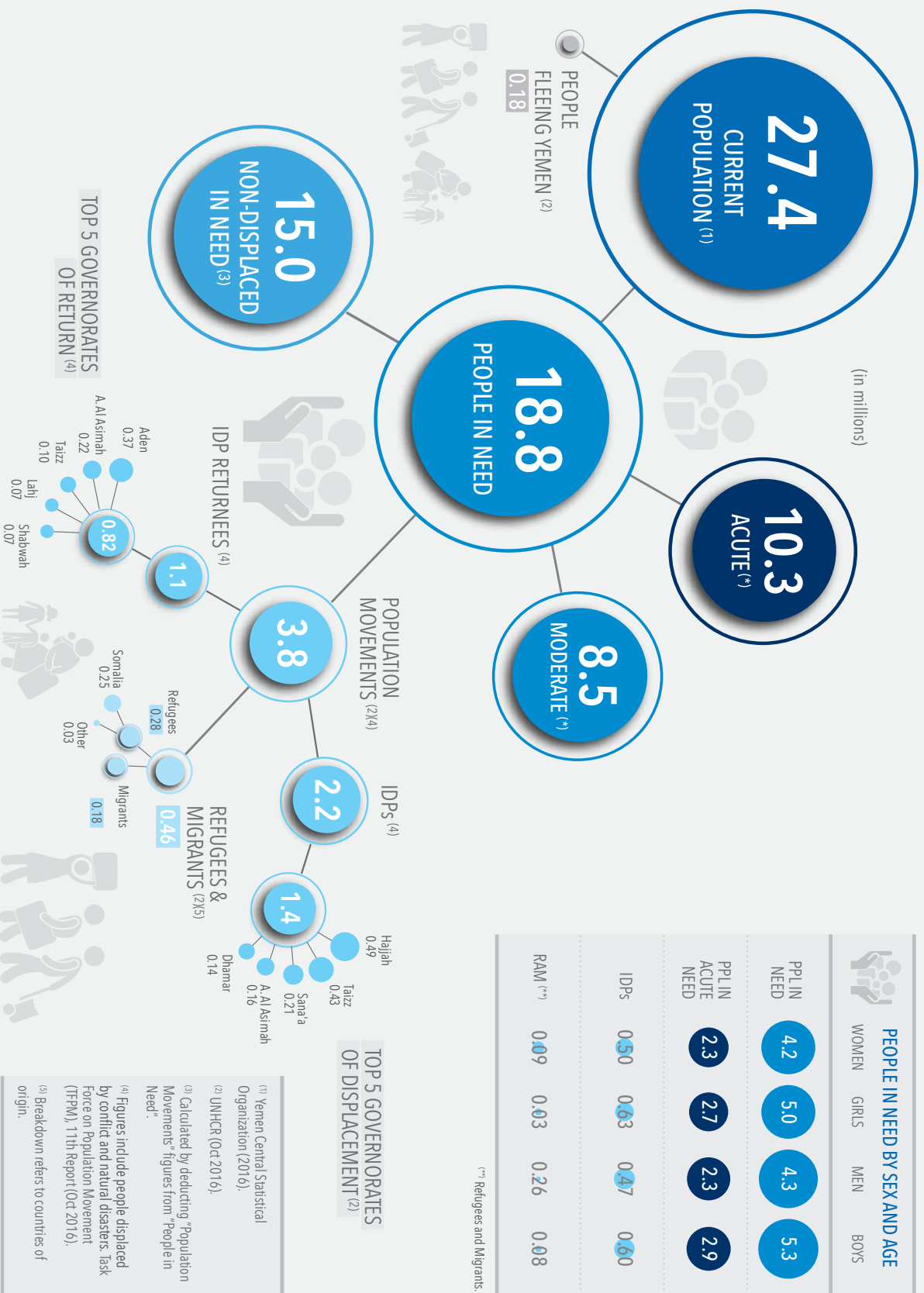
Basic services and the institutions that provide them are collapsing, placing enormous pressure on the humanitarian response. Only 45 per cent of health facilities are functioning, and even these face severe shortages in medicines, equipment, and staff. More than 1,600 conflict-affected schools are unfit for use, and 2 million children are out of school. Most public sector salaries – on which about 30 per cent of the population depend – have been paid irregularly in the past several months.



## 4 Livelihoods & private sector collapse

Conflict and restrictions on imports and financial transactions are devastating livelihoods, pushing millions of people into dependence on humanitarian aid or negative coping strategies. Basic commodity prices are on average 26 per cent higher than before the crisis at a time when purchasing power has eroded substantially, and most goods are only sporadically available in markets. Humanitarian partners cannot replace a functioning commercial sector, which is being deliberately undermined.

## KEY FIGURES



<sup>(\*)</sup> Acute Need: People who require immediate assistance to save and sustain their lives. Moderate Need: People who require assistance to stabilize their situation and prevent them from slipping into acute need.

# IMPACT OF THE CRISIS

More than 19 months of conflict have devastated Yemen, leaving 18.8 million people in need of humanitarian and protection assistance – including 10.3 million who are in acute need. The conflict is rapidly pushing the country towards social, economic and institutional collapse.

## Conflict and chronic vulnerabilities

Even before March 25, 2015, when the conflict in Yemen escalated, the country faced enormous levels of humanitarian need, with 15.9 million people requiring some kind of humanitarian or protection assistance in late 2014. These needs stemmed from years of poverty, under-development, environmental decline, intermittent conflict, and weak rule of law – including widespread violations of human rights.

The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance rose consistently from 2012 to 2014, while real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita – already the lowest in the Arab world – fell by just under 50 per cent from 590 USD to 326 USD per capita between 2012 and 2015 and by almost 35 per cent in 2015 alone. Since the escalation of conflict, government authorities estimate that GDP per capita has contracted by about 35 per cent and that inflation has risen by 30 per cent. The impact has squeezed the coping mechanisms of vulnerable families even further, leaving more people in need of humanitarian assistance.

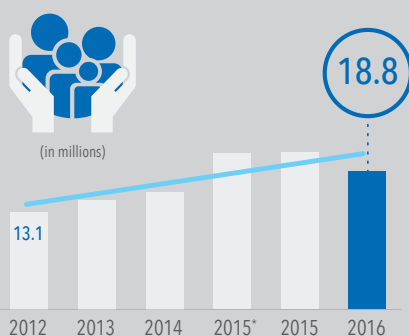
More than 19 months of conflict have exacerbated chronic vulnerabilities leaving an estimated 18.8 million people in need of humanitarian and protection assistance – a nearly 20 per

cent increase since late 2014. This includes 10.3 million people in acute need, who urgently require immediate, life-saving assistance in at least one sector. Due to the conflict, which has caused a pervasive protection crisis, forced displacement, severe economic decline, and the collapse of basic services and institutions, humanitarian needs have risen sharply in all sectors. This chapter addresses these underlying factors and their impact on the overall humanitarian situation; sector-specific needs analyses appear in Part 2 of the HNO.

## Widespread protection crisis

The conduct of hostilities has been brutal. As of 25 October 2016, health facilities had reported almost 44,000 casualties (including nearly 7,100 deaths) – an average of 75 people killed or injured every day. These figures significantly undercount the true extent of casualties given diminished reporting capacity of health facilities after 19 months of war and many people's inability to access healthcare at all. UN Member States, UN organizations, humanitarian partners and human rights organizations, have outlined serious concerns regarding the conduct of the conflict, in which violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law have been committed by all parties to the conflict.

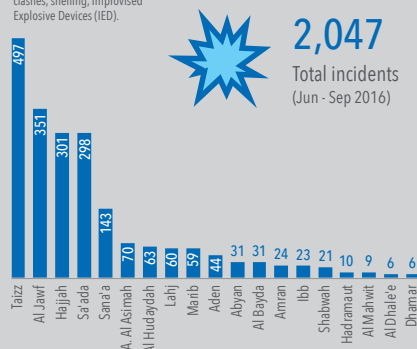
## PEOPLE IN NEED (2012-2017)



Sources: CAP 2013; HNO 2014, HNO 2015; \*Revised HNO 2015; HNO 2016; HNO 2017.

## CONFLICT INCIDENTS\* BY GOVERNORATE

\*Incidents include air strikes, armed clashes, shelling, improvised Explosive Devices (IED).



Source: UN (Sep 2016).

## GDP & INFLATION 2015-2016 CHANGE

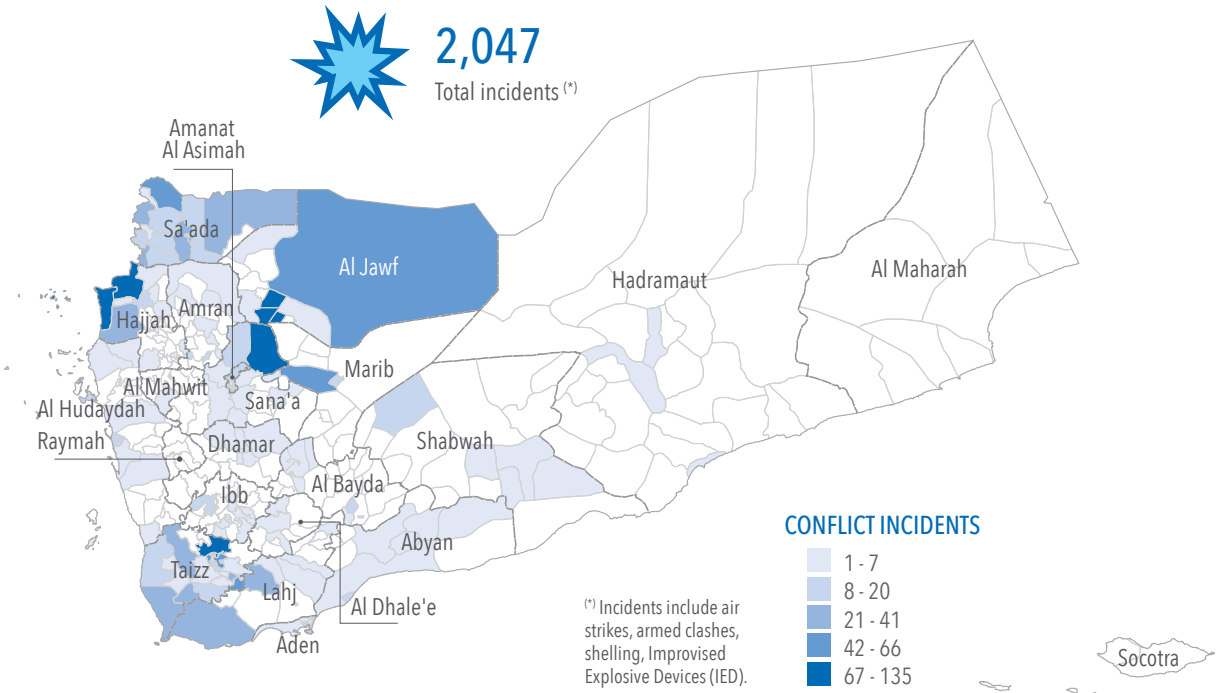
**-35%**  
GDP change from 2015

**30%**  
Inflation change from 2015



Source: MOPIC (2016).

NUMBER OF CONFLICT INCIDENTS (JUN - SEP 2016)



Source: UN (1 Jun - 30 Sep 2016).

As of late 2016, ongoing conflict between Coalition-backed forces, Houthi/Saleh forces, and other groups continued to inflict heavy casualties, cause extensive damage to public and private infrastructure, and impede rapid delivery of humanitarian assistance. After more than 19 months of fighting, parties to the conflict have created a pervasive protection crisis in which millions of civilians

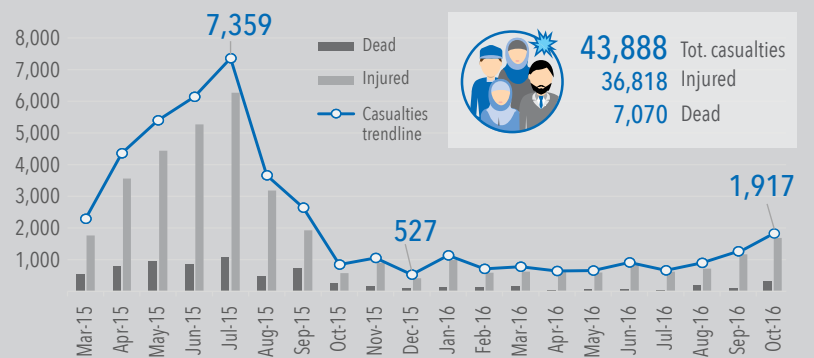
face tremendous threats to their well-being, and the most vulnerable struggle simply to survive. Parties to the conflict are required to comply with their obligation to uphold international humanitarian and human rights law at all times.

HEALTH WORKER CASUALTIES SINCE MARCH 2015



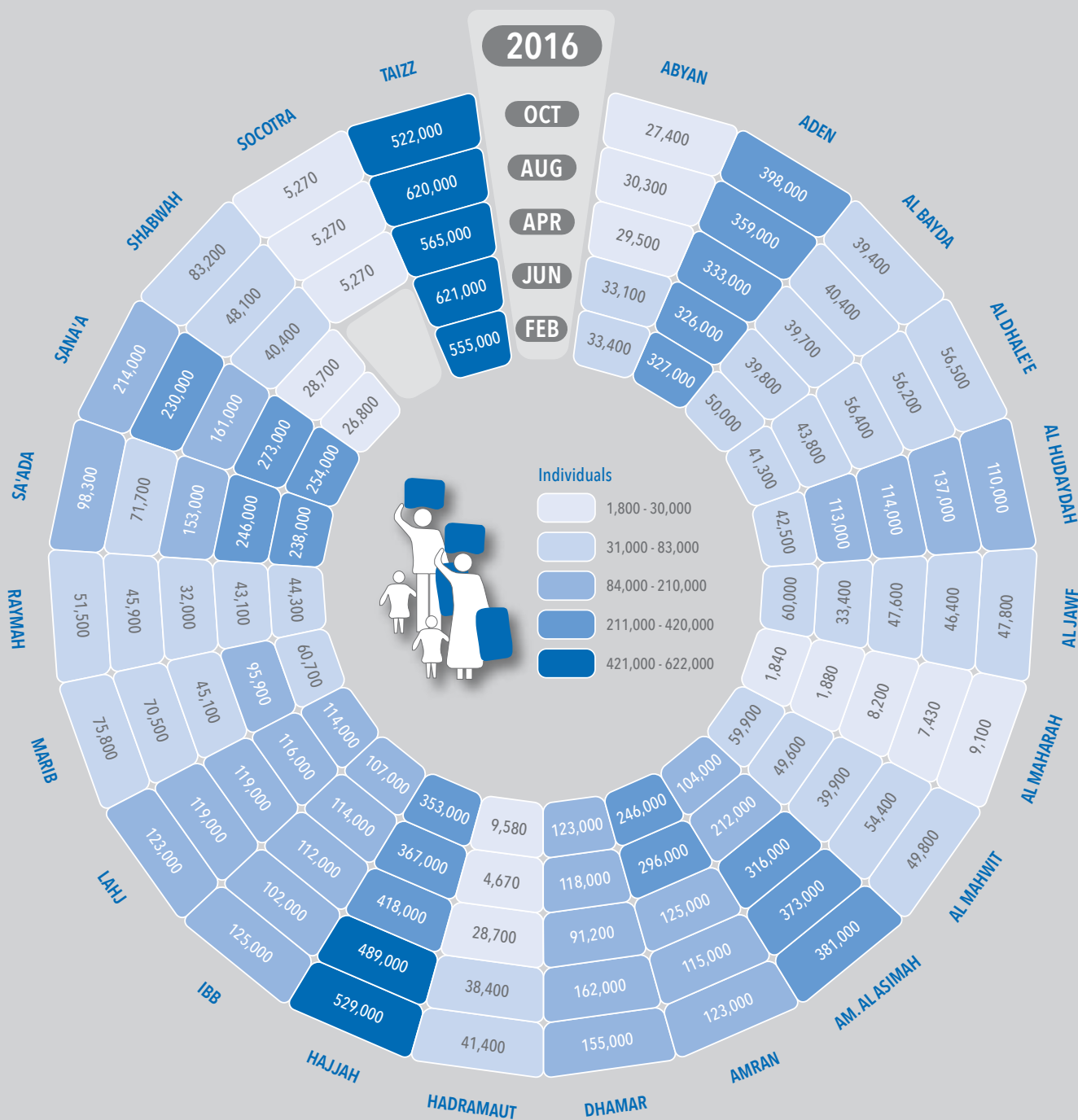
Source: WHO (Sep 2016).

CASUALTIES REPORTED BY HEALTH FACILITIES<sup>1</sup>



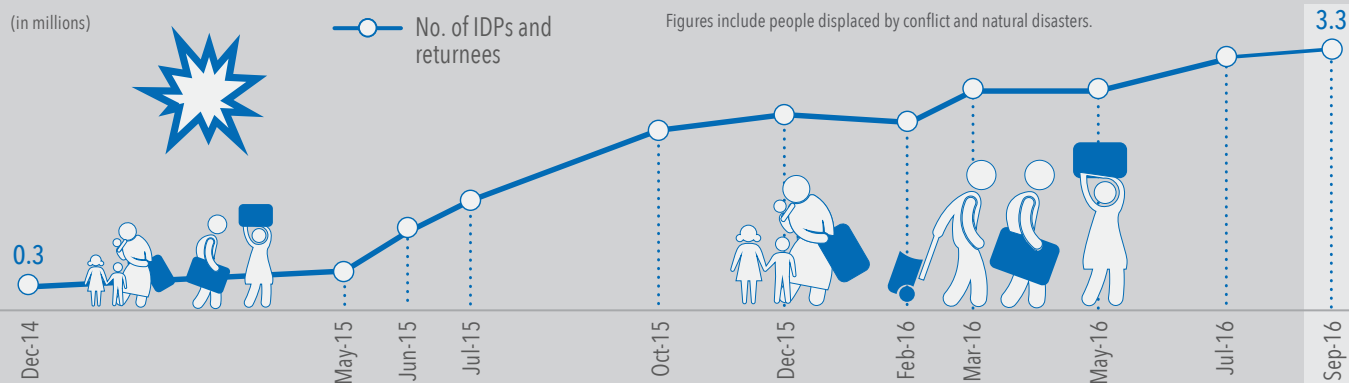
<sup>(1)</sup> Due to the high number of health facilities that are not functioning or partially functioning as a result of the conflict, these numbers are underreported and likely higher. Source: WHO (as of 25 October 2016).

# IDPS AND RETURNEES BY LOCATION OVER TIME



Source: Task Force on Population Movement - TFFPM (2016).

## DISPLACEMENT LEVELS (2014-2016)



Source: Task Force on Population Movement (IOM/UNHCR).

## Forced displacement and returns

As of October 2016, nearly 2.2 million people remained displaced within Yemen. More than half of current Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are sheltering in Hajjah, Taizz and Sana'a, and roughly 77 per cent are living with host families, or in rented accommodation, straining already scarce resources. New displacements continue to occur in areas where conflict persists, largely offsetting the impact of initial returns. Total displacement estimates have remained fairly stable in the last year, ranging between 2.1 million and 2.8 million people, even as the number of returnees has increased. After 19 months of conflict, the average length of displacement has also grown substantially. Ninety per cent of current internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been displaced for more than 10 months, straining their ability – and their hosts' – to cope.

Just over 1 million IDPs have provisionally returned to their areas of origin, although the sustainability of these returns remains precarious. Nearly 70 per cent of returnees are in Aden, Sana'a or Taizz, with more than 85 per cent living in their original residences. Substantial numbers are living in damaged houses, are unable to afford repairs and face serious protection risks. (More information on the needs of IDPs and returnees appears in the "Most Vulnerable Groups" and "Perceptions of Affected People" chapters below.)

## Severe economic decline

The Yemeni economy is being wilfully destroyed, with preliminary results of the Disaster Needs Assessment estimating \$19 billion in infrastructure damage and other losses – equivalent to about half of GDP in 2013. The World Bank estimates that the poverty rate in Yemen has doubled to 62 per cent, and millions of people are now unable to meet their basic needs independently. Deliberate policies and tactics are driving this decline. On numerous occasions, parties to the conflict have targeted key economic infrastructure such as ports, roads, bridges, factories and markets with air strikes, shelling or other attacks. They have also imposed severe access restrictions that severely disrupt the flow of private sector goods essential to civilians' survival, including food,

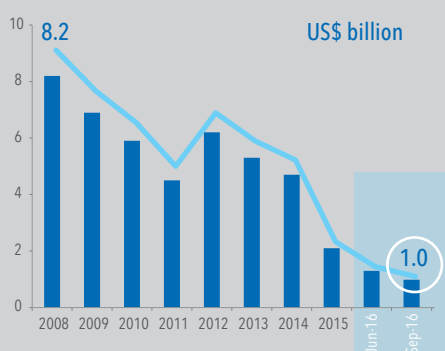
fuel and medicine. Millions of people are now unable to meet their needs independently as a result of the economic decline – itself the result of deliberate policies. Imposed restrictions on imports, movements and financial transactions are crippling the commercial sector and hindering the delivery of humanitarian aid. The end result is an economic environment in which basic commodities are becoming scarcer and more expensive, putting them increasingly out of people's reach. Humanitarian partners face growing pressure to compensate for the entire commercial sector, which is beyond both their capacity and appropriate role for humanitarian action.

## Restrictions on imports and movements

Parties to the conflict routinely impose severe restrictions on movements of people, goods and humanitarian assistance. Reported restrictions on imports by the Coalition, as well as air strikes on critical infrastructure like Al Hudaydah Port, have added to the humanitarian burden by severely reducing commercial imports into the country. Fluctuating Coalition restrictions on imports, as well as air strikes on critical infrastructure like Al Hudaydah Port, have added to the humanitarian burden by severely reducing commercial imports into the country. More than 90 per cent of staple food in Yemen was imported before the crisis, and the country was using an estimated 544,000 metric tons of fuel per month. In August 2016, fuel imports fell to 24 per cent of estimated requirements, and food imports hit their lowest level this year. Since August 2016, the Coalition and the Government of Yemen have also banned commercial flights from using the Sana'a airport. Prior to the ban, Yemenia Airlines estimates that at least one third of passengers were travelling abroad to seek medical care, often for chronic diseases for which treatment in Yemen has become almost non-existent due, in part, to import difficulties. Altogether, this means that more than 6,500 people have been unable to access medical care due to the closure of civilian air space. Yemenia Airlines further estimates that 18,000 Yemenis are stranded abroad.

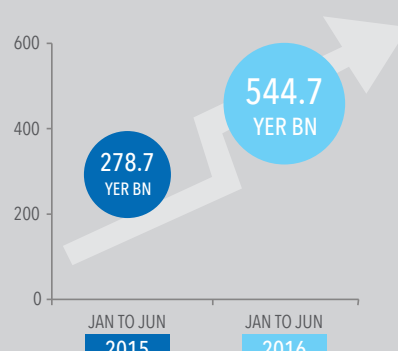
Houthi/Saleh and other forces have at times imposed crippling restrictions on people and basic supplies from entering contested areas, including recurrent restrictions in Taizz and

### FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES



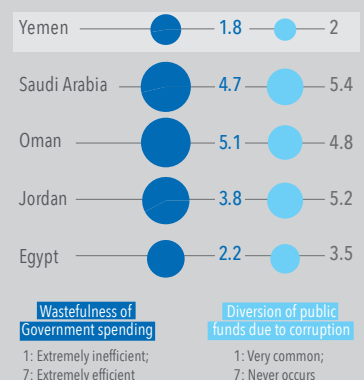
Source: MOPIC and Central Bank of Yemen (2016).

### PUBLIC BUDGET DEFICIT



Source: MOPIC (2016).

### PERCEIVED STRENGTH OF INSTITUTIONS



Source: WEF Global Competitiveness Index (2016 - 2017).

nearby areas. Reports have also emerged of landmines being laid in many areas, including along parts of the western coast that prevent fishermen from providing for their families in an area of growing hunger and malnutrition. Authorities in Sana'a and other areas routinely deny or delay clearances for humanitarian activities, including visas for humanitarian staff, movement requests to deliver or monitor assistance, and customs approval for critical supplies. These restrictions are at times resolved through dialogue, but the time lost represents an unacceptable burden for people who desperately need assistance.

### Liquidity crisis, commodity shortages, and rising prices

Conflict, severe economic decline and imposed restrictions are all contributing to basic commodity shortages and price rises, making it difficult for millions of Yemenis to afford food, water, fuel and other necessities even when these are available in markets. For months, nearly all basic commodities have been only sporadically available in most locations, and basic commodity prices in August were on average 26 per cent higher than before the crisis. The impact of price increases on Yemeni families is considerable, given that purchasing power has fallen substantially as livelihoods opportunities continue to diminish or disappear.

At the same time, Yemen is experiencing a severe liquidity crisis in which people, traders and humanitarian partners struggle to transfer cash into and around the country. As conflict and import restrictions have persisted, lenders have become increasingly reluctant to offer letters of credit to Yemeni traders. This reluctance has reportedly grown since the Government's decision in September to relocate the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) from Sana'a to Aden. These developments are having a pronounced impact on the ability to finance imports of food, medicine, and other critical supplies, compounding the effect of direct import restrictions, as well as considerably restricting people's ability to access cash.

Despite the liquidity crisis, minimal banking services remain available in many areas. Probably the three most common institutions for domestic cash transfers – Yemen Post Office, Al Amal Bank and Al Kuraimi Bank – report a combined total of

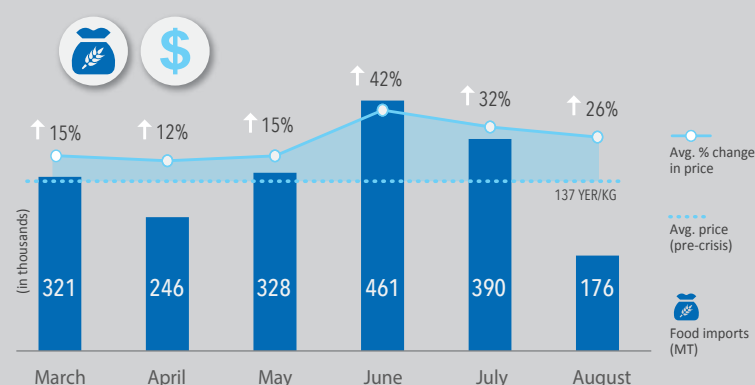
894 active branches or authorized agents across all governorates, although 24 per cent of post offices are not functioning. When considered with at least sporadic commodity availability in markets, this raises the possibility of a stronger need for multi-sector cash assistance to help Yemenis cope in a time of conflict, economic decline and institutional collapse. More analysis is required on this issue, particularly regarding how to ensure the proper enabling environment, minimize protection risks, and overcome external and internal limitations on financial transactions. As of October 2015, humanitarian partners in Sana'a reportedly cannot withdraw more than YR 400,000 in cash per day from banks (about \$1,300); in Al Hudaydah, the limit falls to YR 200,000.

### Collapse of basic services and institutions

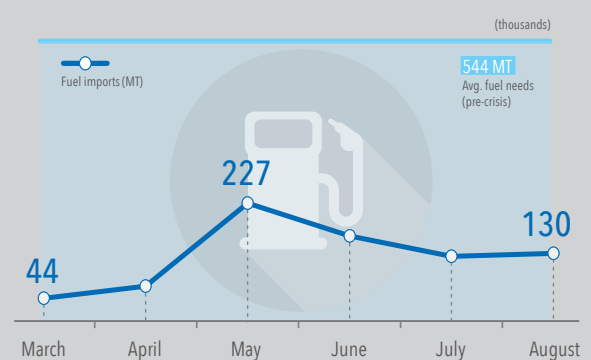
Conflict, displacement, and economic decline are placing severe pressure on essential basic services and the institutions that provide them, pushing them towards total collapse. Humanitarian programmes in Yemen are predicated on an assumption of at least minimal functionality of state services in key sectors like health, water, education and social protection. However, growing evidence points to imminent institutional collapse across large swathes of the country. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) in Sana'a reports that Central Bank foreign exchange reserves dropped from \$4.7 billion in late 2014 to less than \$1 billion in September 2016. The public budget deficit has nearly doubled in the last year, to about \$1.8 billion. Salaries for health facility staff, teachers and other public sector workers go increasingly unpaid, leaving 1.25 million state employees and their 6.9 million dependents – or nearly 30 per cent of the population – without an income at a time of shortages and rising prices. Despite Government commitments to the contrary, relocation of the Central Bank to Aden had not resolved salary arrears as of late October.

State-provided social services are rapidly collapsing while needs are surging. In August, the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MOPHP) in Sana'a announced it could no longer cover operational costs for health services. As of October 2016, only 45 per cent of health facilities

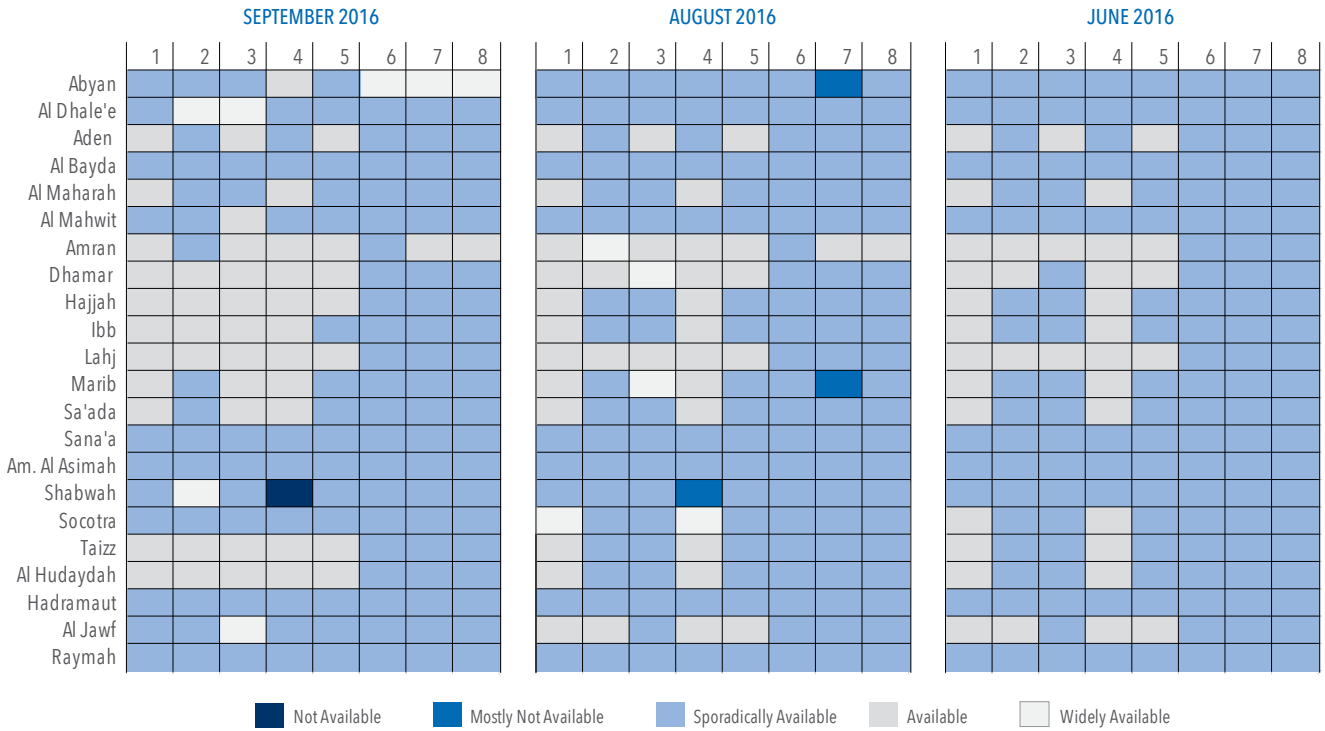
MONTHLY FOOD IMPORTS AND PRICE FLUCTUATION (MAR - AUG 2016)



MONTHLY FUEL IMPORTS (MAR - AUG 2016)

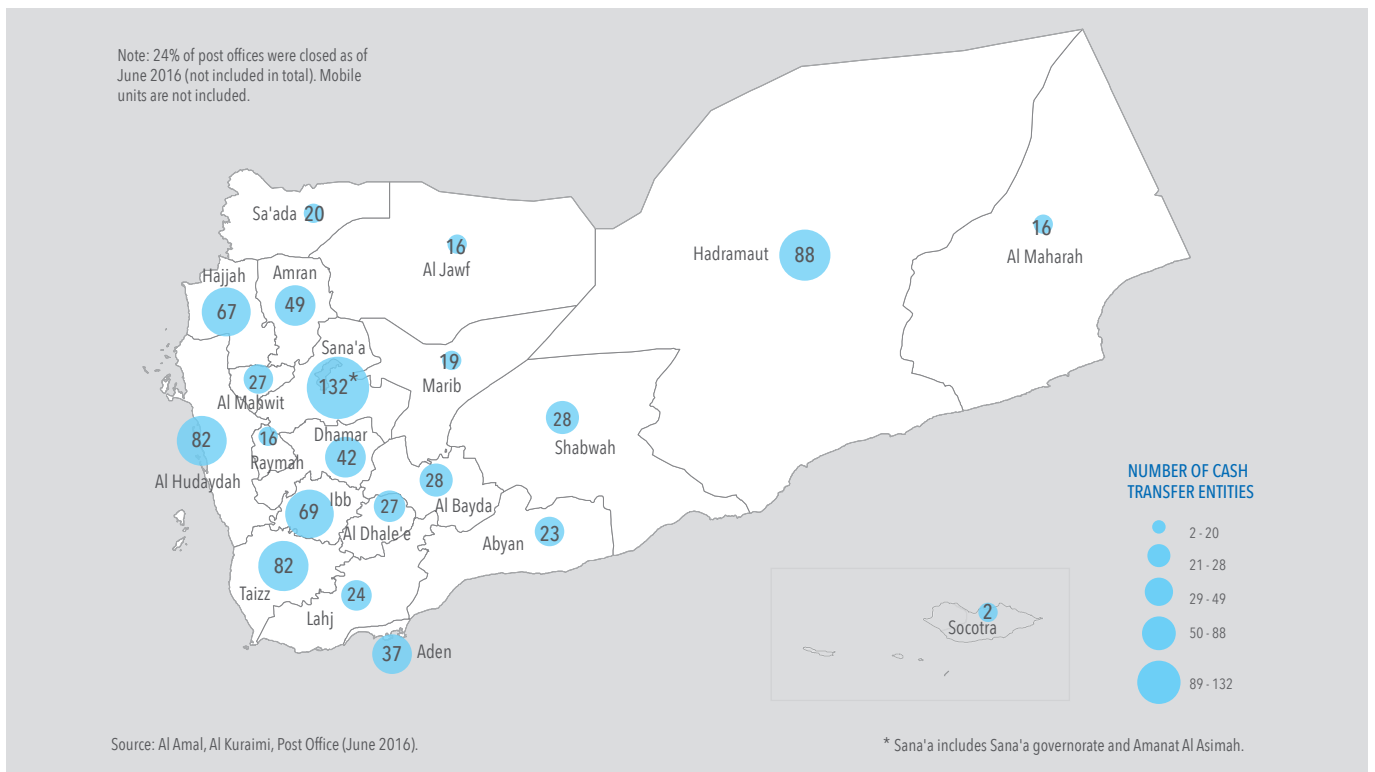


BASIC COMMODITY AVAILABILITY



Source: WFP (Sep 2016).

LIQUIDITY: MOST COMMON CASH TRANSFER INSTITUTIONS





were functional; this rate falls below 25 per cent in five governorates, including Marib, Al Jawf and Al Dhale'e. Absenteeism among key staff – doctors, nutrition counsellors, teachers – is reportedly rising as employees seek alternatives to provide for their families. On top of pressure to compensate for a faltering commercial sector, humanitarian partners are fielding calls to fill gaps created by collapsing public institutions, which is beyond both their capacity and remit. It is essential for all stakeholders to stem this collapse, including through selective re-engagement of development programmes, which have been largely frozen since early 2015.

### Growing humanitarian needs in key sectors

More than 19 months of conflict have left an estimated 18.8 million people in need some kind of assistance or protection in order to meet their basic needs, including 10.3 million who are in acute need. This represents an increase of almost 20 per cent since late 2014 and is driven by increases across key sectors. The 18.8 million people in need estimation is lower than the 21.2 million cited for 2016. These changes do not reflect an improvement in the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Yemen, but rather a further tightening around priorities.

### Food security and agriculture

An estimated 14 million people are currently food insecure, including 7 million people who do not know where their next meal will come from. This represents a 33 per cent increase since late 2014. Agricultural production, employing more than half of the population, has also drastically declined due to insecurity, high costs, and sporadic availability of agricultural inputs. The fishery sector has also been heavily impacted with a near 50 per cent reduction in the number of fishermen due to the impact of the crisis.

### Water, sanitation, and hygiene

An estimated 14.4 million people require assistance to ensure access to safe drinking water and sanitation, including 8.2 million who are in acute need. This represents an increase of 8 per cent since late 2014, and the severity of needs has intensified.

### Health

An estimated 14.8 million people lack access to basic healthcare, including 8.8 million living in severely under-served areas. Medical materials are in chronically short supply, and only 45 per cent of health facilities are functioning. As of October 2016, at least 274 health facilities had been damaged or destroyed in the conflict, 13 health workers had been killed and 31 injured.

### Nutrition

About 3.3 million children and pregnant or lactating women are acutely malnourished, including 462,000 children under 5 suffering from severe acute malnutrition. This represents a 57 per cent increase since late 2015 and threatens the lives and life-long prospects of those affected.

### Shelter and essential items

An estimated 4.5 million people need emergency shelter or essential household items, including IDPs, host communities and initial returnees. Ongoing conflict-related displacements, as well as initial returns to some areas, are driving these needs.

### Protection

About 11.3 million people need assistance to protect their safety, dignity or basic rights, including 2.9 million people living in acutely affected areas. Vulnerable people require legal, psychosocial and other services, including child protection and gender-based violence support.

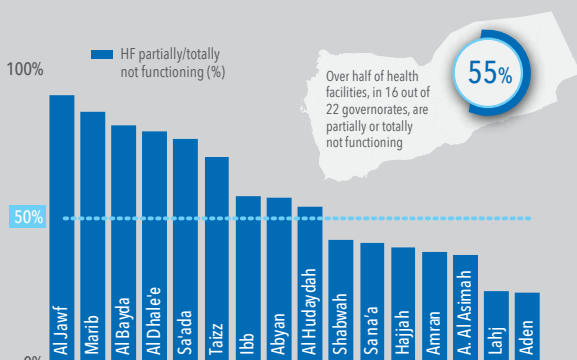
### Education

About 2 million school-age children are out of school and need support to fulfil their right to education. More than 1,600 schools are currently unfit for use due to conflict-related damage, hosting of IDPs, or occupation by armed groups.

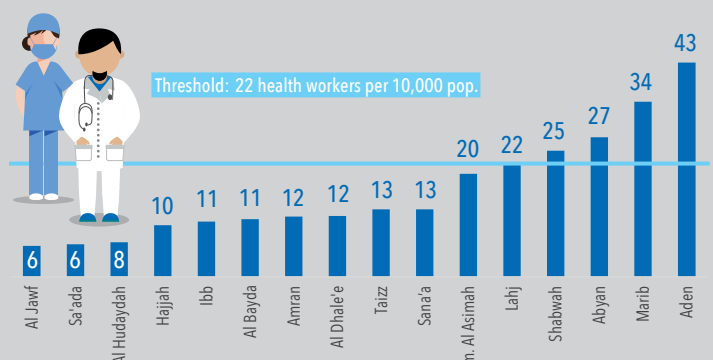
### Livelihoods and community resilience

An estimated 8 million Yemenis have lost their livelihoods or are living in communities with minimal to no basic services. Communities require support to promote resilience, including clearance of landmines and other explosives in up to 15 governorates.

#### STATUS OF HEALTH FACILITIES



#### NUMBER OF HEALTH WORKERS PER 10,000 POPULATION



TIMELINE



**19-26 March 2015**

Rapid escalation in conflict. On 19 March, suicide bombings target two mosques in Sana'a, killing nearly 150 people and injuring 350 people. Houthi/Saleh forces advance south towards Taizz, Lahj and Aden. On 26 March, a Saudi-led military coalition begins air strikes. Fighting and air strikes escalate quickly across the country.

**12 May 2015**

Five-day humanitarian pause begins. Frequent violations are reported.

**Mid-Jul to mid-Aug 2015**

Front lines in the conflict shift significantly. Coalition-supported forces take control of Aden in late July and expand to much of southern Yemen by mid-August. Major clashes, backed by air strikes, erupt in Taizz, and the city comes under siege.

**Late Sep to early Oct 2015**

Apparent air strikes hit two wedding parties, killing more than 150 people. The first attack occurred on 28 September in Taizz and killed more than 130 people. The second hit Dhamar, killing at least 23.

**1 Jul 2015**

UN designates Yemen a "level-three" emergency – the highest level.

**18 Aug 2015**

Air strikes hit Hudaydah port, destroying critical infrastructure at Yemen's largest port. Before the crisis, Hudaydah port handled the majority of Yemen's imports – essential to the flow of food, medicine and fuel into the country.

**6 Oct 2015**

Islamic State claims responsibility for attacks targeting Coalition and Government of Yemen officials at the Qasr Hotel in Aden and worshippers at mosque in Sana'a. At least 22 people were killed in the attacks.

**November 2015**

Two consecutive cyclones batter the southern coast and Socotra island, killing at least ten and causing widespread flooding. Cyclones making landfall in Yemen is fairly rare – two in rapid succession is nearly unprecedented.



**15 Dec 2015**

Ceasefire comes into force as parties begin UN-sponsored peace talks in Switzerland. Frequent ceasefire violations are reported.

**Aug 2016**

Peace talks in Kuwait adjourn without agreement on 6 August. Clashes and air strikes intensify immediately afterwards. Air strikes in August hit a crowded market in Sana'a, a school in Sa'ada and an MSF-supported hospital in Hajjah. Islamic State militants kill at least 60 people in a suicide attack in Aden. Sana'a airport closed to civilian traffic.

**8 Oct 2016**

Multiple air strikes on a community hall in Sana'a kill at least 140 people and injure more than 600 in one of the worst single-incident casualty events of the conflict.

**10 Apr 2016**

A renewed cessation of hostilities comes into force. After several delays, UN-sponsored peace talks begin in Kuwait on 21 April.

**4 Oct 2016**

A rocket attack hits a civilian area of Taizz, killing 10 people – mostly children. Indiscriminate shelling into populated civilian areas of Taizz by Houthi-affiliated forces has occurred consistently since August 2015.

**Early Jan 2016**

Formal ceasefire ends as peace talks conclude without result. Clashes and air strikes escalate across the country.

**11 Sep 2016**

An air strike hits a drilling rig constructing a water well in Sana'a. Follow-up strikes hit first responders arriving on the scene.

**24 Oct 2016**

The UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General delivers a proposed road map to parties to the conflict.

**May & Aug 2016**

Heavy rains in May and August cause flooding in seven governorates. Partners estimate that 70 people are killed in the floods, with more than 35,000 needing assistance.



**6 Oct 2016**

The Ministry of Health announces a cholera outbreak. As of 25 October, 51 cases had been confirmed in nine governorates, and 1,148 suspected cases were being investigated.



**BREAKDOWN OF**

# PEOPLE IN NEED

Approximately 18.8 million Yemenis now require some kind of humanitarian or protection assistance, including 10.3 million who are in acute need. Needs have risen by 15 per cent compared to pre-crisis levels.

With more quality data available than at any time since 2014, this year’s analysis is based on a substantially more rigorous methodology for estimating how many people require assistance and the severity of their needs. 2017 priority needs estimates are about 10 per cent lower than last year. This decrease reflects better data collection only, and can in no way be interpreted as an “improvement” in Yemen’s catastrophic humanitarian situation. For a full explanation of the methodology, including criteria for “acute need”, see the Methodology annex.

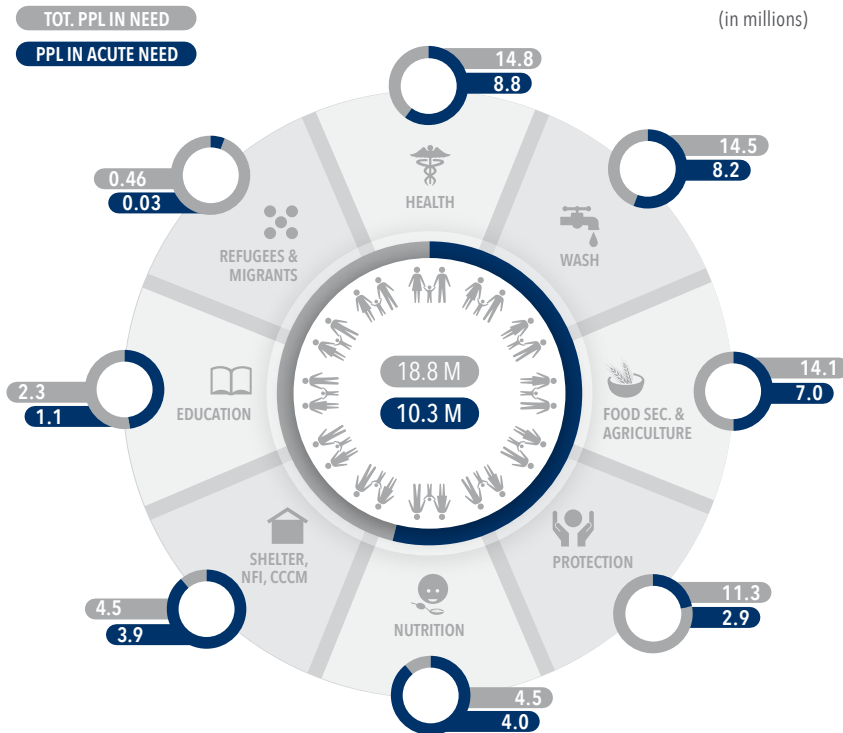
NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN NEED

**18.8M**

NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN ACUTE NEED

**10.3M**

NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN NEED BY CLUSTER OR SECTOR\*
























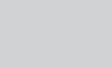
TOTAL PEOPLE IN NEED BY SEX AND RAM

Cluster/Sector	TOT. PPL IN NEED		PPL IN ACUTE NEED		PPL IN NEED (RAM (**))
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
HEALTH	7.3	7.5	4.3	4.5	0.15
WASH	7.1	7.4	4.0	4.2	0.11
FOOD SEC. & AGRICULTURE	7.0	7.1	3.5	3.5	0.14
PROTECTION	5.5	5.7	1.4	1.5	0.22
NUTRITION	2.8	1.7	2.5	1.5	
EDUCATION	1.1	1.2	0.54	0.6	0.03
REFUGEES & MIGRANTS	0.12	0.34	0.01	0.02	
SHELTER, NFI, CCCM	2.2	2.3	1.9	2.0	0.11

(\*) Total and acute.

(\*\*) Clusters estimate the number of people in Yemen with sectoral needs, excluding refugees and migrants. The "wheel" chart on the left refers to cluster estimates only and does not include refugees or migrants. The Multi-Sector for Refugees and Migrants (RAM) provides estimates of sectoral needs for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Yemen. These figures appear under the "RAM" column in the table on the right.

## BREAKDOWN OF PEOPLE IN NEED

PEOPLE IN NEED October 2016 (in millions)		CURRENT ESTIMATED POPULATION	IDPs	VULNERABLE HOSTS	REFUGEES and MIGRANTS	RETURNEES	TOTAL PEOPLE IN NEED	% TOTAL POPULATION IN ACUTE NEED
	Abyan	0.57	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.11	0.42	48%
	Aden	0.89	0.03	0.02	0.11	0.37	0.77	43%
	Al Bayda	0.75	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.00	0.53	37%
	Al Dhale'e	0.71	0.03	0.06	0.00	0.03	0.54	48%
	Al Hudaydah	3.2	0.10	0.04	0.01	0.00	1.9	34%
	Al Jawf	0.57	0.04	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.43	50%
	Al Maharah	0.14	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.10	35%
	Al Mahwit	0.72	0.05	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.38	10%
	Am. Al Asimah	2.9	0.16	0.02	0.09	0.22	2.0	39%
	Amran	1.1	0.11	0.06	0.00	0.01	0.70	26%
	Dhamar	1.9	0.14	0.11	0.01	0.02	1.1	21%
	Hadramaut	1.4	0.01	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.75	13%
	Hajjah	2.1	0.49	0.24	0.00	0.04	1.6	46%
	Ibb	2.9	0.11	0.12	0.00	0.01	1.6	25%
	Lahj	0.99	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.07	0.82	55%
	Marib	0.34	0.05	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.21	35%
	Raymah	0.60	0.05	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.39	22%
	Sa'ada	0.85	0.07	0.06	0.00	0.03	0.76	82%
	Sana'a	1.2	0.20	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.93	37%
	Shabwah	0.63	0.01	0.02	0.10	0.07	0.55	49%
	Socotra	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03	3%
	Taizz	2.8	0.43	0.46	0.01	0.10	2.2	55%
TOTAL		27.4	2.2	1.7	0.46	1.1	18.8	38%

## MOST VULNERABLE

# GROUPS

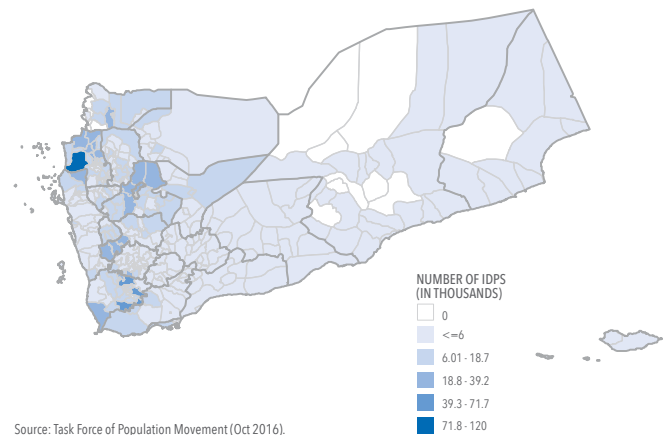
The scope and complexity of the crisis in Yemen are impacting population groups differently, with some at greater risk than others. Within the total 18.8 million people in need, the most vulnerable can often be found among people affected by displacement, women, children, minorities, and refugees and migrants.

### IDPs, returnees and host communities

An estimated 2.2 million people are currently IDPs, of whom 77 per cent are living either with host communities (1.2 million people) or in rented accommodation (480,000 people). Displacement alone is not an indicator of need, but it constitutes a significant risk factor, particularly as displacement becomes more protracted. About 90 per cent of IDPs have now been displaced for more than 10 months, including 85 per cent who have been displaced for more than a year. Amid a severe economic decline and long-term displacement, IDPs and their hosts are rapidly exhausting reserves to meet their needs. IDPs unable to afford rental accommodation or live with host communities are even more vulnerable. About 19 per cent are living in public buildings, collective centres, or in dispersed spontaneous settlements. Services at these locations are often limited, and residents face significant protection risks, including exploitation, harassment and gender-based violence.

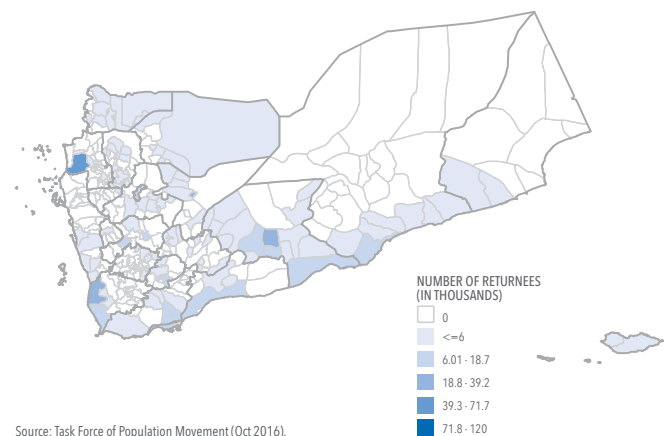
In addition, slightly more than 1 million people have returned to their areas of origin, of whom 86 per cent are living in their former residences. Returns accelerated considerably between March and May 2016, potentially reflecting pockets of stability in some areas or decreased conflict during the April-August period. Information on conditions facing returnees also highlights their vulnerability. Key informants in 69 per cent of assessed locations nationwide indicate that returnees are living in damaged houses, and 16 per cent of locations report that returnees' former homes are uninhabitable. They also report that building materials are too expensive for returnees in 45 per cent of locations, and that they cannot afford rent in 41 per cent of locations. Returnees also face significant protection risks, including the presence of landmines in or around their areas of residence, or reliance on negative coping strategies to meet their needs in the absence of reliable livelihoods.

### IDPS BY DISTRICT



Source: Task Force of Population Movement (Oct 2016).

### RETURNEES BY DISTRICT



Source: Task Force of Population Movement (Oct 2016).

## Women and girls

Even before the current crisis, women and girls in Yemen faced entrenched gender inequalities that limited access to services, livelihoods and other opportunities as a result of prevailing social norms. Conflict has in many cases exacerbated these limitations, and women and girls face a range of specific vulnerabilities. Female-headed households face additional challenges as they seek to provide for their families in a difficult environment, potentially relying on negative coping strategies that leave them susceptible to exploitation and abuse. Key informants across the country report that 10.3 per cent of IDP households are headed by females, including 2.6 per cent headed by minor females. Child marriage remains a serious issue, with 52 per cent of Yemeni girls marrying before age 18, and 14 per cent before age fifteen. Rates of child marriage are reportedly increasing as families seek dowry payments to cope with conflict-related hardship. An IDP assessment in Taizz revealed that 8 per cent of girls aged 12 to 17 are pregnant, indicating a prevalence of early marriage.

Escalating conflict and displacement are also associated with greater risks and incidence of gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual abuse. Focus group discussions have shown that women report psychological distress due to violence, fear for family members, and fear of arrest or detention, while men report distress due to loss of livelihoods, restricted mobility, and being forced to perform “women-specific roles”. These kinds of stress among males can lead to increased levels of domestic violence, placing more women at risk. The GBV Information Management System (IMS) recorded 8,031 incidents between January and September 2016, 64 per cent of which were cases of emotional or psychological abuse (3,373 cases) or physical assault (1,767 cases). However, the true extent is certainly far greater in light of social norms that discourage reporting.

## Children

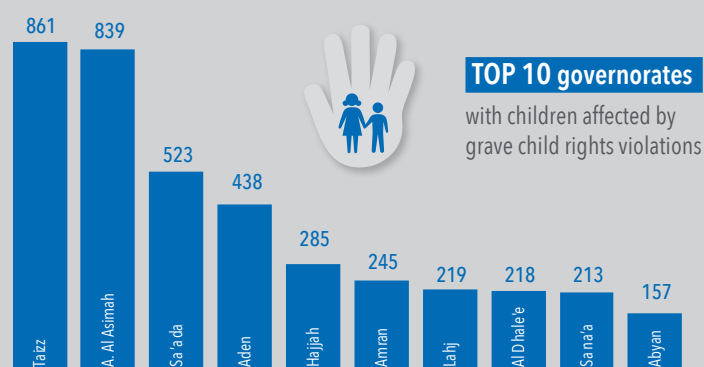
Children are among the most vulnerable groups and are disproportionately affected by the conflict. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) verified 1,309 cases of child death as a result of conflict between January 2015 and September 2016, in addition to 1,950 cases of child injury. A further 1,275 cases of child recruitment by armed groups were verified in the same period. Grave violations of child rights have increased as the conflict has continued. In the first quarter of 2016, child deaths and injuries increased by 19 per cent compared to the last quarter of 2015 (increased from 374 to 445 children). Furthermore, verification of recruitment and use cases of children have increased by 35 per cent compared to the last quarter of 2015 (increase in verified cases from 103 to 140). The abduction and arbitrary detention of children continued through-out the year of 2016.

The conflict is also taking a toll on children’s access to education. Schools have been hit in the course of ground operations and aerial attacks, and partners estimate that 1,604 schools are currently unfit for use due to damage, presence of IDPs or occupation by armed groups. Some 2 million children are out of school, further jeopardizing their future. Children who have experienced stressful situations are likely to show changes in social relations, behaviour, physical reactions, and emotional response, manifesting as sleeping problems, nightmares, withdrawal, problems concentrating and guilt. These effects are compounded by uncertainty about the future and disruption to routine.

## Minority groups

Different groups have coexisted in Yemen for centuries, including a diversity of Muslim adherents and non-Muslim religious minorities. Many Yemenis from different groups stress that sectarianism is “un-Yemeni” and that it runs counter to centuries of practice in Yemeni society. However,

### CHILDREN AFFECTED BY GRAVE CHILD RIGHTS VIOLATIONS JAN 2015 - SEP 2016



## 4,744

children affected by grave child rights violations since January 2015 across Yemen



## 1,275

cases of recruitment and use of children by parties of the conflict in Yemen



after 19 months of conflict, divisions have become more pronounced among some groups as they compete for available resources, and sectarianism is rising in some quarters. In some cases, minority groups have been the target of detention (e.g., reports of Baha'is detained in August in Sana'a) or expulsion (e.g., reports of "northerners" being expelled from southern governorates). Poverty and socio-economic marginalization have also played a role in the ability of radical movements to mobilize, recruit, and promote sectarianism, especially among youth. Beyond religious differences, caste-based discrimination against marginalized groups like the *muhamashin* has persisted for generations, and *muhamashin* communities are often poorer and more vulnerable. This vulnerability has intensified during the conflict, particularly around access to services. Special care is required to ensure that humanitarian assistance takes stock of the different needs of minority groups and reaches them equitably.

### Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Yemen

Despite ongoing conflict and the extremely hazardous journey, nearly 97,900 new arrivals were observed between January and September 2016 – the highest rate since records keeping began in 2006. Most new arrivals are in dire need of basic humanitarian assistance and protection. Nearly 35 per cent are unaccompanied minors. Similar arrival rates are expected to persist in the absence of significant change in the situation in the Horn of Africa.

Government authorities estimate that the total population of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Yemen could range as high 1.7M to 2M people with many transiting temporarily through Yemen on their way to Saudi Arabia or other Gulf countries. As of October 2016, humanitarian partners estimate that 460,000 refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants need humanitarian assistance. This includes more than 278,000 refugees and asylum seekers officially registered with UNHCR, of whom 90 per cent are Somalis with *prima facie* refugee status. Most asylum seekers report they are

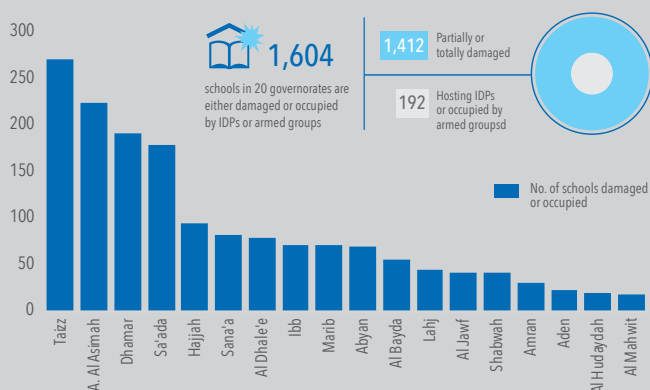
Ethiopian, and many have arrived as part of mixed migratory flows.

The majority of refugees and asylum seekers live in the south, with large numbers of migrants also in the south and significant concentrations in Sana'a, Hudaydah and Hajjah. A relatively large "population on the move" are in Ibb, Taizz and Marib where delivering assistance and protection is extremely difficult.

The conflict has severely impacted Yemen's capacity to absorb refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, or deliver basic services to them. Shrinking protection space is a critical issue. Newly arrived refugees, asylum seekers and migrants often experienced serious protection risks or violations prior to their arrival, including persecution, conflict, extortion, abduction, starvation or prolonged captivity by smugglers or criminal gangs. Protection monitoring reveals lack of access to civil status documentation for refugees, which constrains their freedom of movement and access to livelihoods. Migrants may also face arrest, detention and forced returns across dangerous waters. Women and children are at particular risk of rights violations, including forced labour, recruitment and exploitation; incidents of child protection violations and GBV are widespread. Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants often possess limited knowledge of their rights and available services, and lack personal resources and networks. Main protection service needs include legal aid, psychosocial support, assisted voluntary returns, cash grants, humanitarian admissions programmes, referrals to other services (including GBV and child protection services) and durable solutions.

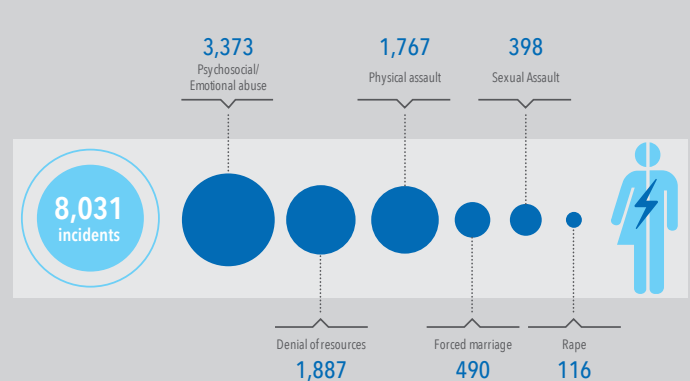
Beyond direct protection needs, many refugees, asylum seekers and migrants arrive destitute and urgently require healthcare, food, drinking water, non-food items, temporary safe shelter and access to hygiene and sanitation facilities. The severity of these needs and difficulty accessing assistance may force them to rely increasingly on negative coping mechanisms that compound already serious protection risks.

### SCHOOLS AFFECTED BY GOVERNORATE



Source: Education Cluster (as of 25 Oct 2016)

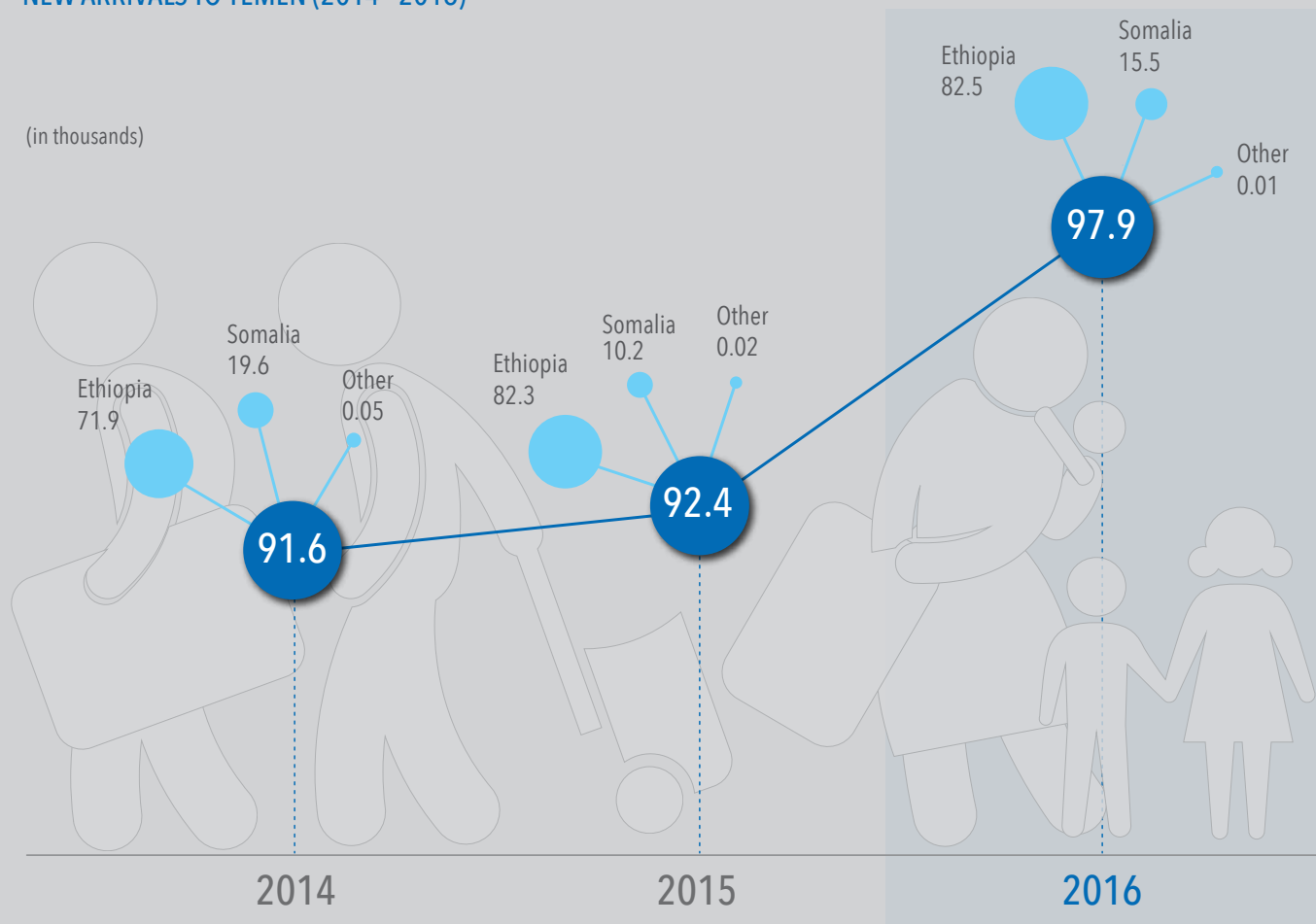
### GBV RELATED INCIDENTS IN 2016



Source: GBV sub-cluster (Jul 2016)

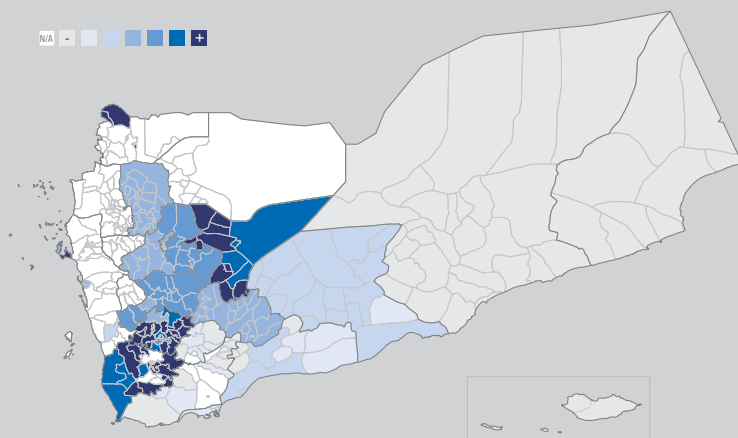
NEW ARRIVALS TO YEMEN (2014 - 2016)

(in thousands)

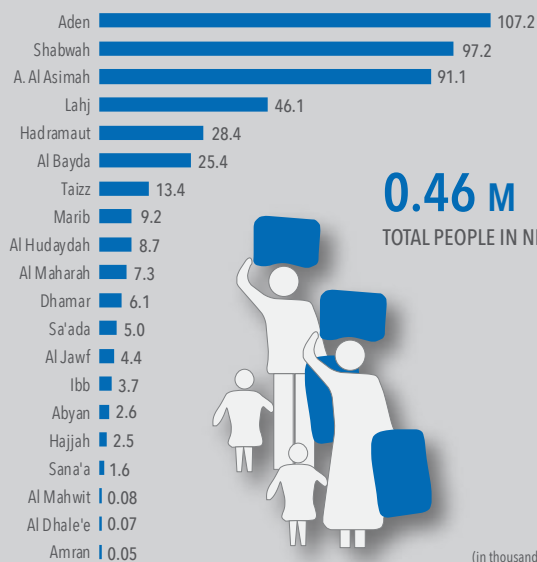


Source: UNHCR (September 2016).

SEVERITY OF NEEDS BY DISTRICT



REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN NEED BY GOVERNORATE



Source: Refugees and Migrants Multi-Sector.



## SEVERITY OF

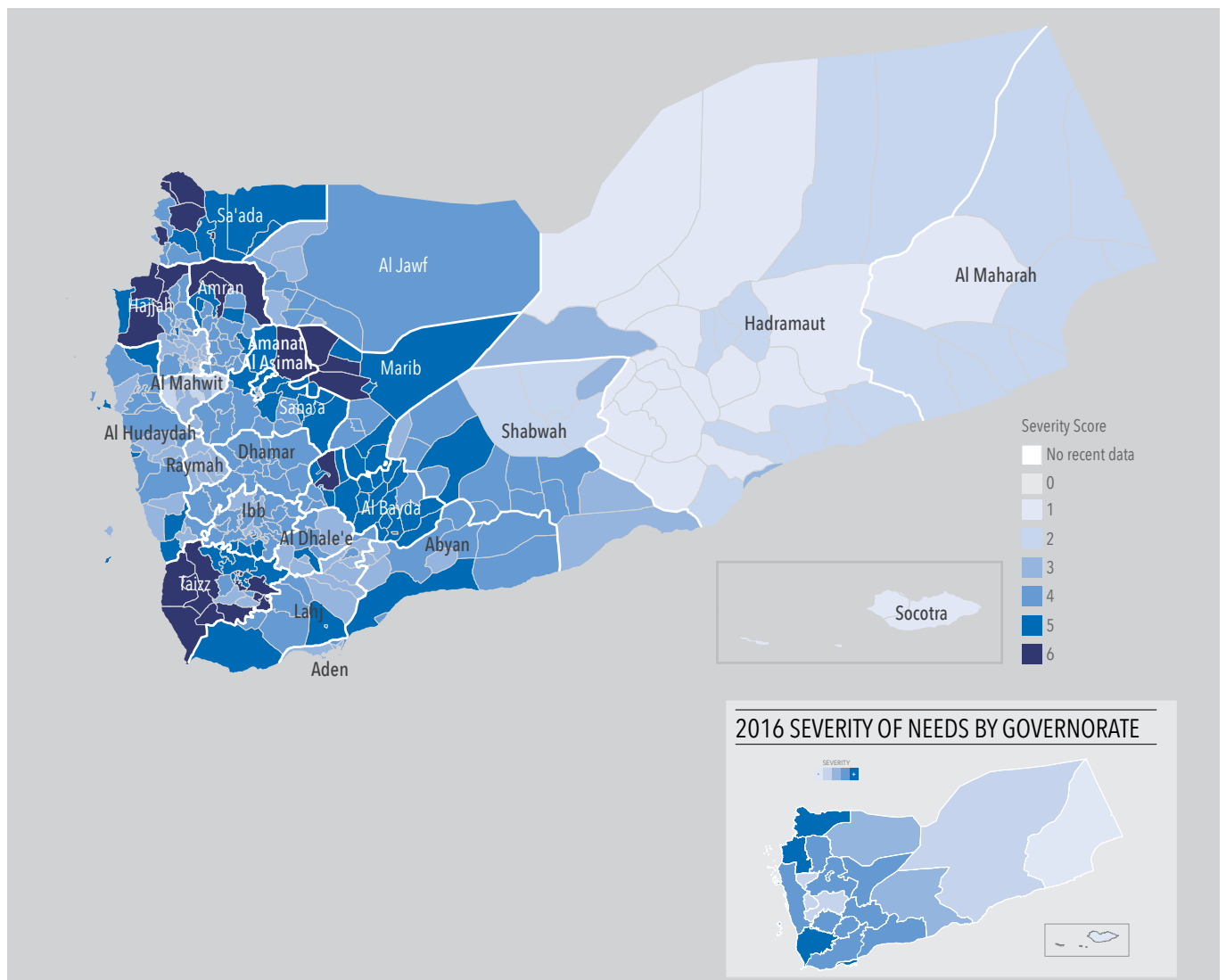
## NEED

The most severe needs across multiple sectors are concentrated in areas of ongoing conflict or areas with large numbers of IDPs. Many of these areas were contending with chronic challenges in terms of food security, nutrition, water and healthcare before the current crisis. More than 19 months of conflict have exacerbated this situation, pushing millions more into humanitarian need.

Areas with the highest cross-sector needs severity urgently require an integrated response to ensure basic life-saving and protection services. These efforts must include concerted advocacy with parties to the conflict to ensure rapid,

unimpeded access, particularly in active conflict zones. This year's district-level severity analysis is the result of overlaying sector-specific severity estimates based on specific indicators; more details appear in the Methodology annex.

## 2017 SEVERITY OF NEEDS BY DISTRICT



PERCEPTIONS OF

# AFFECTED PEOPLE

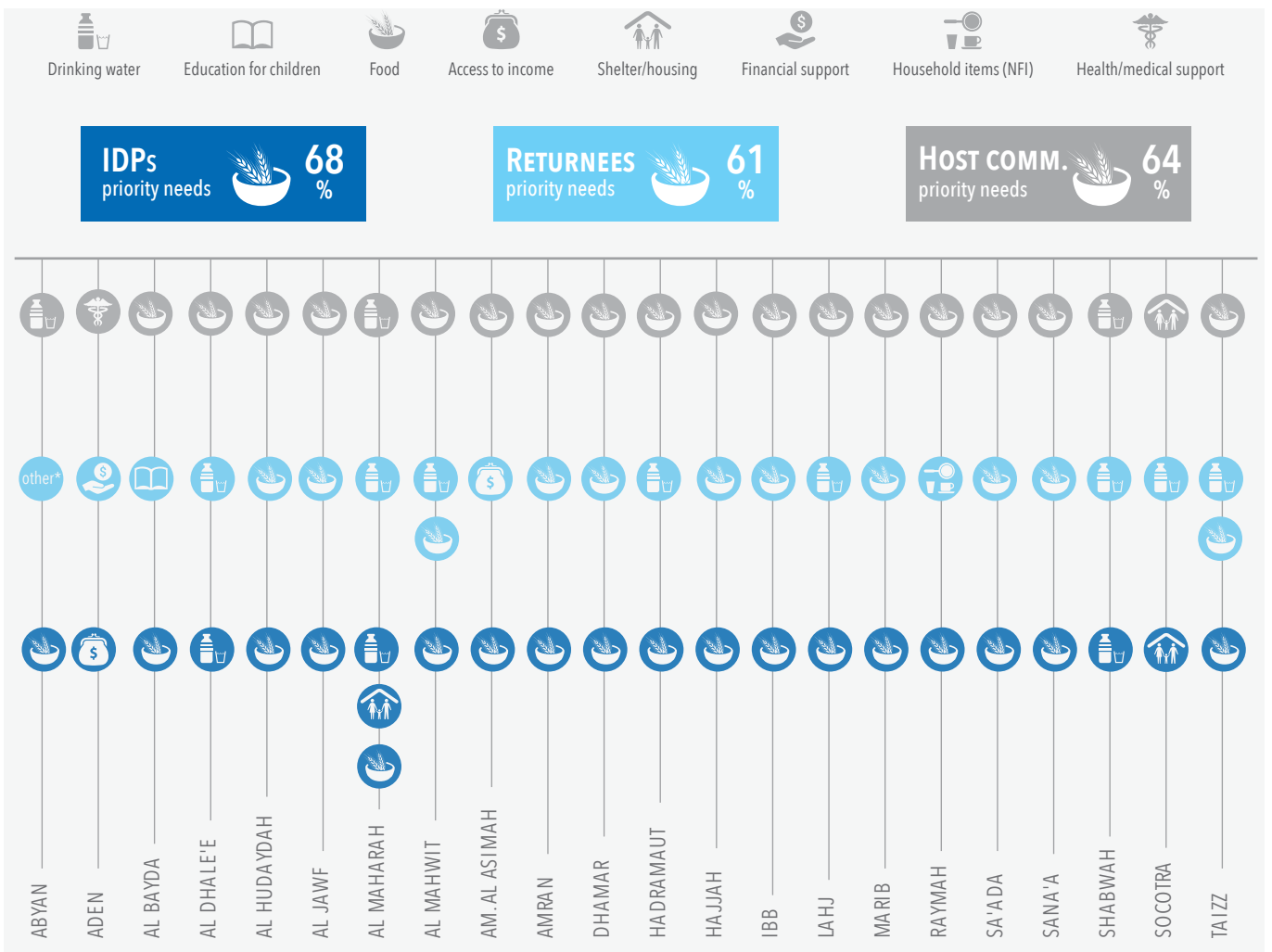
Assessments in 2016 have substantially improved understanding of affected people’s priorities and how they view the response. Large majorities of IDPs, host communities and returnees cite food as their top priority, followed by shelter and water. About half of affected people surveyed feel that humanitarian assistance was at least partially meeting community needs, but fewer than half understand how to access assistance or provide feedback to humanitarian partners.

**Location Assessment (TFPM):  
IDPs, host communities and returnees**

Between June and September, the Task Force on Population Movements (TFPM) surveyed key informants covering 3,292

individual locations in every district of the country in order to identify priority needs among IDPs, returnees and host communities. The results provide a wealth of information on sector-specific needs and priorities among these groups and substantially improve the evidence base for an integrated

PRIORITY NEEDS AMONG IDPS, RETURNEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES IN ASSESSED LOCATIONS



Source: TFPM, Location Assessments (September 2016). \*Other unspecified services or commodities.

response in 2017. Top priority across all three groups was food, followed by shelter and water. Sector-specific results have been incorporated into cluster needs severity analysis, and sector-specific Location Assessment results appear in the sector chapters below. The full TFPM Location Assessment report will be published in November.

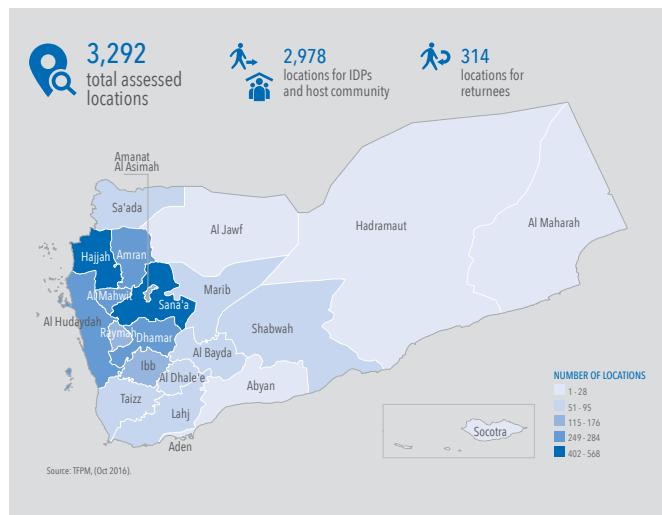
### Community Engagement Survey

In order to improve understanding of how affected people view the humanitarian response, the Community Engagement Working Group (CEWG) piloted a short questionnaire in 16 governorates that surveyed 944 affected people (35 per cent female), primarily in areas where partners are providing assistance. Results indicate significant room for improvement in how humanitarian partners engage affected people in the planning, implementation and monitoring of assistance.

The greatest information needs relate to accessing humanitarian assistance – who is entitled, how to register, where to receive assistance and how to provide feedback. More than half of affected people (56 per cent) indicate that they do not have this information. Affected people also feel that community priorities often go unmet – only 12 per cent of respondents felt that humanitarian assistance is supporting the community to meet priority needs, and 51 per cent indicated that humanitarian assistance does not do this. At the same time, 66 per cent of affected people were satisfied with assistance being provided in their communities. The apparent discrepancy between relatively low agreement that assistance is addressing community priorities, but much higher satisfaction with existing assistance, may indicate a gap between what communities prioritize and what is actually being provided.

Many survey results were more pronounced among women and girls, with fewer females indicating that humanitarian assistance was meeting community priorities, fewer reporting satisfaction with assistance being provided, and only one third indicating they had information on how to access assistance.

### TFPM LOCATION ASSESSMENT: LOCATIONS COVERED



### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

#### Coverage



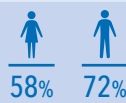
#### Priority Needs



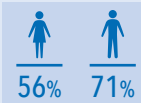
#### Community Perceptions



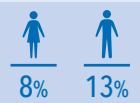
of affected people think that the most vulnerable and in need are receiving humanitarian assistance.



of affected people are satisfied with the assistance being provided.



of affected people believe that humanitarian assistance is meeting priority needs.



#### Information needs

56% of respondents indicated that they do not have the information needed to access humanitarian assistance.

55% of respondents do not know how to provide feedback/complaints to humanitarian agencies.

#### TOP 3 INFORMATION NEEDS

14% Where to access humanitarian assistance

14% How to register for humanitarian assistance

9% Who is entitled to assistance

# 2015

## Our Method



Diane L. Moore, Religious Literacy Project  
Harvard Divinity School

April 7, 2015

"NYC Pro-Muslim Rally marching On Sept. 11, 2010," Viktor Nagorny, from Flickr Creative Commons.



## Contents

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Diane L. Moore, Religious Literacy Project, Harvard Divinity School.

"Nomad People in Changtang, Ladakh," by Dietmar Temps at Flickr Creative Commons.

## Overview

Religions have functioned throughout human history to inspire and justify the full range of agency from the heinous to the heroic. Their influences remain potent at the dawn of the 21st century in spite of modern predictions that religious influences would steadily decline in concert with the rise of secular democracies and advances in science. Understanding these complex religious influences is a critical dimension of understanding modern human affairs across the full spectrum of endeavors in local, national, and global arenas. The Religious Literacy Project provides educational opportunities and resources for *how to recognize, understand, and analyze* religious influences in contemporary life through the overarching theme of conflict and peace and the specific (often intersecting) sub-themes of gender and sexuality, public health, and environmental sustainability. For a variety of reasons dating back to the Enlightenment (including Christian influenced theories of secularization that were reproduced through colonialism) there are many commonly held assumptions about religion in general and religious traditions in particular that represent fundamental misunderstandings. Scholars of religion are well aware of these assumptions and have articulated some basic facts about religions themselves and the study of religion that serve as useful foundations for inquiry.<sup>1</sup>

## Differentiations

### *Differentiating Between Devotional Expression and the Study of Religion*

First and foremost, scholars highlight the difference between the *devotional expression* of particular religious beliefs as normative and the nonsectarian *study of religion* that presumes the religious legitimacy of diverse normative claims. The importance of this distinction is that it recognizes the validity of normative theological assertions without equating them with universal truths about the tradition itself.

Unfortunately, this distinction is often ignored in public discourse about religion. For example, there is a great deal of contemporary debate about the roles for women in Islam. In truth, there are a variety of theological interpretations of the tradition that lead to different, sometimes antithetical practices and assertions. Equally

<sup>1</sup> See [The American Academy of Religion Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States](#), Atlanta: AAR, 2010. (PDF)

common is that differing communities will have similar practices but with diverse theological justifications.

It is appropriate for members of a particular community to assert the orthodoxy (or orthopraxy) of their theological interpretations of the tradition, but it is important to recognize the difference between a theological assertion of normativity and the factual truth that multiple legitimate perspectives exist. The latter represents the nonsectarian study of religion. This is the approach promoted here and the one most appropriate to advance the public understanding of religion.

There are three other central assertions about religions themselves that religious studies scholars have outlined and that flow from the recognition of the distinction between devotional expression and the nonsectarian study of religion outlined above:

1. religions are internally diverse as opposed to uniform;
2. religions evolve and change over time as opposed to being ahistorical and static;
3. religious influences are embedded in all dimensions of culture as opposed to the assumption that religions function in discrete, isolated, “private” contexts.

## Internal Diversity

Religions are internally diverse: this assertion is a truism but requires explanation due to the common ways that religious traditions and practices are frequently portrayed as uniform. Aside from the obvious formal differences within traditions represented by differing sects or expressions (e.g., Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant for Christianity; Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, for Hinduism, etc.) there are differences within sects or expressions because religious communities function in different social/political contexts. One example is the debate mentioned above regarding the roles of women in Islam. The following assertions are also commonly repeated: “Buddhists are nonviolent”, “Christians oppose abortion”, “Religion and science are incompatible”, etc. All of these comments represent particular theological assertions as opposed to factual claims representing the tradition itself.



“Cham Muslim Woman (Vietnam),”  
Adam Jones (2009), from [Flickr Creative Commons](#).

## Religions Evolve and Change

This is another truism but again requires explanation due to the common practice of representing religious traditions without social or historical context and solely (or primarily) through ritual expression and/or abstract beliefs. Religions exist in time and space and are constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by believers. For example, the Confucian concept of the “mandate from heaven” evolved within dynasties, geopolitical regions, and historical eras and continues to evolve today. Another example is that the practice of slavery has been both justified and vilified by all three monotheistic traditions in differing social and historical contexts. Finally, in a more specific example, the Southern Baptist convention in

the United States passed a series of resolutions in the 1970s supporting the moral legitimacy of abortion and reversed those resolutions in 2003.<sup>2</sup>

## Religious Influences Are Embedded in Cultures

Religions are collections of ideas, practices, values, and stories that are all embedded in cultures and not separable from them. Just as religion cannot be understood in isolation from its cultural (including political) contexts, it is impossible to understand culture without considering its religious dimensions. In the same way that race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic class are always factors in cultural interpretation and understanding, so too is religion.



"Holding a vajra empowerment wearing 5 Dhyani Buddha Crowns, lay people, monk, nun, Sakya Lamdre, Highest Yoga Tantra, Tharlam Monastery of Tibetan Buddhism, Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal," Wonderlane (2007), from Flickr Creative Commons.

Whether explicit or implicit, religious influences can virtually always be found when one asks "the religion question" of any given social or historical experience. For example, political theorists have recently highlighted the ways that different interpretations of secularism have been profoundly shaped by varied normative assumptions about Christianity.<sup>3</sup> This is just one representation of a fundamental shift in political theory that is challenging the legitimacy of the longstanding assertion that religion both *can be* and *should be* restricted to a private sphere and separated from political influence.

Modernist claims predicting the steady decline of the transnational political influence of religion that were first formalized in the 17th century have been foundational to various modern political theories for centuries. In spite of the ongoing global influences of religions in political life throughout this time period, it is only in the aftermath of 1) the Iranian Revolution in 1979; 2) the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the

subsequent rise vs. the widely predicted demise of religion; and 3) the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks that political theorists in the West began to acknowledge the highly problematic ways that religions and religious influences have been marginalized and too simplistically rendered.

This shift is a welcome one and paves the way for multi and cross-disciplinary collaborations with religious studies scholars across the full range of social science investigations in order to explore the complex and critically important roles that religions play in our contemporary world.

<sup>2</sup> For a full text compilation of all the Southern Baptist resolutions on abortion from 1971-2005, see [www.johnstonsarchive.net/baptist/sbcabres.html](http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/baptist/sbcabres.html).

<sup>3</sup> See Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); J. Bryan Hehir, "Why Religion? Why Now?" in Timothy Samuel Shah, Alfred Stepan, and Monica Duffy Toft, eds., *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs* (NY: Oxford, 2012) pp. 15-24; José Casanova, "Rethinking Public Religions" in Shah, et. Al., eds., pp. 25-35; and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "The Politics of Secularism" in Shah, et. Al., pp. 36-54.

## Definition of Religious Literacy

The following definition of religious literacy articulated by Diane L. Moore has been adopted by the American Academy of Religion to help educators understand what is required for a basic understanding of religion and its roles in human experience:

Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place.

Critical to this definition is the importance of understanding religions and religious influences *in context* and as *inextricably woven into all dimensions of human experience*. Such an understanding highlights the inadequacy of understanding religions through common means such as learning about ritual practices or exploring “what scriptures say” about topics or questions. Unfortunately, these are some of the most common approaches to learning about religion and lead to simplistic and inaccurate representations of the roles religions play in human agency and understanding.

## Cultural Studies

The cultural studies approach to understanding religion that forms the analytical and methodological foundation for the Religious Literacy Project assumes the basic elements of the study of religion outlined above and frames them within a postmodern worldview with the following specific characteristics.

First, the method is multi and inter-disciplinary and recognizes how political, economic, and cultural lenses are fundamentally entwined rather than discrete. For example, economic or political dimensions of human experience cannot be accurately understood without understanding the religious and other ideological influences that shape the cultural context out of which particular political or economic actions and motivations arise. This is the methodological framework related to the third tenet of religious studies above: that religions are embedded in culture and that “culture” is inclusive of political and economic influences.

Second, the method assumes that all knowledge claims are “situated” in that they arise out of particular social/historical contexts and therefore represent particular rather than universally applicable claims. This notion of “situatedness” is drawn from historian of science Donna Haraway’s assertion that “situated knowledges” are more accurate than the “god-trick” of universal or objective claims that rest on the assumption that it is possible to “see everything from nowhere.”<sup>4</sup> Contrary to popular opinion, the recognition that all knowledge claims are “situated” is not a manifestation of relativism whereby all interpretations are considered

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<sup>4</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (NY: Routledge, 1991) p. 191.



equally valid. Rather, "situated knowledges" offer the firmest ground upon which to make objective claims that are defined not by their detachment but rather by their specificity, transparency and capacity for accountability.

Regarding the study of religion, this understanding of "situatedness" offers a tool to recognize that religious claims are no different than other forms of interpretation in that they arise out of particular contexts that represent particular assumptions as opposed to absolute, universal and ahistorical truths. (For example, claims such as "Islam is a religion of peace" and "Islam promotes terrorism" are equally problematic and need to be recognized as particular theological assertions as opposed to ultimate Truths.)

Third, this notion of situatedness applies to the texts and materials being investigated, the scholarly interpreters of those materials, and all inquirers regardless of station. The method recognizes that all forms of inquiry are interpretations filtered through particular lenses. By acknowledging this fact, an essential dimension of the inquiry itself is to identify those differing lenses and make transparent that which would otherwise be hidden.



"Giant standing Buddhas of Bamiyan still cast shadows," DVIDSHUB (2012), From [Flickr Creative Commons](#).

Fourth, the method calls for an analysis of power and powerlessness related to the subject at hand. Which perspectives are politically and socially prominent and why? Which are marginalized or silenced and why? Regarding religion, why are some theological interpretations more prominent than others in relationship to specific issues in particular social/historical contexts? For example, what are the factors that led to the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan and why did their interpretation of the role of women in Islam, for example, gain social legitimacy over other competing claims within the tradition itself?

In another vein, what are the converging factors that lend social credibility and influence to some religious traditions over others and which dimensions of those traditions are interpreted as orthodox and which heretical and by whom? What were the conditions that allowed Muslims, Christians and Jews to live together in relative harmony in medieval Spain and what are the religious influences that have contributed to shaping contemporary tensions in the Middle East and more globally regarding the "war on terror" and "the Arab Spring"?

Fifth, this approach highlights what cultural anthropologists know well: that cultural norms are fluid and socially constructed even though they are often interpreted as representing uncontested absolute truths. This dynamic tension is powerfully demonstrated in social science theorist Johan Galtung's three-pronged typology of violence/peace. This framework also provides an excellent foundation for discerning and representing the

varied ideological influences of religions in human affairs.<sup>5</sup> What follows is an overview of his typology and examples of how it can be useful for highlighting the significance of religious influences in human experiences across time and place.

## Typologies of Violence and Peace

Often referred to as the “Father of Peace Studies”, Norwegian theorist Johan Galtung has developed a three pronged typology of violence that represents how a confluence of *malleable* factors merge in particular cultural/historical moments to shape the conditions for the promotion of violence (and, by inference, peace) to function as normative.<sup>6</sup>

- **Direct Violence** represents behaviors that serve to threaten life itself and/or to diminish one’s capacity to meet basic human needs. Examples include killing, maiming, bullying, sexual assault, and emotional manipulation.
- **Structural Violence** represents the systematic ways in which some groups are hindered from equal access to opportunities, goods, and services that enable the fulfillment of basic human needs. These can be formal as in legal structures that enforce marginalization (such as Apartheid in South Africa) or they could be culturally functional but without legal mandate (such as limited access to education or health care for marginalized groups).
- **Cultural Violence** represents the existence of prevailing or prominent social norms that make direct and structural violence seem “natural” or “right” or at least acceptable. For example, the belief that Africans are primitive and intellectually inferior to Caucasians gave sanction to the African slave trade. Galtung’s understanding of cultural violence helps explain how prominent beliefs can become so embedded in a given culture that they function as absolute and inevitable and are reproduced uncritically across generations.

These forms of violence are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Galtung provides a representation of these intersecting forces in the following commentary on slavery:

Africans are captured, forced across the Atlantic to work as slaves: millions are killed in the process—in Africa, on board, in the Americas. This massive direct violence over centuries seeps down and sediments as massive structural violence, with whites as the master topdogs and blacks as the slave underdogs, producing and reproducing massive cultural violence with racist ideas everywhere. After some time, direct violence is forgotten, slavery is forgotten, and only two labels show up, pale enough for college textbooks: “discrimination” for massive structural violence and “prejudice” for massive cultural violence. Sanitation of language: itself cultural violence.<sup>7</sup>

Galtung’s typology provides a helpful vehicle to discern the complex roles that religions play in all three forms of violence as well as in their corresponding forms of peace. The formulations of cultural violence and cultural peace are especially helpful and relevant. *In all cultural contexts, diverse and often contradictory religious influences are always present.* Some will be explicit, but many will be implicit. Some influences will promote

<sup>5</sup> Though his own representation of religion is problematic in that he falls victim to making universal claims about religion based on a specific interpretation of one tradition, the typology itself is extremely useful when a more sophisticated and complex understanding of religion is employed.

<sup>6</sup> Johan Galtung, “Cultural Violence” in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 27, No. 3. (Aug.,1990), pp. 291-305.

<sup>7</sup> Galtung, p. 295.

and/or represent socially normative beliefs while others will promote and/or represent marginalized convictions.

For example, in Galtung's illustration cited above, religions functioned to both support and to challenge the moral legitimacy of the transatlantic slave trade and religions continue to function to support and to thwart structural and direct forms of contemporary racism. Similarly, religions currently function in particular ways to shape and support as well as to challenge prominent economic theories and their policy manifestations. In a final example, normative cultural assumptions about gender roles and sexuality in particular social-historical contexts are always shaped as well as contested by diverse religious voices and influences. One has to simply look for these voices and influences in any context and about any issue to find the ways that religions are embedded in all aspects of human agency and experience.

## Summary and Conclusion

The Religious Literacy Project represents the following methodological and analytical assumptions about religion:

1. There is a fundamental difference between the devotional expression of a religious worldview as normative and the study of religion which recognizes the factual existence of diverse devotional assertions;
2. Religions are internally diverse;
3. Religions evolve and change;
4. Religious influences are embedded in all aspects of human experience;
5. All knowledge claims (including religious ones) are socially constructed and represent particular "situated" perspectives;
6. There is nothing inevitable about either violence or peace; both are manifest in three intersecting formulations: direct, structural, and cultural and both are shaped by conscious and unconscious human agency where religious influences are always operative.

The country and religion profiles represent these assumptions as do the materials constructed for teachers. We believe that these foundations provide the best tools to understand the complex roles that religions play in human experience, and understanding them will help diminish the negative consequences of widespread religious illiteracy.



Evgeni Zotov, "Priest in Ashotan Maryam Monastery," Ethiopia, [Flickr Creative Commons](#).