

HUMANITARIAN UPDATE



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HIGHLIGHTS

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BRACING FOR WINTER: AID AGENCIES STEP UP WINTERISATION PREPAREDNESS EFFORTS

Partners have started working to protect vulnerable communities from the looming winter season.

Following the heavy rains and flooding this year, winter will bring bitter cold and harsh conditions to much of Yemen. Colder than most of the Arab world due to its elevation, Yemen's highlands face temperatures that can dip below freezing (0 °C) in the winter months between November and February.

Winter brings a new series of challenges. Households residing in certain districts of Sana'a, Amran, Dhamar, Ibb, Al Bayda, Amanat Al Asimah, Ad Dale', Sa'dah, and Marib governorates face the highest risk of severe winter weather. Years of immense hardships—conflict and economic crisis, increased cost of living, and loss of livelihoods—will further compound winter's challenges.

This winter season, it is estimated that extreme weather conditions will affect over 900,000 individuals (134,000 households) in 68 districts across 12 governorates over the next four months,

including internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees, and host communities. IDPs will be particularly exposed to winter's shocks.

In response to the anticipated winter-related needs, the Shelter Cluster and partners are stepping up efforts to provide essential winterisation support and ensure that communities, particularly those in high-risk cold areas, have the aid and services required to stay warm and safe.

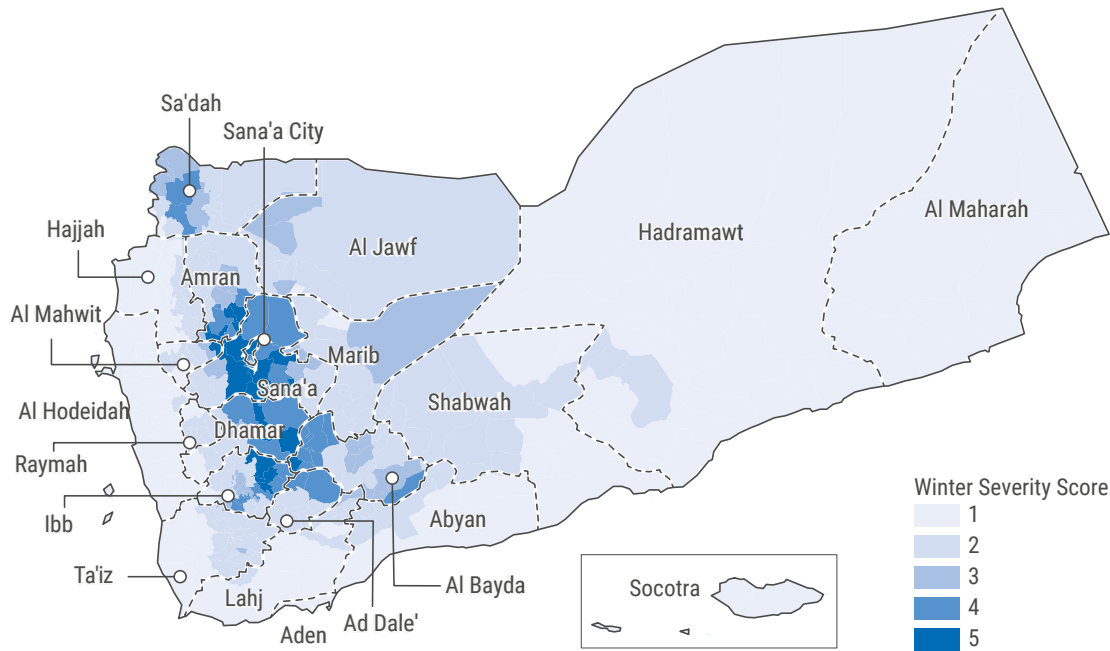
Immediate shelter assistance is a key component of the winterisation efforts. This includes replacing damaged shelters, providing repair materials and tools, and distributing emergency shelter kits for those residing in open spaces.

As part of the Cluster's winterisation programming, partners are also preparing assistance packages tailored to the needs of the most affected households. The package was designed based on community feedback and includes high-thermal blankets and winter clothing. The assistance offers crucial warmth and protection against harsh cold



OCHA

YEMEN



Source: Shelter cluster

temperatures. Cash assistance will be provided to households based on an assessment of local markets.

Priority will be given to families in dire need of insulation and protection from the extremely cold temperatures. This includes individuals residing in open spaces, informal settlements, inadequate shelter conditions, and those at risk of forced eviction or relocation. Moreover, individuals with specific needs and vulnerabilities, such as unaccompanied children, older people, female-headed households, persons with disabilities or mental health issues, and those with severe medical conditions or chronic diseases will be prioritised for assistance. The aid will be distributed according to the beneficiary's family size to ensure effective and dignified support. Needs assessments are currently ongoing.

The Shelter Cluster Winterisation Response Strategy requires \$9.8 million to reach about 81,300 of the most vulnerable families dispersed in 68 districts and 12 governorates. Despite the critical nature of these winterisation efforts, securing sufficient funding remains a significant challenge. So far, the Shelter Cluster has received only 16 per cent of the \$9.8 million required, leaving a considerable gap. Without an urgent additional \$8.2 million, approximately 60,200 families, totalling around 421,000 people, will be exposed and vulnerable to the harsh winter conditions. The support of aid partners is crucial in bridging this funding gap and ensuring that these communities receive the vital assistance they desperately require.

YHF: SUPPORTING VITAL ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Amidst the challenges posed by eight years of conflict, socio-economic hardships, and climate change, the Yemen Humanitarian Fund (YHF) is helping to illuminate a path toward empowerment and resilience for the country's most vulnerable.

The socio-economic context in Yemen is characterized by widespread poverty, high unemployment rates and limited access to basic services. Yemen was already one of the poorest countries in the Middle East, with a significant portion of the population living below the poverty line, whose conditions have further exacerbated

because of the conflict. Many businesses have closed, leading to job losses and reduced income opportunities. The Yemeni currency has also depreciated significantly, leading to inflation and making essential goods and services less affordable for the population.

Access to healthcare, education, and other basic services has been severely affected, with many facilities damaged or inaccessible. Furthermore, the conflict has disrupted trade and humanitarian aid flows.

The protracted conflict has also been marked

PROTECTION PROJECTS OVERVIEW IN 2023



19

Total protection
projects



\$6.9M

Total budget
for 2023



163,478

Total number of
beneficiaries



16

Implementing
partners

12 NNGOs
4 INGOs

by severe violations of human rights and humanitarian law with a negative impact on the capacity of people to enjoy freedom of movement and to access employment and other livelihoods opportunities in safety and dignity. These factors amplify protection risks across the country and expose the most vulnerable to exploitation and different forms of violence.

According to the 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, a staggering 17.7 million people in Yemen, 75 per cent of whom are women and children, are in need of critical and life-saving protection services including immediate access to adequate livelihood opportunities that would support families rebuild their lives as well as make informed choices with respect to their future.

The YHF has allocated seven million dollars (USD) in 2023 for immediate lifesaving support to people with the highest protection risks and needs. This allocation aims to reach the most vulnerable people in hard-to-reach and underserved areas through integrated approaches that reduce vulnerabilities and improve resilience, including economic empowerment, mental health, and psychosocial support.

This type of support can be life-changing.

Nadia, a 28-year-old widow, had to make the heart-wrenching decision to send two of her children to work, foregoing their education to meet their basic needs. Without a stable income, she had few other options to care for her three children.

Nadia later learned about an economic program offered by the Yemen Women's Union (YWU). She signed up and received training in accessory manufacturing, followed by training in marketing and financial literacy. She was given the necessary tools to start her own accessory-making business.

"With the establishment of my business, I found a lifeline, a stable source of income that allowed my children to stop working and embrace education once again," she told the YHF.

The YWU, supported by YHF, is working to address vulnerabilities by supporting

the economic empowerment of internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities across Taiz, Ibb and Ad-Dhale.¹ YWU has targeted the most vulnerable women there who face challenging circumstances due to conflict and provides them with life-skills and income-generating training tailored to meet their needs and interests.

Between March and August 2023, 120 women, 40 from each governorate, were trained by the YWU in a range of fields: incense and perfume production, pastry making, leather bag crafting and accessory manufacturing. Women selected for the training include heads of households without a source of income, divorced or widowed women, women caring for sick family members or children, and survivors of gender-based violence.

Alongside the practical skills, YWU teaches women marketing and financial management and equips them with the tools to start small businesses. Together, these skills and tools help improve their financial stability and confidence, igniting a strong desire for many to launch their businesses.

Noura is a resilient, single mother who found herself responsible for her four children after a divorce. Amidst life's adversities, she found a glimmer of hope when she joined a training on pastry making.

Equipped with the necessary tools, Noura embarked on her entrepreneurial journey.

"As word spread about my venture, I found myself crafting cakes for weddings and other celebrations. I still distinctly remember the exhilaration I felt upon receiving an order for an event hosting 70 people, followed by an even larger request catering to 150 guests. Every satisfied customer became an ambassador for my small business," Noura recalls.

This empowering initiative has brought about positive changes in women's lives, a path towards self-reliance, and a greater sense of fulfilment and satisfaction, particularly for women who had previously been victims of abuse.

Noura reflected, "Today, I stand here, filled with gratitude. I've managed to create a

¹ Al-Shamayateen (Al-Turbah), Al Ma'afar of Ta'iz governorate, Al-Dhahar district of Ibb governorate, and Damt district of Ad Dale' governorate.

source of income that allows me to provide for my children, and I am eternally thankful.”

The initiative’s impact is evident, as most beneficiaries have already started profiting from their products, providing a secure income source for their families. One beneficiary has begun exporting her incense products to other countries. Some have even become trainers in their respective fields, contributing to society and gaining respect from their peers.

The YHF-supported protection interventions extend beyond the direct beneficiaries, creating a ripple effect that positively impacts their children and relatives. The interventions help to strengthen family resilience and resolving conflicts between spouses caused by a lack of income. This stability positively improves the psychological well-being and health of the children and can help address

protection risks. Moreover, empowering the family’s breadwinner with a steady income stream safeguards children, ensuring their return to school.

The OCHA-managed YHF has significantly contributed to alleviating Yemen’s humanitarian crisis. This year, the YHF allocated over USD 54 million in direct support for high-impact projects across Yemen. These allocations have been channelled through eight UN agencies, 11 international organizations, and 25 national organizations. Of the \$54 million, 47 per cent has gone to NNGOs, 24 per cent to INGOs, and 25 per cent to UN agencies. The YHF’s approach ensures that funding is made directly available to humanitarian partners, enabling them to deliver timely and effective life-saving assistance to the people who need it most.

CHAMPIONING WOMEN’S HEALTH: DR. SAWSAN’S STORY OF COURAGE

In a remote, mountainous area of Sa’dah, Dr. Sawsan performs daily miracles.

70-80 per day.

Dr. Sawsan is a female gynaecologist from Ibb Governorate. Her workplace is a rural hospital in the remote Razeh District of Sa’dah Governorate. Located near the border with Saudi Arabia, Razeh is incredibly hard to reach. The district requires a ten-hour drive from Yemen’s capital, Sana’a, and more than five hours from the centre of Sa’dah Governorate.

She was compelled to work in Sa’dah by the massive need for female doctors there.

“I remember the first time I told my family I had an opportunity to work in Razeh District. Everyone refused and told me about the risk of working and living there.” The remote area lacks essential services, has a weak education system, and is very expensive due to high transportation costs.

Movement restrictions prevented the doctor from safely travelling to Sa’dah from Ibb alone.

To overcome this hurdle, Dr. Sawsan convinced her husband to move the family and their children to the remote area so that she could provide life-saving services to women and deliver babies. She is one of the only female doctors in the governorate.

“As you know, female doctors come from other

governorates.”

Dr. Sawsan explained that a combination of factors—including limited education in Sa’dah—results in many families dismissing the idea of a girl’s education. This leads to a lack of female health professionals and essential medical services in the



Dr. Sawsan after helping to deliver a baby in the rural hospital, Razeh District. The hospital is supported by UNFPA.

governorate. This is a particularly challenging situation because women in the area only wish to seek medical services from a female health worker.

This results in a massive patient load for Dr. Sawsan, who receives all female cases, whether related to gynaecology or not. She sees over 70 patients daily, most of whom are among the most vulnerable women. Many lack essential medical services in their villages or cannot afford the travel costs for specialised care elsewhere. Most of her care is related to pregnancy care, family planning and childbirth services.

“We receive and admit cases on a 24-hour basis. I not only work as a gynaecologist but also as a general doctor and a health educator. I give guidance to patients and their companions. I check on cases and follow up on their diagnoses,” she explains.

Having a gynaecologist at the hospital has reduced deaths, including a decrease in the number of maternal deaths in the area.

Dr. Sawsan recounts the day a woman arrived at the hospital suffering from severe bleeding. She and her team treated the woman in the obstetric division and gave her a blood transfer. “She was about to die, but eventually—Thanks to God—we saved her life.”

The hospital receives many cases of women who arrive only after their health has severely deteriorated. Limited education and awareness of healthcare leads to many women seeking health services late.

“Women here cannot move or arrive at the health facility without having a companion, in addition to the long distances they have to travel, the bumpy roads, the high transportation costs and the deteriorated economic conditions of people.”

These challenges make Dr. Sawsan’s life-saving work essential.

“The best part of my job is seeing a woman smile after receiving my help that ended her pains.”

YEMEN’S SILENT CRISIS: BATTLING MENTAL HEALTH AMIDST CONFLICT

The far-reaching impacts of the complex, multidimensional crisis in Yemen all contribute to—and exacerbate—mental health conditions. The crisis has eroded protective support systems, amplified existing problems, and increased household challenges.

In Yemen, an estimated seven million people require mental health support. A 2019 study² in six governorates of Yemen found that post-traumatic stress disorder was the most prevalent condition (45%) in Yemen, followed by depression (27%), anxiety (25%), and schizophrenia (18%).

This prevalence is likely even higher among specific vulnerable groups, such as IDPs, children, women, the elderly, people with disabilities, people with non-communicable diseases, marginalized communities, and conflict-related casualties, including landmine survivors.

Challenges to existing support and services

Yet, mental healthcare remains scarce in the country. Among the estimated seven million who require support, only 120,000 have uninterrupted

access to mental health services and treatment in a facility.³ There are severe shortages of psychiatric nurses, social workers and psychologists, and psychiatrists. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are 59 psychiatrists for the whole country.

Moreover, limited access to services—especially in hard-to-reach areas—leaves women and girls at a heightened risk of protection risks, including abuse and exploitation. Further compounding these challenges is that many lack access to information on their rights and where to seek help safely. Similarly, children displaced by the conflict are already facing immensely distressing experiences. The protective support provided by schools (hope, shelter, a system of support, and critical information) is further eroded if they lose access to education.

Beyond limited availability and accessibility of services, there is an absence of mental health law and legislation to support related interventions. The stigma associated with mental health conditions is compounding these challenges. This increases the likelihood that people who need

² National Mental Health Strategy, page 20. The study in six governorates represented 42 per cent of the population.

³ Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023.

support will avoid seeking the required services, adding suffering for patients and their families. As a result, mental illness is generally not prioritized in Yemen.

Critical work of partners

This year's World Mental Health Day, celebrated on 10 October, served as a reminder that mental health is an essential part of health. The most vulnerable—those affected by crises—cannot be left behind. Despite challenges, humanitarians are working to address the gap between demand and supply of mental health services. Partners provide multidisciplinary and tailored mental health services and support key mental health infrastructure.

For example, to reduce and mitigate the psychological effects of gender-based violence (GBV) on survivors and provide them with specialised, multi-level mental health services, UNFPA is supporting six psychological care centres in the governorates of Sana'a, Ta'iz, Ibb and Aden. Since the beginning of 2023, more than 100,000 people have received specialised psychological support via the hotline and outpatient services at the centres, of whom three-quarters are survivors of gender-based violence. While these hotlines provide essential support remotely, access to comprehensive care and in-person services is still widely needed nationwide.

Similarly, local partners such as the Family Counseling & Development Foundation (FCDF) offer a toll-free helpline 12 hours a day, six days a week, in addition to their in-person services. Given that certain areas in Yemen are hard to reach—and recognising that those without access may face heightened mental health needs—staffed psychologists at FCDF provide a mobile alternative. Support and information are offered for people with mental health needs and their loved ones.

Increasing awareness around mental health, including prevention and care of affected people, is essential to the humanitarian community's work in mental health. De-stigmatizing mental health is necessary so people can seek the support they need without the added fear of shame or threats. Partners are engaging with the community to increase awareness of mental health, working to normalise mental health issues, and providing information on existing services.

Beyond these tailored services, it is important to recognise that mental health does not exist in a silo. Mental health support is a secondary benefit of a wide range of humanitarian interventions. Many programs—from educational support to livelihoods—are protective and help improve affected people's mental health and well-being.

Building capacity for longer-term support

A longer-term approach to mental health care is therefore required.

In 2022, the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MoPHP), with support from WHO, finalized the National Mental Health Strategy (NMHS) 2022–2026. NMHS supports the development and integration of curative and preventive mental health services that will ensure comprehensive access for all. WHO is supporting the MoPHP in developing a governance document, health workforce capacity building, and service delivery at community, primary and secondary care levels. WHO is also supporting institutional capacity building for mental health data collection to increase information on mental health prevalence.

Since then, to increase accessibility to needed services, the WHO has established 47 mental health units in 22 governorates across Yemen and provided the units with psychotropic medications. Three mental health hospitals in Aden, Sa'dah, and Ta'iz governorates are now being rehabilitated.

To help address the shortage of mental health specialists, WHO has trained 142 health workers in the 47 mental health units in the "Mental Health Gap Action Programme – Humanitarian Intervention Guide." The guide enables trained health workers to appropriately assess and manage mental health conditions in the 22 governorates across Yemen.

Mental health conditions and emergencies are highly interconnected, and war's psychological and psychosocial effects are long-lasting. Partners remain dedicated to supporting the need for mental

health support in Yemen. Ongoing and increased investment in mental health services, support and awareness is now essential to help the Yemeni people thrive.

Kholoud's Story

Three years into Kholoud's marriage, the conflict in Yemen erupted and shut down the health facility where she was working as a midwife. Her husband also lost his job. With no income, their living conditions became dire. They lacked food to feed their three children of nine, seven and four years. Anxiety levels rose.

"My husband took all my money and possessions and sold them to open a small clinic for me. He forced me to work there day and night without any break to be with my children. He took all my income and kept pressuring me to make more money," Kholoud told UNFPA.

"I was completely burnt out. When I could no longer work, he insulted and cursed me continuously. My physical and mental health was in a terrible state. I finally reached a breaking point."

Kholoud's father took her to Ta'iz to seek treatment, but she had to stop the treatment halfway due to the high cost. Her husband brought her back to the village, and she was forced to work at the clinic again, in exchange for him not abusing their children.

"The constant exploitation and humiliation broke me. I ended up worse than before," adds Kholoud.

This time, Kholoud reached out to her sister, who heard about mental health services on the radio, and called to book an appointment. Kholoud arrived the next day at one of the specialized mental health care centres supported by UNFPA.

At the centre, she was immediately referred to a psychiatrist and provided with the needed support and medications free of charge until she recovered. Kholoud was also referred to a "safe space," which offers women and girls a supportive environment to connect with other women as well as seek tailored support, such as legal services.

Kholoud, now 28, has rented a small house for herself and her children close to her sister. She is working in a nearby hospital that the mental health centre helped find for her.

"When you lose all hope and the will to live and wait for death, and suddenly relief comes to you; this is how the mental health centre has saved me," says Kholoud. "I am repairing the mental well-being of my children and myself, free from exploitation, abuse and exhaustion. People appreciate my work and respect me; this is why I wanted to be a midwife," stated Kholoud.



YEMENI FARMERS' EFFORTS FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Each year, farmers pray that the loathed Fall Armyworm doesn't find their crops.

The high destructive Fall Armyworm spreads quickly. Originally native to the Americas, the Fall Armyworm was first detected in Africa in 2016 and made its way to Yemen in 2018. The moth can fly up to 100 kilometres in one night before laying up to 1,000 eggs. Then the worm eats its way through crops, with a preference for maize. Their name reflects their destructive behaviour, moving from one field to another once they have consumed all available food.

A major threat to food security, the Fall Armyworm is adding misery to Yemeni farmers already grappling with numerous challenges.

The pests are a menace for farmers as they devour crops. About 70 per cent of Yemenis live in rural areas and depend heavily on agriculture as a critical source of food and income. The pest can lead to a detrimental impact on a households' livelihood if crops are destroyed, and if the damage is widespread enough, the worm can affect food prices and food insecurity.

The years-long conflict in the country has only worsened the situation for farmers. They have faced shortages of critical agricultural necessities such as seeds and fertilizer and increased farming input prices. Farmers have also faced a sharp increase in the price of fuel—required for farming equipment and bringing crops to markets to sell—and unpredictable weather patterns, which present additional threats to harvests.

Farmers are desperate to manage the new pest. With pesticides very costly, some farmers report being forced sell crops from the previous harvest to afford that pesticides to save the current crop from the Fall Armyworm.

In response, from 2021 to 2022, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) provided crop-saving information through farmer field schools. Farmers received training on alternative pest control methods to protect human health, crops, and the environment and other best agricultural practices. The schools allowed farmers to practice, test and evaluate new sustainable methods and technologies using demonstration plots.

Farmers learned how to use the *mraemrah tree*,⁴ commonly found in Yemen, as a natural insecticide. The tree produces Neem oil that can serve as a “biopesticide,” hampering the growth and development of the fall armyworm. The tree is available locally, and the mixture is much cheaper than using chemicals and has no environmental impact. Farmers can prepare the Neem oil in small quantities in their villages.



Farmers are now applying these techniques on the ground to decrease Fall Armyworm numbers and their effects on crops. The approach helps to prevent longer-term food insecurity challenges and bolster livelihoods. It has also significantly strengthened the social cohesion among Yemeni farmers, especially in the conflict areas. Farmers are encouraged to make collective decisions for their fields, instead of each farmer making the decision individually.

Moreover, with training support from FAO, the national authorities in Yemen have since enhanced their capacity to identify, monitor and manage Fall Armyworm.

The agriculture sector remains critical to the livelihoods and food security of the most vulnerable populations in Yemen. These sustainable practices aim to protect agriculture and farmers’ livelihoods against the pest in the longer-term.

⁴ Also known as *Melia azedarach*, chinaberry tree or bead tree.

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