



Roundtable discussion: Humanitarian action in Yemen

Thursday 16 April | 13.00 - 15.00 CET

Summary Report

Introduction

The conflict that started in 2014 between the Internationally Recognized Government of Yemen (IRG) and the Sana'a-based de facto authority (DFA) in the North of Yemen – commonly known as the Houthis - has resulted in a severe economic and humanitarian crisis, one of the worst and most neglected in modern history. The conflict fragmented the nation into two main areas of political and economic control. The newly published [2026 Yemen Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan \(HNRP\)](#) states that as of 2026, 22.3 million people require humanitarian assistance and protection services. This includes 5.2 million internally displaced people, alongside migrants and refugees. The latest IPC analysis points to a further deterioration in food security, with 18.3 million people being acutely insecure. Furthermore, the country is also grappling with deep environmental and climate crises.

Yet, despite the scale of need, funding remains critically insufficient. While roughly 70 percent of humanitarian needs in Yemen are concentrated in the North, operational space for aid agencies is only decreasing, with access constraints and deteriorating security conditions limiting the reach of humanitarian actors.

KUNO invited representatives of NGOs, academics, and policymakers to exchange knowledge and perspectives on the pressing challenges facing humanitarian response in Yemen. The session aimed to foster dialogue and identify opportunities for more effective action. Key points of discussion included humanitarian needs and the implications for response priorities, humanitarian access and operational conditions in north, international political development, and efforts for sustainable interventions.

The session was moderated by **Muna Alhammadi**, MENA regional coordination team member and co-focal point, Women and Gender Constituency (WGC).

The humanitarian needs and access

Over the past year, Yemen faced a significant increase in concerns around food insecurity, funding cuts, regional conflicts, bank closings, and arrests of humanitarian workers; all of which are affecting humanitarian needs and priorities. At the moment, fifty-five per cent of the Yemeni population – twenty million people – require humanitarian assistance. That is 1.3 million more in comparison to previous years, and the needs continue to increase due to the multilayered crisis in the region and global cuts in humanitarian funding. For instance, the increasing fuel prices worldwide have resulted in thirty-five per cent higher shipping costs, which in turn cause local food and gas prices to skyrocket while the supply decreases sharply. Simultaneously, salary payments are severely delayed in the IRG-controlled areas, particularly in the public sector, leaving employees to survive on savings. In the North, salaries have nearly stopped altogether. Consequently, food insecurity is surging, with 2.2 million children experiencing

malnutrition, and 500.000 being in severe need of support. Yet only 20 per cent of affected populations receive assistance.

The escalating situation showcases that needs aren't simply increasing, but that the response system is struggling to keep up with the nature of the crisis itself. This is no longer a situation where the humanitarian sector can realistically aim to meet all needs, forcing organisations to make choices about who gets support - and who doesn't.

This reflection sparked a conversation around prioritisation. For example, some organisations create guidelines based on information they receive from partners. Furthermore, certain set criteria determine prioritisation, for example, of women-headed households or families supporting a disabled family member. But due to limited resources, organisations are unable to respond to all affected areas. Very few humanitarian actors are operating in the DFA-controlled north of the country, despite the majority of Yemeni people residing there, and aid delivery is becoming even more challenging.

Yemen counts 5.5 million internally displaced persons, most of whom moved from the North to the IRG-controlled areas. This number is only expected to increase. Therefore, organisations need to implement more localisation initiatives. If they can't access the North, funding should be directed to local actors operating there. There are local NGOs active in the North who possess access, resources, skills, and trust from local communities. Donor conditions and operational constraints in the North make high-quality and principled humanitarian action impossible. This raises the question: What is the red line here when the humanitarian principles cannot be upheld? It is not only needs, not only ability, and not only donor requirements, but it is also about principles that determine allocation decisions. There is also a high need in the South, where there is more access, and thus, participants find it also a legitimate choice to work there.

Access, security and operational conditions

In the South, there is competition between the IRG and STC (Southern Transitional Council), a separatist group backed by the United Arab Emirates, controlling parts of southern Yemen and advocating for a return to an independent South Yemen. Additionally, there is the ongoing tribal conflict, both between different tribes as well as between tribes and the government. The IRG has been unable to resolve this, and the conflict is further exacerbating fuel prices and complicating humanitarian aid delivery. Moreover, access delay and denial issues due to hindrance by security forces are observed.

The regional international conflict added to the constraints due to pipeline issues and inflation. The region is in a perpetual state of armed conflict - from Gaza to Lebanon and Iran – and warfare tactics are being duplicated across different countries, such as the targeting of infrastructure and essential resources, further undermining frontline aid delivery. Moreover, strong regional actors, such as Saudi Arabia, which controls the airspace, exercise power over the IRG to further their own agenda. Consequently, the issue is not *if* a crisis will escalate, but *when*.

The humanitarian imperative requires humanitarians to access people in need. But when humanitarian actors decide the risk is simply too high and decide to leave, it is a sensitive conversation. The operating conditions in the south are significantly safer, and humanitarians are not targeted there. The key issue is not only the duty of care, but how to prevent perpetuating harm when constraints force humanitarians to remain silent on severe violations or meet minimum standards for interventions. It is about red lines for organisations. The communities most in need (in the North) are currently left out of most programs in Yemen. Organisations have to ask themselves if they are unable to work in a certain area, can they give their funds to a partner who does have access? It is important for organisations to keep this in mind when designing the next responses. Moreover, in the North, there have been pauses in UN operations. which have implications for NGOs. One of the participants explained that their organisation has witnessed a gap

in coordination and diplomacy. For instance, flights have been disrupted, limiting mobility and access. Furthermore, donors are retreating, which complicates operations to reach the communities most severely affected.

The effects of the Humanitarian Reset

From many of the participants, it became apparent that the conversations to form the reset are not sufficiently inclusive and do not inform local organisations. Collaboration from the UN is only on paper; it's basically non-existent in practice. The funds are going to UN agencies not to the local actors, keeping all the response UN-led, while it should be local-first, needs-based. In the north, there should be a conversation with local actors about risks, but nothing is happening. There is no engagement, initiatives or actions behind this reset. The whole system of Reset is not focusing on reorganising the system, nor centring local organisations. Moreover, where the funding is going to is based on initiatives that are more visible, rather than actually based on needs – f.e, protection initiatives fall off the table.

Meeting the funds as stated in the Humanitarian Response Plan will reach its lowest point in 2026, with only 10% of the requested amount. The recent Reset also has an effect on these already reduced funds, all while there are more needs. Organisations have closed due to a lack of funding, and some local actors are vanishing. Since 2024, they have faced many challenges, including banking problems and donor funding reductions. A recent study shows that only 10% of local organisations have sufficient funds to survive longer than three months, and most affected communities are dependent on these local actors. The Reset system is now transferring risks to local partners. There is a need for a consultation on how this will be changed. Resetting is not just about reducing budget and scope; they need to think about sustainable solutions, funding, and centre the local actors.

Sustainable and resilience-based approach in Yemen

Humanitarian interventions, whether local or international, have to focus more on sustainability with an integrated approach that focuses on development, rather than only emergency projects. The links in the HDP nexus are important to help strengthen sustainability.

Right now, the system is completely dependent on international actors, which isn't sustainable. Currently, Yemeni communities also respond to their own needs when they're not reached by INGOs and the government. It was mentioned by participants that decades ago, local actors responded themselves, but because of the influx of international funding the local capacities, infrastructures have been destroyed. International actors should invest in such solutions such as community participation.

One participant said that despite the fact that a lot of flooding is happening in Yemen, there is no national disaster agency being set up with a system to alert populations and mobilise aid. Climate change is only getting worse, so there should be tangible things we can do and support, such as a national disaster agency/initiative.

How climate change impacts women and girls and exacerbates the humanitarian situation.

Women and girls are among those most affected by climate change and displacement in Yemen, facing increased risks such as loss of livelihoods, barriers to education, protection concerns, and reduced access to essential services. In the context of prolonged conflict and economic hardship, climate shocks and repeated displacement continue to deepen existing inequalities. At the same time, women also play

a critical roles as responders, community leaders, and actors in resilience and recovery efforts. The discussion highlighted the importance of ensuring that humanitarian responses more effectively address these realities and adopt more gender-responsive approaches.

Women-led organisations are key to the response and protection in Yemen. They are the most suited to address the issues that women are facing from day to day, and implement tailored programs, for example, gender-based violence. The benefits are multiple: there is a safe space for connection and open conversation between women (when no men are present); if it's women-led, it gives a chance for the intervention to have another perspective (so it's not the usual intervention). The budget cuts, however, are threatening the closure of these organisations.