



# UNDERSTANDING HOW UNHCR ENGAGES WITH COMMUNITIES IN **YEMEN**

## Community Engagement Survey Report

September 2020



A staff from UNHCR's NGO partner organization, NMO, records feedback from a displaced woman at a non-food items distribution site in Aden. © UNHCR/NMO, Amer Abdulkareem, July 2020

# Introduction

Community engagement and two-way communication with affected populations are critical to understanding refugees and internally displaced persons' needs and how they want UNHCR and its partners to address them. It also allows UNHCR to inform displaced communities and individuals about how to access services. It supports communities to strengthen pre-existing capacity and their own resilience to shock, such as conflict, natural disaster or epidemic, notably COVID-19. Listening and talking to the communities it serves is inherent in UNHCR humanitarian response and an integral to UNHCR community-based protection approach.<sup>1</sup>

In Yemen, community engagement has been an essential part of UNHCR's response to the crisis. UNHCR and its partners engage and communicate with communities using both physical and virtual modalities, including face to face meetings, posters, leaflets, hotlines, text messages, and social media. It is essential for emergency responders to understand different groups and individuals' information needs, their preferred channels, and trusted sources. Any engagement with communities must also take into consideration socio-cultural norms and traditional practices that may impact specific groups' – such as women, children, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities – access to information and opportunities to impart information to other members of the community or humanitarian partners.

In June 2020, UNHCR conducted a survey to assess the quality and impact of its engagement with communities and identify areas for improvement. This abstract presents the key findings of the study and recommendations to address the gaps identified and better support effective two-way communication between UNHCR and its partners and the communities they serve in Yemen.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5209f0b64.pdf>

# Methodology

## Who we spoke to?

UNHCR interviewed over 3,000 displaced Yemenis, refugees, asylum seekers, and host community members across the country.



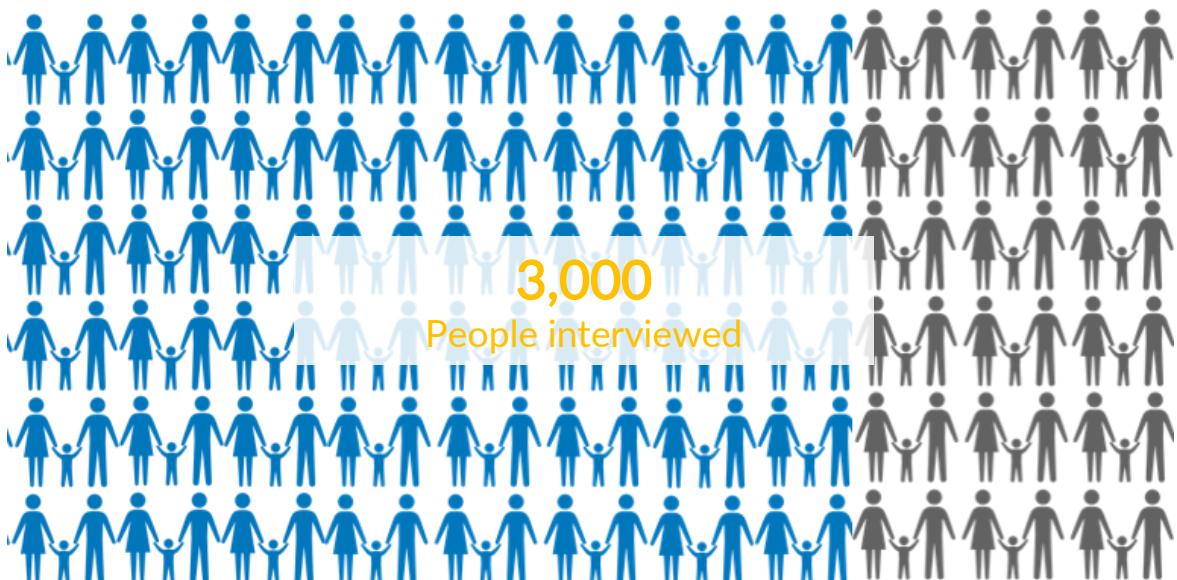
70%

Displaced Yemenis and host communities



30%

Refugees and Asylum Seekers



42%

of IDPs respondents  
were women and  
girls



58%

of IDPs respondents  
were men and boys



73%

of refugees and asylum  
seekers respondents  
were women and girls



27%

of refugees and asylum  
seekers respondents  
were men and boys

## What did we ask?

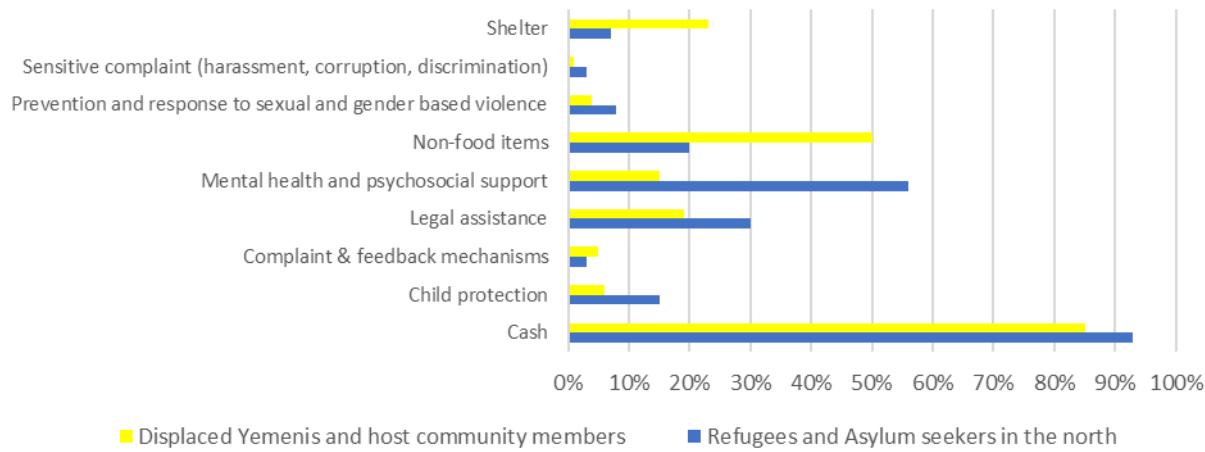


The survey was designed to help to capture the understanding that displaced people and their host communities have of the services offered by UNHCR and its partners. It also aimed to understand how displaced communities communicate with UNHCR and its partners, in particular their use of complaints and feedback mechanisms and their main challenges that may prevent them from using such mechanisms in order to identify how UNHCR could adapt its two-way communication. The survey also included questions related to the knowledge amongst displaced persons of COVID-19 preventive measures and the main barriers in implementing them.

## Key findings

- **Displaced Yemenis, refugees, asylum seekers, and host communities' families do not always know the full range of services offered by UNHCR and partners.** They are generally well informed mainly of UNHCR cash support, a lifeline for most of them.
  - Refugees and asylum seekers interviewed in the north of Yemen are well-aware of the psychosocial support offered by UNHCR and partners, including as psychological first aid in the field.
  - Displaced Yemenis are aware of non-food items assistance, given UNHCR presence on the frontline of the emergency response, when families lose their home and belongings due to conflict or flooding.
  - They are less aware of other available protection services, including psychosocial support, legal assistance, specialized services for SGBV survivors, and children, which may be explained by an overall lack of familiarity with such services that, even before displacement, were limited and socio-cultural norms.

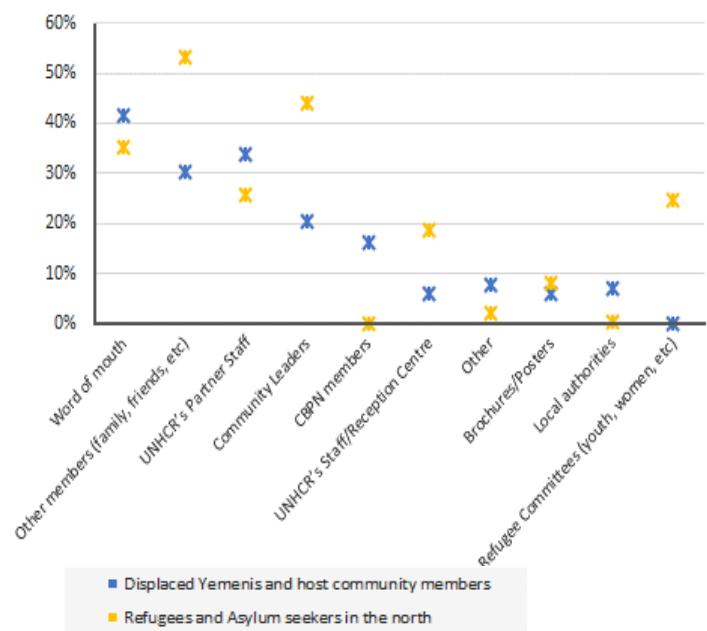
**What are the service(s) and assistance you know are provided by UNHCR?**



- **Refugees, asylum seekers, displaced Yemenis, and members of their host communities play a crucial role in supporting the information flow on UNHCR's assistance and services.**

- **Displaced persons trust people they know:** more than half of refugees and asylum-seekers respondents in the north and one-third displaced Yemenis and host communities interviewed countrywide rely on their **family, friends, and relatives** to access information;
- **Informal communication remains the preferred way to receive information:** forty-two per cent of displaced Yemenis and host communities interviewed countrywide, and 35 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers interviewed in the north rely on '**word of mouth**';
- **Organised community structures help transmit information:** forty-four per cent of refugees and asylum seekers interviewed in the north of Yemen rely on **community leaders** while 25 per cent on refugee specialised committees.
- **UNHCR** primarily relies on local and community-based organizations that are often well-rooted and respected in the communities they serve.

**How do you obtain information in your community about Services provided by UNHCR?**



**UNHCR partners managing protection services, including at community centres, remain key intermediaries between UNHCR, refugees, asylum seekers, displaced Yemenis, and members of their host communities.** UNHCR partners lead activities at the community level, such as awareness-raising sessions, mass information campaigns, door-to-door visits, and monitoring in sites and at services points, such as community centres. These activities ensure that UNHCR partners are in direct and regular contact with communities affected by displacement.

**35%** of displaced Yemeni reported that they learned about UNHCR activities through UNHCR partner staff.



**27%** of displaced Yemeni contact UNHCR and its partners using hotlines.

**22%** of refugees and asylum seekers in the north of Yemen contact UNHCR and its partners through complaints and feedback boxes.



**69%** of refugees and asylum seekers in the south of Yemen prefer face to face meetings with service providers to raise their concern.

**15%** of refugees and asylum seekers in the north of Yemen contact UNHCR and its partners through UNHCR staff.

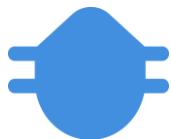


#### *Complaints and Feedback Mechanism in Yemen*

UNHCR Yemen's Complaints and Feedback Mechanism is a system through which refugees, asylum-seekers, displaced Yemenis and returnees can share their feedback and complaints regarding their protection and assistance concerns. The existing channels include hotlines, complaint and feedback boxes in Community Centers and UNHCR Offices and emails managed by UNHCR staff.

- Strong communication initiatives to raise awareness about COVID-19, including by UNHCR, helped to increase awareness and adoption of preventive measures amongst displaced Yemeni, refugees, and asylum seekers.

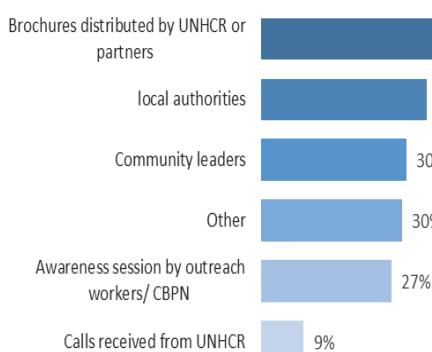
**89%** of displaced Yemeni and host communities, and  
**87%** of refugee and asylum seeker respondents interviewed in the north of Yemen **know about COVID-19 preventive measures**



**85%** of displaced Yemeni and host communities and vast majority of refugees and asylum seekers in the north of Yemen interviewed say that **they apply those measures**.  
 However, some cannot apply them mainly due to **lack of access to clean water and hygiene, lack of access to PPEs, and financial means to purchase them**.

#### **Sources used to get information about the preventive measures for COVID-19**

##### **Refugees and Asylum seekers in the north**



##### **Displaced Yemenis and host community members**



\* "others" such as through radio, SMS messages etc.

### UNHCR's communication initiatives about COVID-19

UNHCR conducted mass awareness raising on COVID-19 preventive measures through various communication channels to pass accurate and timely information. This included the production and distribution of brochures, information dissemination through calls, messaging at the assistance collection points, home visits and at community centres.

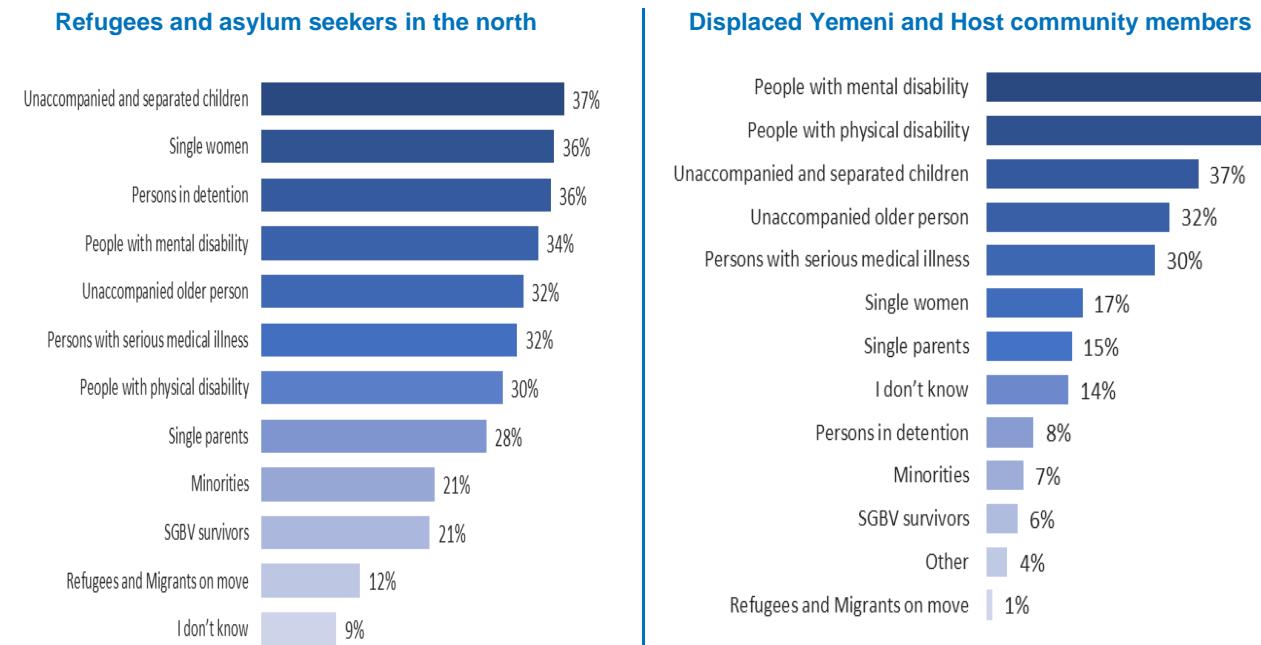
These awareness-raising were coupled with other initiatives such as the distribution of hygiene kits.



A staff from UNHCR NGO partner organization, NMO, leads an awareness-raising session with a group of displaced Yemeni women at a non-food items distribution site in Al Hudaydah governorate. © UNHCR/NMO Amer Abdulkareem

- According to refugees, asylum seekers, displaced Yemenis, and host community members, people with specific needs, including older people without family support, people with disabilities, children, single women face the most significant challenges in accessing information.

### Vulnerable groups who have the most difficulty accessing information in your view



Those groups may face difficulty accessing information, possibly due to mobility issues, access to service points, and socio-cultural norms limiting their social interaction.

- The main barriers faced by refugees, asylum seekers, displaced Yemenis, and host community members in accessing information are the lack of phones, electricity, and lack of internet.

#### Main obstacles accessing to information

	IDPs	Refugees in the north
Lack of information on how to contact UNHCR	40%	33%
Have no phone	27%	60%
No electricity	29%	50%
Limited/ no access to internet	26%	36%
Socially isolated	27%	29%
Cannot use the social media	28%	13%
Need to pay to have information	19%	5%
I don't know	12%	13%
Other	9%	5%
Neglected by the family and community	6%	4%

In addition to common obstacles such as lack of phone, electricity and internet access, **40%** of displaced Yemeni and host communities interviewed countrywide and **33 %** of refugee and asylum seekers in the north of Yemen say that lack of knowledge on how to contact UNHCR prevents them from accessing information.



- **Both refugees and asylum seekers, as well as displaced Yemenis and their host communities, do not know enough about the existing complaints and feedback mechanism.**



**76%** of refugees and asylum seekers in the north of Yemen, most of the refugees and asylum seekers in the south of Yemen and most of the displaced Yemeni countrywide have **not used UNHCR feedback and complaints mechanism.**

## Key recommendations

- **UNHCR and its partners should continue to diversify modalities of communication with communities, mainly through community structures.**
  - With displaced Yemenis: strengthen face to face communication through UNHCR staff, partners, community-based protection networks (CBPNs), and community centres, considering that displaced Yemenis face various physical barriers accessing to information such as lack of phones, electricity, and illiteracy.
  - With refugees and asylum seekers: strengthen communication through the existing community structure, including community leaders and specialized committees.
  - Leaflets adapted to the level of literacy of the targeted audience need to be made available in places such as community centres and distributed through community networks.
- **UNHCR should multiply efforts to ensure that displaced people receive adequate information on how to contact UNHCR and its partners.**
  - UNHCR will increase its efforts to enhance complaints and feedback mechanisms in place, including hotlines, boxes inside the facilities, and dedicated e-mails in addition to receiving feedback at community centres and through protection monitors. Locations of feedback and complaint boxes, as well as hotline numbers, will be further disseminated to displaced people.
  - UNHCR will review the existing complaints and feedback mechanism to ensure timely reply to feedback and complaints received and ensure effectiveness in the procedure.

- **Communication should be adapted to the specific needs of different ages, gender, and diversified groups as much as possible.**
  - For children: easy-to-understand communication tools need to be applied, such as simple posters and audio-visual (video, radio, etc.).
  - For women: effectively use the existing structure such as women group for refugees, ensure gender balance in community-based protection networks as well as among protection staff particularly monitors reaching out at the household level. Hold regular FGDs with women at community centres and other locations.
  - Attention should be given to older persons whose mobility may be restricted and may prefer face to face communication.
  - Mobility issues and specific needs of persons with disabilities should also be taken into consideration with the support of specialized agencies.
  - Information campaign or messaging needs to remain available in multiple languages, particularly for refugees and asylum seekers.

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