

Yemen Humanitarian Senior Officials Meeting VI

7 May 2024

CO-CHAIRS' SUMMARY

The sixth Yemen Senior Officials Meeting (SOM VI) took place in Brussels on 7 May 2024, co-hosted by the European Union and the Kingdom of Sweden¹. The meeting gathered humanitarian and development actors, donors, international organisations and international and Yemeni Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) – to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. It was preceded by comprehensive consultations on 24-25 April 2024 in Aden, Amman and Sana'a.

The participants committed to continue acting collectively to alleviate the suffering of the population of Yemen, assessed the challenges in delivering lifesaving assistance, share good practices and identified recommendations for next steps.

Yemen continues to be one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Nine years of devastating conflict, economic deterioration and the collapse of public services have left 18.2 million people in Yemen – half of the population – in need of humanitarian assistance and protection services for their survival.

The SOM VI took place at a critical moment. After two years of slight improvements, the humanitarian situation is deteriorating again. The regional spill-over of the conflict in Gaza, attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea, and military escalation are adding to existing challenges faced by the Yemeni population. After a period of armed conflict followed by a prolonged no-war no-peace situation, the humanitarian context is entering a new, uncertain phase where the risk of return to a conflict exists.

At the same time Yemen remains an underfunded crisis. The Humanitarian Response Plan was only funded at 41% in 2023, the lowest funding level since the onset of the conflict. Participants called on all donors to increase or at least maintain their level of funding. Prioritization and better targeting have started, and more choices have to be made.

Our joint humanitarian imperative is increasingly challenged by regional political dynamics. Joint humanitarian advocacy efforts must continue to focus on compliance with International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law to protect the necessary humanitarian space. This is a condition for the delivery of a principled humanitarian response to vulnerable populations across Yemen.

¹ Previous SOMs took place on 13 February 2020, 12 November 2020, 1 June 2021, 23 June 2022, and 23 May 2023.

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Food insecurity and malnutrition is growing again. The health system is collapsing and immunization programmes are severely disrupted. The outbreak of cholera is rapidly spreading. The number of IDPs, 4.5 million, remains worryingly high, evictions are on the rise and the conditions for durable solutions are not materializing. Yemen is one of the most contaminated countries by landmines and explosive remnants of war. The profound impact of climate change and extreme weather events in Yemen exacerbates the ongoing humanitarian crises.

Despite huge needs, the space for humanitarian and development actors in Yemen is shrinking. Bureaucratic impediments, restrictions on movements and access, distribution challenges, and security risks are rising. These restrictions and the interference in humanitarian needs assessments, programming and monitoring are eroding the delivery of aid.

There is an increasing number of security incidents. Aid workers are under serious threat. Many have been harassed, attacked, kidnapped or even killed. Many remain in detention.

Women play a vital role in the humanitarian response. Restrictions of movement of Yemeni female aid workers, mainly in northern parts of Yemen, reduce the ability to reach vulnerable groups, particularly women, girls and children, and to monitor impact. Freedom of movement for female aid workers should remain a joint advocacy priority for the humanitarian community.

The protection crisis is widespread and protection services are limited. Six million Yemenis, including many girls and boys, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants need protection assistance, with populations on the move being particularly vulnerable. Building a safer and protective environment is of paramount importance. Donors, humanitarian actors and Yemeni authorities each have a role to play, either in protection advocacy, funds mobilisation, strategic engagement with affected communities and local actors, and the provision of targeted or integrated protection services following an area-based approach.

Yemeni NGOs play a critical role thanks to their privileged access, knowledge and proximity to hard-to-reach communities. A locally led humanitarian response is essential and should meaningfully engage and empower women and youth. It should be strengthened to sustain the engagement with host communities and local authorities, and to prepare for and react to climate-related disasters.

While the overall picture is bleak, several gains have been made. Humanitarian aid has saved lives in Yemen. The number of people in need have decreased by 16%. Large-scale donor support has prevented famine. Child mortality has slightly reduced following years of sustained humanitarian assistance. Resilience programs have improved capacities of local communities and structures to cope with future crises. Community-driven disaster prevention has decreased the impact of climate emergencies in IDP sites. Protection services are more central in humanitarian responses across sectors. Stand-alone protection interventions, humanitarian demining, victim assistance and trauma care, have gained momentum. Localisation has been reinforced with the setup of the coordination forum for Yemeni NGOs. Aid works.

Gains made are, however, fragile and can easily be reversed.

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A united and consistent approach among all humanitarian actors confronting the operational environment is fundamental. Whenever the space has been given, results have been tangible. It is essential for aid actors, including donors, to continue to engage with central and local authorities, and host communities to address these challenges.

Participants agreed on the importance of the following ways forward:

1. *Staying engaged.* Despite huge challenges, the humanitarian imperative calls for maintaining life-saving support and resilience interventions to the people in need, wherever these needs are, across the country, while fostering a strategic engagement with authorities to regain a proper humanitarian space.

2. *Safeguarding humanitarian principles.* Humanitarian actors will continue to safeguard humanitarian principles. Donors will support humanitarian actors by adjusting or redirecting their programmes to areas where a principled humanitarian response can be ensured, and by working with implementing partners to adapt, temporarily pause or suspend programmes if and where needed. Participants are committed to address bottlenecks in structured dialogue with the relevant Yemeni actors. The work on the recalibration strategy endorsed last year will continue.

3. *Ensuring the centrality of protection.* The strategy on the centrality of protection and corresponding action plan are now in place. It is essential to closely monitor its implementation, promote its inclusiveness, and to ensure the accountability of all actors involved for its success.

4. *Responding to emergencies*

- *Health and epidemics.* It is key to develop targeted advocacy with national and local authorities and to raise awareness within communities on health risks and epidemics. It is paramount to reinforce and support an efficient coordination of the health response. Development donors are urged to invest in the sustainability of the health system and the reinforcement of local public health capacities, allowing health care workers to focus on the most pressing emergencies.
- *Food and nutrition.* It is essential to step up support to prevent the return of famine and to back the efforts of actors involved in the food and nutrition response to re-target assistance to the most pressing needs and vulnerable cases. Wherever possible, strengthening resilience of the most vulnerable people towards future food crisis should be included.
- *Mine action.* Humanitarian and development actors should increase their engagement in mine action and strengthen the coordination and implementation of demining activities.
- *Impact of climate change.* It is important to develop climate-sensitive programmes to build communities' resilience to climate shocks, reduce vulnerability and promote sustainable development. Humanitarian and development actors should support climate-friendly projects that reduce the climate footprint of their operations.
- *Migration.* Systematic inclusion of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the wider humanitarian response should be further strengthened. Humanitarian workers must be granted unconditional and sustained access to people on the move, whether in detention/quarantine sites or along the route.

5. *Embracing localisation.* Humanitarian and development donors should increase their support to balance partnerships between international and Yemeni aid actors. It is important to support

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locally led responses, women organisations, fostering behaviour change, and ensuring context analysis, proximity with people in need, and the long-term sustainability of the response.

6. *Investing in civil society.* It is essential to encourage the meaningful participation of civil society across coordination and decision-making spaces and to maintain long-term support to sustain the resilience of local communities and the capacity of local first-responders. Donors will continue to discuss with Yemeni civil society actors the follow-up of the SOM process.

7. *Addressing the funding gap.* The reduction of international funding and the increasing competition with other crises, has forced the international community to prioritize, focus and retarget its support towards the most pressing emergencies. Greater efforts to broaden the donor base is necessary to continue responding to the significant humanitarian needs in Yemen.

8. *Reinvesting in development.* While acknowledging the constraints put on development funding, development actors need to significantly increase their engagement to address structural needs, sustain support to basic needs, including in livelihoods, health, climate resilience and adaptation as well as civil society strengthening.

9. *Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.* The use of funds along the HDP-Nexus is key to deliver aid in a complementary, targeted, and efficient way. Life-saving humanitarian assistance should be used in areas where it is necessary, and sustainable development opportunities should be explored wherever possible.

The participants to the SOM II mandated the European Commission and the Kingdom of Sweden, the two co-chairs and hosts of the SOM VI, to debrief all relevant actors on the outcomes of this meeting.