

Assessing prospects for durable solutions in Yemen

NRC Yemen



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Cover photo: Displaced family in Al-Tuheyta district, Al Hudaydah.

Photo: Mahmoud Al-Filstini/NRC

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1 Executive summary

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) conducted an intention survey with the objective of identifying prospects for durable solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) across five governorates in Yemen. NRC staff and enumerators interviewed 360 households from the seven districts of Alqanawis, Altuhayta, and Alzuhra in Alhudeydah, Tuban in Lahj, Amran city in Amran, Mahabsha in Hajja, and Mokha district in Taiz governorate.

Majority of the surveyed households (70%) have been displaced for over three years. The main reason for displacement is insecurity and/ or active conflict, coupled with lack of livelihood opportunities. Most of these have been displaced from Hajja (54%), Hodeida (21%), and Taiz (20%) which are governorates that are currently experiencing active conflicts.

The survey identified that two thirds of the assessed population preferred to return to Areas of Origin (AoO) compared to one third who expressed interest to locally integrate at the place of displacement (PoD). Of those who showed interest to return, only 38% demonstrated an intention to return within a period of six months – IDPs in Lahj (Tuban) and Taiz (Mokha) have shown the greatest desire to return within six months among the group. The other 62% who have opted for return as a durable solution, indicated that they would not return immediately or within the next six months due to insecurity at the place of origin and/ or lack of livelihood opportunities. The key conditions for return were identified as improved security situation and access to employment and/ or livelihood opportunities.

The assessment identified lower intentions toward local integration, with the exception of Amran city where 90% of the respondents expressed the desire to locally integrate. Only one third of those surveyed were inclined to locally integrate. The preference for local integration was attributed to safety and security coupled with the desire to find employment and/ or livelihood opportunities at the place of displacement. The main conditions put forward for local integration included access to livelihoods and/ or employment opportunities, access to housing or land, safety and security, as well as access to basic services, mainly education and health care.

In summary, the assessment identified prospects for durable solutions with specific emphasis on returns as a favorable option, and highlighted the potential to pilot local integration in a few locations. In both options, IDPs will require adequate support in order for them to realise a sustainable solution to their displacement.

2 Background

2.1 Context

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains one of the worst in the world. Nearly six years of conflict and severe economic decline are driving the country to the brink of famine, and exacerbating needs in all sectors. An estimated 80 per cent of the population – 24 million people – require some form of humanitarian or protection assistance, including 14.3 million who are in acute need.¹ Two thirds of all districts in the country are already pre-famine, and one third face a convergence of multiple acute vulnerabilities. The escalation of the conflict since March 2015 has dramatically aggravated the protection crisis in which millions face risks to their safety and basic rights including widespread violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL).

Given the current situation in Yemen, durable solutions are considered to be a distant prospect by many in the humanitarian and development sector. The focus of the humanitarian interventions remains emergency in nature due to the active conflict with ever changing frontlines coupled with natural disasters like floods and cyclones. This said, there are over 1 million² spontaneous IDP returns recorded in 2019, of which majority returned to Aden, Amanat Alasima, Taiz, Shabwah, and Lahj. However, there is no evidence to conclude that this led to durable solutions. In the case of Yemen, achieving durable solutions is complicated by continuous fighting and ever shifting conflict frontlines, coupled with severe economic decline and limited livelihoods opportunities.

The inter-agency standing committees (IASC) framework on durable solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs)³ states that a durable solution is achieved when IDPs no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement, and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement. Durable solutions can be achieved through return, local integration and resettlement.

¹ OCHA Yemen, News and Updates, 28 January 2021. Retrieved 08 February 2021

² United Nations, Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2019

³ The Brookings Institution – University of Bern Project On Internal Displacement, IASC Framework On Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons, Inter- Agency Standing Committee, April 2010

The authorities in Yemen tend to favour return over local integration to minimize demographic impact of the displacement.⁴ For them, return represents restoration of the situation before the conflict erupted and does not necessarily require allocation of new land. However, it is worth emphasizing that, as per the IASC framework returns must be voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable.



A camp for displaced people in Amran governorate. Photo: Mohamed Hasan/NRC

⁴ Eleonora Ardemagni, Government, De Facto Authority and Rebel Governance in Times of Covid-19: The Case of Yemen

3 Methodology

3.1 Sample size

NRC Yemen limited the sample size to 450 households (HH) since the survey was a pilot. The sample was able to yield results with a reasonable statistical representation, calculated by balancing the statistical soundness of the sample size as well as the resources available for the assessment. The districts selected for this assessment were purposely targeted based on NRC's presence, ongoing or planned durable solution programmes in those districts.

Using a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% as a basis for calculation, the initial sample size was targeted at 384 HH. Initially nine districts were selected, therefore setting the sample as 42.6 HH per district (384 HH distributed equally between districts). For a more suitable representation and better comparative analysis, the sample size was increased to at least 50 HH per district, bringing the total to 450 HHs.

Governorate	Number of IDPs (HH)	Sample size
AlHudeydah (3 districts)	91,500	50
Hajjah (2 districts)	18,774	50
Amran	61,116	50
Dhamar	20,628	50
Taiz	22,920	50
Lahi	15,000	50
Total	229,938	450

Table 1. Sample size.

3.2 Household surveys

Household surveys were conducted to collect quantitative data. The data collection team included both male and female-headed households, with women respondents

comprising at least 30% of the total sample size for each location. The survey targeted the head of the household and if he or she was not present, a senior adult from the same household was interviewed instead.

The contact details of IDP households were extracted from NRC's existing beneficiary's databases. The databases were prepared to allow for a random selection of men and women respondents for the survey. IDP HH were contacted and invited to participate in the survey until the desired sample size (70% men, 30% women) was reached.

3.3 Limitations

Several challenges faced during the data collection have impacted the outcome of the survey.

Access: The main challenge was in Dhamar governorate was access as NRC lacks physical presence there, hence the team planned to collect data remotely. However, it was difficult for the team to obtain lists of IDPs from organizations and agencies working in the area due to data protection protocols related to remote surveys. As a result, data collection was impossible and the survey team were unable to obtain the necessary permits to access the governorate on time. Therefore, Dhamar governorate was excluded from the survey.

Connectivity: In general, most of the challenges faced during the data collection were related to remote methods used in the survey. The vast majority of respondents could not be reached, specifically female-headed households hence the planned female respondent targets could not be reached during the survey. Several respondents could not be reached in Altuhayta because their phones were either switched off or out of network coverage. 70% of the planned sample size could not be reached in that district. In other instances, the phone numbers provided did not belong to the respondent, which made reaching them even more difficult. Those who could not be reached were replaced by other randomly-selected respondents from the list.

Lengthy and tedious processes: Several respondents found the survey long, resulting in survey fatigue. As a result, some surveys had to be postponed to a later date which further delayed data collection processes.

Location and verification of respondents: Data collection teams in the field faced numerous challenges locating respondents residing in remote areas. In such instances, the households/respondents were replaced.

4 Findings

4.1 General information

4.1.1 Target locations and communities

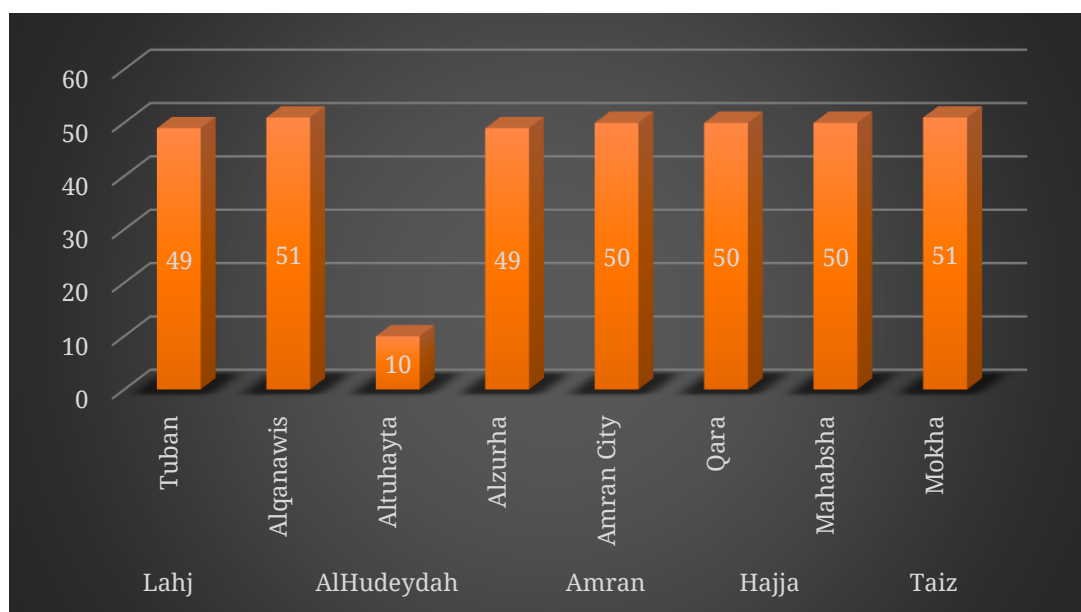


Table 2. Target locations and communities.

The survey was conducted in eight districts across five governorates identified as pilot locations for the implementation of NRC's durable solutions ambition.

A total of 360 randomly selected households were interviewed for the exercise, while covering more than 100 IDP sites.

The survey was conducted from 11 November to 23 December 2020.

4.1.2 Demographic and displacement profile

The interviewed households consisted of 267 males and 93 females, indicating a ratio of 74% and 26% respectively with an average age of 40 years. The lower reach of female respondents was attributed to a combination of cultural reasons and unavailability of female headed households at the time of the survey (see section 3.3). Of those interviewed, 69% were the heads of the household, while the rest viewed themselves as members of the household. The family size varied with an average of

seven family members per household present at the displacement site. Most of the family members (95%) were in the same location, while 5% acknowledged having members outside the displacement site – most of these being extended family members.

In terms of household composition, 24% of household members were under the age of five years, 29% were between the age of six and 17 years, while 41% were aged between 18 and 59 years making this age group the most dominant at the IDP sites. In addition, the survey found 5% were above the age of 60 years. The overall ratio between male and female household members was split at 50%. 36% of those interviewed reported the presence of sick family members, 13% elderly, 7% with physical disability and 4% with mental disability within their respective households.

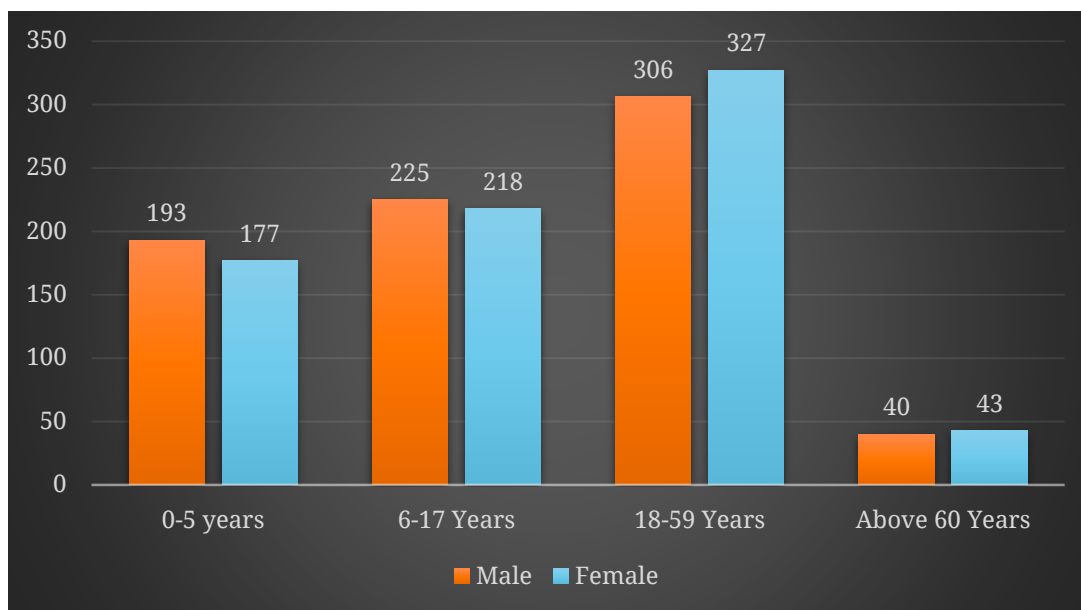


Table 3. Age and gender.

Despite the presence of 443 school aged children in the assessed households, only 45% of them were attending school. The main reasons for not attending school included: 1) unaffordability of school fees, 2) lack of schools at reasonable distances, 3) lack of civil documents, 4) child’s participation in family’s income-generating activities, therefore their unavailability to attend school. Majority of the respondents (IDPs) were originally from Hajja (54%), Hodeida (21%), and Taiz (20%). The survey provided an analysis on IDP origins based on where they are currently displaced at, see below:

- IDPs Living in Tuban, Lahj governorate:** Majority of these IDPs originate from Taiz (61%), and Alhodeydah (38%). Those originating from Taiz are from the districts of Dimnat Khadir (66%), Altaiziyah (16%), Maqbana (13%), while those from Hodeida are from the districts of AlFaqiah Bura (52%), Zabid (36%), Al Hali (5%), and Al Hawak (5%).
- IDPs living in Mokha, Taiz governorate:** Displaced persons living in Mokha are mainly from Taiz (72%) and Alhodeydah (25%) governorates. Of those from Taiz, 78% are from Maqbana districts, and 18% from Mokha district. Those from

Alhodeydah are particularly from AlGarrahi (61%), Alhali (30%), and Almina (7%) districts.

- **IDPs living in Alqanawis, Altuhayta, Alzurah, Alhodeydah governorate:** IDPs under this category are from Hajja (88%), and Alhodeydah (12%) governorates. Of those from Hajja, majority are from districts of Harad (65%), Abs (18%), Midi (9%), and Hayran (6%), while those from Alhodeydah originate from districts of Altuhayta (77%), and Almina (15%).
- **IDPs living in Qara, Mahabsha, Hajja governorate:** 88% of IDPs living in Hajja are from districts within the governorate, while 8% are from Alhodeydah. Those from Hajja are mainly from districts of Harad (65%), Midi (14%), Qarah (7%), Hajja city (4%), Abs (3%), Hayran (2%) and Mustaba (2%). Those from Alhodeydah originate from Al Hali (50%), and Alhawak (25%) districts.
- **IDPs living in Amran city, Amran governorate:** This category of IDPs originate from Alhodeydah (42%), Saddah (20%), Hajja (18%), and Taiz (8%) governorate. Those that are from Alhodeydah originate from AlHali (71%), and Bajil Bayt (14%) districts, while those from Hajja and Taiz originate from Harad (88%) and Alta'ziyah (75%) districts respectively. The data did not specify districts of those originating from Saddah.

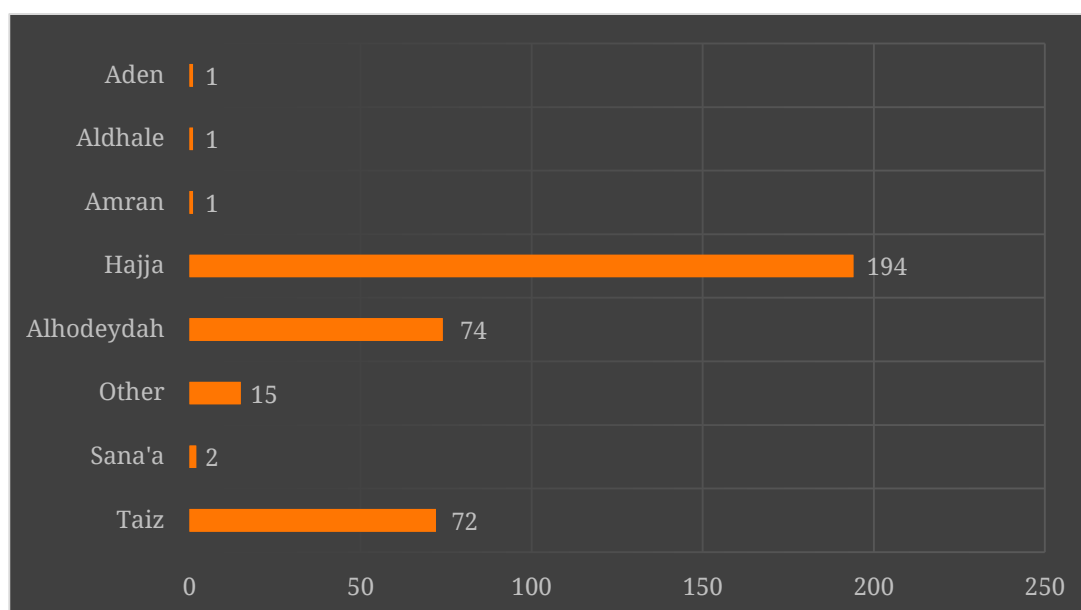


Figure 1. Place of origin.



IDPs walking through the Al Meshqafa camp in Tuban district. Photo: Mahmoud Al-Filstini/NRC

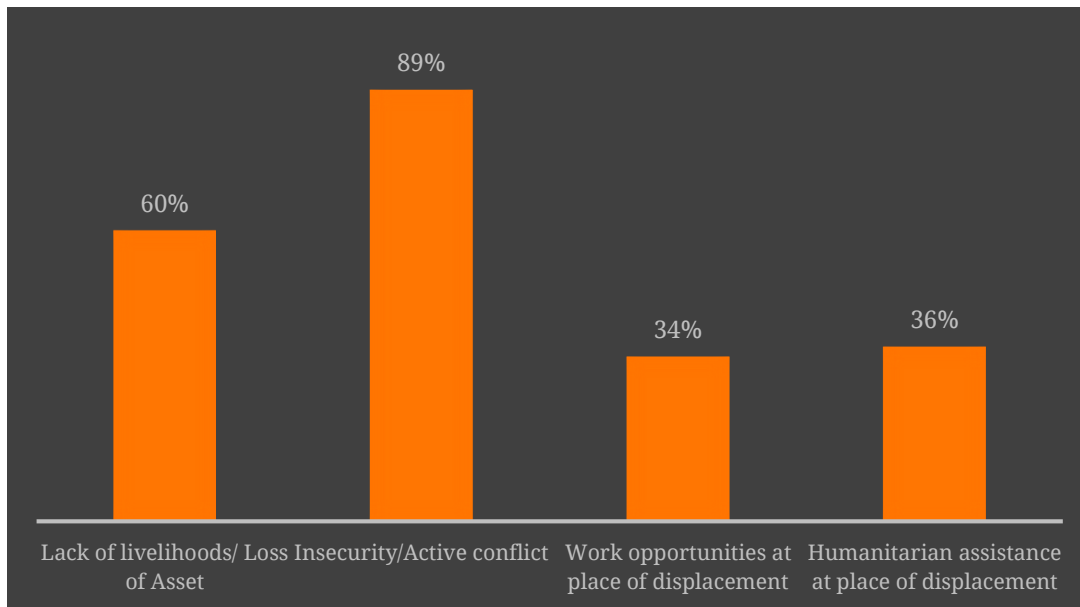


Figure 2. Reasons for leaving place of origin.

The main reason IDPs left their places of origin have been attributed to two factors:

- 1) **Push factors:** Insecurity and/ or an active conflict and lack of livelihood opportunities and/ or loss of assets at areas of origin had the greatest influence in their decision to leave.
- 2) **Pull factors:** The availability of humanitarian assistance and work opportunities at locations of displacement had some form of influence in their decision to leave their places of origin.

In addition, 24% of the respondents indicated that they needed additional information such as the security situation at place of origin, source of livelihoods upon return, and the situation of their houses to make an informed decision.

In terms of duration of displacement, 56% of IDPs had been displaced for a period of three to six years, 25% for period of one to three years, 14% for over six years, and 3% have been displaced for less than 12 months. Of the interviewees, 36% indicated they had been displaced multiple times (leaving previous place of displacement), mainly attributed to the lack of livelihoods and/ or assistance.

The majority (98%) of the respondents indicated that their main sources of income at their places of origin were casual labour, farming, handicrafts making, trading and agriculture/pastoralism. When asked about how they earn a living at their places of displacement, the majority mentioned casual labour as the main source of income, followed by the provision of porter services, humanitarian assistance, and begging.

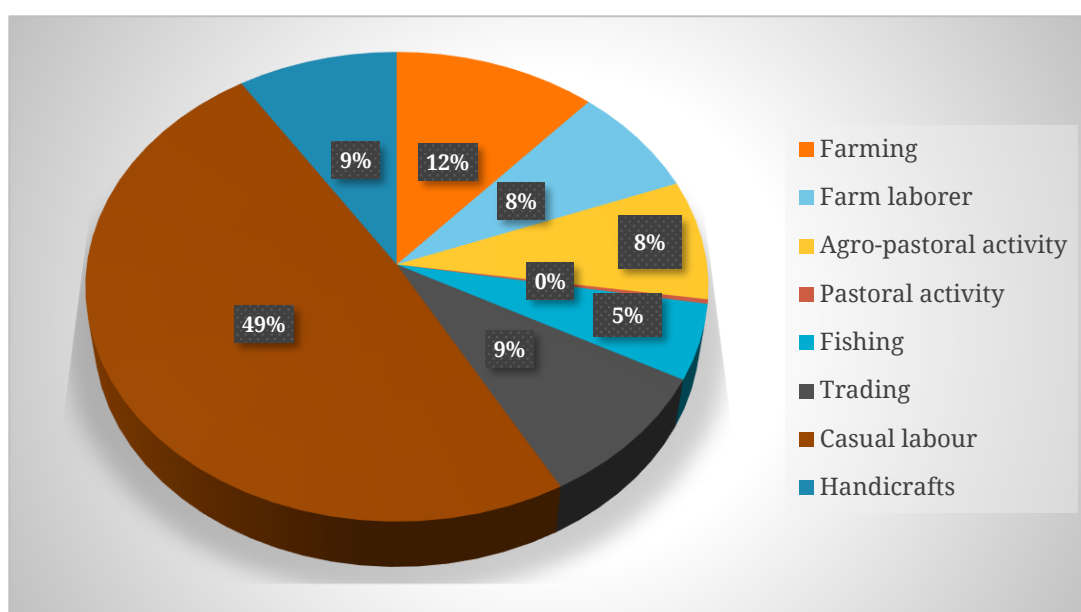


Figure 3. Past livelihood means at a place of origin.

According to the majority of respondents interviewed, the main bread winners in the family were husbands (74%), children (13%), and wives (8%).

In terms of household expenses, respondents indicated that most families spent their earnings on food, health, education and rent respectively. In addition, some of the respondents mentioned that non-food items (NFIs), *khat* and transport were also part of the household expenses.

4.2 IDP intentions

The majority (69%) of respondents preferred return to their places of origin as a durable solutions option, while 30% preferred to locally integrate at their places of displacement. Despite the fact that the majority of families expressed willingness to return, only 38% of the respondents planned to return within a period of six months. 58% indicated that they would remain in the current location for the next six months, while 4% were undecided.

This demonstrates that despite willingness to return to areas of origin, the majority of IDPs still feel that these areas are not conducive for voluntary, safe and dignified return. This said, it is worth noting the 38% who have expressed willingness to return within a period of six months.

Current displacement location	Preferred DS option	Percentage (%)
Lahj (Tuban)	Return	75
	Local integration	24
Alhodeydah (Alqanawis, Altuhayta, Alzuhra)	Return	77
	Local integration	22
Amran (Amran city)	Return	30
	Local integration	70
Hajjah (Mahabsha)	Return	66
	Local integration	33
Taiz (Mohka)	Return	90
	Local integration	10

Table 7. Preferred durable solution (DS) option per location.

Table 7 shows an overwhelming preference for return as a durable solutions option in all assessed locations, except Amran city where 70% of the respondents preferred local integration. Although majority of the IDPs were more inclined to choosing return, a reasonable number expressed a desire to stay at the current location (displacement site) until situation in their area of origin is conducive for a sustainable return.

Current displacement location	Plan for the coming six months	Percentage (%)
Lahj (Tuban)	Return	55
	Stay at current location	44
Alhodeydah (Alqanawis, Altuhayta, Alzuhra)	Return	40
	Stay at current location	58
Amran (Amran city)	Return	0
	Stay at current location	98
Hajjah (Mahabsha)	Return	30
	Stay at current location	65
Taiz (Mohka)	Return	69
	Stay at current location	14

Table 8. IDP plans in the coming six months.

Overall, only 38% of the assessed population expressed an intention to return within the next six months, with IDPs in Lahj (Tuban) and Taiz (Mokha) showing the greatest desire (55%, and 69% respectively) to return.

4.2.1 Return as a durable solution

The respondents who indicated return as their preferred durable solution option were further questioned on their reason for wanting to return, duration of their return, conditions of return, livelihood means after return as well as possession of assets and the status of their belongings at place of origin. The main reason for returning to their Area of Origin was attributed to:

- improved security situation at places of origin (86%)
- limited work opportunities at places of displacement (62%)
- risk of eviction (59%).
- limited access to humanitarian aid (59%)
- having sufficient savings to restart life at places of origin (55%)

Regarding the ideal condition for return, the majority of respondents indicated that improved security situation and access to services at their areas of origin were among the main considerations they would make before their return. However, 41 respondents (18%) expressed willingness to return under any condition.

“I wish the security situation can improve so that I can return to my original home”
says Ahmed Gharib, Soq Alail, Amran.

Regarding the livelihoods in the Area of Origin following return, the majority of respondents indicated that they would engage in casual work, followed by trading and farming, while 12% expressed flexibility to engage in any kind of work. 91% of the respondents believe that these livelihood options would sustain them upon return to areas of origin.

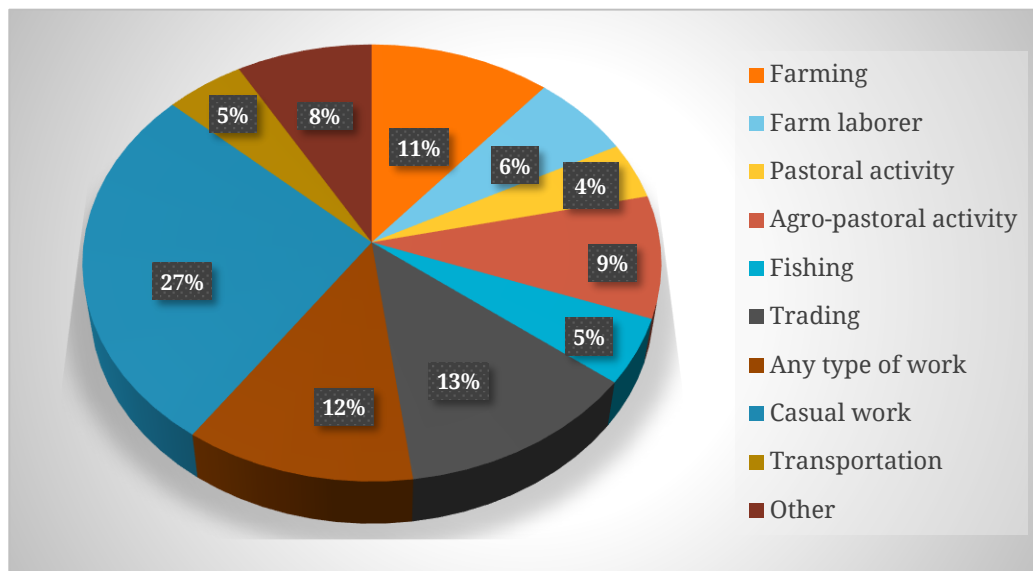


Figure 4. Livelihood options in places of origin.

The survey findings indicated that the vast majority of IDPs lack sustainable livelihood opportunities at the Areas of Origin, suggesting a need for investments in livelihoods.

In terms of assets left behind during displacement and how they could be used upon return, the majority of respondents indicated owning a house (55%), farm land (14%), livestock (5%), agricultural tools (4%) while 11% had no assets to return to.

In terms of the conditions of assets, 65% of the respondents indicated that they had received reliable information that these assets had been destroyed during the conflict (or were no longer in their usual state). 12% stated that assets left behind were still available while another 5% indicated that their assets were either occupied or being used by others. 18% of the respondents lacked information on the status of their assets.

The majority of respondents indicated that they had received information about the status of their assets through relatives, fellow IDPs from the Area of Origin, and IDP leaders.

On nature and duration of returns, 72% of respondents indicated that their return to the Area of Origin would be permanent while 27% indicated that they would return temporarily to assess the overall situation at the Area of Origin. Most of the respondents (71%) acknowledged that all family members would return at the same time, while 29% expressed that they would leave some family members behind and return in a phased manner. The main reason for returning in phases included security, and the need for education continuity for their children.

Respondents choosing phased return indicated that family members would be left behind at the place of displacement including children (39%), wives (34%), and

husbands (20%). With regard to the situation upon return, the majority (55%) of respondents indicated that they would live in their former home/house while 26% preferred to live in temporary accommodation. 14% indicated that they would live with a relative(s), while 3% would rent a house.

Respondents anticipated the following challenges upon return: limited access to food, insecurity, lack of or limited access to employment or other livelihood opportunities, lack of education, limited access to basic services such as health, and education.

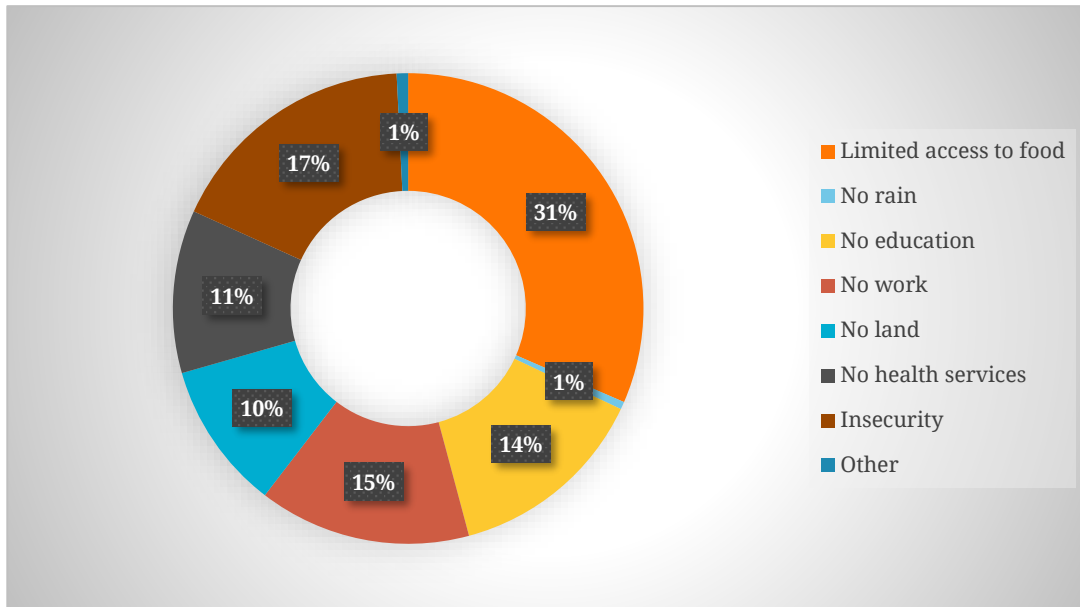


Figure 5. Anticipated challenges upon return.

42% of the respondents indicated that they needed additional information regarding the conditions in their areas of origin, including the status of their homes/houses, job and/ or livelihood opportunities, and the overall security situation.

4.2.2 Prospects of local integration

This section analyses why respondents want to continue living in their current location in the coming six months, their plans for local integration, and type of tenure they enjoy at their current accommodation.

According to the respondents, the main factors influencing their decision to remain at the current location over the next six months include security at places of displacement, availability of humanitarian assistance as this is their main source of living, ability to integrate in the displacement site including the ability to secure a house at their current location, education (specifically where a family member attends school at the place of displacement), and livelihoods (a family member has a job at the place of displacement).

Despite the preference to stay at the current displacement site, only 29% intended to locally integrate permanently. The majority (71%) viewed remaining in the displacement site as a temporary measure. Respondents from Amran were the exception as the majority opted to stay and locally integrate, but with support. In response to what would enable IDPs integrate locally, the majority of the respondents

indicated access to employment and/ or livelihood opportunities (50%), availability of and access to housing and/or land (30%), security and safety (29%), access to education (3%), and access to health care (2%).

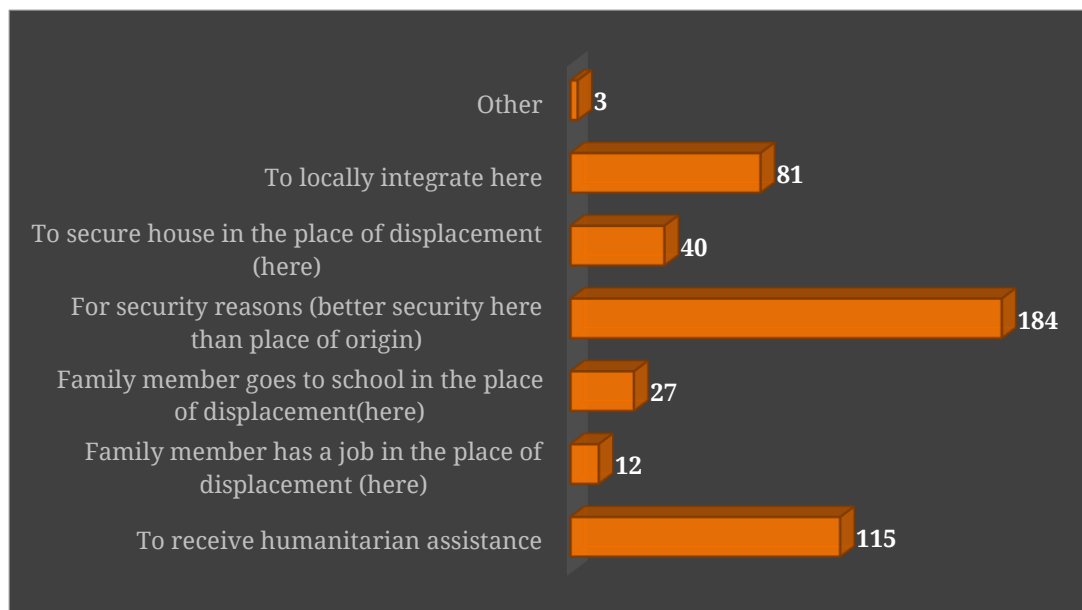


Figure 6. Main reasons for staying in the current location.

In terms of land tenure security including documentation, the majority (58%) possess communal land agreements, followed by verbal permission (20%), occupying without permission (15%), formal rental agreements (11%), while 3% were not aware or did not have knowledge of tenure documents. It was noted that only four families from Amran expressed willingness to relocate to a third location (Alhodeydah and Hajja) within Yemen, mainly to reunite with extended family.



Asma Saleh in her new shop after an NRC cash grant for capital. Photo: Nasser Abdulkarim/NRC

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Despite the complications and challenges linked to durable solutions in Yemen, the survey identified several prospects for durable solutions. Return to Areas of Origin was found to be the preferred durable solution option. However, further analysis will be required at areas of return to assess the conditions such as the security situation and livelihoods opportunities among other factors that are determinant to the achievement of durable solutions. This will ensure that returns are not only voluntary, safe and dignified but also sustainable.

Further, local integration was found to be the other preferred option. However, unlike return, it requires political will from stakeholders at the displacement site including local and central authorities, to ensure sustainable and lasting integration. Hence, as with returns, local integration requires a comprehensive and integrated approach involving both state and non-state actors, and humanitarian and development partners.

“I will work and do anything just in order to go back and re-settle in my home”
says Saud Ali, Al Mahabisha, Hajjah.

It is critical that any durable solution option or process adheres to the minimum criteria set by the IASC framework on the achievement of durable solutions. This includes long-term safety, security and freedom of movement; an adequate standard of living including at a minimum access to adequate food, water, housing, health care and basic education; access to employment and livelihoods; access to effective mechanisms that restore their housing, land and property or provide them with compensation.

5.2 Recommendations

- **Pilot projects that support voluntary, safe and dignified returns.** These entail facilitation of dignified, safe, sustainable and informed return to areas of origin.

Further in-depth analyses at areas of origin need to be conducted to ascertain the conditions including but not limited to safety and security of the returning population, access to services and existence of livelihoods and/or income generating opportunities to boost self-reliance. Information provision in regard to the situation in the areas of return as well as available assistance and rights will be a critical element for decision-making processes for households and communities on return and therefore should be an essential part of durable solutions programming. Additionally, 'go and see visits' can be organized by the community to ascertain whether the situation at areas of return is conducive for returns, and present findings to fellow IDPs to make informed decisions.

- **Pilot projects that support local integration:** Although the desire for local integration was lower in comparison to returns, there are opportunities to pilot this in selected locations. As significant differences are found between districts, pilot local integration project should be very much tailored to the specific local (district or sub-district) context. Local integration is a complex and gradual process with legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions. It imposes considerable demands on both the individual and the receiving communities. NRC and other agencies should explore opportunities for local integration through advocacy and integrated programming (livelihoods, legal assistance, water, sanitation and hygiene, and education) including creation of synergies between resilience and durable solutions. The support and political will of the local governments is key in the success of local integration interventions. The authorities should actively respect and support the preferences of IDPs who have chosen to integrate locally, including in situations where displacement becomes protracted due to the impossibility of return. Furthermore, implementing organizations should seek to fully understand the reasons behind any absence of political will for local integration. Pursuing local integration in the absence of political or local buy-in may create more harm than good. The needs, rights and legitimate interests of IDPs should be the primary considerations guiding all policies and decisions on durable solutions.
- **Strengthen stakeholder engagement through advocacy to shift focus to durable solution programming.** Although the assessment identified prospects for durable solutions programming, there is little interest among the humanitarian and donor community to engage in this due to the recurrent emergencies in Yemen.
- **Invest in durable solutions programme design.** There is need to ensure projects adhere to durable solutions programming principles including that interventions are government-led, area-based, collective and comprehensive, participatory and community-based, rights and needs-based, gender, age and disability-sensitive, and sustainable. Further, we need to ensure that interventions apply a conflict-sensitive approach while designing and implementing durable solutions programs. For instance, the needs of receiving communities should be considered in decisions about local integration of IDPs to ensure no harm is done.
- **Durable solution policy:** Under the 2012-2014 Yemen transitional programme for stabilization and development, the country had a clear policy to find durable solutions for IDPs. It is time for stakeholders to come together to formulate a new durable solutions policy for displacement resulting from the conflict in 2015.