Zafaran, a displaced woman from Taiz City, has been forced to sell the only mat in her cramped room to pay to refill a small cooking gas cylinder. For her, sitting on the concrete floor is less painful than keeping her two children hungry.

“When the bombings intensified in our neighborhood, we fled barefoot and we couldn’t even bring any clothes with us. We took shelter in a school but a few days later we were asked to leave and we ended up in this crowded place in Ibb,” Zafaran recalled.

“We are not only deprived of food, decent accommodation and jobs, but we are also suffering from diseases that require expensive medicines and regular visits to hospitals.”

“I never imagined that one day I would have to beg in the streets to allow myself and my family to survive,” she said, bursting into tears. “All I want now is decent accommodation and food rations.”

Zafaran is one of more than 500,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled from Taiz, representing one quarter of all IDPs in Yemen.

A two-year-old conflict in Yemen has impoverished millions of Yemenis, including more than 2 million internally displaced people who are still unable to return their homes. Poor sanitation and limited access to safe water have exacerbated their health situation, causing an increase in skin infections like scabies and growing numbers of cases of acute watery diarrhea. Upper respiratory tract infections and vector borne illnesses like dengue and malaria are more easily transmitted in the cramped, insanitary conditions the IDPs are living in.

The displacement of populations in Ibb and other governorates has also overloaded the public health facilities.

The demand for services from Dialysis Centre in Al-Thawra Hospital in Ibb governorate is now far beyond the centre’s capacity and it is overwhelmed with more than 200 new kidney failure
patients who have been displaced from Taiz. Other departments, including pediatrics and emergency obstetrics are offering free-of-charge health services for IDPs, adding a greater financial burden to the already weakened public hospitals and health facilities.

“Many internally displaced people have fled the brutal conflict to find themselves living in abject poverty and harsh health conditions,” said Dr Nevio Zagaria, WHO Acting Representative for Yemen.

“The situation of these IDPs has been exacerbated by a disrupted health system and insecurity, as well as through inadequate access to safe water. We are working with health partners to provide basic health services and essential medicines to health facilities to help them cope with the pressing health needs of IDPs and other patients.”

New IDPs from Al-Mokha

Over the past two months, thousands of IDPs have fled the intense fighting which erupted in Al-Mokha City.

“We’ve lived in starvation, fear and poverty. While fleeing, we witnessed bodies on the ground and watched apache helicopters flying above us,” said Aisha Ali, who fled to Ibb and is now living with 8 individuals in a tent cluttered by unclean kitchen utensils, worn clothes and empty tins.

“We used to live at subsistence level, but now we have no home, no food and even no clean water. For the first time, we had to drink seawater and now we are eating the remnants of food from restaurants,” said Aisha.

“Everyone in this tent is plagued with several diseases. Our children are suffering from diarrhea, vomiting, scabies and fever. Diseases are rapidly spreading among us.”

In another tent, Waseem Kulaib, a fisherman from Al-Mokha, has also fled the war with the 4 members of his family and cannot afford to buy medicines to alleviate his colon and stomach pains.
“It kills me to see my children hungry and sick while I’m unable to help them. The war has totally humiliated and paralyzed us,” he said.

While hospitals and health facilities are providing free health consultations to IDPs there are costs related to travelling to and from the facilities and to buying the medicines prescribed by health specialists. These associated costs are often too much to be covered by the little money available to a family and discourage many from seeking health care.

WHO has scaled up its presence in Ibb governorate, host to over 134,000 IDPs, to help it meet the needs of health facilities there that are struggling to offer services.

“Despite the huge support provided by WHO for the health system, much more support is urgently needed to respond to the dire health needs of millions of people in Yemen, including vulnerable IDPs,” said Dr Zagaria.

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