

# Yemeni Journalists

## 3 Years of Displacement

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# Introduction

Yemeni journalists face the largest wave of displacement in modern Yemeni history. When the Houthi militia invaded the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, in September 2014 and the subsequent so-called "Decisive Storm" military interference, led by Saudi Arabia, Yemeni journalists have ever since been a major target of abuse and intimidation perpetrated, to varying degrees, by all conflict parties.

Killings, kidnappings and various forms of abuse have forced journalists to search for less unsafe areas. While many journalists took the radical decision of giving up their profession altogether and keeping away for fear of prosecution and detention, Yemen saw large-scale forced displacement of journalists abroad. More than 400 journalists relocated to other countries, nearly one-third of the total number of journalists officially affiliated to the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate.

For the first time, hundreds of Yemeni journalists are scattered in various countries around the world, as displaced people, refugees and job seekers. Those who are hired by Yemeni media outlets abroad - the so-called Diaspora media - are considered lucky.

A review of the places of journalist concentration prior to, and in the wake of, the war gives us a clear indication of the scope of violations suffered by this segment of society which has paid the heaviest price of the war. More than 30 journalists have been killed, while 12 others have jailed for more than three years, some of whom have been forcibly disappeared.

We at SEMC are pleased to release this report which presents a simplified picture of the scope of suffering of Yemeni journalists because of the war, and the damage resulting from the restrictions imposed on freedom of the press and freedom of the individual. Journalists, of various affiliations and orientations, have borne the bulk of those infringements and arbitrary practices.

This sad, indeed tragic reality, constitutes a severe blow to the profession in Yemen. In such a harsh environment, the list of choices available to Yemeni journalists are restricted to arrest, death, or plunging into the unknown.

**Mostafa Nasr**

**Director, SEMC**

## Objectives

The report aims at highlighting the issue of displacement of Yemeni journalists. The ongoing war in Yemen, and the concomitant suppressive measures imposed by the various conflict parties have occasioned a wave of internal and external displacement of Yemeni journalists, in search of safety and refuge.

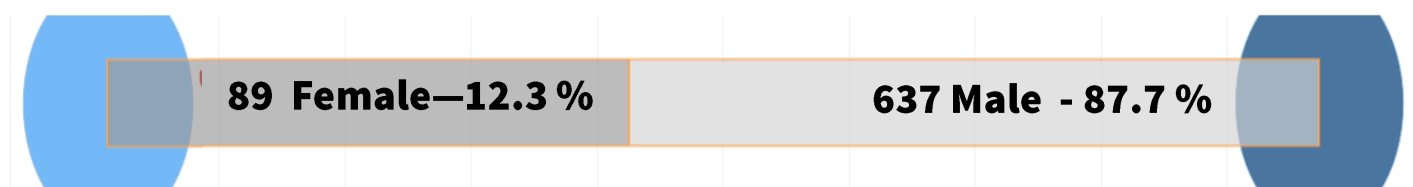
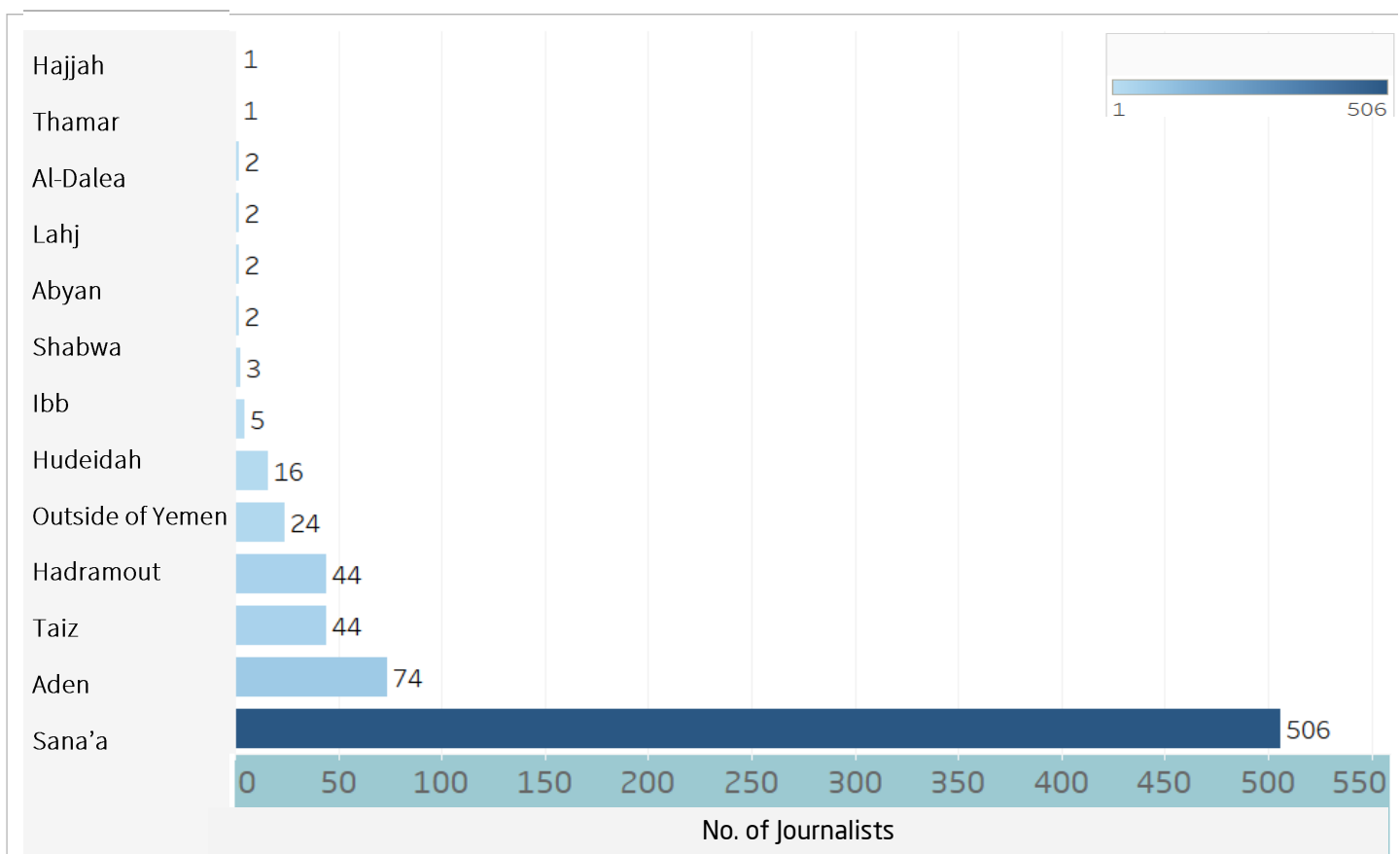
## Methodology

The research team relies on the ..... election statistics, which sets members of the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate at ..... This number constitutes the research sample. Based on this number, the research team collects data and measures the scope of displacement of Yemeni journalists. It should be noted here that the report deals with only 726 cases, which represent only 55% of the total number of the syndicate membership. The sample was restricted to latter number for two reasons; namely, the fact that many members of the syndicate do not practice journalism as a profession, and the inability of the research team to reach other members.

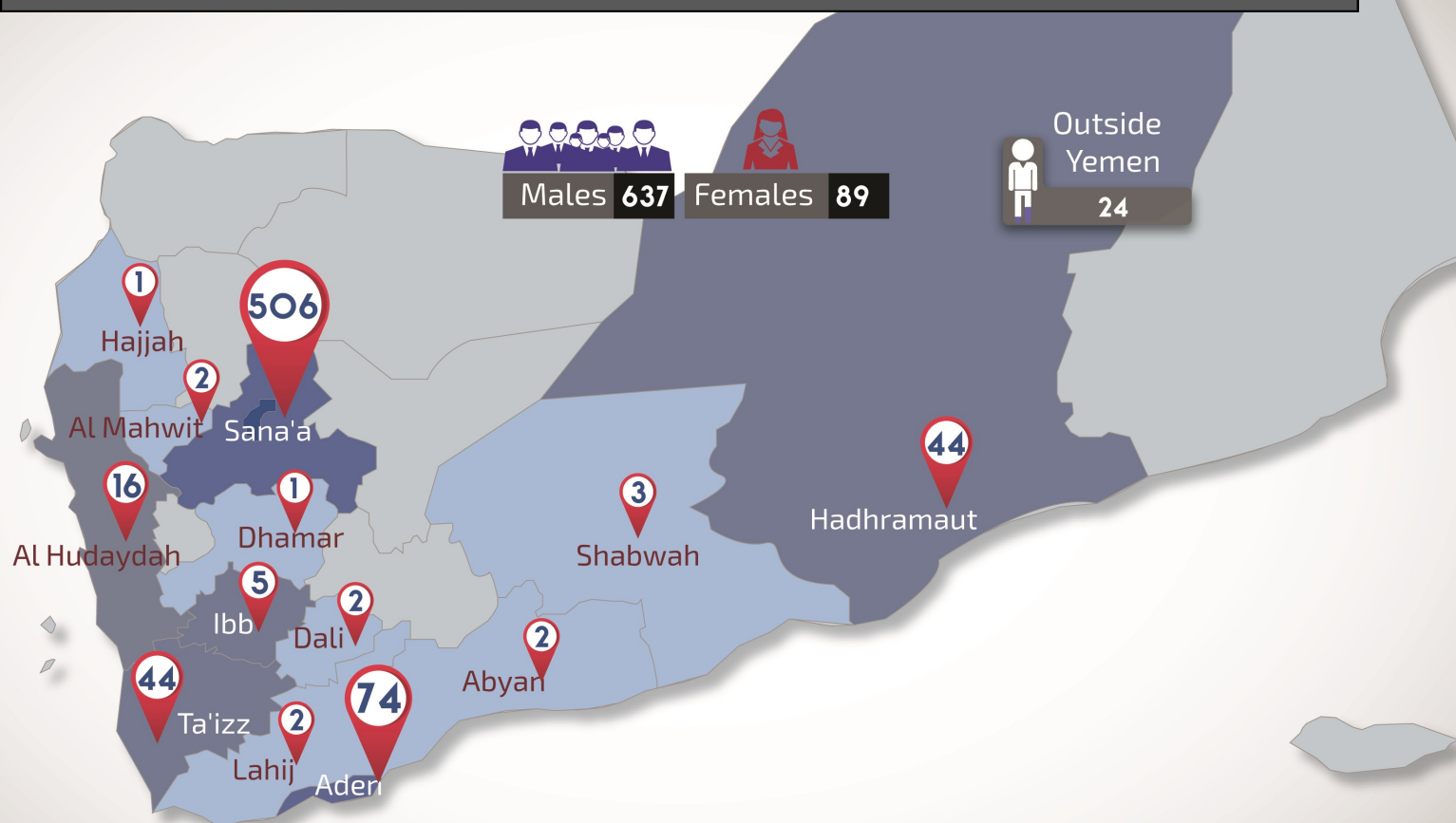
### Note

**There are many internally and externally displaced journalists who are excluded from the report because they are beyond the scope of research, which covers only members of the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate.**

The report covers only the 726 journalists distributed in nine Yemeni governorates, in addition to 26 journalists who worked abroad, before the outbreak of the war in 2014.



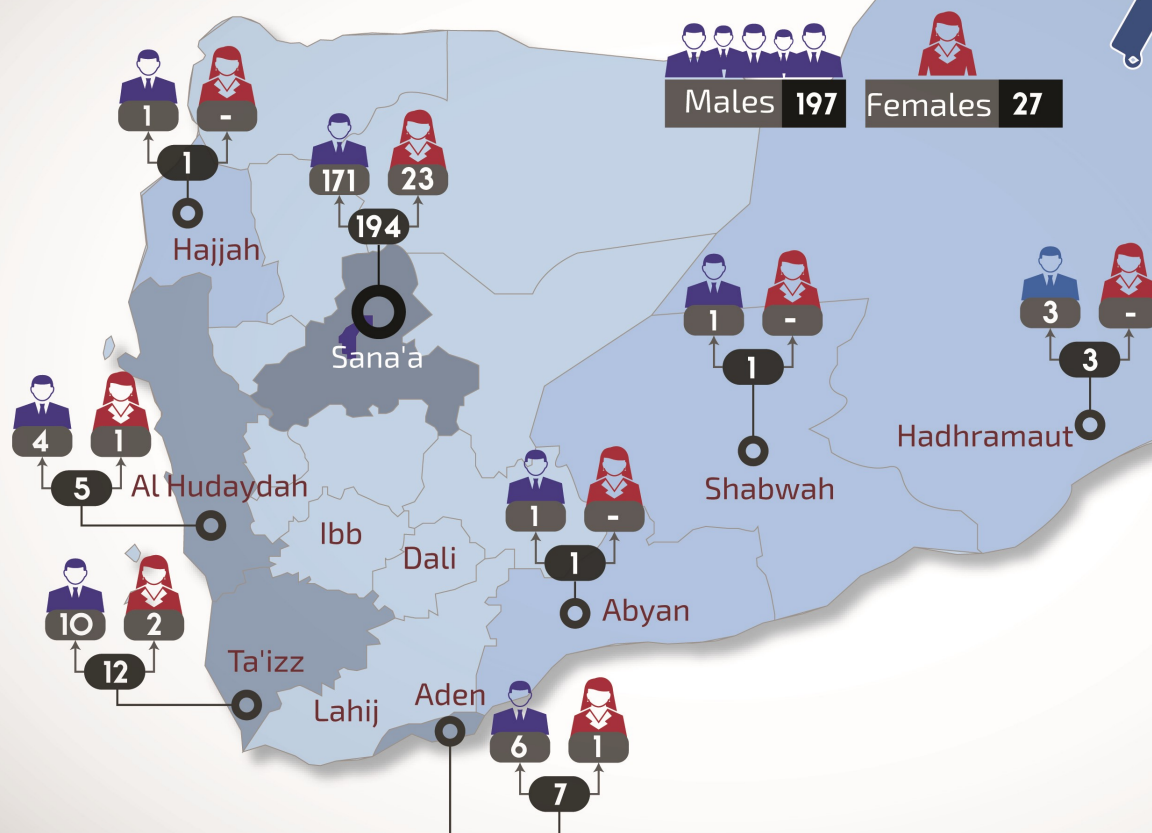
## INFOGRAPHIC: Map showing targeted journalists' locations prior to the outbreak of the war in 2014



# Journalist Centrifugal Governorates

Analysis results show that the capital city of Sana'a witnessed the highest rate of outbound movement of journalists due to the heavy-handed suppression of Yemeni journalists' freedoms in the city. Journalists forced to leave the city constitute 86% of the total number of displaced journalists both inside the country and abroad. Taiz comes next (5%), followed by Aden (3%), Hodeida (2%), and Hadramout (only 1%).

## From where Yemeni Journalists are displaced ?

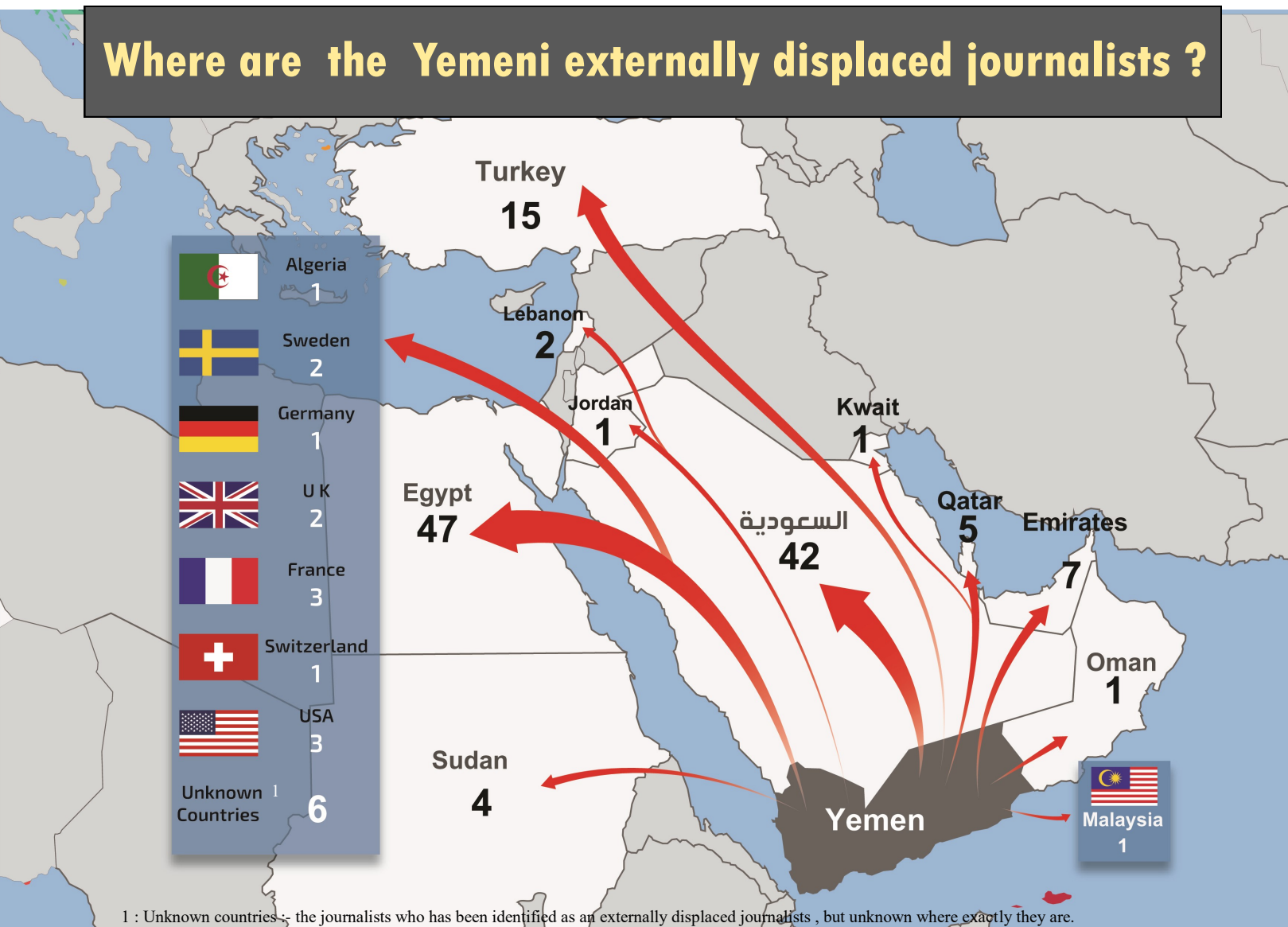


# Displaced Journalists Concentration Areas

Data shows that 30% of Yemeni journalists who were forced to leave their homes were internally displaced, while 70% were forced to leave the country altogether.

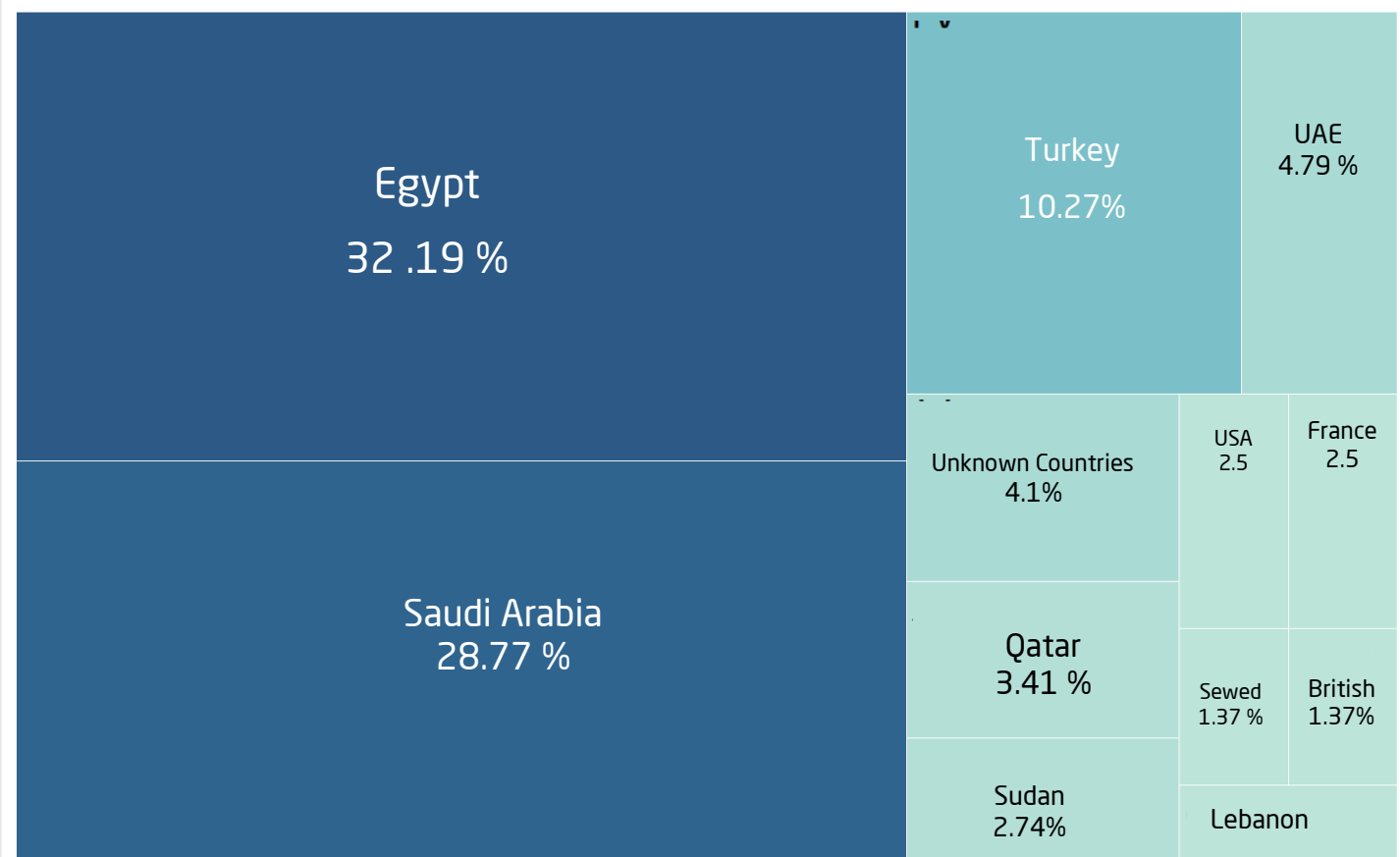
This phenomenon has resulted in the emergence of the so-called 'media of the Diaspora', As severe restrictions were imposed on the freedom of expression, and media freedom in particular, several TV channels, radio stations, and websites relocated to other countries. Those media outlets hired hundreds of journalists who fled the country to escape the oppressive environment at home.

## Where are the Yemeni externally displaced journalists ?





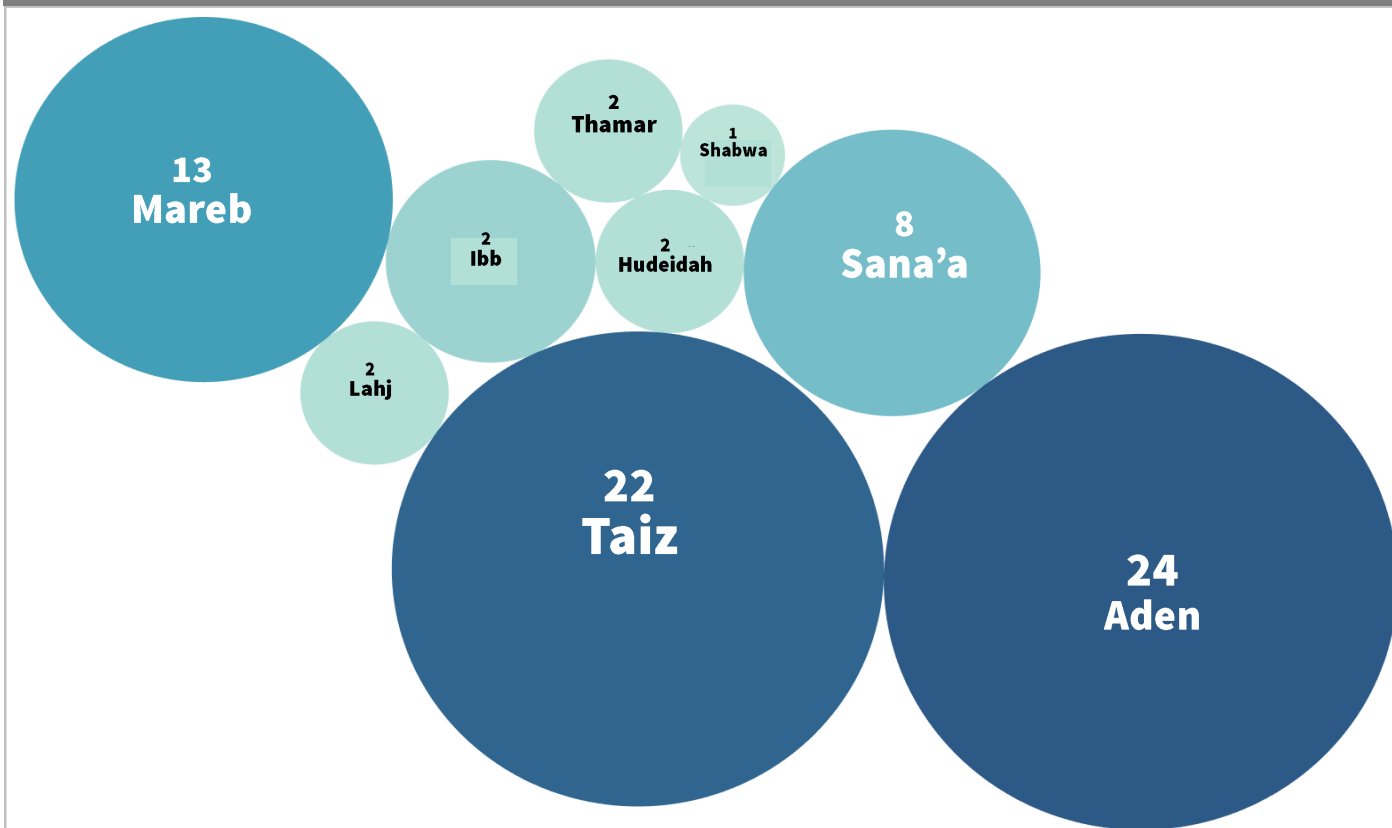
Egypt represents the major host country of displaced Yemeni journalists after the outbreak of the war in 2014, hosting 32% of the total number of displaced journalists abroad, followed by Saudi Arabia (28%), and Turkey (10%). Some 28% of journalists are distributed in the United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Sudan, Germany, Kuwait, Sweden, America, Switzerland, Oman, France, Qatar, Lebanon, Britain and Malaysia. The whereabouts of the remaining 4% of externally displaced journalists could not be located.



# Attractive Governorates For Journalists

Aden is the most attractive governorate, hosting 30% of total number of internally displaced journalists. Taiz comes next, hosting 28%, followed by Marib (16%), Sana'a (10%), and Ibb governorate (5%). The remaining 11% was distributed among the Shabwa, Thamar and Hodeida governorates.

Where the internally displaced Journalists has been hosted ?



# Stories featuring cases of displacement involving Yemeni journalists

## Journalist :- Hani Al-Junaid

On May 16, 2017, three journalists and I were kidnapped by the so-called security belt gunmen in the southern governorate of Aden. We were subjected to torture and severe ill-treatment. A mock execution, with someone playing my role as a defendant, was executed. I was detained until next day on charges of atheism. We were kidnapped just two days after the murder of our friend, civil and political activist, Amjad Abdurrahman in the city of Aden on the same charge of atheism. I was released after public, social, and political pressure. Those gunmen threatened to murder me wherever I would go in Yemen. Indeed, the next two days after my release, they raided and searched the house where I lived. They inquired about me and obtained information that I was staying in al- Mansoura quarter. A group of gunmen were commissioned to liquidate me, along with my colleagues who were hiding with me in the same house.

We escaped to the city of Mukalla in the eastern province of Hadramout. From Mukalla we made our way to Sayoun, and flew to Cairo with the help of Amnesty International. Prior to these incidents, in October 2015, I was prosecuted in Sana'a by the Houthi militia because of my writings against it. I had to escape to Taiz. In February 2016 a child was murdered in Taiz on charges of belonging to the Houthi militia. As a journalist, I wrote about this crime objectively. I was warned that I am being searched for by gunmen with links to Arif Jamil, the person in charge of arming Popular Resistance. Therefore, I escaped to Aden, only to face death again, as I have recounted.

## Journalist :- Ali Al-Faqih

### 37 months of Diaspora

Houthi gunmen stormed our office on Thursday evening, just a few hours after the Saudi-led military operations in Yemen were launched. Those were the closing moments of our five-year-old institution. The gunmen took over the office, detained colleagues inside and confiscated all equipment. However, damage did not stop at occupying the office, confiscating equipment, and stopping our work. We were at the doorsteps of a very critical stage at the personal level. It was just the beginning of a long miserable journey of displacement. My life was at stake, and my movement was being closely monitored. I had to leave Sana'a with my family on Saturday evening, March 28, 2015. Our first destination was the city of Taiz. We thought it won't take long and that things would go back to normal after a while. Two months later, I found that the place we were staying in was no longer safe, as the neighborhood had turned into a battlefield. I seriously considered leaving this place, and finally decided to go to Marib Governorate. On May 25, I left Taiz to Marib, while my family moved to the village in rural Taiz. In Marib I had to stay away from the town, as confrontations had reached the outskirts of the town. With the help of dear colleagues, Wadi Obeida was chosen as a suitable place to settle. We took advantage of a building, belonging to a charity organization, where we took shelter. It was also a suitable place for work since a power supply was provided to the building by a neighboring ice plant, which operated a generator. I spent three months in this place, during the first half of which I maintained hopes that the war would end and that I would be to go back to Sana'a, while the second half was dominated by the idea of seeking a better displacement shelter.

By the end of August, there was the opportunity to move to Riyadh. Despite the improved displacement conditions, the long period of displacement has eliminated the lingering hope of returning home and pursuing a normal life. A year ago, I settled in Cairo. Places change, but the feeling of forced displacement is too difficult even to describe.

## Journalist : Khalil al-Omari

The moment the Houthi official in the Sunaina neighborhood in Sanaa began to carry out a population count in the area under his surveillance, collecting information on people and their work, I decided to leave. Journalists in particular were being closely monitored by the Houthis, The Houthi official was already inquiring about the journalist who lived nearby, and I was the person being chased. As I oppose the Houthi group, and as fifteen journalists who were among my close colleagues had already been arrested. I decided to leave to Taiz and then to Aden.

## Journalist :- Shaker Ahmed Khaled

"The country I live in is a real paradise, but the being away from home, and missing one's relatives and friends makes it a difficult experience."

There were many things to arouse your fears. A state of anxiety was predominant and there were difficulties in transportation, as well as power and Internet outages. Gas trucks surrounded the workplace to refuel at the Supply Camp, making the neighborhood a potential military target of Saudi-led coalition strikes. I guessed it would be targeted at any moment. Otherwise, the militia was brutal in its arrest of journalists. Some journalists were tortured and others were positioned in various military sites as human shields. Unlike other journalists who had left the country, we usually received such news and crimes with great concern because we were operating from Sana'a which was under Houthi control. When militia gunmen broke into and occupied the newspaper office one afternoon, we were forced to work from home for some time despite the difficult situation.

The moment I realized that all means of life were lost, including security, safety, the power supply, and the Internet service, in addition to operator threats to stop Nass Mobile service, I decided to emigrate. I escaped from Sana'a cautiously, fearing arrest, and had to pass through checkpoints where severe security measures were imposed. At one of those checkpoints, I had a narrow escape of arrest.

## **Journalist :- Abdurrahman Al-Bayl:**

After the Houthis seized control of the capital Sana'a on 21 September 2014, Yemeni media was plunged into a crisis.

Before the takeover of Sanaa, I was molested and received threat messages. Members of the Military Police searched for me at my workplace: the Yemeni News Agency, SABA, because of an article published in the Al-Mashhad al-Yamani newspaper. Then I was summoned to the Press Court in four different cases, in one of which I was a defendant against a Houthi-backing merchant. The situation became more difficult and dangerous after the full seizure of the capital. My news website was blocked. When Saudi-led Arab Coalition launched their so-called Operation Decisive Storm, I had to contact some colleagues, to arrange for going out of the country. Two other colleagues and I seized the opportunity of preparations for the Riyadh Conference, and obtained transit visas via Saudi Arabia from the GCC mission. When we reached the Tiwal border port in May 2014, we were not allowed to enter Saudi territory due to delay of the entry permits. We returned to the border town of Haradh on the Yemeni side. We were detained for more than 6 hours at a checkpoint where we were interrogated on the pretext of attempting to cross the border into Saudi territory.

We stayed there for about two days and could not enter Saudi Arabia or return because of the delay of entry permits. It was one of the most difficult journeys and it lasted for about four days, where we had no shelter before being given a pass valid for 10 days, and were allowed entry.

## Journalist :- Fathi Abu-Nasr,

Suddenly, you find yourself out there, homeless and destitute. All around you are reveling militia gunmen, terrorizing people and suffocating freedoms. The Kalashnikov is the only tool of production in Yemen. Alienation haunts you all the time. The capital has become a haunt of the death industry. Newspapers are stopped and confiscated. You are in the midst of a psychological labyrinth, dominated by fear of the perverted reality! Chase and escape. Indeed. Your friends convince you of how crucial it is for you to leave the country, but it is difficult to leave because you cannot bear the expensive airfares of a Yemen Airways flight. By chance, Friedrich Ebert Foundation could give a helping hand, and bailed you out via Aden and Oman to participate in a conflict-sensitive journalism event in Beirut. Then you are suspended there in Beirut, waiting for the entry visa to Egypt, and experience the various types of bitterness. Finally, after waiting for more than two months, you get the visa and fly to Cairo.

Then you try in vain to get to terms with your new environment. You have to seek lodging at a friend's apartment. You rely on your friends' to support you financially. You follow the news of your country every day only to cry at the end of each day. You are consumed with longing for your wife and your little kids. Separation is the rule. We can do nothing, except waiting for good fortune. You struggle for 8 months to get your family to Egypt. You sell your furniture, evacuate your rented apartment in Sana'a, and borrow money from your friends to buy tickets for your family. You rent an apartment in central Cairo. You cannot buy furniture in one go, only an item at a time. How humiliating! After some time, the basic and essential items are secured. Your family arrives after an arduous and exhausting journey the troubles of which cannot be cured by love. The only compensation lies in discovering special feelings that you did not know before the war.



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