

Social impact monitoring report: July - September 2021

CONTEXTUAL ISSUES CAUSING NEGATIVE SOCIAL IMPACTS

The key drivers of humanitarian need over July–September 2021 were civil unrest, conflict, decreasing purchasing power, shrinking civic space, and religious repression. These factors affected all people to a degree but were more acutely felt by specific categories. Such categories include women, children, the unemployed, public sector employees, people with limited financial resources, particular Islamic sects, and people who perform traditionally stigmatised tasks associated with low status groups (especially musicians).

In July–September, conflict increased between the Internationally Recognized Government of Yemen (IRG) and the de-facto authority (DFA) in the north of Yemen (also known as the Houthis), mainly in Al Bayda, Marib, and Shabwah, displacing over 13,000 people (70% of whom were from and within Marib). In September, increased conflict in Marib displaced many, with some already twice or thrice displaced beforehand. The resources of households became increasingly depleted with every move. The trend of multiple displacements was not observed earlier in the conflict, raising concerns over the limited resources households have at their disposal, the cost of displacement, and increasing vulnerability as people end up staying close to active conflict because of limited capacities to move away from it.

Protests sparked by worsening economic and living conditions and the corresponding response of the authorities were the main social impact concerns in areas controlled by the IRG and the Southern Transitional Council (STC). These protests had been taking place since January 2021 and increased in intensity in September, limiting mobility and access to income, goods, and services. As the civil unrest continues, protests are becoming increasingly widespread and more violent.

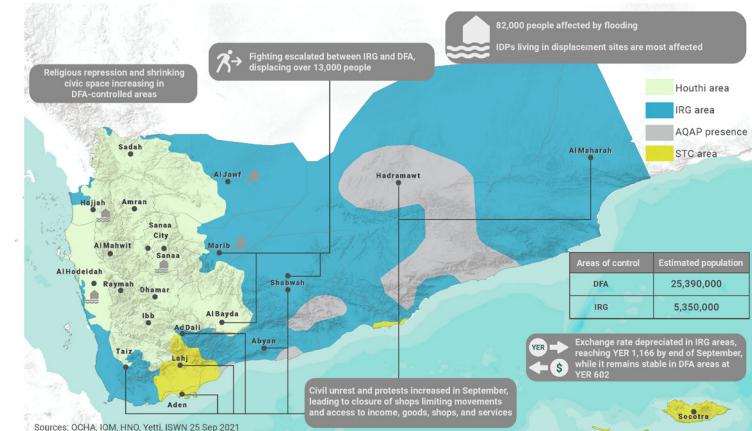
The exchange rate reached YER 1,166 per USD 1 in areas under IRG control by the end of September, leading to continued price increases and lower purchasing power. This affected people with low or irregular income the most. In DFA-controlled areas, the exchange rate remained stable, and there was less impact on purchasing power compared to southern regions. **Shrinking civic space and religious repression are increasing**, directly affecting women and girls, as well as those from Islamic sects, musicians, and children.

This edition of the Social Impact Monitoring Report (July–September) highlights three themes:

- civil unrest and its overall impact on the community (in IRG-controlled areas)
- shrinking civic space, particularly for women (in DFA-controlled areas)
- religious repression (in DFA-controlled areas)

About the report

The Social Impact Monitoring Report aims to develop better insights on the vulnerability of people to social and economic factors in Yemen and the impact these factors may have. The issues and themes selected are the ones that emerge from daily monitoring during the reporting period and are chosen based on the significance of their impact (or potential impact) on people as already observed and over time. This report is produced regularly at approximately six- to eight-week intervals and supports changes in understanding identified over time.



See full map on page 7.

Methodology

The analysis presented in this report is based on:

- the daily monitoring of relevant indicators that are logged in ACAPS' qualitative database
- the analysis of data from ACAPS' core dataset (ACAPS 8/09/2021)
- secondary data review of documents published in and on Yemen
- joint analysis sessions involving the Yemen Analysis Hub team and partners to test and refine assumptions
- key informant interviews with operational actors to cross-check and ground-truth findings and assumptions and to fill information gaps.

Limitations

There is limited information specifically related to the impacts on vulnerable groups. The nature of available information, which is mainly qualitative, makes it difficult to compare and aggregate data, especially on a continuous and country-wide basis. In light of these limitations, ACAPS has confidence that the approach being used to monitor the indicators and the integrated analysis of their meaning provide a structured way to understand social impact and vulnerability.



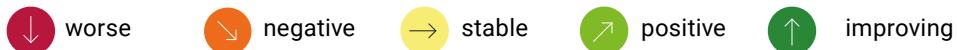
ISSUES AND THEMES EMERGING FROM QUALITATIVE DATA MONITORING	GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION	VULNERABLE GROUPS/CATEGORIES PARTICULARLY IMPACTED												
		Internally displaced people (IDPs)	Yemeni migrants and their families (supported by remittances)	Primary producers (agriculture and fishery)	Northerners living in the south	Migrants living in Yemen	Prisoners and detained people	Marginalised ethnic, tribal and religious groups (Al Muhamasheen Al Mazayna, Jews, Christians and Bahais)	People with disabilities, the elderly and the chronically ill	Men (unemployed, without access to livelihood)	Women (unemployed, without access to livelihood)	Widows and female-headed households	Pregnant and lactating women/girls	Children (girls and boys)
Conflict in Marib governorate	Marib	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap
Reduced purchasing power	Nationwide	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap
COVID-19 situation	Nationwide, but the DFA-controlled areas are potentially impacted the most, and where information is the most limited	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap
Vaccine rollout	Nationwide but the DFA-controlled areas are potentially impacted the most, and where vaccine rollout is limited to health and aid workers	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap
Religious repression	DFA-controlled areas	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap
Fuel crisis (current)	Nationwide	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap
Seasonal rain (between April-October)	Nationwide, however the most affected governorates are Marib, Al Hodeidah, and Hajjah	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap
Shrinking civic space	DFA-controlled areas	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap
Civil unrest	IRG-controlled areas	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap	Info gap

This table is based on qualitative monitoring. Key information:

Very negative	Negative	Somewhat negative	No impact	Somewhat positive	Positive	Very positive	Information gap	Not applicable or no specific impact
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Description of trends:



Increased civil unrest in the IRG- and STC-controlled areas of Yemen creating a cycle of economic, social, and protection impacts

Daily protests have been consistent in southern governorates since January 2021. In September, they increased in geographic spread, levels of violence, and number of people involved, including both protesters and security forces. The most significant events were in Aden, Al Mukalla, and Taiz. At the start of 2021, the protests were specific to Aden, Hadramaut, and Taiz but eventually included more southern governorates, such Abyan, Ad Dali, Lahj, and Shabwah.

September recorded the highest number of protests in a single month. The number of people participating in the demonstrations varied from the hundreds to the thousands. Protesters would at times block major roads and burn tires to express their frustration.

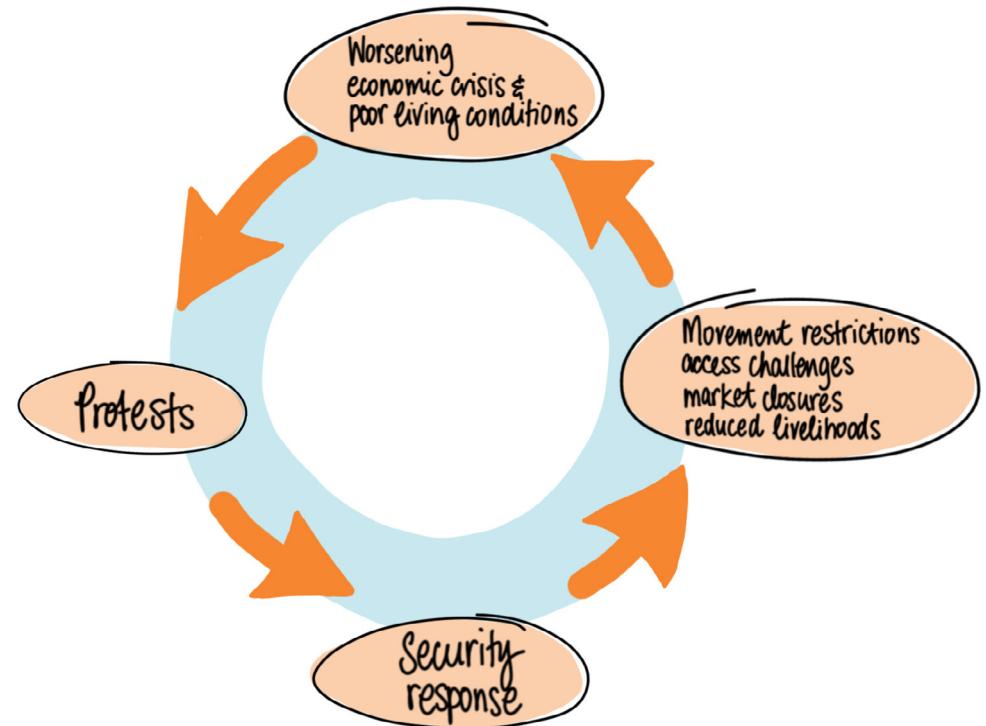
In general, people protested over deteriorating living conditions resulting from electricity cuts, fuel shortages, currency depreciation, increasing prices, declining purchasing power, corruption, crime, insecurity, and violence (CIMP accessed 17/09/2021). Dynamics differed between each governorate, meaning the specific triggers for protests varied between locations.

Security forces met protests with aggression, including the use of tear gas and open fire with live ammunition to disperse protesters. Such violence has resulted in nine civilian casualties by the end of September.

Declining purchasing power – a result of the depreciation of the Yemeni rial in use in the IRG-controlled areas coupled with inconsistent salaries payment – severely limits the ability of families to afford their daily needs, often pushing them to adopt negative coping strategies. At the same time, strong governance and institutions able to ensure the provision of public services are mostly absent. The combination of these factors results in frustration, which has boiled over into anger for those protesting.

After nine months of protests leading to no changes in living conditions, civil unrest has become a significant phenomenon in IRG-controlled areas, with its impact evident in economic, social, and protection spheres. The situation has become a **vicious cycle**: people

protest because of poor **economic conditions**, which causes markets and shops to close and disrupts livelihoods and access to commodities. The resulting **economic stress** to households then leads to **further frustration and protests**. Without changes in how the IRG and STC authorities support citizens and respond to protests, it is difficult to see how the situation can improve.



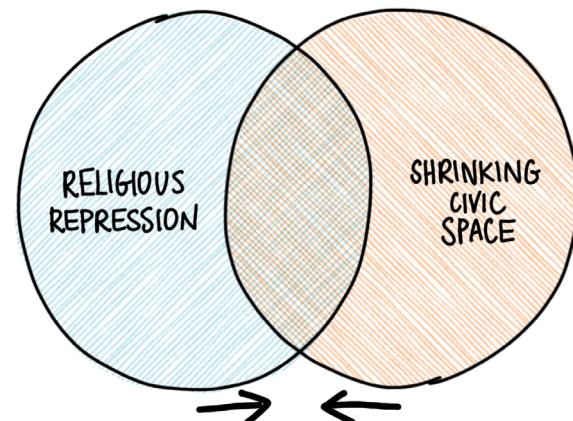
Source: ACAPS

Civil unrest has changed social connectivity and interpersonal relationships. The more unrest continues, the more disruption is likely to affect social life and service access. People get more frustrated, leading to more arguments and violence in the streets. An increase in corruption and bribery has already been observed, and increased criminality is likely. Higher fuel prices in these areas are causing business disruptions and limiting people's movement. These conditions increase fear and frustration among the general population, who have a limited set of choices to mitigate the situation. They either accept the deteriorating living conditions or get involved in the protests, with the associated risks of being injured during violence or detained by authorities. Continuing with normal daily life and economic activities without risk has become less and less of an option for many.

The security response from the Government has triggered fear among some groups within the population. People originally from northern parts of the country (or northerners) feel particularly threatened and at high risk of targeted violent attacks from militants aligned with the STC or from forces accusing them of alleged collusion with DFA and Islah forces. On 8 September, STC forces arrested and killed a man travelling from Aden towards a DFA-controlled area to visit his family because they suspected him of being a member of the DFA ([MEE 11/09/2021](#)). In 2019, intense conflict resulted in the STC taking control of Aden and expelling over 2,400 northerners from Aden and the Tur Al Bahah district in the Lahj governorate ([ACAPS 16/08/2019](#)). The discrimination, harassment, and expulsion of northerners has long been an issue in Yemen. Many southern separatist forces retain historic grievances dating back to the violent unification of Yemen in 1990–1994. Over the past decade, and especially throughout the course of the war, these forces have been inciting increasingly violent assaults on northerners. This issue becomes more notable when the political situation in the south is unstable, so the current situation gives reason for concern that a new wave of harassment against northerners is beginning.

Increasing road insecurity in Lahj has also been linked to deteriorating living conditions. Anecdotal information suggests that people see opportunistic crime as a way to supplement resources and release frustration. Several incidents impacting the safe movement of civilians and humanitarian organisations have been reported, causing concern within the humanitarian sector. Humanitarian workers have reported increased harassment at checkpoints in the Lahj governorate, with checkpoint personnel demanding money to allow their safe passage.

While the overlap between shrinking civic space and religious repression cannot be overlooked, these factors are addressed separately to unpack the complex combination of social, cultural, and religious issues and identify who is vulnerable to the measures associated with these themes (including how such measures affect them).



Source: ACAPS



Religious repression affecting Islamic sects, children, women, and musicians in DFA-controlled areas

From 2015, Houthis have been gradually enforcing policies linked to suppressing the religious practices of some Islamic sects. Reports on such incidences increased between July–September 2021.

The official religion in Yemen is Islam, with around 55% being Sunni Shafai school and 45% Zaydi Shia school of thought. The Houthis (who are Zaydis) are repressing the population in two different ways: 1) imposing generic religious norms including taxes and celebrations. 2) suppressing non-Zaydi practice (such as the weddings, Salafi centers, and Tarawih prayer which is conducted during Ramadan)

There's a mixture of ideological and pragmatic intentions behind this such as:

- increasing revenue by collecting Al Zakat and taxing religious celebrations.
- encouraging people to join the frontlines through sermons and other religious messaging, thereby increasing the number of fighters
- emphasising that 'true believers' are those from the Zaydi school of thought (implying that those unaffiliated are infidels) to increase supporters for Zaydi Islam and hence the Houthis.

There are deliberate attempts to create division among people from different Islamic sects. Incidents related to religion reported between July–September built on previous incidents related to tax collection, music suppression (the suppression of music can be traced back to the Zaydi tradition), the closure of Salafi mosques (Salafis and Houthis share a long sectarian animosity), the replacement of Sunni imams who didn't reinforce Houthi policies, and making changes on the school curriculum, especially with regard to history and Islamic and social studies, to reinforce the key tenets of Zaydi Islam.

In addition to Al Zakat taxes on the economic sector, religious celebration taxes **are now enforced**. Between July–September, additional taxes were imposed on shop owners during religious events such as Eid al-Ghadir (an Islamic commemorative holiday celebrated by Shia Muslims) and Al-Mawlid (the birthday of the prophet Mohammed) ([ACLED 07/10/2021](#); [Almasdar 03/10/2021](#)). These taxes are collected by Houthi supervisors (known as the Al Mushraafeen) ([ACAPS supervisory system 17/06/2021](#)). Those who refuse to pay are subjected to the closure of their shops, detention, or violence leading to the loss of their livelihood. Collected taxes are used to prepare for the celebrations and provide capital for the war effort.

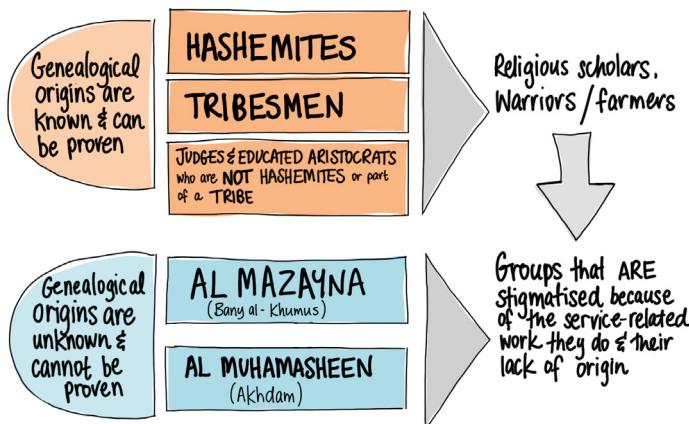
Mosques belonging to Islamic sects other than Zaydi Islam, such as Salafi or other Sunni groups, were shut down or repurposed. Since June, around 16 Salafi centres were closed, and one was demolished. Two imams were abducted and detained in Ibb for not following DFA directives, such as pronouncing the Houthi slogan ("Allah is greater, death to America,

death to Israel, curse on the Jews, victory to Islam”). Women also experience religious repression by Al Zainbyat (DFA female forces), who aim to impose Houthi ideology on girls and women and recruit them as intelligence officers, medics, guards, or members of the Al Zainbyat forces (ACLED 17/09/2021; Al Jazeera 09/09/2020).

Increased religious oppression could marginalise more groups and create division within sects, as some imams and individuals conform to the Houthi line while others continue to resist. It could also be a sign that the link between religion and society is changing with policies that aim to restrict freedom of worship, change opinions, and limit diversity.

The **school curriculum in DFA-controlled areas has experienced systematic changes over the past three years**. It has gradually adopted a narrative of Islamic history teaching Shia ideas and beliefs, such as the universal validity of the Imamate and the supremacy of the Hashemite bloodline without references to views held by other branches of Islam (ACLED 23/09/2021). **Public schools have been forced to protest against non-Houthi parties or to recite the Houthi slogan** in an attempt to directly influence children and encourage them to enlist with DFA forces. Children subjected to recruitment attempts are between 11–17 years old. Yemen’s union of teachers had previously denounced the new schools and curriculum (Impact-se 15/04/2021).

The nature of important social and cultural events, specifically weddings, has changed based on Houthi-imposed restrictions. For example, traditional musicians are no longer allowed to sing and play at weddings and have been replaced with religious chanters (Al-Monitor 10/09/2021). Most of musicians in Yemen belong to Al Mazayna (a group of people working as butchers, musicians or barbers). This restriction has left them with no livelihood in a market where it is already difficult to find work. Reported incidents mostly involve weddings; the Yemen Analysis Hub is still monitoring this to identify if other social and cultural events are impacted and if it is affecting other groups.



Source: ACAPS

Civic space shrinking, especially for women

An increasing number of incidents linked to gender segregation (where men and women are not allowed to share the same social space or interact socially) has been causing concern that civic space is shrinking. The UN defines civic space as “the environment that enables civil society to play a role in the political, economic and social life of our societies” (OHCHR 02/10/2021).

Between July–September 2021, DFA authorities continued to restrict women and men from mixing in universities, schools, restaurants, and coffee shops. Several incidents across this period led to arrests. In Sana'a, pro-Houthi university personnel detained a student for two hours for talking alone to a female classmate on campus. In the same city, a number of young men and women celebrating a wedding and throwing water at each other from two cars were accused of “performing sexual acts in public” and arrested (ACLED 17/09/2021).

A document **banning women from using smartphones and cosmetics and working in humanitarian organisations was circulated in the Bani Hushaish district of the Sana'a governorate, calling these activities an ideological invasion**. The document was signed by local Houthi supervisors (Al Mushrafeen) and senior tribal leaders loyal to the DFA. The violation of this ban requires the woman’s male guardian (Al Mahram) to pay a penalty of YER 200,000 and a cow (Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies 13/10/2021; Cratersky 24/09/2021). While this policy is specific to Bani Hushaish, the generally more restrictive environment for women and girls across the DFA-controlled areas raises concerns that this type of official declaration could lead other bordering districts or villages to enforce similar actions to restrict the movement of women and girls. Such a restriction on their independence and freedom could lead to longer-term impacts limiting women’s access to education.

The male guardianship tradition requires a woman to be accompanied by a male guardian whenever she is in the public sphere. Aside from her husband, a Mahram could be any member of a woman’s family with whom marriage would be considered haram (not permitted), including a brother or son. In recent years, this requirement has been framed as part of religious law and has been increasingly emphasised. Humanitarian organisations have been confronted with the issue since 2017 by being stopped in checkpoints or refused to the permission to travel within governorates, but events of recent months show that it is being enforced much more frequently.

Documented examples and anecdotal reports of a male guardian being imposed across DFA-controlled areas have emerged during the reporting period, with Al Hodeidah, Hajjah, and Sadah reporting the most enforcements. Some organisations have reported female aid workers being stopped and asked to return to where they came from (whether to the office or their homes) or wait until their guardian (Mahram) picked them up (ACAPS' conversation with operational actors). Although primarily associated with Houthi-controlled areas, male guardianship (Mahram) was enforced recently at some checkpoints in IRG-controlled areas, such as Abyan, Ad Dali, and Lahj governorates.

Besides women working for humanitarian organisations, authorities are limiting the movement of women in general within governorates. The impact on employed women and their households has been severe. For one, necessitating a male guardian to accompany an employed woman disrupts household activities. Such a decree could also intimidate or force women to leave their jobs, leading to a loss of household income. A male-dominated workforce would have longer-term societal impacts as well. Humanitarian response – particularly for women and girls – would be limited, as there might not be enough female humanitarians to meet with or deliver to them. Such policies or impositions could change the way employed women are perceived in the community. Overall, the imposition of policies such as Al Mahram would overturn the increase of female presence in the Yemeni labour force since the war started, narrowing women's freedom and their right to be independent and heavily affecting access to and the delivery of services.

ON THE WATCH LIST

Less seasonal rain and a higher occurrence of flash floods

Between July–August, torrential rain and flash floods damaged public infrastructure including bridges, destroyed or damaged around 10,000 houses, and affected an estimated 174,000 people across Yemen (IFRC 16/08/2021). Flash floods are not new in Yemen. Anecdotal observations suggest that rains and flooding in September 2021 were less intense than in previous years. The impact was severe because, in the case of IDPs, resources had been depleted after seven years of conflict and multiple displacements, forcing them to take risks that include staying in dangerous areas. An example is staying close to streams, which increases their exposure to the impact of floods, such as the loss of assets, damages to shelter, and injuries or death. For people residing in their own homes or those in rented accommodations, the lack of repairs and maintenance to infrastructure and houses damaged by floods in previous years or run down during the conflict makes them vulnerable to the impact of floods. People affected by floods face increased social and economic vulnerability.

Lack of concern about COVID-19 by people despite a third wave of cases

A third wave of COVID-19 cases began in late July 2021. The number of new cases reported daily has reached levels similar to the peak of the first wave and has not yet plateaued. As at the end of September, 311,483 vaccine doses have been administered in Yemen. The overwhelming majority of the administered vaccines were to men, particularly those migrating to Saudi Arabia for work. There are currently no (or very limited) COVID-19 safety restrictions implemented inside the country, and anecdotal observations indicate that people and the health community are less wary of catching the virus than during the early stages of the pandemic.

Continuous decline of the exchange rate in IRG-controlled areas affecting purchasing power

The rial continues to drop in value (reaching YER 1,166 to USD 1 by the end of July in areas under IRG control). There are indications that the continuous decline of the rial, combined with increased prices in the coming 12 months, will result in a 39% reduction in purchasing power. Currency depreciation continues to drive rapid food and fuel price increases in areas under IRG control. The average cost of the minimum food basket in August 2021 was 62% higher than during the same time last year. A loaf of bread costs YER 50 compared to YER 20 in Houthi-controlled areas.

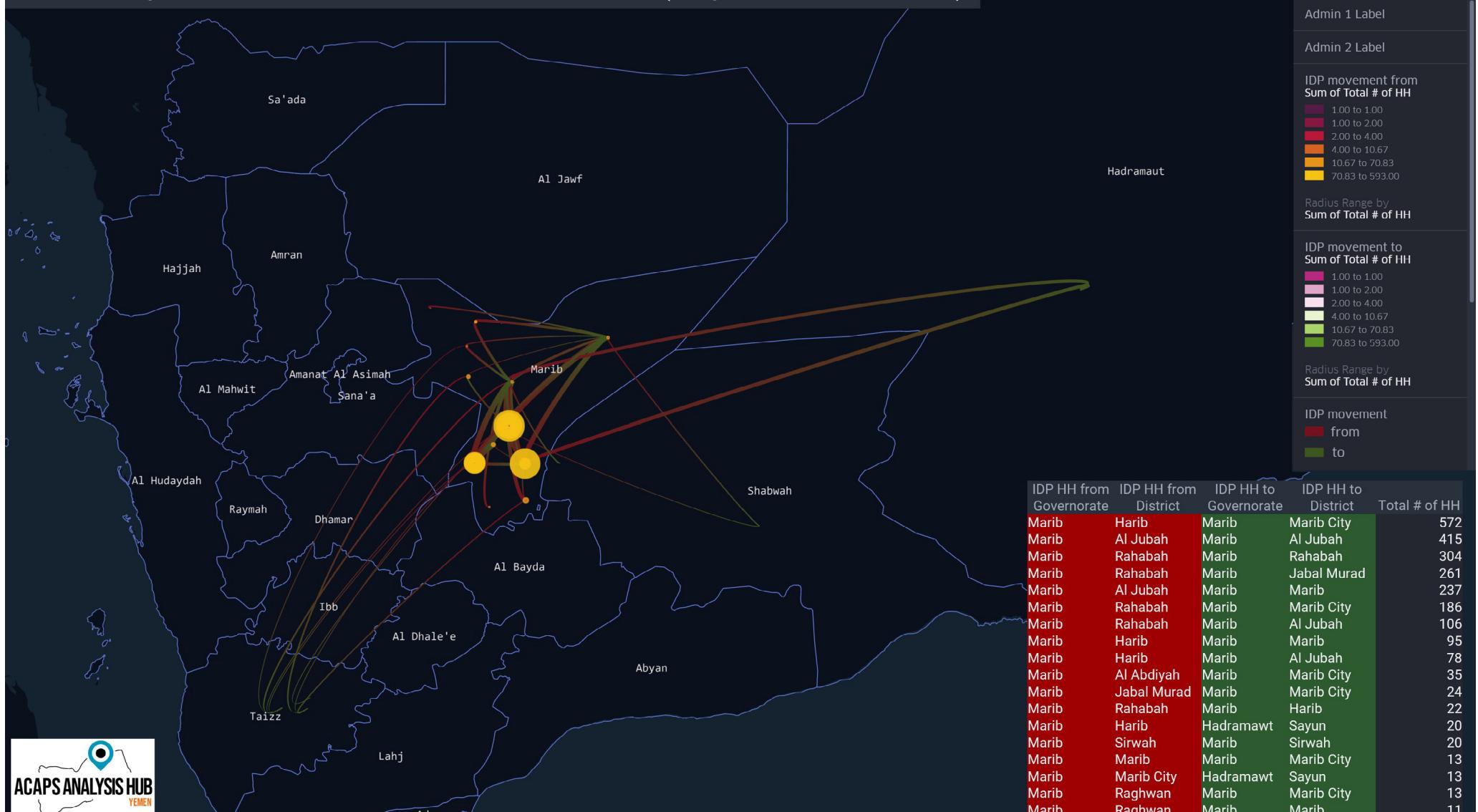
Execution of prisoners as a statement against nonloyalists

On 18 September, hundreds of people in Sana'a witnessed the execution of nine prisoners charged by the DFA with spying for the Saudi Arabia coalition. This event severely affected the community, bringing fear to the general public and putting prisoners under the threat of execution.

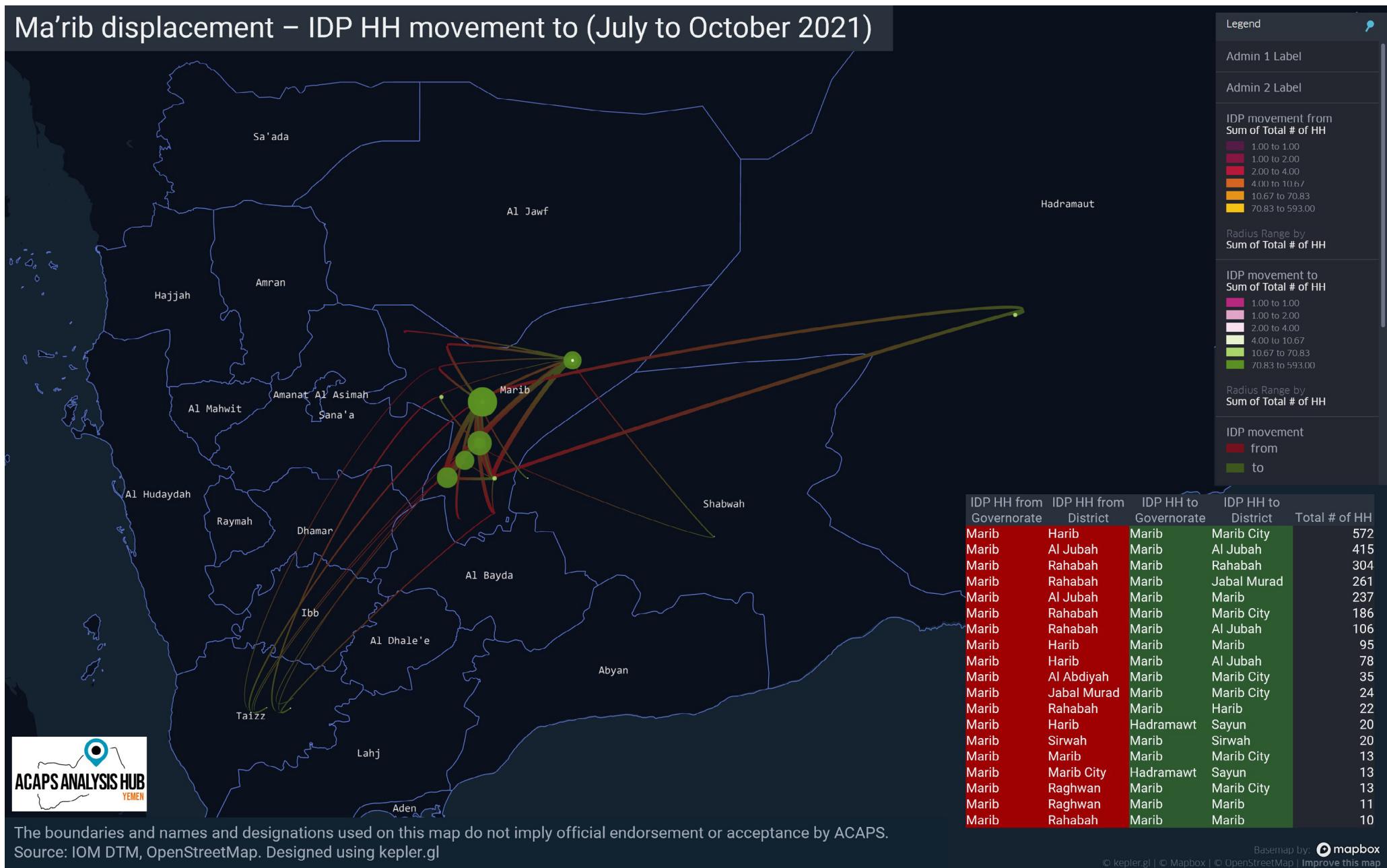
Conflict in Al Bayda, Marib, and Shabwah

Conflict increased in September and displaced over 13,000 people (70% of whom were from and within Marib). In September, increased conflict in Marib displaced many, with some already twice or thrice displaced beforehand. The resources of households became increasingly depleted with every move. The trend of multiple displacements was not observed earlier in the conflict, raising concerns over the limited resources households have at their disposal, the cost of displacement, and increasing vulnerability as people end up staying close to active conflict because of limited capacities to move away from it.

Ma'rib displacement – IDP HH movement from (July to October 2021)



Ma'rib displacement – IDP HH movement to (July to October 2021)

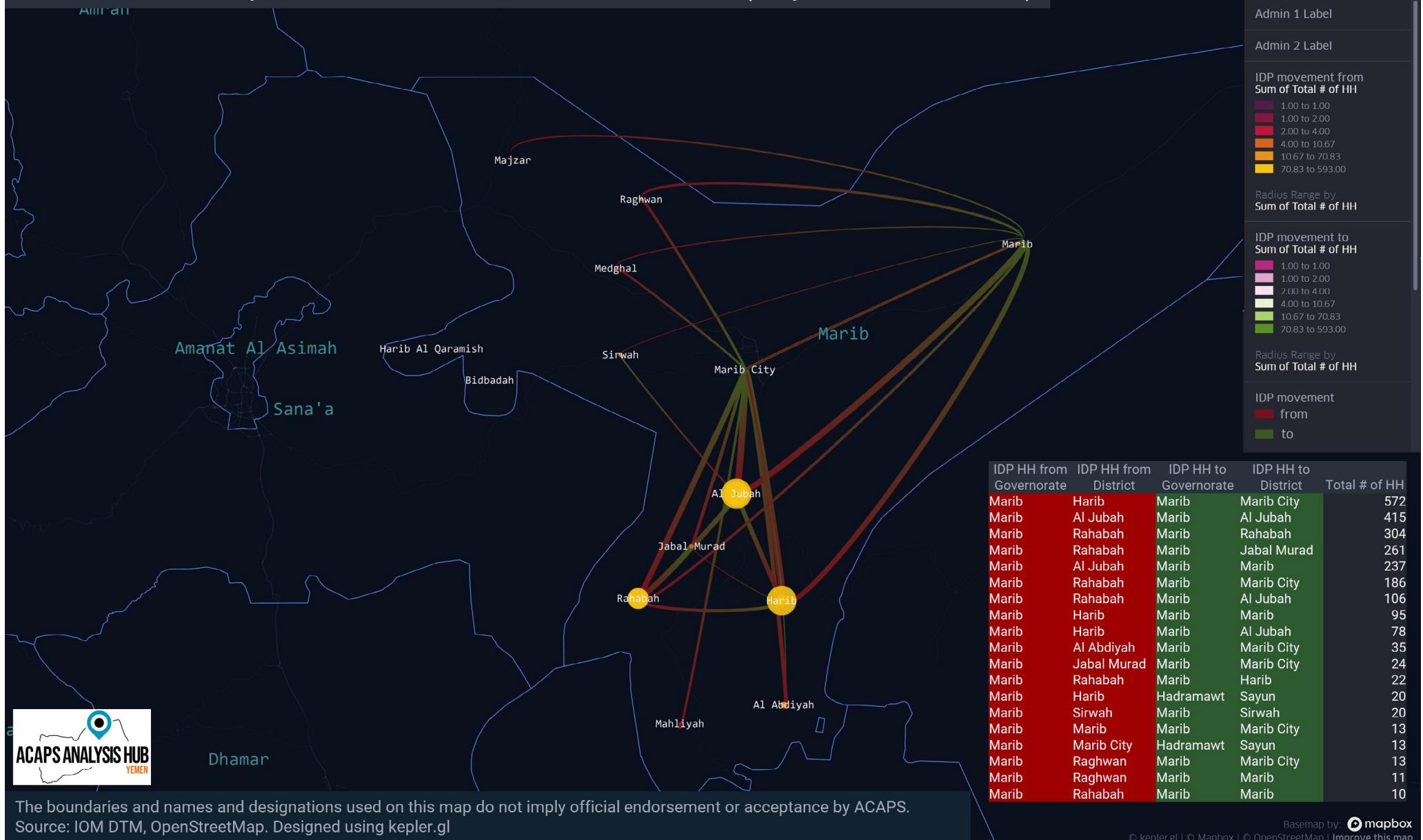


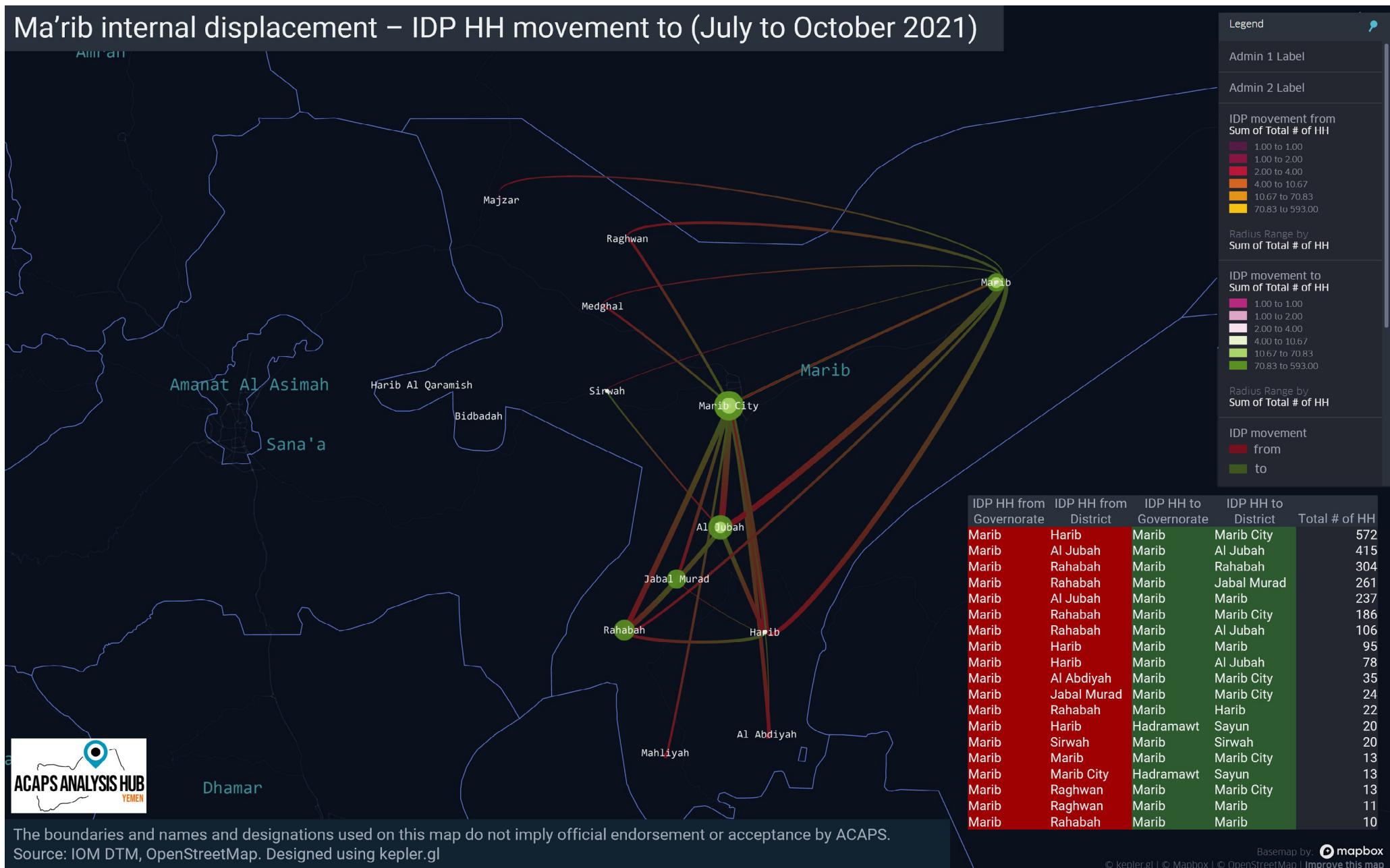
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Source: IOM DTM, OpenStreetMap. Designed using kepler.gl

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Ma'rib internal displacement – IDP HH movement from (July to October 2021)





Key humanitarian developments between July-September

