



# COVID-19 SNAPSHOT in April 2021 Yemen Conflict

## Introduction

Yemen is characterised by different political, tribal, ethnic, and religious identities,<sup>1</sup> which play a role in shaping the history and dynamics of ongoing conflict as well as the prevailing socio-political context of the country. The ongoing conflict is complex and multi-layered, with the involvement of rival regional powers adding a geopolitical dimension to the ongoing war since 2015. As the national framework has disintegrated, local rivalries have intensified, leaving more room for foreign state interference in the country. Since March 2015, a dangerous combination of factors, driven by conflict and economic decline, and now exacerbated by COVID-19, have compounded the dire situation for over 24 million Yemenis, as reported by the UN, INGOs and local sources. Moreover, the country has been de facto split into different areas for several years: the de-facto authorities of Al-Houthi control the majority of northern and central governorates, the coalition forces under the internationally-recognised Hadi government control part of the southern and eastern governorates, while the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) is gaining increasing control over key areas in the South (Aden, Al Dhale, Lahj, and Socotra).

## Data collection and analysis

Data for this second round of the COVID-19 snapshot monitoring series in Yemen was gathered from 22-26 January 2021 in the following target districts: Toor Al Baha and Tuban in Lahj governorate, Al Mawasit and Jabal Habashi in Taiz governorate. The four surveyed districts are controlled by the internationally-recognized Government (IRG) supported by the Saudi-led coalition. This coincided with a period of very low (reported) COVID-19 caseloads in Yemen, before a new uptick in cases started mid-Feb. This report was prepared by an independent consultant team and the Search forCommon Ground



(Search) Yemen team, with support from Search's COVID-19 Response Programming Team and Institutional Learning Team. For more information on the data collection methodology and tools used by Search for Common Ground (Search) for this research, click [here](#). This report is part of a series of regular COVID-19 snapshots aimed at providing quick and actionable answers to a set of specific questions. The previous report for Yemen can be found [here](#).

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\* This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Search for Common Ground and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

1. ACAPS, "Yemen Conflict Crisis Overview," updated 12 January 2021.



## Update: COVID-19 Measures and Impact on Conflict

As of 05 April 2021, there are 4,885 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 956 deaths in the country.<sup>2</sup> Compared to our first snapshot report, the number of reported cases has more than doubled. Based on available information, Hadramawt (South) is the most affected governorate in terms of the number of reported cases, followed by Taiz (in the middle) and Aden (South) governorates.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, there have been no new cases reported by the Houthi authorities during this second monitoring period. Generally, the overall number of cases in Yemen is largely under-reported due to limited testing capacities, limited access to healthcare, and the associated risks of seeking treatment,<sup>4</sup> which often deter citizens from getting tested. Yemen is among 180 countries that have signed an agreement with the COVAX facility – a global initiative to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines. Yemen expects to receive an initial batch of COVID-19 vaccines in April or May, while the brand of the vaccine in question remains undecided and vaccine hesitancy is reportedly high.<sup>5</sup>

During the reference period of this report (November 2020 through January 2021), no COVID-19 prevention measures were applied at the national or sub-national level:<sup>6</sup>

As the scale of COVID-19 remained relatively limited till February, contrary to earlier predictions, people in both parts of Yemen were less worried about the pandemic as they were contending with multiple other pressing needs. The economy of Yemen continued to contract, facing high inflation and a collapsing currency, with a devastating impact on the population. The pandemic led to a loss of remittances entering Yemen, in particular from the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, as famine is affecting ever more Yemenis and threatening the lives of millions, COVID-19 might take less precedence in people's minds. However, the impact of COVID-19 will be heavily felt in Yemen in the months to come, with caseloads increasing again. For a country that is already operating at roughly 50% of its pre-conflict capacity, the pandemic places additional pressure on Yemen's healthcare system, with oxygen and personal protective equipment quickly becoming scarce in a second wave. COVID-19 will result in further deterioration of already dire needs in food insecurity, water and sanitation, and public health, especially for those living in displacement sites.<sup>8</sup>

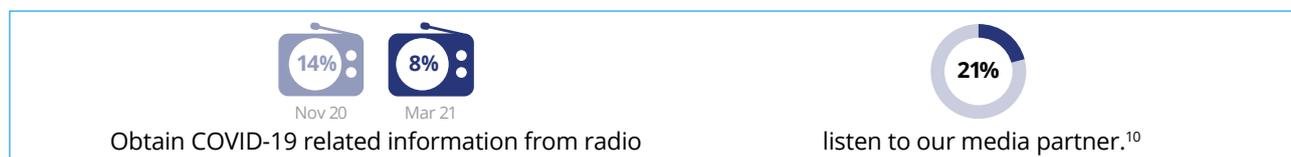
	<b>Schools open</b>
	<b>Teleworking not mandatory</b>
	<b>Borders/airports open</b>
	<b>All services are open</b>
	<b>Mask wearing not mandatory</b>

Additionally, increased vulnerability to COVID-19 among elderly populations could endanger the roles elders play in Yemeni society and lead to leadership gaps, changes and power struggles at the local level, which in turn could feed into more instability. Thus, the virus risks destabilizing the traditional power structures that dictate socio-political life in Yemen. COVID-19 also had an impact on the arrival of migrants from East Africa heading to Gulf countries; around 35,000 migrants entered Yemen in 2020, a 75% decrease compared to 2019. At the same time, conditions for migrants stranded in Yemen due to increased movement restrictions, remain particularly concerning as they are usually more vulnerable and require humanitarian assistance to satisfy basic needs.<sup>9</sup>

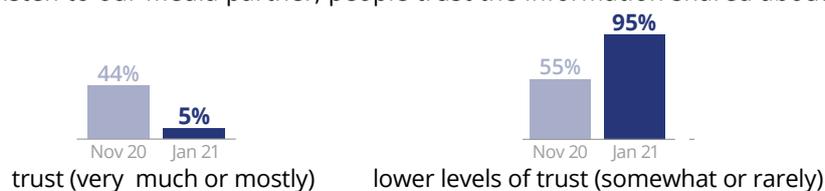
## COVID-19's Impact on Social Cohesion & Trust

**Trust in information on COVID-19 in the media is decreasing, while information sharing has risen sharply, potentially pointing to wider circulation of rumours and misinformation**

The top three trusted sources among respondents for getting information about COVID-19 in our target districts in Yemen are:



Out of those who listen to our media partner, people trust the information shared about Covid-19:



2. WHO, [Online COVID-19 Portal](#), 5 April 2021.

3. It is important to keep in mind that reported caseload per governorate may be more linked to testing capacity in each governorate, than to actual positive cases.

4. Some of these risks include ill-prepared facilities, people fearing they will be kept in quarantine facilities against their will, or the stigma that is attached to COVID-19.

5. Business World, ["Yemen to receive first batch of Covid-19 vaccine in April or May"](#), 14 January 2021.

6. Except for partial school closures taken by the local authority in Hadramout governorate.

7. UN SC, [Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen \(S/2021/79\)](#), January 2021.

8. ACAPS, ["COVID-19 Update"](#), February 2021.

9. International Organization for Migration (IMC), ["IMPACT OF COVID-19 MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS ON MIGRANTS ALONG THE EASTERN CORRIDOR"](#) August 2020.

10. Our media partner is [Sawt Al-Tofola FM](#), a private radio station created in 2016, that treats mainly children and women's topics, and many of its programmes are produced by youth and children themselves. The station is located in the North but broadcasts in the North and South of the country. At the time of data collection in January 2021, our joint media programmes were still under the preparation phase.

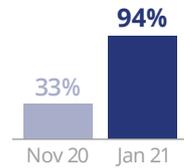
Overall, more women trust (very much or mostly) the information disseminated by our media partner than men. Yemeni women typically play an important role during health crises and other crisis situations. Throughout the pandemic, they have supported response efforts by producing masks and addressing other pandemic-related issues such as water shortage. Therefore, these considerations might mean they pay more attention to information related to COVID-19.<sup>11</sup>



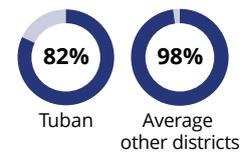
Among IDP respondents, none of them report listening to this radio station. Given that IDPs often perceive themselves as temporary residents, they may not prioritize listening to radio stations, particularly if the stations are unknown or unfamiliar to them. IDPs also face additional barriers in terms of access, such as obtaining radio equipment. **Hence, IDPs are often best targeted through existing social media platforms (e.g. Whatsapp).**

**Information sharing on COVID-19 is significantly higher in this round compared to the first.**

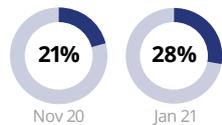
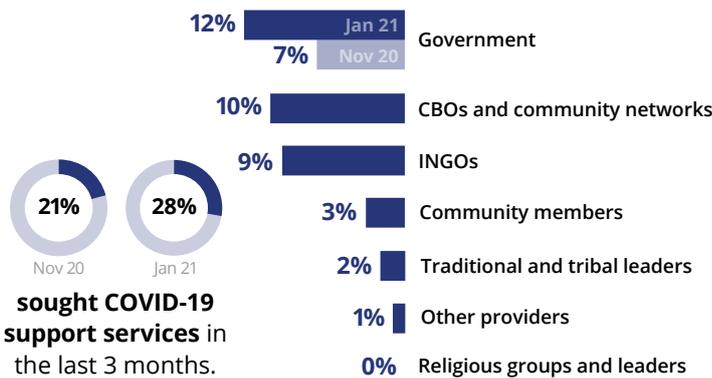
Overall, the vast majority share COVID-19 related information heard on trusted media sources with their friends and family members, compared to the first round.<sup>12</sup> **This might indicate a potential risk of increased misinformation sharing, as lower levels of trust in media tend to be associated with higher levels of informal information sharing.**



In Taiz governorate, 97% shared COVID-19 related information compared to 91% in Lahj. There is a lower rate of information sharing in Tuban compared to the average, in the other districts.



**Less than half have confidence in their government's COVID-19 response, while non-governmental responders enjoy higher levels of trust. Similar trend for satisfaction with COVID-19 services**



**sought COVID-19 support services in the last 3 months.**



**65%** health



**14%** employment

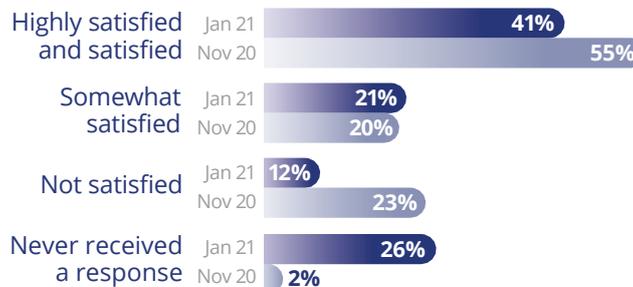
Additionally, similar to the first round, health and employment remain the top requested services.

This may be because so many Yemenis are already contending with other dire needs and thus may prioritize less COVID-19 related support.<sup>13</sup> **Stigma and the fear of being accused of spreading the virus are likely contributing to the continued low levels of service requests.**

**Our survey shows that 42% of respondents (or a member of their households) have lost fully or partially the main source of income during the pandemic.** Loss of livelihoods due to the pandemic are likely driving service requests related to employment and health.



Out of those who sought COVID-19 related services *from any service provider*:

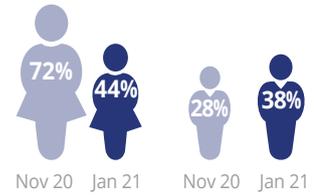


A decline in humanitarian aid in Yemen may have weakened service provision in general, contributing to lower satisfaction levels.<sup>14</sup>

11. Reliefweb, "COVID-19 exacerbates the effects of water shortages on women in Yemen", August 2020.  
 12. It is worth mentioning that statistics of this round are not entirely comparable to the first round, where the question was about sharing COVID-19 related information heard on Search's media partner exclusively.  
 13. Yemen has been termed by the UN as 'the world's worst humanitarian crisis'. 80% of the population – 24.1 million people – need some form of humanitarian assistance, and the UN continues to warn of impending widespread famine.  
 14. UN Office of the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, "Lack of funding cripples humanitarian operations in Yemen", 23 September 2020.



More women than men are satisfied (highly satisfied or satisfied) with COVID-19 related services, but even so, there has been a significant drop in levels of satisfaction among women, possibly pointing to increased level of unmet needs and a more difficult situation faced by women because of the pandemic.

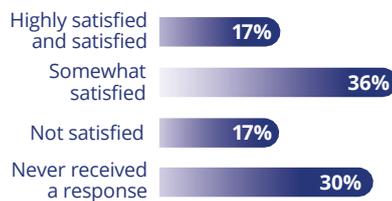


Overall, respondents in Taiz are more satisfied, compared to Lahj. The lower satisfaction in Lahj is driven by distinctly low levels of satisfaction in Tuban district. The availability of services might be contributing to these satisfaction levels, as only 14% of respondents in Jabal Habshi reported not getting a response, versus more than 43% in Tuban.

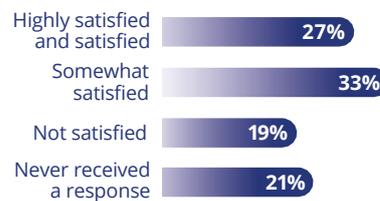


Looking at the service providers that received the most requests, **more respondents are satisfied with services provided by INGOs and CBOs than by the government.**

### Satisfaction with COVID-19 services provided by the Government



### Satisfaction with COVID-19 services provided by INGOs and CBOs

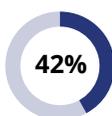


More women than men are satisfied (highly satisfied or satisfied) by services provided by the government. Possibly, feelings of marginalisation and fears of losing current assistance might contribute to higher satisfaction levels among women.

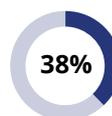


21% of respondents in the Taiz governorate are satisfied (highly satisfied or satisfied) with government-provided services, while none in the Lahj governorate.

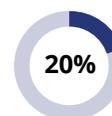
Higher satisfaction rates in Taiz might be because the governorate is traditionally prioritized by the government and also receives higher levels of humanitarian aid given that it is an epicenter of conflict and hosts a large number of IDPs; therefore, communities have greater interaction with and experience engaging humanitarian organizations and receiving aid. Lahj, which is more rural, receives less assistance and communities are less aware of options for assistance and services.



**agree (strongly agree or agree) that the government is doing its best to consider the needs of everyone equally when making decisions about COVID-19**



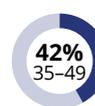
**disagree (strongly disagree or disagree),**



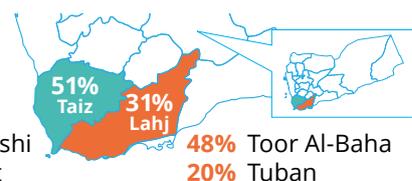
**have neutral reactions.<sup>15</sup>**



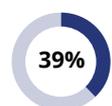
Levels of trust in the government are higher among young respondents (18-34) and adults, compared to +50. One of the reasons for older respondents' lower levels of trust in the current government's capacities and performance might be due to their past experience with previous governments, which they may have considered as more capable or better performing.



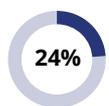
Trust levels in the government are considerably higher in Taiz than in Lahj. A potential explanation for lower levels of trust in Tuban might be due to the relatively weak presence of the government in rural and semi-urban areas. Limited governmental capacity and presence in the south has left other parties, including tribal and community figures, to fill gaps.



Perceptions that IDPs are prioritised for humanitarian assistance might be fueling higher levels of mistrust among host community members.



**Do not trust the government**

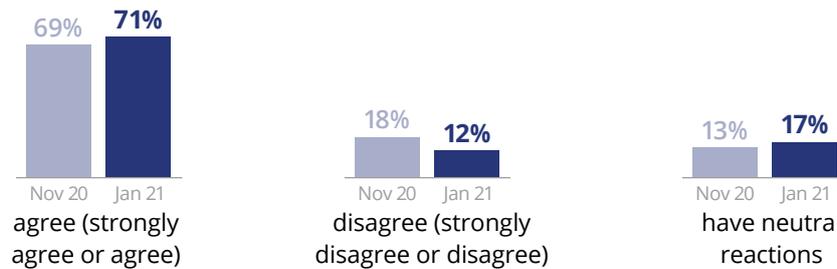


Host Community

IDP

15. These statistics are not comparable to the first round of the Yemen snapshot, where the question was about trusting all COVID-19 responders (public and private), including government authorities.

Generally, there are higher levels of trust in non-governmental COVID-19 responders, and this trust level is increasing.



that people working on COVID-19 have their best interests in mind when they do their work

**Trends to Follow**

Consistent with the previous round, more women than men strongly agree or agree that non-governmental actors working on COVID-19 have their best interests in mind when they do their work. Often, women manage household affairs and therefore have more contact with these actors, which might contribute to higher levels of trust in these actors compared to men.

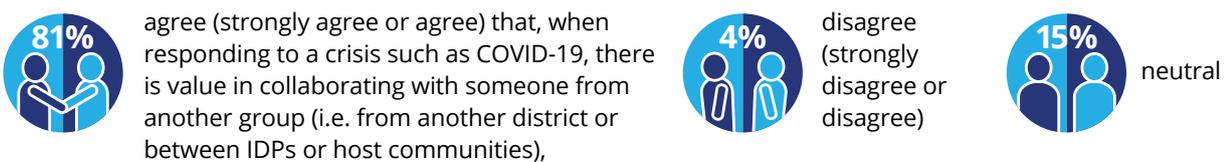
Young people (18-34) trust non-governmental COVID-19 actors the most.

More host community members do not trust non-governmental actors working on COVID-19 response, compared to IDPs. As mentioned above, perceptions that IDPs are prioritised to receive assistance might contribute to lower levels of trust among host community members.

### Most Yemenis value collaboration during a crisis, yet actual interaction across divides is decreasing, especially across districts

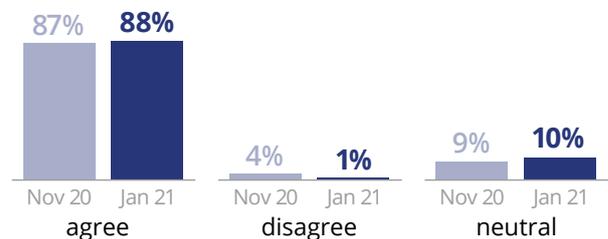
Though slightly lower than in the first round, the majority of respondents in our target areas continue to collaborate and interact across the different dividing lines. However, **our data shows that interaction with individuals from other residency groups (i.e. IDPs and host communities) is better than with individuals from other districts.** Over 4 million people are estimated to have been forcibly displaced since the beginning of the conflict in Yemen. Only 1 million IDPs are living in verified sites, while the majority are hosted within communities, usually with their relatives or friends in other regions.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, interaction and collaboration among different groups, particularly between IDPs and host communities, might translate to higher levels of solidarity, particularly within the extended family, than with individuals from other geographical areas.

#### Majority of Respondents Value Collaboration across Divides:



#### Collaboration between IDPs and host communities:

The majority of respondents value collaboration between host communities and IDPs to respond to a crisis, results were very similar to the first round.



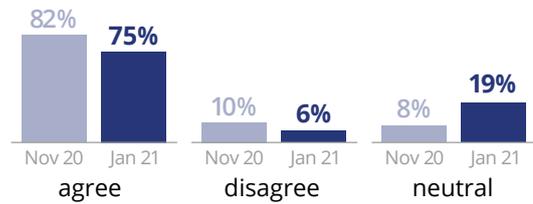
**Trends to Follow**

Overall, IDPs tend to value this kind of collaboration more than the host community members. Generally, host communities tend to have more negative perceptions towards IDPs than the other way around, fueled by grievances related to shared resources, including land and property ownership, as well as perceptions that IDPs are prioritised for services. The collaborative tendency shown by IDPs might be due to the fact that they often rely heavily on host communities for support, which is also increasing tensions amid scarce resources. The capacity of host communities to accommodate IDPs is severely strained, and COVID-19 may be putting additional pressure on these fragile relationships.

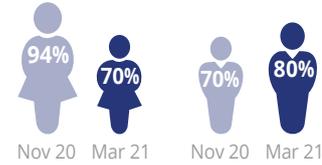
16. OCHA, "HUMANITARIAN NEEDS OVERVIEW YEMEN", February 2021.

**Collaboration between districts:**

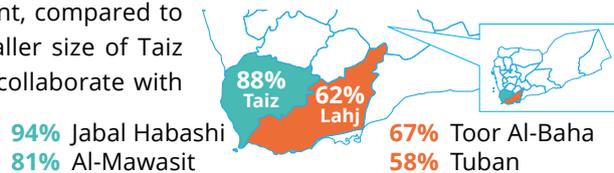
Overall, **75% of respondents value (strongly agree or agree) collaboration with someone from another district** to address a crisis like COVID-19. This average has decreased compared to the first round of data collection, this slight decrease might be attributed to the deteriorating security situation in our target areas over the past three months.



More men than women value collaboration with someone from another district to address a crisis. The inverse was true during the first round of data collection. However, data from this round better reflects social norms in Yemen, where men are more likely to collaborate across geographic divides.

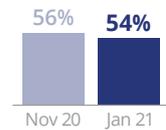


Overall, individuals from Taiz report higher agreement, compared to Lahj. As mentioned above, due to the relatively smaller size of Taiz compared to Lahj, there might be a higher need to collaborate with individuals from other areas.

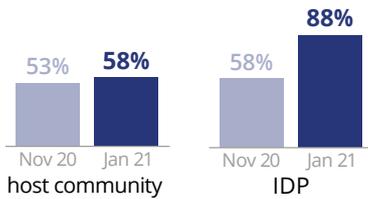
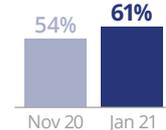


**Actual Interaction across Divides**

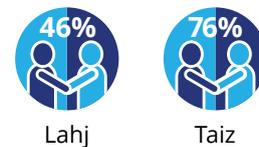
On average, only 54% of respondents confirmed having interacted (remotely or in-person) with people from another group (another district or between IDPs and host community members) in the last 3 months, compared to 56% during the first round of data collection.



**Interaction between IDPs and Host Community Members:** Overall, 61% of respondents confirm having interacted (remotely or in-person) with people from the other group in the last 3 months, an increase from 54% in the first round.

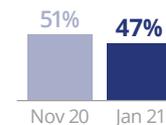


More than half of host community members and the majority of IDPs report interacting with individuals from the other group, both up from the first round.



Interaction between host community members and IDPs was lower in Lahj than Taiz, which can be explained by the higher number of IDPs present in Taiz.

**Actual Interaction between Districts:** Overall, **47% of respondents confirm having interacted (remotely or in-person) with people from other districts in the last 3 months**, slightly down from 51% in the first round.



**Trends to Follow**  
Men interact with people from other districts more frequently than women, likely due to socio-cultural norms regarding interaction outside close relatives.



Respondents report interaction with people from other districts as follows:



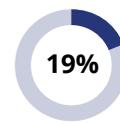
**Majority of Respondents Report Feeling Safe when Interacting across Divides:**



**73%** feel safe when interacting with people from another group (from another district or between IDPs and host community members)



8% do not feel safe



19% have neutral reactions

**Feelings of Safety among IDPs and Host Community Members:**



In general, IDPs may feel more vulnerable and less secure given their situation of displacement. Additionally, negative perceptions among host community members towards IDPs might also drive reduced feelings of safety among IDPs when interacting with the host community.



80% host community



60% IDP

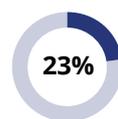
## Feelings of Safety between Districts:



**65%** feel safe when interacting with people from another district



12% do not feel safe



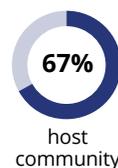
23% have neutral reactions



Men report higher levels of safety than women when interacting with people from other districts.



Overall, 67% of host community members and only 40% of IDPs feel safe when interacting with individuals from other districts.



There are important variances between districts: Reduced feelings of safety in Al-Mawasit (Taiz) are likely attributable to the insecurity situation in the district, where there has been increased clashes between the two main warring parties in Yemen from one side, and among different forces under the IRG, from the other.

93% Jabal Habashi  
45% Al-Mawasit



65% Toor Al-Baha  
56% Tuban

## Next Steps For COVID-19 Response Efforts

### Strengthen and Expand Media Reach of COVID-19 Information

- Our findings on access to COVID-19 information show that only 8% of respondents get this from radio stations. Since people rely much more on TV and social media (WhatsApp) to get information on COVID-19, those working on COVID-19 information dissemination should ensure they are tapping into these channels. Additionally, family and friends remain another important source for citizens to receive information, creating a need for innovative ways to disseminate information via informal channels. For instance, equipping community and religious leaders, and other influential community stakeholders, who have reach and trust among communities, with information sharing techniques. Moreover, flyers, brochures, and other communication tools can be disseminated within public spaces at the community level. This could also help to limit the spread of rumours around COVID-19 and the vaccine.

### Prioritize diversified COVID-19 response efforts to increase trust in the overall response

- Our data shows that non-governmental stakeholders working on COVID-19 have much higher levels of trust among respondents than governmental responders (71% vs. 42%), and that people are more satisfied with COVID-19 services provided by non-governmental actors than by the government (27% vs. 17%). Alongside governmental response efforts, response strategies should integrate a diversity of stakeholders such as CBOs, INGOs, community leaders, and others to increase trust and acceptance of the overall response, including the vaccine roll-out. Moreover, our data shows that especially youth have high levels of trust (81%) in non-governmental actors, revealing an important opportunity for increased youth engagement for COVID-19 response efforts alongside non-governmental actors.

### Support efforts that strengthen social cohesion across divides

- Our data shows that a large majority of respondents value collaboration across divides to address a crisis such as COVID-19, including between districts and among IDPs and host communities. However, respondents tend to value collaboration between districts less than between IDPs and host communities, and actual interaction between individuals from different districts is also lower than between IDPs and host communities (47% vs. 61%), indicating a need to provide more opportunities for people to connect (virtually or in person) across districts. Additionally, host community members value collaboration with IDPs less than the other way around, signaling a potential conflict trigger, especially if COVID-19 continues to put a strain on available resources, or if the response (including vaccination) is perceived as discriminatory or exclusionary. Hence, COVID-19 response efforts should be conflict-sensitive and inclusive, promoting efforts to reinforce social cohesion across dividing lines. For instance, media campaigns can elevate voices from different districts/regions that disseminate messages of solidarity in a variety of local dialects, or supporting response efforts implemented jointly by IDPs and host communities.