

# THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN YEMEN AFTER SEVEN YEARS OF CONFLICT



## SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

- **Prevent hunger and famine:** as millions of Yemenis are pushed to the brink of famine, parties to the conflict must refrain from using hunger as a weapon of war, and instead take all the necessary measures to revitalise the economy and allow the free flow of goods, particularly food and fuel.
- **Mitigate the impact of conflict on civilians:** warring parties must fulfil their obligations under International Humanitarian Law and take all measures at their disposal to protect civilians and vital civilian infrastructure against attacks. Additionally, confidence-building measures with parties to the conflict, particularly those that can immediately mitigate humanitarian needs must be supported. These include the reopening of Sana'a Airport, implementing mechanisms that enable sustained seaport operations to facilitate fuel and food imports, resuming civil servants' salary payments, and supporting the Central Bank of Yemen.
- **Support preparedness and response for a third wave of COVID-19:** donors should provide urgent support to bolster the capacity of health actors in Yemen to deal with a third outbreak of COVID-19. At the same time, authorities across Yemen must remove all barriers preventing people from getting tested, receiving adequate treatment for COVID-19, and most importantly; getting vaccinated to protect themselves and their communities.
- **Funding the humanitarian response:** donors should urgently mobilise additional resources in the coming months to ensure humanitarian agencies have adequate resources to address the increasing needs on the ground and sustain life-saving interventions including food assistance, health, protection and water and sanitation. At the same time, as Yemen

enters its eighth year of conflict, longer-term funding is needed to solve the root causes of vulnerability and enable those affected to build resilience to future shocks.

- **Economy:** the conflict has devastated an economy already weakened by years of mismanagement and corruption and destroyed critical infrastructure. Rapid inflation of food and fuel prices is now pushing many people in Yemen to the brink of famine. To mitigate this, Yemen direly needs financial aid packages that address the root causes of vulnerabilities to stop the deterioration of the local currency and stabilise the prices of basic goods.

As Yemen enters its eighth year of conflict, humanitarian needs are growing; exacerbated by an ailing economy, a third wave of COVID19 and public infrastructure decimated by ongoing conflict. Many people in Yemen are now on the brink of famine, with women and girls being particularly at risk. At the same time, 50 per cent of the response funding needs are unmet, and humanitarian partners continue to face challenges to accessing those most in need.

Yemenis have an irrevocable right to live safely and in dignity and to enjoy unhindered access to rights and basic services that guarantee their survival, including through humanitarian assistance. To achieve this, aid agencies in Yemen have identified key priority areas that require urgent action by policy makers attending the UN General Assembly during Leaders' Week, parties to the conflict, donors, and the humanitarian leadership:

## THE HEAVY TOLL OF SEVEN YEARS OF CONFLICT ON CIVILIANS

In Yemen, seven years of continued armed conflict and use of explosive weapons in populated areas have had deadly consequences for civilians, with over 18,000 civilian casualties and counting. The ongoing conflict has also devastated public infrastructure, leaving many people without access to essential, life-saving services such as healthcare and water. Marginalised groups, including women, children, persons with disabilities, refugees, migrants and Muhmasheen are particularly vulnerable.

The destruction of housing and infrastructure has driven four million civilians from their homes. Many are unable to return, forced into secondary or even tertiary, long-term displacement and without access to livelihoods opportunities and support networks. Even when the conflict ends, the long-term impacts of damage to hospitals, schools, businesses, power plants, and water infrastructure, will prevent people from returning back home. The fragmentation of communities also negatively impacts social cohesion, limiting the ability for communities to rebuild and recover in the long term. The threat of displacement and destruction of civilian infrastructure shows no sign of abating, as some 1.5 million IDPs in Ma'arib and 500,000 host community members are currently at risk of violence and (secondary) displacement should hostilities escalate. Parties to the conflict and states cannot turn a blind eye to the systematic pattern of harm that is being inflicted on Yemeni civilians.

### Recommendations

- The only solution to put an end to the continued suffering is a cessation of all hostilities. Irrespective of progress on the political track, parties to the conflict must take effective precautionary measures to promote accountability and prevent civilian casualties in the conduct of hostilities as they are obliged to do under International Humanitarian Law.

- Demand specific protection of civilian sites, particularly those indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, including houses, hospitals, schools, water stations and farmlands.
- Remind parties of the provisions of UN Security Resolutions 1894, 2175, 2286, 2417 and 2475, on the protection of civilians, medical facilities and humanitarian personnel.
- Aid agencies should continue to support programmes that care for the wounded from lifesaving trauma care to rehabilitation and social integration.

## AN AILING ECONOMY

The crisis in Yemen has devastated an already battered economy. Over the past seven years, conflict has disrupted production and import of oil derivatives, while waves of sharp currency devaluation, depletion of foreign currency reserves, shrinking foreign trade and investments price inflations has pushed Yemen's economy to the edge of collapse. Economic activity has contracted by more than 50 per cent, and the share of GDP per capita has decreased by about two-thirds. In addition, about 80 per cent of the population now live under the poverty line, with the middle class almost completely eroded. The absence of efficient and transparent governance systems across the country makes long term intervention of international financial institutions and direct budget support difficult.

The disparity of fiscal policies adopted by various parties to the conflict is another driver of the economic crisis, adversely affecting people in Yemen. New Yemeni Riyal notes issued by the Central Bank in Aden remained banned by authorities in Sana'a, while the IRG's Central Bank relies on monetary expansion to curb the lack of stable foreign currency exchange and state revenues. This is deepening the currency exchange value gap between the two areas, fostering the depreciation of the Yemeni Riyal. At the end of July, the Yemeni Riyal's (YMR) value reached a record low of YMR 1,000 against USD 1 in southern Yemen, and YMR 600 against USD 1 in northern Yemen. This is problematic for a country that imports 90 per cent of its food, causing significant inflation in the prices of food and the fuel.

Exchange and transfer companies impose large fees on remittances sent in local currency from IRG controlled areas -where the value of the new Yemeni Riyal is decreasing- to the Houthi-controlled areas. In early 2021, fees of up to 40% were recorded for remittances transfers from southern to northern governorates. This has caused discontent, given that families receiving those remittances are either getting less, or senders are forced to significantly increase the amount sent to cover the fees, or part of those. While remittances coming from abroad have decreased by 70 per cent in some cases because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the recently reported de facto deportation threats for tens of thousands of Yemenis working on the southern regions of Saudi Arabia could further plummet this vital source of income for their families who rely on those remittances inside Yemen.

Volatile monetary policies, low global prices for oil derivatives and fuel imports below the average consumption needs have led to a sharp increase of basic commodity prices, including food, fuel, rent and medicines, which put these out of the reach of most people. In 2019, the World Bank reported that the monthly cost of the survival minimum expenditure food basket (SMEB) for one household, increased by 145 per cent since conflict started in 2015. This happened while salaries of hundreds of thousands of public servants across the country have been static and have been paid intermittently at best since the transfer of the IRG Central Bank to Aden in 2016.

## Recommendations

- Revitalise the economy through financial aid packages to stop the deterioration of local currency and prevent the increase in prices of basic commodities including food, fuel, water and electricity.
- Any direct deposit to the Central Bank in Aden should be supported by enhanced oversight of the financial authority over spending and aim at stabilizing the economy and cover public workers' salaries across the country.
- Pressure competing authorities across Yemen to put civilians' interests at the centre of their monetary and fiscal policies and reach an agreement concerning the import and distribution of fuel.
- Remove all restrictions on commercial imports through all airports, seaports and land crossings, including reopening the Sana'a airport to commercial flights, so that fuel, humanitarian aid and commercial goods could enter and reach all areas across Yemen.
- In parallel to diplomatic efforts to secure a peaceful end to the conflict, influential actors should pressure parties to the conflict to reinstate a unified and transparent monetary system.

## THE GROWING THREAT OF HUNGER AND FAMINE

Currently, over 16.2 million people in Yemen are food insecure. People in certain parts of the country live in famine-like conditions, with over five million people on the brink of famine as the economy remains afflicted by the conflict, leaving many people unable to afford to buy food. Rates of malnutrition among women and children in Yemen are among the highest in the world. Recent assessments show that about 1.2 million pregnant or lactating women and nearly 2.3 million children under five need to be treated for acute malnutrition.<sup>1</sup> Of these children, 400,000 are at risk of severe acute malnutrition and could lose their lives unless they receive urgent treatment. Acute malnutrition among young children and mothers in Yemen has increased with each passing year of conflict and worsened significantly in 2020. In addition to the lack of food, the accelerated spread of diseases including diarrhoea and cholera have acted as catalysts for this crisis.

The economic decline in Yemen is one of the primary factors causing hunger and malnutrition in Yemen. In August this year, the price of a month's supply of wheat flour, cooking oil, beans and sugar stood at YER 60,000, amounting to a 250 per cent increase compared to February 2015.<sup>2</sup>

The rise in food prices, coupled with the lack of income force, has forced many people to resort to negative coping mechanisms. More middle-income families are buying food on credit, less preferred foods, or in some cases trading assets and personal belongings for food. Poor families often find themselves forced to take more drastic measures such as skipping meals, begging for food and in some cases child marriage. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to food

<sup>1</sup> WFP, <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/yemen-emergency>

<sup>2</sup> Save the Children, "Price hikes and currency freefall push Yemen's children further into hunger", August 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/price-hikes-and-currency-freefall-push-yemen-s-children-further-hunger-save-children>

insecurity as they are reportedly deprioritised at the household level and receive lesser amounts of food compared to their male counterparts.

## Recommendations

- Hunger and famine must never be used as a weapon of war. Parties to the conflict must remove all barriers and restrictions at once and facilitate access to humanitarian assistance and the flow of commercial goods, particularly food, into and across the country, notwithstanding areas of control.
- This is not the time to turn our backs on millions of Yemenis at risk of starvation. Donors should fund and support critical interventions to prevent hunger from spreading, particularly among already vulnerable groups including children and breastfeeding women.
- Aid agencies should design gender-responsive approaches to assistance distribution, particularly when distributing food, to ensure all household members receive adequate amounts of food and other essentials. Local Yemeni women frontline humanitarian workers and local women-led humanitarian organisations should lead and inform these approaches to ensure they are targeted and responsive.

## A THIRD WAVE OF COVID-19

COVID-19 has worsened an already dire humanitarian situation in Yemen. The conflict in Yemen has decimated the healthcare system, putting nearly half of the hospitals within the country out of service. As of the last week of August, there were 7,851 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 1,486 reported deaths across Yemen. During August, the number of reported COVID-19 cases increased exponentially, reaching 216 cases by the final week, more than triple the number of cases reported during the first week of the month. Given the limited testing capacity available in the country, authorities fear that the actual number of cases could be ten times more.

The dramatic increase in the number of COVID-19 cases prompted health officials and aid agencies in the country to raise the alarm about a potential third wave of outbreak. During a meeting held by head of the Internationally Recognised Government's (IRG) COVID-19 taskforce, the Prime Minister instructed attendees to begin preparing for a third wave, including the re-opening of containment and intensive care wards throughout the country. This reflects health actors' deep concerns about the readiness (or lack thereof) of the healthcare system to absorb another outbreak amid a stalled vaccination campaign. As of 26 August, only 311,483 vaccine doses had been administered in Yemen, mainly due to the lack of available vaccine doses in the country.

The situation in northern Yemen is likely as critical if not worse. *De facto* authorities in northern Yemen pursued a policy of withholding data concerning the number of cases and deaths caused by COVID-19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, authorities in northern Yemen declared only four cases of infection, and one death due to COVID-19. Additionally, authorities continue to accentuate the level of threat that COVID-19 poses by refusing to roll-out any vaccination campaigns, issuing community guidelines or adopting mitigation measures to curb the spread of infection. This effectively puts the lives of nearly 70 per cent of the Yemeni population at risk, and worse, leaves doctors and healthcare staff without the required resources and

equipment to both treat patients and protect themselves against the virus. Because of this, at least 150 Yemeni doctors have reportedly died due to COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>

## Recommendations

- Authorities across Yemen must provide people with unrestricted and no-cost access to appropriate COVID-19 treatment facilities, increase testing capacity, and encourage people to seek medical care before their condition becomes critical.
- The Ministry of Public Health and Population in northern Yemen should take proactive steps to determine the severity of the spread of COVID-19 in each governorate, disseminate data of COVID-19 cases to enhance planning and response, and impose adequate preventive measures to curb the spread of infection.
- Health authorities across Yemen, with the support of aid agencies, should promote and facilitate health promotion activities to empower communities in the fight against COVID-19.
- Authorities in southern Yemen should simplify the vaccination procedure and enable all civilians to receive the vaccine to limit the spread of the virus. Authorities in northern Yemen must take part in the vaccination campaign and allow civilians unrestricted access to vaccines, particularly medical staff who are at increased risk of exposure.
- Donors should maintain their support to health actors in Yemen and enable a scale-up of their COVID-19 response capacity through both COVAX and supporting existing primary and secondary health systems.
- Health actors should pre-emptively devise comprehensive response strategies to ensure preparedness to respond, including through prepositioning adequate protective equipment, medicine, and ventilation devices, and staff training.
- Aid agencies should scale-up water, sanitation and hygiene interventions, particularly in densely populated areas, to curb the spread of the virus.

## HUMANITARIAN FUNDING

More than 20 million Yemenis are estimated to need humanitarian assistance in 2021, over 12 million of whom are estimated to be in acute need. Their lives are now at risk as limited funding threatens to drastically reduce critical emergency programming in the coming months. By the end of August 2021, the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) was only 50% per cent funded. While some donors have generously increased support compared to 2020, others have yet to mobilise or increase funding to meet the critical needs of Yemenis. Despite growing needs in the country —and with threat of a third wave of COVID-19— the UK, one of the key donors for the response, cut humanitarian funding to Yemen by nearly 60% this year.

Current funding levels are insufficient to meet the requirements of the HRP at the same as time as a deteriorating economic situation is contributing to a looming famine, driving up the scale of humanitarian needs. Without an urgent mobilisation of funds, some agencies may be forced to reduce critical, life-saving programmes from September 2021 onwards. The consequences of this will be catastrophic for millions of vulnerable families.

As fighting in Ma'arib governorate intensifies, growing numbers of newly displaced people are living in critical conditions. Drastic underfunding for shelter (15.4 per cent) and camp

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<sup>3</sup> Yemen Doctors in Diaspora, April 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/103881397990521/posts/291236955921630/?d=n>

coordination and camp management (4.2 per cent) programming means that many vulnerable families forced to flee the conflict are unable to find safe shelter.

More than 15 million people in Yemen currently need WASH assistance, with more than eight million in acute need. WASH programming is only currently 7.7 per cent funded and without urgent mobilisation of funds, agencies will be forced to reduce life-saving WASH programmes in September.

The migration route through Yemen is the busiest in the world. Migrants face in Yemen numerous threats to life, undergoing a highly dangerous crossing to get to Yemen and risk kidnap, violence and arbitrary detention in-country. While numbers of migrants entering Yemen temporarily slowed in 2020 due to COVID, numbers are set to rise and dramatic mobilisation of funds are needed to support the response for migrants, which is currently only 4.6 per cent funded.

As the conflict in Yemen enters its eighth year, the protracted crisis, a rapidly deteriorating economy, extremely high levels of food insecurity, devastated public infrastructure and continued violence and insecurity threaten to wipe out long-term development. According to a 2019 study by the UNDP, the conflict in Yemen has already reversed development gains by 21 years (UNDP, 2019). While it is vital that funding continues to support critical emergency response, there is also a growing and urgent need for early recovery funding that solves the root causes of vulnerability, enables Yemenis affected by the conflict to build resilience to future shocks and to draw a roadmap for Durable Solutions for those displaced by the conflict.

## Recommendations

- Donors who announced pledges at the High-Level Pledging Event on 1 March 2021; should immediately disperse them.
- The donor community should mobilise additional resources in the coming months, to ensure humanitarian agencies' capacity keeps pace with increasing needs on the ground and they can sustain life-saving programmes.
- The donor community should marshal additional resources to fund a concerted, multi-sectoral package of recovery and development programmes, building Yemen's resilience to shocks in the medium to long term. This should not come at the expense of existing emergency programming.
- UN agencies and the donor community should ensure that the need for early recovery and resilience response is reflected in the HRP for 2022 alongside continued support for emergency response.

## SIGNATORIES

### CARE

Danish Refugee Council

Emergency

Handicap International - Humanity & Inclusion

International Medical Corps

International Rescue Committee

### INTERSOS

Mercy Corps

Norwegian Refugee Council

NYC Medics

Oxfam

Qatar Charity

Relief International

Save the Children

Search for Common Ground

Solidarités international