Overview

From October to December 2020, 13.5 million people (45% of the total population) are facing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above), despite ongoing humanitarian food assistance. This includes 9.8 million people (33% of the total population) in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis), 3.6 million (12 percent) in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency) and of greatest concern, approximately 16,500 people in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe).

Between January and June 2021, the number increases by nearly 3 million to 16.2 million people (54% of the total population) facing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above). Out of these, an estimated 11 million people will likely be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3), 5 million in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and the number of those in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5), will likely increase to 16,700.

Food insecurity is more severe in areas with active fighting or bordering areas with limited access, and is particularly affecting Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and marginalized groups. The caseload in Petra (IPC Phase 5) is mainly found in Al Jawf, Hajjah and Amran. In Al Jawf and Hajjah, conflict, displacement and limited humanitarian access are the main drivers. While in Amran, highly vulnerable marginalized groups such as landless wage labourers and lack of access to public services such as water, sanitation and health are the primary causes. Overall, there are more than 4 million IDPs in Yemen who face comparatively worse food security outcomes.

The projection assumes that all beneficiaries will receive 50% assistance in January – June, any further reductions (including the possibility of zero assistance) coupled with other shocks could lead to heightened food insecurity levels, including further populations falling into IPC phase 5 (Catastrophe).

An emerging concern is the projected deterioration in the nutrition situation in at least 15 out of 19 zones of the country in the Aug to December 2020 period for which an ongoing IPC acute needs assessment has been completed.

Key Drivers

- Conflict: Conflict is the principal driver of food insecurity in Yemen leading to widespread displacement, humanitarian access constraints, disruption of public services, ports blockade and restrictions, fuel crisis and economic disruption. Without a permanent solution, it is unlikely that all other mitigation measures will have long-lasting effects.

- Economic Shocks: High food prices, unaffordable minimum food basket and increased depreciation of the Yemeni rial against the US dollar has impacted nearly all households, as the country relies mainly on imports. As the cost of food become unaffordable, many households adopt negative coping strategies to access food.

- Reduced Foreign Reserves: Reduced direct foreign investments, a shortfall in humanitarian funding and a pause in remittances has led to a liquidity crisis and depreciation of the rial to unprecedented levels. Reductions in humanitarian food assistance, due to funding shortfalls, has led to increased levels of vulnerability for the majority of the population, who rely on humanitarian assistance.

Trend Analysis

Food insecurity in Yemen shows an increasing trend compared to the extremely high levels observed in 2018/2019 with an increase of nearly 300,000 people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance in the first six months of 2021. In terms of severity (IPC Phase), the number of districts on Phase 4 are threefold those in 2018/19 (from 49 to 154). In 14 out of 22 total governorates analysed, the population classified in IPC Phase 5 and above increased compared to the 2018/19 period. Peaks of increased severity are observed in Al Jawf, Hajjah, Ibb, Raymah and Sa’ada governorates. The protracted dire situation complicating the already fragile livelihoods, especially when combined with increasingly negative coping mechanisms, reducing income opportunities and the impacts of COVID-19 on livelihoods. However, it is important to note that for most of 2019, the food security situation was stable as a result of generous contributions from donors who provided urgently needed resources to significantly scale-up food assistance and stabilise the economy, thus preventing a famine in early 2019.

Preparedness and Response

13.5 million people are currently targeted for food assistance. In 2018/2019, 258 out of 333 districts, more than 25 percent of the population received food assistance. The food basket comprises 80 percent of households’ caloric needs. However, the assistance provided is not sufficient to cover all needs, particularly in the northern governorates where beneficiaries have received reduced assistance since April 2020 with distributions every two months instead of monthly, due to limited funding and a challenging operating environment. The reduced food assistance has led to heightened household vulnerabilities, any further reductions or disruption would be catastrophic.

Recommended Actions

- De-escalation of Violence and Ceasefire: Urgent cessation of conflict to protect lives and livelihoods, immediate lifting of the ports blockade and restrictions to expedite the movement of goods and exports, and unrestricted humanitarian access to reach the most vulnerable households, including marginalized persons.

- Life-saving Humanitarian Assistance: Urgent funding of humanitarian assistance is required to scale-up assistance to save lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable Yemenis in need.

- Injection of Foreign Currency Reserves: To stabilise the exchange rate and bolster liquidity within the economy, an injection of foreign currency reserves is swiftly required. Famine was prevented two years ago when member states and donors provided urgently needed resources, and we can do it again.

- Livelihood Diversification: Scale up livelihood diversification programmes for the populations in need of assistance to increase their already eroded resilience and stop them from slipping into worse conditions.

Population in IPC Phase 3, 4 & 5 by Governorate | 2018 - 2021