

HUMANITARIAN UPDATE

A doctor treats a malnourished child at a malnutrition treatment center in Al-Sadaqah Hospital, in Aden. March 2020. Photo by Ayman Fuad/YPN for WHO.

Issue 4 / April 2021

SITUATION WORSENS AMID A SEVERE FUNDING CRISIS

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The situation in Yemen – already the world's largest humanitarian crisis – continues to deteriorate amid a funding crisis that is impeding scale-up of life-saving aid to avert famine.

Having endured six years of armed conflict and related violence alongside an economic blockade, the people of Yemen are again facing the specter of heightened food insecurity and potential famine, according to the recently released humanitarian needs overview.

Yemen faced the threat of a large-scale famine in 2018, but unprecedented levels of humanitarian funding enabled aid agencies to launch the fastest and largest response of this crisis, which helped avert this threat. However, the underlying drivers of the crisis – the war and the blockade – persist and their impact worsened the humanitarian situation in 2020 and into 2021, leaving millions of people again facing the threat of large-scale famine.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS FOR YHRP



US\$ 3.85
BILLION

TOTAL FUNDING RECEIVED FOR YHRP



US\$ 1.32
BILLION

FUNDING UNMET FOR YHRP



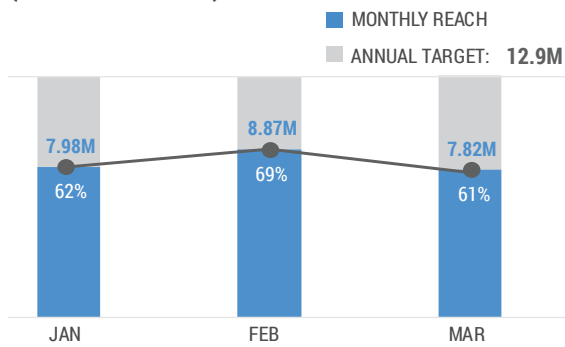
US\$ 2.53
BILLION



OCHA

YEMEN

FOOD SECURITY RESPONSE (JAN-MAR 2021)



Source: WFP

By the end of April, only 34 per cent (\$1.326 billion) of the \$3.85 billion required to avert famine was provided. Aid agencies are reaching only half of the 16 million people targeted with food assistance every month. This means that, if funding is not urgently secured to enable a massive scale-up of life-saving aid, millions of those in acute need risk falling into greater levels of need. The international community must not wait for a famine classification in Yemen to act. Millions of people have exhausted coping strategies and food insecurity will continue to rise without immediate humanitarian support.

The situation is aggravated by a weakening economy, mainly the depletion of foreign

currency reserves which is driving inflation up, eroding purchasing power and pushing food prices higher, again resulting in increased levels of food insecurity.

Traditional sources of foreign currency such as remittances, oil exports, humanitarian funding and bilateral funding streams remain suppressed. Consequently, the Yemeni rial is still trading near record lows – at YER 892 per USD throughout March before slightly appreciating to YER 830 by the beginning of April. This fluctuation means that millions of people cannot afford to buy food or other essentials, even those who still have an income.

In his [briefing](#) to the UN Security Council on 15 April, USG/ERC Mark Lowcock called on donors to disburse any outstanding pledges right away, and to make additional pledges. He also noted that “sustained assistance is going to be necessary all through the year if we are going to avert the famine, as well as deal with Yemen’s other acute needs.” USG/ERC Lowcock also called for the provision of additional foreign exchange through the Central Bank to stabilize the local currency.

RAMADAN IN A COUNTRY ON THE BRINK OF FAMINE

On 13 April, Muslims around the world marked the start of *Ramadan* – a time of spiritual reflection, self-improvement and heightened devotion. In this month of prayer and community, Muslims fast from dawn to dusk, abstaining among other things from food and drink during the daylight hours. Each day begins with *sahur*, a pre-dawn meal before the day’s fast and the last meal before *iftar*, the evening meal at sunset. Both meals are vital for maintaining the health, energy and wellbeing of those who fast, and are an opportunity for families, friends and neighbors to come together. Yet in Yemen, the majority of whose 30.7 million people observe *Ramadan*, many people struggle to find food for themselves and their families.

Having enough to eat for *sahur* and *iftar* is difficult for some and an uncertainty for many; even when the fasting concludes at the end of this holy month, the hunger will continue.

Food prices in Yemen are now up to 200 per cent higher than they were before the conflict began in 2015, putting traditional *sahur* and *iftar* dishes as well as everyday foodstuffs increasingly out of people’s reach. More than 16 million people in Yemen are already skipping meals nearly every day because they simply have no other choice, among them nearly 50,000 people who already live with famine-like conditions and some 5 million people on the brink of it. Over 67 per cent



A QRCS distribution store in Sana'a City during last Ramadan.
© Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS)

of internally displaced persons (IDPs) – 2.6 million people – are in emergency food insecure situations, and nearly 2.3 million children under the age of five and more than a million pregnant and lactating women are projected to suffer from acute malnutrition this year. Under the 2021 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP), food security partners aim to support 16 million people with life-saving food assistance, and to progressively move half a million people from emergency food assistance to conditional cash transfers and livelihoods programmes over the course of the year. For many people in Yemen, this food assistance is all they have to eat this *Ramadan* and beyond.

Some humanitarian partners have adjusted their activities for *Ramadan*, such as the Enjaz Foundation for Development, which is additionally providing water for some 155 displaced families living in a hosting site in Dhamar Governorate throughout the holy month, and the UN World Food Programme (WFP), which is distributing over 1,300 MT of dates – a favored *Ramadan* and *Eid* staple – to some 1.5 million people in seven governorates in May. Also implementing *Ramadan* projects across Yemen is the Qatar

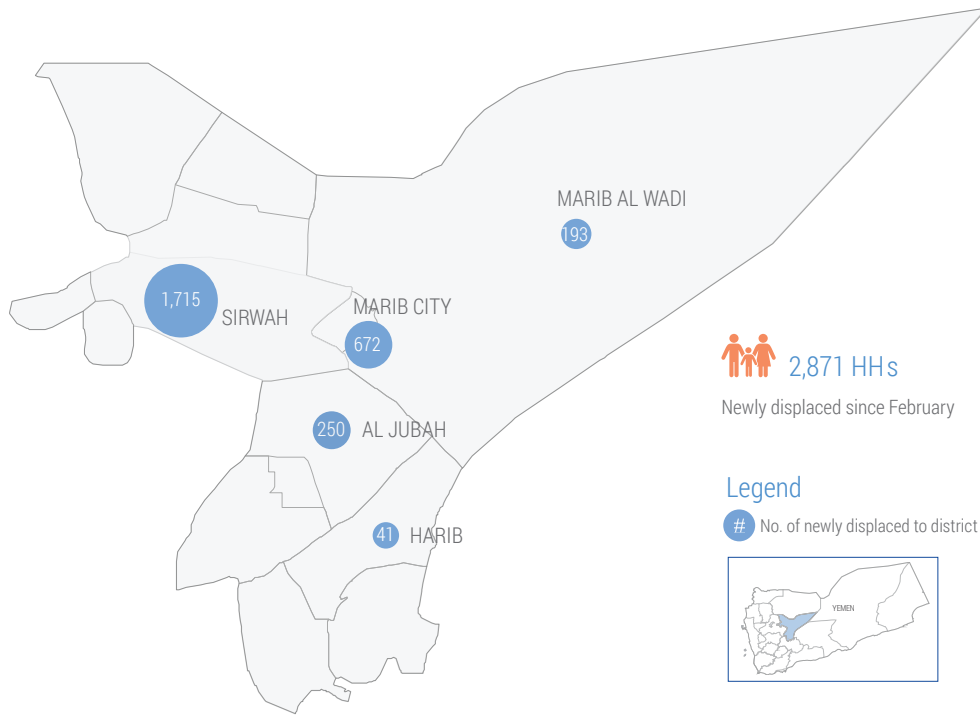
Red Crescent Society (QRCS), which is this year providing *Iftar* for some 62,300 people in seven governorates, *Zakat Al-Fitr* for 30,100 people in two governorates, and *Eid* clothing for 5,400 people in four governorates. The projects mainly target people with heightened vulnerabilities, including displaced persons, people with disabilities, orphans and marginalized communities. When asked about this, Rema Al-Khateeb, Relief Officer at QRCS explained, “QRCS has conducted *Ramadan* projects in Yemen every year since 2015. This holy month reminds us to be there for those who are less fortunate than us, and to assist them however we can. The people we support already endure so much hardship, and we want to bring some added joy to them during this blessed period, in addition to the usual aid.”

Immediate support is needed to fill the funding gaps preventing humanitarian partners from ensuring life-saving food assistance reaches the millions going hungry in Yemen. Without this, hunger and malnutrition will increase, and hundreds of thousands of people will die. Strong support is also needed for the country’s economy, to enable people to better afford food and other essential commodities – 90 per cent of which are imported – that have become dramatically more expensive with the depreciation of the Yemeni Rial. This *Ramadan*, aid agencies reiterate the critical need for sustainable support for the humanitarian operation and continued efforts to usher in the end of hostilities, so that the people of Yemen can experience the next *Ramadan* in peace, and with abundant food to share *sahur* and *iftar* with their loved ones.

HOSTILITIES IN MA'RIB CONTINUE TO DISPLACE CIVILIANS AND INTENSIFY NEEDS

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the unabated fighting in frontline areas of Ma'rib Governorate, which has seen hostilities escalate since the beginning of February 2021. Consequently, at least 2,871 families

have been displaced within the governorate as of 25 April, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other partners report that at least 692 more families have been displaced to other governorates.



IOM estimates that 2,871 families have been displaced since 8 February. Source: IOM

The clashes have largely concentrated in Sirwah District, where some 30,000 internally displaced persons (IDP) live and from where most of the displacements have occurred. People are estimated to have been displaced from eight of the 14 IDP sites in this district since early February, with four of the sites – Al Khair, Al Mil, Al Tawasul and Edat Alrra – closed and evacuated to the Al Sowayda IDP site after being impacted by shelling at the end of March.

Ma'rib Governorate had some 125 IDP sites at the start of the escalation, home to many of the estimated one million displaced people living in the governorate – the largest IDP population in Yemen according to authorities. Most people newly displaced by the ongoing hostilities have stayed in the same district, with many remaining in Sirwah moving to areas closer to Ma'rib City such as Arak and Kasarah. Others have moved to other districts of Ma'rib Governorate including Ma'rib Al Wadi, Ma'rib City, Al Jubah and Harib, or to other governorates including Al Bayda and Amran. This has contributed to an increasing concentration of greater numbers of people in fewer hosting sites, compounding existing overcrowded conditions, intensifying already severe needs, and stoking tensions between new

arrivals and existing residents. On 3 April, a fire at the Aljufainah IDP site in Ma'rib City highlighted the dangers of the densely populated IDP sites. Reportedly ignited by an electrical fault, the fire caused the death of one child and injured several other civilians, some of them severely. Eighteen shelters were destroyed by the fire, impacting 21 families who were subsequently temporarily relocated to a nearby school.

Even as the persisting hostilities impede access, humanitarian partners are continuing to step up the response, delivering life-saving support to meet the most urgent needs of the newly displaced people. Following the fire at the Aljufainah IDP site, partners swiftly responded with site cleaning, emergency tent installations, as well as provision of Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) kits,



Partners are scaling up response in Ma'rib. Photo:IOM

cooked meals and mattresses and blankets for each affected family. In areas where displaced people are arriving, partners have implemented needs assessments and delivered assistance including food, shelter, non-food items (NFI) and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) support, and are prepositioning further stocks. Health services have been strengthened through the provision of medicines and medical supplies to hospitals and other health facilities, in addition to support for emergency services, operating theatres, outpatient therapeutic feeding programmes, and emergency obstetric and newborn care. Additionally, Protection partners are extending legal assistance and psychosocial support to newly displaced persons, providing support including for referrals and lost identification

documents, and raising awareness on fire safety. More details are available in the [Ma'rib Situation Update No. 3](#).

A Regional Coordination Team for Ma'rib has been established to facilitate response coordination across the governorate, in line with the Ma'rib Operational Plan focusing on key humanitarian interventions for an estimated 200,000 people, of whom some 105,000 people are projected to be displaced by this September. The plan also aims to support some 95,000 people in acute need – 80 per cent of all displaced persons living in hosting sites in Ma'rib City and Ma'rib Al Wadi, which host the largest concentration of displaced persons and where further new arrivals are expected in the coming months.

COVID-19 VACCINATION CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED AMIDST RISING CASES IN YEMEN

The first COVID-19 vaccination campaign in Yemen was launched in Aden on 20 April, three weeks after the arrival of the first 360,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines in the country. Supported by WHO and UNICEF in coordination with the Government of Yemen's Ministry of Public Health and Population, the campaign covers 133 districts in 13 of Yemen's 22 governorates, and aims to reach nearly 320,000 health workers, elderly persons and people with comorbidities with the first dose of the *AstraZeneca* vaccine within two weeks. As of 1 May, 10,482 people had successfully received their first of the two doses required to maximize their immune response to COVID-19.

The 360,000 doses are the first batch of 1.9 million doses of the vaccine that Yemen is expected to receive in 2021, and arrived together with 13,000 safety boxes and 1.3 million syringes that are critical for the safe and effective roll-out of the vaccination campaign. This is part of the total 14 million

doses that Yemen will receive through the COVAX facility, which aims to guarantee fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for all countries, and which is co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi and WHO, with UNICEF as its key delivery partner.

To demonstrate support for the campaign and encourage public confidence in the vaccine, UNICEF Representative to Yemen, Philippe Duamelle, WHO's Aden Office Director Noha Mahmoud, and the Government of Yemen's Minister of Public Health and Population, Dr. Qasim Buhaibeh; Deputy Minister of Public Health and Population, Dr. Ali Al-Waleedi; Minister of Civil Service, Dr. Abdul Nasser Al-Wali; and Governor of Aden, Ahmed Hamed Lamlas; each received shots of the vaccine at the launch.

The campaign comes as Yemen endures a significant increase in COVID-19 cases and associated deaths; two-thirds of the 6,329 COVID-19 cases confirmed between

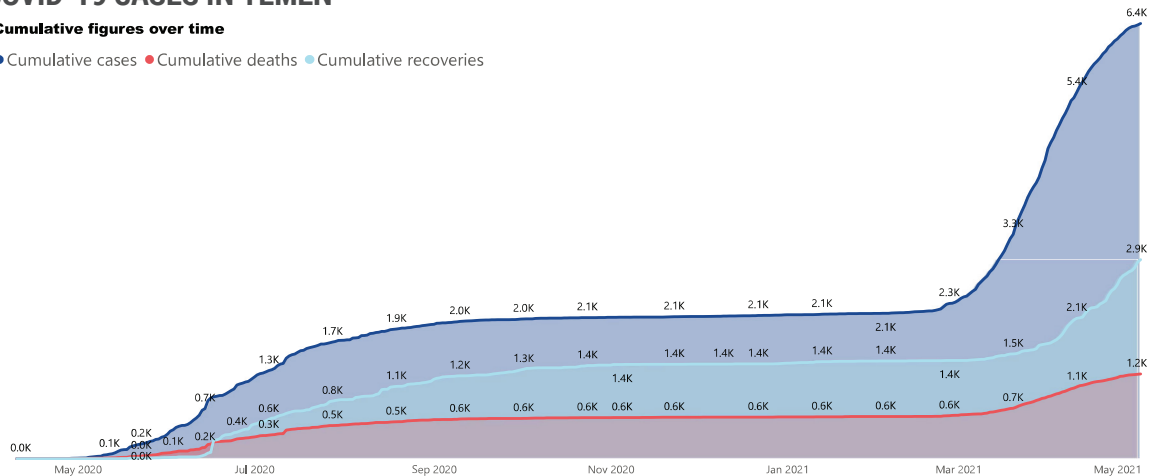
the start of the pandemic and 1 May were recorded since mid-February 2021, and some 50 per cent of the total 1,230 COVID-19 associated deaths were recorded over the same 12 weeks. Of the confirmed cases, most have been in Hadramawt, Ta'iz and

Aden governorates, which have recorded 2,522, 1,248 and 1,035 cases respectively. With testing and reporting inhibited by the ongoing conflict, the actual figures are estimated to be far higher.

COVID-19 CASES IN YEMEN

Cumulative figures over time

● Cumulative cases ● Cumulative deaths ● Cumulative recoveries



Source: WHO

COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR HUMANITARIAN ACCESS ON THE RED SEA COAST

Humanitarian access is essential for the provision of effective and efficient assistance and protection to the people who need it. Some 16.5 million people in need in Yemen live in hard-to-reach areas today, compared to 5 million people two years ago, with bureaucratic obstacles presenting the most pervasive constraint for the safe, sustained and principled delivery of assistance and protection services. Bureaucratic impediments represented over 93 per cent of the 4,484 access incidents reported across 20 governorates in 2020, while more than 75 per cent of the 489 access incidents reported in the first two months of 2021 involved restrictions of movement into and within Yemen. Since early March 2021, mounting challenges have emerged at Yemen's Red Sea coast, as new administrative requirements – such as for exchanges of sensitive information, duplicative programmatic information and comprehensive movement permits – and demands by local authorities have increasingly disrupted the

timely delivery of aid and movement of humanitarian personnel, to the point of completely interrupting it.

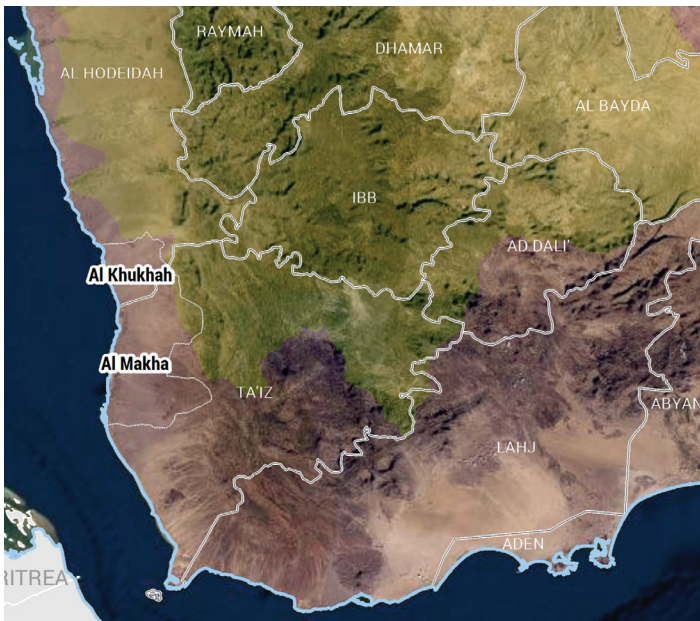
Affecting parts of Ta'iz and Al Hodeidah governorates, the shrinking space to operate here comes after a new unrecognized local authority operating independently of the Government of Yemen issued a directive making movement permits and other bureaucratic requirements mandatory for all humanitarian staff and cargo movements on the Red Sea coast near Al Makha and Al Khukhah. All security checkpoints in the area were instructed to enforce the new requirements. Since this was implemented, UN agencies as well as international and national NGOs working in the Red Sea coast area have reported 33 access incidents as of 4 April, with partners estimating that these incidents have obstructed humanitarian assistance for at least 475,000 people to date – some 76 per cent of the around 622,000 people living on the west coast targeted with

some form of humanitarian assistance in 2021.

To resolve this issue and enable unfettered access to people in need once again, humanitarian partners and OCHA have engaged with authorities at the local, national and international levels. Through this collective action, the humanitarian community has been successful in securing pauses in the movement restrictions, to enable people to receive the assistance they need while negotiations for a permanent

solution continue. At the end of March, the requirement to comply with these directives was waived for the first week of April; this was later extended to last until mid-May so that humanitarian cargo and services can continue to reach people in need without hindrance throughout the month of *Ramadan*.

Efforts are ongoing to permanently end the blockage of humanitarian movements in these coastal areas of Ta'iz and Al Hodeidah, as OCHA and humanitarian partners persist in seeking a permanent reversal of the constrictive directives imposed by the new local authority. As emphasized by the USG/ERC Mark Lowcock in his briefing to the UN Security Council on 15 April, “[These new regulations] were issued independently, without Government approval, and they brought aid delivery in the area to a near standstill. They have now been suspended for *Ramadan*, which is a good start, but we hope to see them reversed altogether.” For the sake of the more than half a million people relying on aid in this area, humanitarian partners are working through all available avenues to make this hope a reality.



Aid agencies continue to engage with authorities to ensure unfettered access to people in need in the coastal areas of Ta'iz and Al Hodeidah. Source: OCHA

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