

HUMANITARIAN UPDATE

Health workers at the COVID-19 quarantine centre in Aljomhori Hospital in Aden check the oxygen supply, November 2020. © Ayman Fouad/YPN for OCHA.

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Emergency Relief Coordinator reiterates that Yemen is being starved while the Security Council echoes calls for action

At an event in New York on 10 December, "Averting Famine in Yemen", the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), Mr. Mark Lowcock, reiterated his assertion, first made in a briefing to the Security Council in November 2020, that Yemenis are being starved, "It's the war that's pushing Yemen towards famine. That's how we got to this point. The economy is collapsing... And donors are offering much less help this year. Not western European or American donors but other key donors. And so, what we've got now is the result of decisions taken by powerful people in Yemen and other countries. And that's what I meant when I said that Yemen was being starved. Those same powerful people could just as easily choose not to starve Yemen."

Mr. Lowcock drew attention to how famine was averted in Yemen at the end of 2018 and start of 2019, when the world took action, "Humanitarian funding increased sharply in 2019, enabling aid agencies to save millions more lives. Yemen's partners injected foreign exchange into the economy, which helped keep food and other commodities affordable for people.

And, of course, we had the Stockholm Agreement." The ERC pointed to the very different situation in 2020, with violence increasing, economic support having dried up, and funding for the aid operation having plummeted. "Agencies this year received only about half as much money as last year. That's why we've cut the number of people receiving food aid. And we've closed clinics. And we've closed water stations. So, it's unsurprising when we say that the results confirm that famine-like conditions are back in Yemen. Yemen is again being starved."

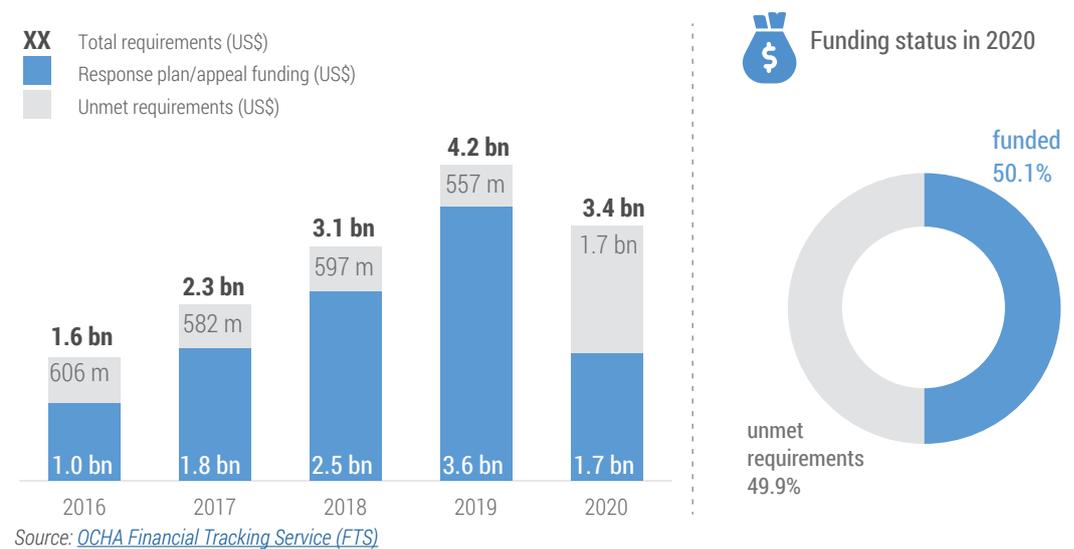
The ERC stated that ultimately, solving the crisis in Yemen will require a political solution and that dependable support for Yemen's battered economy would also be needed. In the meantime, he indicated that millions of people need humanitarian assistance to survive. As the year closes, only 50 per cent of the US\$3.38 billion needed for the humanitarian response in Yemen has been received.

Three days later, on 13 December, the Security Council took up the cause and called on all international

donors, including those in the region, to step up urgently and save lives by disbursing outstanding pledges and making early and generous contributions in 2021 to prevent UN programme closures and famine in Yemen. Security Council members expressed alarm at the recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) assessment, indicating that the number of people living in famine-like conditions in Yemen, currently 16,500, is expected to triple to 47,000 by June 2021 even if current levels of assistance are maintained. The assessment shows that 13.5 million people are already at risk of starvation and facing acute food insecurity, and this could rise to

at least 16 million – over half the population – by June 2021. Security Council members highlighted how conflict and economic collapse are key drivers of the famine risk in Yemen and urged partners to consider all possible measures to strengthen the economy, including further injections of foreign exchange to the Central Bank. The statement also appealed to the parties to the conflict to keep to their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law and for continued donor support to improve humanitarian access to prevent enormous loss of life.

Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan funding 2016 - 2020



Senior UN officials condemn attack on Aden airport, which caused multiple civilian casualties, as new government arrived in Yemen

An attack on Aden airport on 30 December, as members of the newly formed cabinet returned to Yemen, caused multiple civilian deaths and injuries. At least 16 people were killed and 98 others were injured in missile attacks on the airport. Three staff from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were among the dead. The injured included three more ICRC staff, and nine women, two foreign nationals, eight media staff and four children. Government officials, security and military leaders and soldiers were also injured. Work is ongoing to confirm the number of civilian casualties caused by the attack. An explosion was also reported close to the Mashiq Palace, where cabinet members were taken following the incident at the airport.

The [UN Secretary-General](#), António Guterres; [Emergency Relief Coordinator \(ERC\)](#), Mark Lowcock; and [UN Special Envoy to Yemen](#), Martin Griffiths, all condemned the attack, extended condolences to the families of those who died and wished a speedy recovery to the injured. The Secretary-General reaffirmed, “the steadfast commitment of the United Nations to support efforts to resume a Yemeni-led and Yemeni-owned political process to reach an inclusive, negotiated settlement to the conflict.” The ERC indicated that, “This tragic event is an urgent reminder that all parties in the conflict must respect their obligations under International Humanitarian Law”; while the Special Envoy stated that, “This unacceptable act

of violence is a tragic reminder of the importance of bringing Yemen urgently back on the path towards peace.” ICRC expressed profound sadness at the casualties among its staff, “The Yemeni people have endured a terrible amount of suffering over the last five years. A day like this adds even more grief both for the Red Cross family and for the Yemeni families who had loved ones killed or injured in this explosion.”

There were more attacks in Al Hudaydah and Taizz in December, pushing up the number of civilian casualties in the two governorates. The Humanitarian Coordinator a.i., Mr. Laurent Bukera, condemned an attack on the Thabet Industrial Complex in Al Hudaydah on 3 December that killed 6 workers and injured 10 others. “The parties to

the conflict should stop indiscriminate attacks on civilians which are in clear violation of international humanitarian law,” said Mr. Bukera. “Instead, they should be focusing on saving millions of Yemenis from looming famine.” On 12 December, artillery shelling hit a sports centre in Taizz City, killing a father and son and injuring two other boys. “Children continue to pay the highest price in this conflict, and far too often they are paying with their lives,” said Mr. Philippe Duamelle, Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen a.i. “This is one more shocking breach of international humanitarian law,” said Mr. Duamelle. “Once again, we implore the parties to the conflict to abide by their obligations and stop killing and injuring civilians.”

UN Secretary-General calls for more to be done to end the devastating conflict in Yemen on the anniversary of the Stockholm Agreement

In a press release marking the second anniversary of the Stockholm agreement on 13 December 2020, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, called for more to be done to end the devastating war in Yemen.

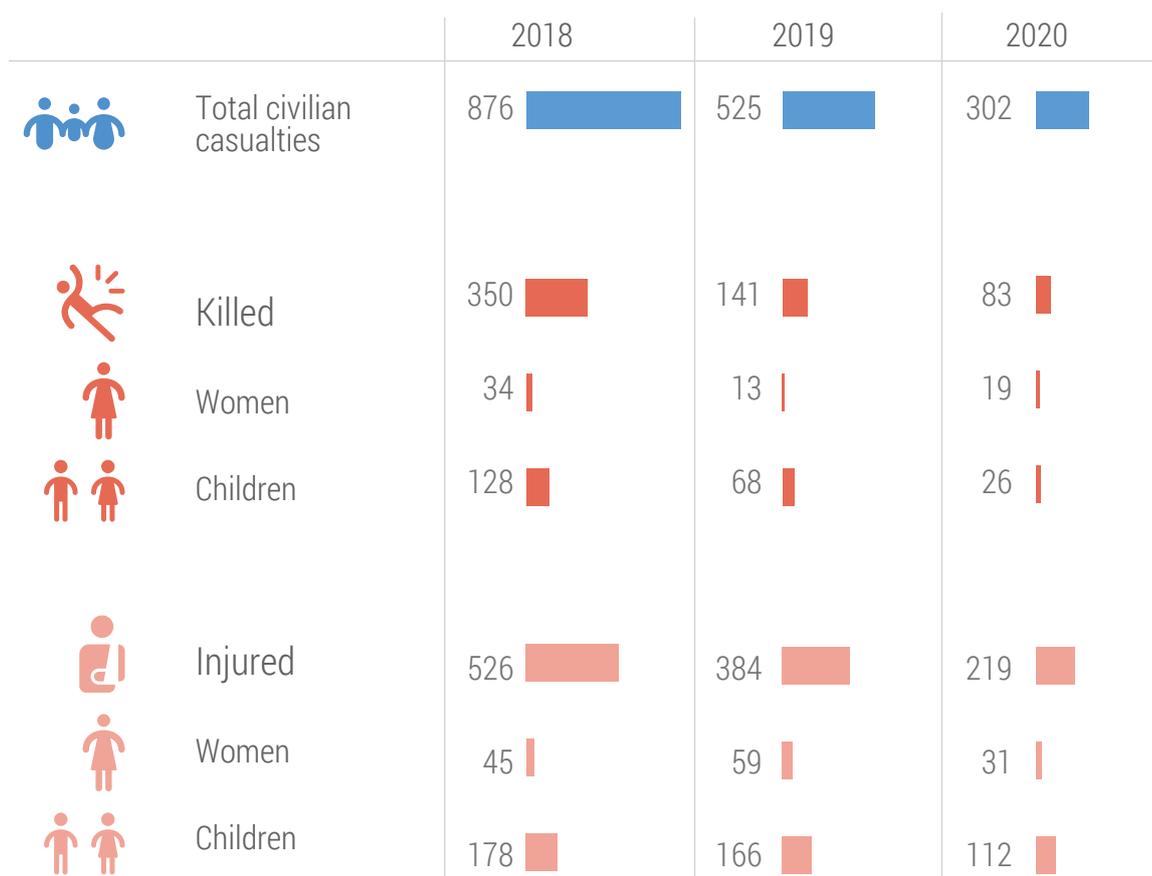
“The Stockholm Agreement helped to avert a catastrophic military escalation at the time, thereby safeguarding the continued although limited functioning of the Red Sea ports and the entry of commercial goods and key humanitarian assistance, on which millions of Yemenis depend to survive. The preservation of this lifeline is even more vital now as pockets of famine-like conditions have returned in Yemen and millions are facing severe, growing food insecurity, in particular against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. I call on all Member States to step up their financial support for United Nations relief operations, and to help address the severe economic crisis in the country.”

Mr. Guterres urged the parties to the conflict to fulfil the commitments they signed up to in the Stockholm Agreement, including through the full and unconditional participation in the Redeployment Coordination Committee and other joint mechanisms and implementation of the ceasefire on the ground in Al Hudaydah. The Secretary-General indicated that it was only through dialogue that the parties would be able to agree on a nationwide ceasefire, and economic and humanitarian confidence-building measures to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people, and the resumption of an inclusive political process to reach a comprehensive negotiated settlement to end the conflict.

The Stockholm Agreement had three main components: a ceasefire in Al Hudaydah City and the ports of Al Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Issa, an agreement on activating a prisoner exchange agreement, and a statement of understanding on Taizz. The Agreement took effect on 18 December 2018 and was endorsed by the UN Security Council under resolution 2451 (2018) on 21 December 2018. In the year prior to the Agreement, fighting displaced hundreds of thousands of people in Al Hudaydah, the price of food skyrocketed, and more than two-thirds of the country was threatened with acute levels of food insecurity without humanitarian assistance – about 90 per cent of Yemen’s commercial imports and 70 per cent of its humanitarian assistance arrived through Al Hudaydah’s ports.

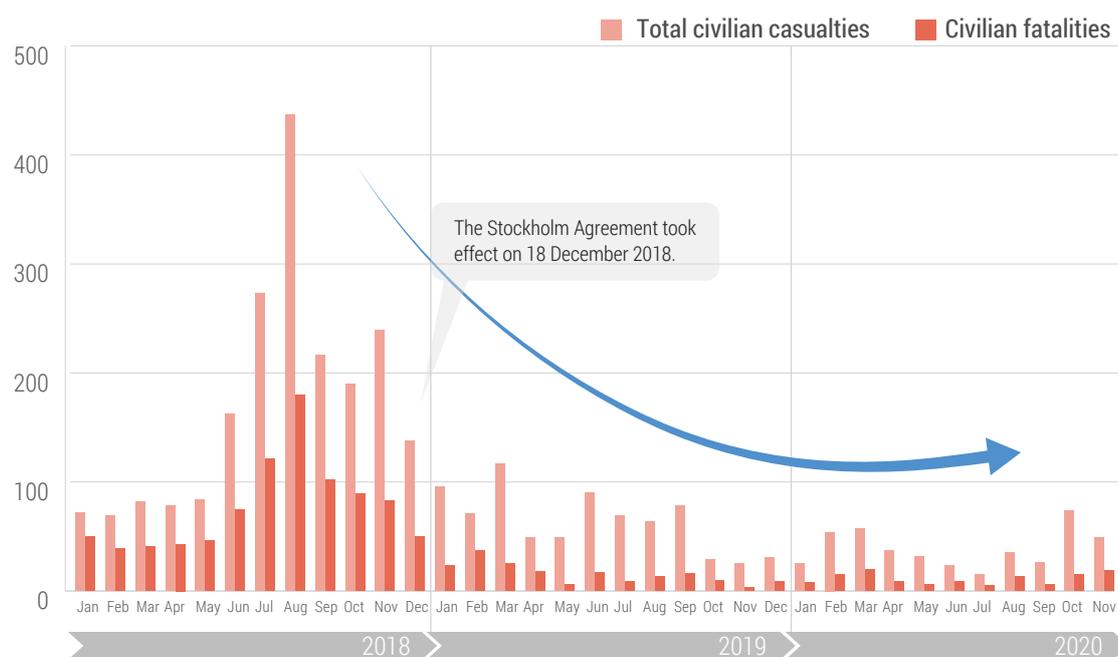
On the humanitarian file, there have been frequent violations of the ceasefire, but food and fuel has continued to arrive through the Al Hudaydah ports over the past two years, and thousands of displaced people were able to return to Al Hudaydah City. While attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure continue, civilian casualties have substantially decreased. Access issues make it difficult to confirm the exact number of civilian casualties in Yemen, but verified figures indicate that the number of civilians killed in Al Hudaydah Governorate decreased from 350 in 2018 to 83 in 2020, while the total number of civilians injured reduced from 526 to 219. Over the same period, the number of children killed fell from 128 to 26 and the number injured fell from 178 to 112. Other sources, including the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project, suggest that the number of civilian casualties was higher but still show a fall in numbers following the Stockholm Agreement.

Verified civilian casualties in Al Hudaydah Governorate 2018 - 2020



Source: The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Civilian casualties recorded in Al Hudaydah Governorate by the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project 2018 - 2020



Source: [Civilian Impact Monitoring Project \(CIMP\)](#)

COVID-19 amplifies underlying vulnerabilities in Yemen

Health partners remain concerned that there has been significant under-reporting of COVID-19 in Yemen – at the end of December 2,101 cases and 611 deaths had been reported – and that the official epi-curve underestimates COVID-19 infections. Though the extent of COVID-19 in Yemen remains unknown, research has highlighted the potential socio-economic impact of the virus, which has added to the country's existing multiple challenges, including conflict, economic collapse, hunger, disease, and displacement. The FAO-WFP early warning analysis of acute food insecurity hotspots of October 2020, for example, highlighted how COVID-19 restrictions had compounded the major drivers of food insecurity in Yemen – the ongoing economic crisis and the prolonged conflict – mainly because of the impact on work opportunities, incomes and remittances.

A recent study by the Cash Consortium in Yemen (CCY) draws similar conclusions, indicating that COVID-19 has amplified underlying vulnerabilities in Yemen. The research, undertaken in August when COVID-19 restrictions had been eased across the country, involved surveys with 571 households in 9 governorates (Aden, Al Dhale'e, Al Hudaydah, Amran, Hajjah, Lahj, Marib, Sana'a City, and Taizz) spanning areas controlled by the de facto authorities (DFA) in the north of the country and areas controlled by the internationally recognized government (IRG) in the south.

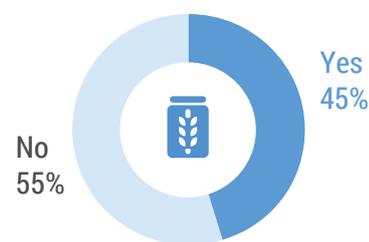
The study shows that the living conditions and economic status of the households surveyed had deteriorated since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and while the worsening situation cannot be attributed solely to COVID-19, it is likely to be a significant contributing factor with respondents reporting changes across a range of variables. The study indicates that the pandemic has had an adverse impact on households' living situation, employment, income, and remittances from abroad – the largest source of foreign currency in Yemen. Nearly half of respondents stated that their family breadwinner had lost their job, and almost half of them assessed their income loss as high or medium. The average monthly income reported by respondents even before the pandemic (YER68,545 – about \$114 – between December 2019 and March 2020) was already lower than the monthly Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB - YER101,000 in northern governorates and YER117,000 and in southern governorates), yet around a third of respondents reported a decrease in income since the start of the pandemic, at the same level as the decrease in remittances from abroad. A quarter of the families surveyed indicated that they had moved since the start of the pandemic or consider themselves at risk of eviction. Of the restrictions imposed by the authorities in response to COVID-19, respondents identified the curfew, being unable to send children to school, and movement restrictions as those that had affected them the most.

Cash Consortium in Yemen findings among a sample of vulnerable households in August 2020

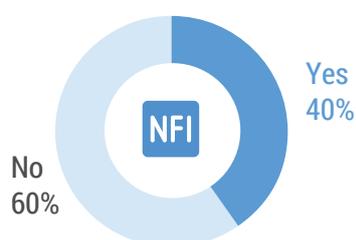
Lost a source of income since March 2020



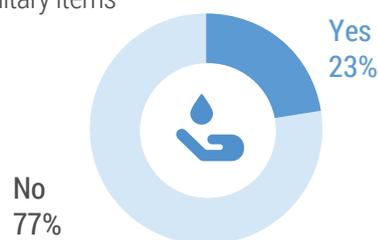
Households with enough food



Households with enough basic household items



Households with enough hygiene/sanitary items



Source: Cash Consortium in Yemen (CCY)

Economically vulnerable households have limited coping mechanisms to deal with the effects of the pandemic. According to the study, the majority reported having no savings and those who did thought they would not last for more than a month. Households were resorting to negative coping strategies, including taking on significantly more debt – often reported as an increase in debt of 50 per cent – and almost 75 per cent of households reported having no savings and being in debt, making them extremely vulnerable. While displaced households were mostly worse off across different indicators, experiences as a result of the impact of COVID-19 and ability to cope did not differ dramatically.

The study highlights that basic needs that are key to containing the spread of COVID-19 frequently

go unmet. Households identified food, cash, medical assistance, and water as priority needs and most households lacked sufficient hygiene items, including soap and disinfectant. While respondents seemed to have continued access to markets and indicated that most goods are still available, prices were perceived as significantly higher than before. The survey also indicated a demand for a more comprehensive information package with practical information about COVID-19.

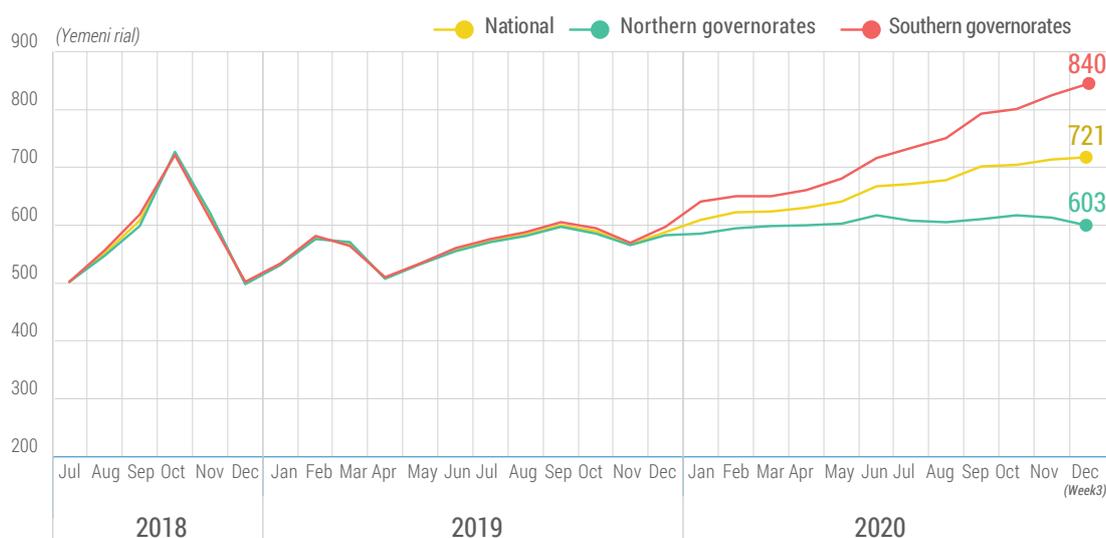
Based on the study, CCY concludes that humanitarian actors and donors need to continue monitoring, supporting, and coordinating immediate cash transfers, which should ideally be integrated with other longer-term types of assistance to help communities cope with the harmful effects of COVID-19.

Rial reaches all-time low in southern governorates, compounding threats to food security, before rallying by the year-end

In October and November 2020, the value of the Yemeni rial declined sharply in southern governorates reaching an all-time low of YER920/US\$ on 9 December. The value of the rial began to recover in mid-December following the formation of a new government in the south under the framework of the Riyadh Agreement, regaining 40 per cent of its value. Following approval by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) of a \$94.7 million

withdrawal from the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) on 21 December, the rial appreciated further and was exchanging at YER625/US\$ by 28 December. However, the rial's recovery remains fragile, subject to economic and political shocks and fluctuations. The value of the rial slid to YER695/US\$ following the attack on Aden airport on 30 December as members of the new government were arriving in Aden.

Value of the Yemeni rial against the US dollar since July 2018



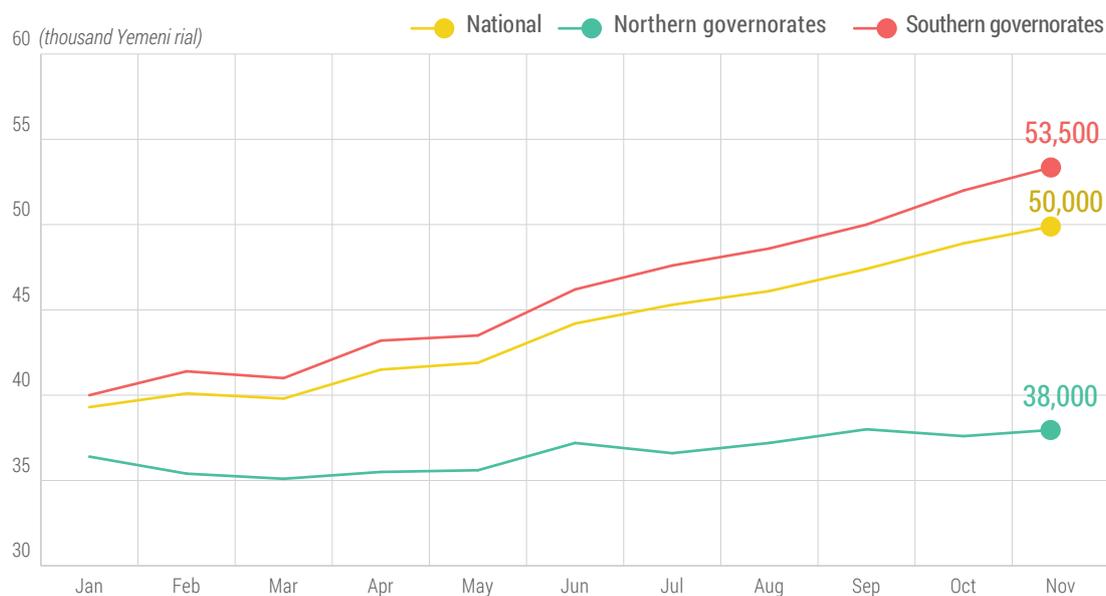
Source: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

All four main sources of foreign currency in Yemen shrank in 2020, affecting the exchange rate, inflation, and the price of food and other commodities. Foreign currency is vital to the Yemeni economy as the country imports around 90 per cent of food and fuel requirements. COVID-19 led to a fall in remittances from Yemenis working abroad, the largest source of foreign currency, especially from Gulf states. Data collected by the Cash Consortium of Yemen (CCY) indicates that while remittances may have recovered modestly in recent months, they are still significantly below pre-COVID levels; 65 per cent of exchange shops surveyed by CCY in November 2020 reported that remittances had not returned to pre-COVID levels. The situation was compounded by a drop in the global demand for fuel derivatives caused by the pandemic, which led to a sharp fall in Yemeni fuel exports, eroding the internationally recognized government's (IRG) foreign currency reserves. Withdrawals from the \$2.2 billion Saudi cash deposit to the CBY in Aden, which has since March 2018 helped importers buy staple commodities at subsidized exchange rates, were put on hold between April and August, and again between August and December. The KSA approved the withdrawal of \$94.7 million from the deposit on 21 December, which helped stabilize the exchange rate. However, the Saudi cash deposit is almost exhausted, which means that the CBY cannot cover funds for imports of basic commodities in foreign currency without a new cash deposit from KSA or other international donors. Finally, there was a huge drop in foreign aid to Yemen in 2020 – from \$4.06 billion in 2019 to \$1.92 billion in 2021 – a decrease of 54 per cent.

The depreciation of the rial and inflation were key factors in driving up food prices in 2020, especially in southern governorates. The price of food doubled between 2015 and 2019 and prices continued to rise throughout 2020. The national average price of sugar in November 2020 was 46 per cent higher than in November 2019, while the cost of wheat grains was 28 per cent higher, wheat flour was 25 per cent higher and cooking oil was 23 per cent higher. Other factors have contributed to increased food prices. These include competition between the parties to control import financing; the conflict has increased transport and logistics costs at each stage of the food supply chain, and COVID-19 has also affected global supply chains and prices. The rising price of fuel and fuel shortages – caused by the inability of the IRG to pay international energy suppliers due to diminishing foreign exchange reserves – have disrupted the provision of public services, including electricity and water, and driven up the price of food and other commodities in southern governorates.

In November, the national monthly average cost of the Minimum/Survival Food Basket (MFB) had increased by 2 per cent compared with October, and by 16.2 per cent compared with January 2020. However, the cost of the MFB in southern governorates was 35 per cent higher than in northern governorates and the cost of the MFB in Socotra, where the highest increase was recorded in the south, was almost double that in Sana'a in the north, YER63,250 compared with YER32,050.

Minimum Food Basket (MFB) prices in 2020



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Fuel shortages continue at gas stations across northern governorates

A shortage of fuel supplies at gas stations in northern governorates continued to be reported throughout December, though the situation varied by governorate. The Yemen Petroleum Company's (YPC) emergency plan introduced at the end of November remained in effect, limiting the number of fuel stations that could open, opening hours, and the quantity and frequency at which fuel could be purchased. Queues formed at fuel stations in some governorates during the month. Any impact on the humanitarian situation is as yet unclear.

Under the Emergency Plan in Sana'a City, there were 46 fuel stations open in the first week of December, 16 in the second week, and at one point in the third week of the month, only 3 fuel stations were open. Long queues formed at fuel stations during the month. After a fuel vessel transporting 29,475 metric tons (MT) of petrol was reported to have arrived at Al Hudaydah port on 24 December, the number of fuel stations operating in Sana'a City rose to 41, and 40 litres of petrol could be purchased for cars every 5 days, though queues for fuel persisted. The price of fuel on the unofficial market fluctuated between YER8,000 (about \$13.33) and YER10,000 (about \$16.66) for 20 litres of petrol during the month, compared with the official price of YER5,900 (about \$9.83).

By mid-December, few official gas stations were operating across the Ibb hub area, the informal market had expanded and prices increased to YER10,000 for 20 litres in Ibb and Taizz governorates. By the end of the month, more fuel

stations had been permitted to open and vehicles could be refilled with 30 litres of petrol every 5 days but, as in Sana'a City, queuing for fuel continued. In Al Hudaydah, all fuel stations were closed by mid-month and only a few stations remained open in Hajjah and Al Mahweet. However, by the month's end, some fuel stations had re-opened, there was no queuing at petrol stations and fuel was available and easy to obtain. In general, the fuel crisis has had less impact in Sa'ada. Fuel has remained available through official fuel stations throughout the month with larger supplies available on the informal market, where prices fluctuated – at mid-month, fuel cost YER7,500 (about \$12.5) for 20 litres in Sa'ada and Al Jawf. By the end of the month, fuel stations were operating and the YPC was providing further supplies when needed.

In terms of fuel imports to northern governorates, from mid-October, there was an increase in the number of fuel vessels allowed to dock at Al Hudaydah port and, according to the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) 17 vessels discharged a total of 353,454 MT in fuel derivatives in October and November 2020 compared with 22 vessels that discharged 403,898 MT in fuel derivatives over the same period last year. However, the number of vessels discharging fuel derivatives at Al Hudaydah port fell in December 2020, when 4 vessels discharged 75,904 MT of fuel derivatives, in contrast with 9 vessels discharging 248,265 MT discharged in December 2019.

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