Yemen | Food Security and Price Monitoring

15 August - 14 September 2020

Highlights

- The underlying drivers of food insecurity warn of a severe food security crisis in Yemen. Key underlying assumptions of the IPC 2020 prediction (July-December) for the 133 districts in areas under control of the Internationally Recognised Government of Yemen (IRG) most likely scenario have been overpassed. This includes the assumed continued scale of humanitarian operations and replenishment of foreign currency reserves. Two additional assumptions, the depreciation of the USD/YER exchange rate to reach YER 1,000/USD 1 and displacement in conflict areas are close to being reached. Therefore, IPC figures of food insecure people risk being underestimated and rendering a review.

- Conflict has further escalated in Ma’rib and Al Bayda governorates leading to over 4,800 newly displaced families to Ma’rib city and other areas of Ma’rib governorate between mid-August and 24 September alone. With the implementation of the Riyadh agreement not yet in effect and a reduced level of humanitarian funding, the threat of famine facing the Yemeni people is resurfacing stronger than in the past two years since the adoption of the UN Security Council resolution 2417.

- The accelerating depreciation of the Yemeni rial in areas under has reached unprecedented levels, i.e. YER 841/USD 1 by 21 September. Consequences for the capacity and costs of food and fuel imports are dire and have contributed significantly to inflationary trends of food prices in 2020. A renewal of the USD 2 billion Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) deposit to replenish foreign currency reserves, that in 2018 helped the rial recover within a few months, has yet to materialise.

- Since the beginning of 2020 and until mid of September, the cost of the Minimum Food Basket (MFb) crossed the 2018 crisis-level benchmark by 23 percent. For households who could barely afford the MFb at the start of the year, the 38 percent cost increase in IRG areas means that a household of seven people would share the same food that originally only four and a half members shared. It is likely that inferior diets and poor food consumption will rise also triggered by reduced income levels.

- The fuel crisis, which erupted in the second week of June has continued to limit the availability of both petrol and diesel on official markets throughout July and August. With price increases for petrol of more than 70 percent and diesel between 52 percent in IRG and 67 percent in areas under Sana’a-based authorities (July to mid-September), transport of essential goods including food and water as well as access to income opportunities are becoming more constrained.

- The proportion of households with inadequate food consumption remained on average at 39 percent during July and August. Poor food consumption surpassed the IPC threshold of 20 percent of the population in four governorates: Al Jawf, Raymah, Al Dali’ and Al Baydah, driven by the combination of reduced assistance in the northern governorates, the decrease in remittances, increased unemployment and conflict in Ad Dali’ and Al Jawf.

- Receiving only half assistance since April 2020 in areas under control of the Sana’a-based authorities, peoples’ resilience capital is diminishing; the value of the reduced food coping strategy index in Raymah, Al Jawf and Al Baydah has crossed the three of 19 points. 46 percent of households apply food-based coping strategies every day of the week (compared to 36 percent in areas under IRG). With continued stress on vulnerable households, a further deterioration of acute food insecurity is concerning.

### Exchange Rate

Since the division of the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) in Aden and the CBY in Sana’a, the country has been suffering from detached and contradicting monetary policies. In effect, two currencies are in place and the divergence between them further increased to more than 200 Yemeni rial during the second week of September. This is reflected on the discount rates applied to financial transfers between the south and north of Yemen, which had already reached 30-35 percent.

**Table 1: Percent change in average prices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity/Item</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>September Weekly Prices</th>
<th>Price Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15-21 Aug</td>
<td>23-31 Aug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>YER/Kg</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>YER/Kg</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>442</td>
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<tr>
<td>Red Beans</td>
<td>YER/Kg</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diesel</td>
<td>YER/Litre</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrol</td>
<td>YER/Litre</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas under Sana’a-based authorities**</td>
<td>YER/Litre</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Exchange Rate (USD/YER)

The exchange rate is rapidly depreciating in Aden since mid of August

**Fig 1: Exchange Rate (USD/YER)**

*Data source: WFP market data collection, percent change in prices reported for 8-14 September 2020, compared to the equivalent week in previous months. Alert for price change: +15 percent for Y/Y, +10 percent for 6M, +7.5 percent for Q/Q, +3.8 percent for m/m. Prices of petrol and diesel take into account black market rates, as both petrol and diesel were not available in many of the fuel stations in areas under Sana’a-based authorities areas since mid of June 2020.*


Prepared by: WFP Yemen CO, VAM unit | 10 October 2020
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The rial rapidly depreciated to unprecedented levels in areas under the control of the Internationally Recognised Government of Yemen (IRG). It averaged YER 803 during W2 September and reached levels never seen before at YER 844/USD 1 by the third week of September, 29 percent less end-2019 values. The accelerating depreciation is worrying; while the rial had lost 21 percent of its value in almost eight months, it lost an additional ten percent in only five weeks from mid-August and until the third week of September. This led the CBY of Aden to impose additional controls on exchange offices and banks to curb rapid depreciation. The most pronounced of these controls is enforcing fuel traders and suppliers to process their payments through CBY. Meanwhile the Exchange Association in Aden issued a circular which warned against dealing with 26 money exchange companies in Yemen that were fuelling market speculations with their operations. The CBY of Aden also banned any transactions through local financial networks as a step towards establishing a unified financial network that will operate under the direct supervision of the CBY. Surprisingly, the rial briefly strengthened to YER 780/USD 1 on 27 September before returning to YER 814/USD 1 in early October.

The risk of further depreciation during coming weeks remains high due to unpredictable developments in the main sources of foreign reserves, which are nearly depleted in the CBY of Aden. While the IPC most likely scenario assumed timely replenishment of reserves, indications of a renewed KSA deposit remain unclear. Speculations of further rial depreciation remain, with expectations that it will eventually cross YER 1,000 YER/USD 1. IPC figures of food insecure people in the south risk being underestimated and rendering a review should the exchange rate in areas under IRG continue to depreciate beyond YER 1,000/USD 1 and the deposit remain un-replenished.

Meanwhile, the rial remains stable in areas under Sana’a-based authorities, averaging YER 602/USD 1 during the second of September.

Food and Fuel Supply

The fuel crisis, which erupted in the second week of June has continued to affect both petrol and diesel markets throughout July and August. However, the availability of fuel slightly improved towards mid-August through unofficial market supply, although it has since worsened. UN Verificiation and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM) data show a marked decline in the volume of fuel imports discharged through the Al Hodeidah and Saleef Ports in June against the cleared volume. In July, however, the discharged volume increased to nearly 133,000 mt (see Figure 2), which accounts for only half of the minimum monthly needs. Another approximately 131,000 mt were discharged between 29 July and 16 September (see Figure 3).

The Sana’a Petroleum Company indicated that available reserves reached critically low levels during July and warned of a humanitarian crisis if the necessary reserves were not replenished stating that 250 million litres of petroleum and diesel were needed to end the current crisis and stabilize the fuel market. Similar warnings were issued by the Sana’a based Ministry of Transportation in August, highlighting that available stocks may not be sufficient to cover the operational needs of Saleef and Al Hodeidah ports. The Red Sea Ports Corporation highlighted that as of 8 September, 19 commercial vessels carrying 485,456 mt of fuel and gas were being held pending clearance from the Evacuation and Humanitarian Operations Cell (EHOC), with a total detention period of 1,432 days since UNVIM inspection and clearance.

Price Developments - Diesel and Petrol

Following price peaks in October 2019, both fuel and diesel prices decreased significantly until May 2020, also driven by relaxing international oil prices. However, with an intermittent price peak in July, diesel prices in areas in Sana’a-based authorities have risen sharply in the first half of September while petrol prices also increased (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). In general, diesel has become 67 percent more expensive since May in northern governorates compared to 52 percent in southern governorates, while petrol prices are up by 73 or 72 percent respectively.

However, with the recurring sharp price increases and the resulting volatility, transport of essential goods including food and water as well as access to income opportunities and markets are becoming more constrained.

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1 Source of data: https://vimye.org/opsnapall
2 Reflects average daily exchange rate for areas under IRG on 21 September from WFP daily exchange rate monitoring system.
3 The reasons for the existing gap between the exchange rates in areas under IRG and Sana’a-based authorities were covered in previous issues of the Food Security and Price Monitoring bulletin.
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Average petrol prices in areas controlled by IRG and Sana’a based authorities

Fig 4: Prices of Petrol* (YER/L)

Average diesel prices in areas controlled by IRG and Sana’a based authorities

Fig 5: Prices of Diesel* (YER/L)

Availability of Food Commodities

Key food commodities were generally available in markets until mid-August. Exceptions were the continued shortages of red beans in Socotra, Al Mahra and Shabwa governorates in mid-August in addition to shortages of wheat flour in Socotra. Data from the UNVIM shows that the volume of monthly food imports discharged at the ports of Al Hodeidah and Saleef during July reached 355,334 mt.¹

Fig 6: Commercial food imports - Red Sea ports (UNVIM data)

This is the second highest total volume of monthly food imports since May 2019. Overall, the total volume of food imported and discharged through Hodeidah and Saleef ports during January-July 2020 amounted to 1.94 million mt (including food imported by agencies), 128,664 mt or six percent lower than in the same period in 2019. It is worth to note that in 2020, no construction material and other cargo than food and fuel were discharged at the Red Sea ports.

Food Prices

The accelerating depreciation of the Yemeni rial in areas under IRG contributed significantly to inflationary trends of food prices in 2020. Since the beginning of 2020 and until mid of September, the cost of the MFB increased by 38 percent in areas under IRG, almost four times the increase compared to areas under the Sana’a-based authorities. The absence of solid market controls resulted in varying inflation rates across governorates in the south. While the cost of the MFB increased since the beginning of 2020 by almost 60 percent in Abyan, in Ma’rib it increased by only 22 percent during the same period. The cost increase in IRG areas of 38 percent in 2020 theoretically means that a household of seven people would share the food that originally only four and a half household members shared.

In mid-September, the cost of the MFB in areas under IRG increased by 7 percent, compared to mid-August. On the other hand, the cost of the MFB was rather static in areas under Sana’a-based authorities. The vast and cumulative increase in food prices during 2020 is indeed alarming; prices of vegetable oil, sugar and red beans increased in those areas since the start of 2020 by 54, 46 and 43 percent respectively; furthermore, wheat flour, the key staple food commodity, increased by 33 percent. This price development for wheat flour in the IRG controlled areas is even more worrying because it occurred in only three months (July-September) and wheat flour contributes 60 percent to the cost of the basket. These steady increases affect each household.

Marked inflation in the cost of the MFB had already crossed the 2018 crisis level benchmark by 23 percent to reach YER 6,755/person/month, a significant increase from prices during the IPC analysis period for the southern governorates. In mid-September, the cost of the MFB was highest in Socotra (YER 7,739) and Al Mahara (7,124). The rather unique nature, geography and climate in Socotra collectively affect food availability and prices in this governorate.

Fig 8: Average Weekly Prices of Wheat Flour (YER/Kg)
Prices in IRG areas increased by 33 percent since beginning of 2020

Fig 9: Average weekly prices of vegetable oil (YER/Litre)
Prices kept high level in IRG areas after 54 percent increase in 2020

Fig 10: Average weekly prices of sugar (YER/Kg)
Price increase slows down in IRG areas after 46 percent rise in 2020

Fig 11: Average weekly prices of red beans (YER/Kg)
Prices in IRG areas are 36 percent above those under Sana’a-based authorities mid-September 2020
The cost of the MFB is likely to continue increasing in September due to further depreciation in the rial and high fuel prices.

Regarding international prices of key food commodities, the overall FAO food price index reached a six-month high during August 2020, driven by the 5.9 percent increase in the vegetable oil index, the 6.7 percent increase in the sugar index, in addition to a 1.9 percent increase in prices of cereals.

**Food Security – August 2020**

**Overall status of household access to food**

Against the increase in food prices, deterioration in incomes and livelihoods, rising conflict and the reduction in humanitarian assistance, **more households were unable to consume their minimum food needs during June-August 2020**, compared to the beginning of 2020. Household food consumption measured by the WFP proxy indicator “Food Consumption Score-FCS” indicates an increase in the proportion of households with inadequate food consumption, from 29 percent in May and 36 percent in June to 39 percent in July and August. In areas under Sana’a-based authorities, seven governorates experienced an increase in adequate food consumption during August to reach as high as 56 percent in Raymah. Also, households with severe deprivation in food consumption, “poor FCG”, increased from 10 percent in January to 13.9 percent in July and slightly reduced to 13.1 percent in August. The prevalence of poor food consumption has stabilized or slightly improved in August compared to July. This is because of the seasonal increase in consumption during Eid Al-Adha as well as payment of a full-month salary to all civil servants, military and security forces in areas under IRG at the end of July, and payment of half month salaries to all public workers in the north.

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95.8 percent of “Assisted HHs” are assisted by WFP.

7 The status of household access to food is measured using the Food Consumption Score as a simple proxy indicator, where the population with low frequency/quality of food consumption is referred to as “poor” food consumption group (FCG), those borderline consumption as “borderline” FCG and the rest “acceptable” FCG.

8 Data from mVAM, covering 1-23 June 2020.

For a large proportion of the population, humanitarian assistance and intra-household social support are the principal means to acquire food. Forty-four percent of households rely on either humanitarian food assistance or borrowings to meet their food needs; this ratio increases to 56 percent amongst households with poor FCG (see figure 16 below).

The worsening food security status in Yemen is an outcome of the various interacting factors above. However, household responses indicate that unemployment and reduced wages are the key elements constraining household access to food, followed by high health expenses and increasing food prices, all explaining the heightened risk of an escalating humanitarian crisis during 2020 along with the rapidly developing economic crisis and the reduced assistance.

The impact of locusts and floods on household access to food however appear to be mild as they were hardly reported by households as key drivers of poor access to food.

In order to cope with the above-mentioned challenges, 43 percent of households adopted food-based coping strategies every day of the week during August. Food-based coping strategies include a reduction in the number of meals or portions of food consumed, borrowing food, relying on cheaper foods and adults reducing their consumption for children to eat. Overall, the reliance of households on food-based coping strategies is captured by the proxy indicator “reduced coping strategies index - rCSI”, which increased to 20 points in August, crossing the IPC critical threshold of 19 points.

The income-poor are consuming cheaper calories from cereals, fats and sugars to avoid hunger, rather than macro and micro-nutrient rich foods, and thus continue to have notably low dietary diversity. During August, 63 percent of households with poor FCG consumed four or less food groups, compared to 18 percent amongst households with borderline food consumption and two percent amongst households with acceptable food consumption.
Food Security and Price Monitoring

Fig 17: Percent of HHs Adopting Food Consumption-based Coping Strategies, August 2020
More than 40 percent of households rely on food-based coping strategies every single day

The notable improvement seen during May reflects seasonal effect of increased charity and community support during Ramadhan. The impact of reduced assistance was evident starting June, following the phase-out of the Ramadhan effect.

Fig 18: Average Weekly Frequency of Food Groups Consumed per Household, August 2020
4 million people had a poor diet in August and consumed pulses, fruits, proteins, dairy, vegetables and fruits less than once a week

Impact in reduced levels of humanitarian food assistance in areas under the Sana’a based authorities

Given the prevailing context and deterioration in economic conditions, humanitarian food assistance remains key to food security in Yemen; without which the prevalence of inadequate food consumption amongst assisted households would be very high. Receiving only half assistance since April 2020 in areas under control of the Sana-based authorities, peoples’ resilience capital is diminishing. The number of WFP-assisted households with inadequate food consumption increased from 28 percent in May to 43 percent in both July and August. It presents a significant shift following the reduction in levels of assistance provided with the impact being seen. Assistance is currently provided every two months instead of monthly as a result of a reduced funding outlook amidst operational challenges. WFP is advocating to maintain the level of assistance where it is to support households with a predictable minimum assistance ration to serve as a safety net, from where emergency response can be triggered should early signs of deterioration be captured.

Fig 19: Dietary Diversity of HHs with Poor Food Consumption, by Assistance during August 2020
Similar dietary diversity of HHs in poor FCG, regardless of assistance

Fig 20: Impact of reduced assistance on WFP beneficiaries continues in areas under Sana’a-based authorities, a step-up in inadequate food consumption to 43 percent since June

Impact in reduced levels of humanitarian food assistance in areas under the Sana’a based authorities

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Areas under Sana’a-based authorities

Areas under IRG

1. The notable improvement seen during May reflects seasonal effect of increased charity and community support during Ramadhan. The impact of reduced assistance was evident starting June, following the phase-out of the Ramadhan effect.
Furthermore, the rCSI in areas under Sana’a-based authorities is also high. It reached a score of 21 points in August compared to 17 points in areas under IRG. In areas under Sana’a-based authorities, 46 percent of households apply food-based coping strategies every day of the week, compared to 36 percent in areas under IRG.

Governorates with high-intensity conflict

In addition to more than 40 active frontlines, conflict has further escalated in Ma’rib and Al Bayda governorates leading to 4,847 newly displaced families to Ma’rib city and other areas of Ma’rib governorate between mid-August and 24 September alone. With the implementation of the Riyadh agreement not yet in effect and the humanitarian funding challenges, the threat of famine facing the Yemeni population is resurfacing stronger than in the past two years since the adoption of the UN Security Council resolution 2417 as poor food consumption is more prevalent in governorates with high intensity of conflict, such as Ma’rib, Al Baydah, Al Jawf and Abyan. In August, nearly 19 percent of interviewed households in these governorates consumed poorly compared to 12 percent in May 2020; similarly, inadequate food consumption reached 48 percent during August, up from 36 percent in May.

Alert for four governorates with extremely high proportion of deprived populations since May 2020

Severe deprivation in food consumption averaged 13 percent across Yemen. However, in four governorates it had surpassed 20 percent of the population: Al Jawf, Raymah, Al Dali’ and Al Baydah. This is driven by the combination of reduced assistance in the northern governorates, the decrease in remittances, increased unemployment and conflict in Al Dali and Al Jawf. In contrast to Raymah with its very high prevalence of poor food consumption throughout 2020, both Al Jawf and Ad Dalī’ had a steep deterioration since May 2020 (see figure 21), mainly attributed to conflict. The seriousness of the situation is also illustrated by the fact that more than half of the population in these four governorates had inadequate food consumption during August compared to 39 percent on average for all governorates. At the same time, the rCSI was as high as 23 in Al Jawf and 21 in Al Bayda.

While close monitoring remains essential for all four governorates, a fresh focus of humanitarian assistance might be required for Raymah.
Impact of COVID-19 on Households

Map 2: Households with incomes affected by COVID-19 (unpaid/paid less) - August 2020

Map 3: Households facing challenges in accessing markets - August 2020

Map 4: Households unable to reach their jobs since start of pandemic - August 2020

Map 5: Households facing challenges accessing medical care - August 2020