

1. YEMEN

Unrelenting conflict and risk of famine



KEY FACTS

Population: **29.8 million**

24.3 million people in need of humanitarian aid (80% of population)

16.1 million people facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 3+) in 2021 (54% of population)

53.2% child stunting due to malnutrition (second highest in world)

20.5 million people lack access to clean water and sanitation

3.6 million people internally displaced

50% of health facilities are not fully functional

190th (of 195 countries) for capability to prevent and mitigate epidemics

63% increase in assaults and abuse targeting women since the conflict began

167th (of 167 countries) for women's equality

168th (of 181 countries) for resilience to climate change

5/5 score for severity of access constraints

48% of funding received for 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan

Above: Abdul Ghafar sits with his son Abdullah in Mosuk Village, southern Yemen. When Abdullah, 3, became sick his father took him to the IRC mobile health clinic where he received treatment for cholera and malnutrition.

PROBABILITY

10 HUMAN THREAT

5 NATURAL THREAT

IMPACT

8 CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE

8 EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION

Yemen tops the IRC's annual Emergency Watchlist for the third year in a row: a consequence of over five years of major armed conflict and severe underfunding that has pushed the world's largest humanitarian crisis to new lows in 2020 and left the humanitarian response on the brink of collapse.

The conflict remains intense even after five years since the escalation of the war in 2015 following the Saudi and Emirati-led Coalition's intervention to support the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) against the Ansar Allah movement. Conflict between forces loyal to the IRG and Ansar Allah escalated in Jawf and Marib governorates throughout 2020. There is no sign of a political resolution to the crisis despite localized agreements over the past two years. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic and a steep drop in humanitarian funding puts the country at risk of massive further deterioration. Food insecurity is rising and 47,000 Yemenis are projected to face the worst ("catastrophe", IPC 5) levels of food insecurity in 2021, underlining the risk of famine.

"Yemen faces a triple threat from conflict, hunger, and a collapsing international response. COVID-19 is further exacerbating the world's largest humanitarian crisis, crippling global supply chains and worsening Yemen's food insecurity. At the end of 2020, malnutrition for children under 5 was the highest ever recorded, yet, in the face of an unprecedented threat, the world has turned its back on Yemen. Never before have Yemenis faced so little support from the international community – or so many simultaneous challenges."

- Abeer Fowzi
Deputy Nutrition Coordinator, IRC Yemen



HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2021

- ▶ **Stalled peace efforts and competition for control of Yemen's oil fields put the country at risk of new rounds of escalation and even greater humanitarian needs.** The number of frontlines rose from 33 at the beginning of 2020 to 47 by October ([OCHA](#)). Marib governorate to the east of Sanaa, host to one million IDPs, saw an escalation towards the end of 2020 as Ansar Allah forces advanced towards IRG-controlled oil-producing areas ([OCHA](#)). The December 2018 Stockholm agreement between IRG and Ansar Allah remains largely unobserved, though there has been some progress on prisoner exchanges. Yemen's ever-deepening economic crisis and fuel shortages mean that Marib oil fields may be a particular focus for conflict in 2021. At least 90,000 people were displaced in Marib during 2020 and these numbers will rise if fighting spreads to more densely populated areas of the governorate in 2021 ([IOM](#)). Persistent tensions in southern Yemen between the IRG and fighters aligned with the Southern Transitional Council also spark sporadic clashes which threaten the lives and livelihoods of Yemenis.
- ▶ **Yemenis tell the IRC that they are more concerned about hunger than COVID-19, though the pandemic is increasing the risk of famine by deepening Yemen's economic crisis.** The war has destroyed many Yemenis' livelihoods at home and abroad, leaving over 80% of the population reliant on humanitarian assistance ([OCHA](#)). The Yemeni Rial has lost 25% of its value in 2020 alone while rising fuel prices and shortages drive up the cost of food and restrict humanitarian activities ([WFP](#)). Over 16 million Yemenis are expected to face crisis or worse (IPC 3+) levels of food insecurity in 2021, with 47,000 at the highest "catastrophe" (IPC 5) level ([IPC Info](#)). With COVID-19 further limiting economic activity, WFP has warned that many Yemenis could face famine in 2021 ([WFP](#)). Moreover, women and girls are likely to be particularly affected. 1 million pregnant women are malnourished and 120,000 women and girls are at risk of violence ([UNFPA](#)).
- ▶ **Parties to the conflict in Yemen often disregard their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access.** The [Yemen Data Project](#) finds that 40% of deaths in airstrikes since 2015 have occurred in residential areas. This means that Yemenis are more likely to be killed in their homes than any other location. Hospitals, homes, bridges and other critical civilian infrastructure are regularly damaged or destroyed by fighting; only half of Yemen's medical facilities are still fully functional ([OCHA](#)). The conflict's wider impacts are even more deadly and have long-term implications for the country's recovery; UNDP research finds the majority of deaths in the conflict are due to indirect impacts of conflict - and decisions by parties to it - particularly reduced access to health services, food and infrastructure ([UNDP](#)).
- ▶ **The humanitarian response faces unprecedented threats from underfunding, on top of one of the world's most challenging operating environments.** OCHA estimated that 19.1 million people in need were in hard-to-reach areas by August 2020 due to insecurity and/or bureaucratic constraints ([OCHA](#)). Bureaucratic measures - imposed by all parties to the conflict - threaten the humanitarian response, such as slow approval processes for life-saving programming. Moreover, humanitarian funding dropped significantly in 2020, forcing 31 out of 41 major UN programs to reduce or close down entirely ([OCHA](#)) and the WFP to halve food rations for 8.5 million people ([WFP](#)). As a result, [3 million](#) fewer Yemenis were receiving aid each month by late 2020 compared to the response at the beginning of the year. There are profound concerns about whether there will be enough money to pay for critical humanitarian action in 2021.
- ▶ **An avoidable disaster at the Safer oil tanker could cause catastrophic disruptions to economic activity and humanitarian action.** The Safer tanker is currently in use as an export terminal near Yemen's largest port, Hodeidah. Years of poor maintenance mean it could cause an oil spill four times larger than the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster, resulting in long-term disruption to Hodeidah port and the fishing industry, as well as incalculable environmental damage ([ACAPS](#)). Hodeidah port handles about 70% of Yemen's commercial and humanitarian imports so a leak could cause food prices in Yemen to double and fuel prices to triple ([UNEP](#)).

THE IRC IN YEMEN

The IRC has been working in Yemen since 2012. The IRC is one of the largest non-governmental health actors in Yemen and supports primary health facilities, emergency obstetric and newborn care centers and hundreds of health workers. The IRC's programming also includes therapeutic feeding programs, cash transfers and livelihood programs, services for women and children who have experienced violence, water infrastructure rehabilitation and education for out of school children.. In response to COVID-19, the IRC is supporting the establishment of a COVID-19 isolation unit. Learn more about the [IRC's Yemen response](#).

