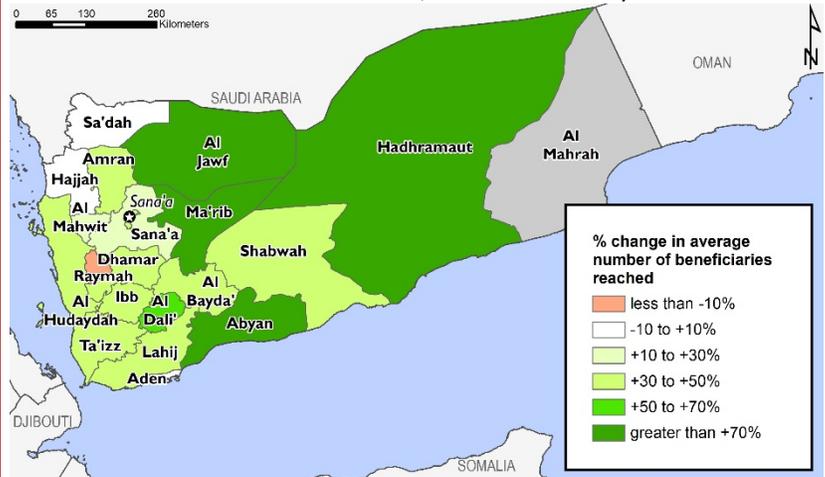


Food access to deteriorate following anticipated reductions in humanitarian assistance

The World Food Programme’s recent decision to suspend humanitarian food assistance in Sana’a City, and unrelated, temporary reductions in the size of food assistance distributions expected nationwide as a result of temporary funding gaps, are raising high concerns that many Yemenis will begin to face increasing food consumption gaps in the coming months. WFP indicates its decision to suspend assistance in Sana’a City is based on difficulty receiving permission to assess and reach worst-affected populations in Sana’a City and to implement a bio-registration system for beneficiaries to improve accountability of operations. Humanitarian access to and independent assessment of worst-affected populations nationwide must be established, and the resumption of assistance to previous levels is critically needed to prevent a further deterioration of outcomes.

Figure 1. Percentage change in average number of monthly WFP emergency food and cash assistance beneficiaries, mid-2018 vs. early 2019



*note – WFP reported no beneficiaries in Al Mahrah in mid-2018 but has since scaled-up

Data source: WFP

For more than two years, Yemen has faced the largest food security emergency in the world and continues to face a risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) in a worst-case scenario. Large-scale humanitarian assistance, implemented primarily by WFP, has helped to protect food consumption and livelihoods among millions of Yemenis and has helped to prevent a large-scale deterioration of food security outcomes. In 2018, WFP assistance reached an average of seven million people each month before increasing to reach approximately 10 million people, or about two-thirds of those in need, per month in early 2019 (Figure 1) with, on average, nearly a full ration.

Since May, WFP has warned that governing authorities in northern Yemen are denying access to some populations most in need of assistance, preventing an independent retargeting campaign, and are hindering the implementation of a bio-registration system for beneficiaries. These warnings culminated with WFP’s decision in June 2019 to suspend humanitarian food assistance in Sana’a City, which targets approximately 850,000 beneficiaries per month. Meanwhile, WFP has continued and scaled up its nutrition programming in Sana’a City, including community based-management of acute malnutrition, prevention of moderate acute malnutrition for children 6-23 months of age, blanket supplementary food distributions, and therapeutic and supplementary feeding for pregnant and lactating women. Separately and unrelatedly, WFP also announced in early July that, due to funding shortages, it will temporarily cut ration sizes of emergency food and cash assistance for two months.

In Sana’a City, the suspension of assistance will likely result in some households facing larger food consumption gaps. Because assistance may not have been reaching those most in need, the effects of suspending assistance may not be as severe as would typically be expected. However, indications that assistance was not reaching those most in need raises high concern that worst-affected households continue to face considerable difficulty accessing food and may be exhausting typical means of coping. In addition, the reductions in ration sizes expected nationwide over the coming two months will likely result in some populations facing larger consumption gaps.

The absence of assistance in Sana’a City, alongside the temporary halving of ration sizes to the more than 10 million beneficiaries nationwide, will significantly reduce the amount of wheat supplied by assistance in Yemen. However, the overwhelming majority of Yemen’s wheat is supplied via commercial imports, which has the capacity to fulfill supply needs. Due to many households’ weak purchasing power and strong market linkages between Sana’a City and neighboring governorates, the price effects of reductions

in assistance are likely to be limited. Nonetheless, the fact that millions of Yemenis lack purchasing power raises concerns that household food consumption will deteriorate further.

Preliminary evidence suggests that food security may have improved slightly in the months leading up to the recent reduction in assistance deliveries, possibly due to the humanitarian scale-up since 2018. At present, WFP expects to resume full rations of assistance (except in Sana'a City) in the near-term with new funding commitments, meaning any impacts are likely to be temporary. In Sana'a City, which is presently facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) acute food insecurity, the prolonged absence of assistance among beneficiary populations in need will likely lead to a more intense reliance on irreversible coping strategies and a deterioration of nutritional status. These populations, alongside worst-affected populations who have been unable to access assistance over the past year, are at greatest risk of acute malnutrition or more severe food security outcomes. Continued nutritional programming could stabilize some nutritional outcomes, possibly masking a more severe food insecurity situation. Although Sana'a City will likely remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) at the area level, FEWS NET expects an increased number of people are already facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4).

The World Food Programme's recent decision to suspend humanitarian food assistance in Sana'a City, alongside the temporary pipeline break, raises concern that additional people will begin to face increasing food consumption gaps or rely on irreversible coping strategies to access food. Humanitarian access to and independent assessment of worst-affected populations nationwide must be established, and the resumption of assistance is critically needed to prevent a further deterioration of outcomes.