

*Sustained imports needed to reduce the risk of Famine in 2018*

Yemen faces a risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) given the potential for the recent blockade to resume and drastically limit crucial imports over a prolonged period. A blockade starting in November 2017 severely restricted imports of essential goods, and the temporary re-opening of key ports is set to expire in mid-February. Prior to the blockade, Yemen already faced the largest food security emergency in the world, with more than 15 million people facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) acute food insecurity and in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

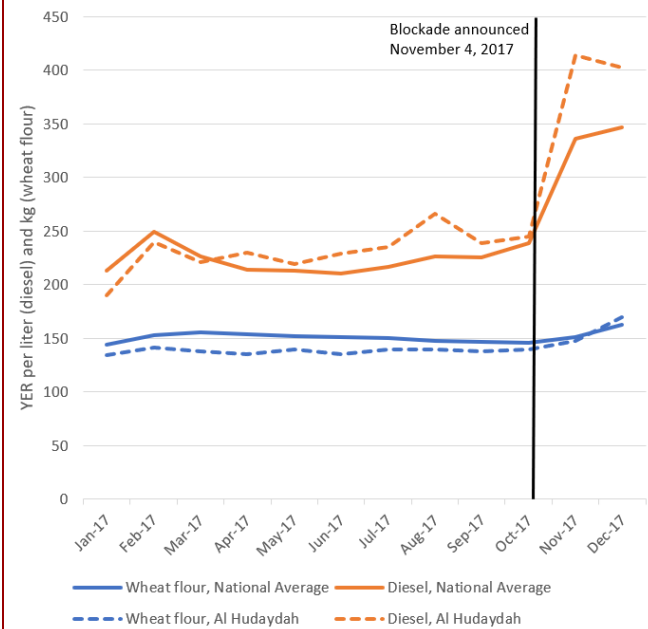
In early November, maritime port access into Yemen was severely restricted by a blockade of all of Yemen’s ports. Most restrictions on commercial imports into Al Hudaydah and Salif, two key entry points for imports of food and fuel, were lifted for a period of 30 days starting in mid-December. On January 19, an extension to keep these ports open for another 30 days was announced, which is set to expire in mid-February. Sustained throughput of essential commodities through Al Hudaydah and Salif is critical for ensuring sufficient supply of essential commodities, such as fuel, staple foods, water, and medical supplies, as the potential for alternative ports and overland trade to fulfill national needs is extremely low.

During the more than one-month closure of Yemen’s Red Sea ports in November, fuel imports declined and prices increased sharply, while wheat flour prices increased modestly (Figure 1) and remained above pre-conflict levels. In early February 2018, WFP reported that stocks of staple cereals (including wheat grain, wheat flour, and rice) in Yemen totaled approximately 784,000 MT, 30 percent lower than levels reported in the [Food Security and Agriculture Cluster’s Food Availability Brief](#) from November 1, 2017, prior to the blockade. Meanwhile, ongoing depreciation of the Yemeni Rial, despite Saudi Arabia’s announcement that it will inject 2 billion USD into the Central Bank of Yemen in Aden, could make future imports more costly and lead to further price increases.

The status of future imports is not the only driver of concern for extreme levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition in Yemen. Additional factors include increased conflict, significantly reduced economic activity leading to low household income and purchasing power, and the ongoing diphtheria and cholera outbreaks. Even in the absence of additional disruptions, FEWS NET expects large areas of the country to remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3!) as large-scale provision of food assistance to 6-8 million people each month prevents a deterioration to worse levels. However, large populations within these areas will continue to face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes as emergency food assistance likely covers less than half of those in need. Food security for some populations may deteriorate to Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) as they begin to face an extreme lack of food and other basic needs.

The approaching expiration of a 30-day extension to the re-opening of Al Hudaydah and Salif ports remains a concern for driving a further deterioration of the ongoing food security emergency in Yemen. Should the Red Sea ports close for a prolonged period of time, severe constraints on fuel and food availability would accelerate sharp increases in fuel and staple food prices, while the lack of imported medical supplies would jeopardize treatment options for life-threatening illness. In this scenario, high levels of excess mortality would occur due to the lack of food and to disease outbreaks. Famine would likely appear first in areas that are [heavily reliant on maritime imports from Al Hudaydah and Salif for staple food supply](#), those areas with large IDP populations, areas where trade flows are highly constrained by active conflict, and/or areas where levels of acute malnutrition are highest. Sustained imports of essential commodities are needed to reduce the risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) in 2018.

**Figure 1. Wheat flour and diesel prices, prior to and following the blockade of Al Hudaydah and Salif ports**



Source: WFP data