WFP Regional Bureau for the Middle East, North Africa (MENA), Central Asia & Eastern Europe
COVID-19 Situation Report #1
23 - 26 March 2020

Highlights

- As of 31 March, 56,615 COVID-19 cases were confirmed in 15 out of 17 countries in the MENA, Central Asia and Eastern Europe region.
- The United Nations launched on Wednesday 25 March the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) featuring an appeal for USD 2 billion. WFP, as part of the GHRP, calls for USD 350 million to fund vital aviation, shipping, storage transport, and engineering services in areas affected by the pandemic. Out of 64 priority countries within the GHRP, 11 countries (Yemen, Syria, Sudan, Palestine, Libya, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iran) are under the MENA region.
- WFP is currently assessing the full impact of COVID-19 on operations in the region. WFP continues to provide life-saving food assistance to 23 million people in need, including internally displaced persons (IDP) and refugees living in camps with enhanced health protocols.
- To protect assisted people and staff from contracting COVID-19, WFP introduced several adjustments of distribution modalities and risk reduction measures at distribution sites and shops.
- Following widespread school closures, the provision of WFP in-kind school meals was suspended. WFP is working with governments and partners to ensure that schoolchildren and their families continue to receive support that addresses their food and nutritional requirements during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Analysis, assessments and monitoring activities are ongoing, adjusted to address challenges due to restriction of mobility. These drastic measures include school closures, suspending air, sea, and land travel.

People assisted in WFP MENA, Central Asia & Eastern Europe Region
February 2020
23 million

Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP)
Overall:
USD 2 billion
WFP funding needs:
USD 350 million

COVID-19 reported cases - regional overview*
(31 March – Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Positive cases</th>
<th>People recovered</th>
<th>Fatalities</th>
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<td>56,615</td>
<td>14,527</td>
<td>3,080</td>
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*The MENA, Central Asia and Eastern Europe region encompasses 17 countries.

Situation Update

- As of 31 March, 56,615 COVID-19 cases were confirmed in 15 out of 17 countries in the MENA, Central Asia and Eastern Europe region, with Iran emerging as an early epicentre, making up half of those cases. Tajikistan and Yemen reported no cases.
- Governments across the region have been adopting drastic measures to reign in the pandemic's progress. These measures include restriction of movement, reduction in commercial enterprises opening hours, banning public gatherings, closing of schools and mosques, and suspending air, sea, and land travel. The combination of which will have severe economic impacts.
- Access to the most vulnerable, particularly refugees, displaced people and migrants, has been affected across the region. Food distributions in IDP and refugee camps continue, with enhanced health protocols. Movement restrictions affect access to some camps. WFP maximizes its efforts to secure access permits and to ensure it continues to deliver its assistance, while minimizing transmission risks for staff, partners and people who receive assistance and developing contingency plans to cover additional needs, if required.
Impact of COVID-19 on WFP Operations

- The COVID-19 pandemic is unfolding from a global health crisis into an economic emergency, posing serious implications on countries’ food systems and food security. It directly impacts supply and demand, decreases purchasing power and impacts the capacity to produce and distribute food.

- WFP is currently assessing the full impact of COVID-19 on several indices such as food security, economy as well as operational and business continuity across the region to identify necessary adjustments in the transfer modality, monitoring, data collection and analysis, and enhancement of mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (mVam) tools.

- An increase in food prices would significantly affect food security in the region as markets represent the main source of food consumed. Syria, Lebanon and Sudan are of particular concern as they were already in a fragile economic situation before the outbreak.

- The food security status of the most vulnerable segments of the population, including migrants, IDPs, refugees, older persons and persons with disabilities will be affected disproportionally, in countries across the RBC region with limited social safety nets and social protection capacities.

- The pandemic is expected to have a severe impact on gender equality in the region. More women are expected to fall into poverty given existing socioeconomic dynamics and their disproportionate involvement in the informal sector.

- To inform decision-making, WFP – in support of the international community – will provide real-time tracking of changes in the areas of food security, health and trade in vulnerable countries. Data and analysis will be visualized through static and web-based platforms.

WFP Response

Overall Risk Reduction Measures

- WFP is introducing adjustments of distribution modalities to adapt to COVID-19: people receiving assistance are queuing at a distance from one another and have access to hand washing or sanitization facilities; WFP is introducing crowd control measures during distributions and extending the days of distribution to reduce the number of people on any given day.

- WFP is ensuring that staff and implementing partners have access to personal protection equipment while distributing food assistance and recently introduced hygiene items.

- In Jordan, WFP has removed the iris-hood used for biometric verification, to avoid the risk of contamination at the refugee camps.

- Biometrics such as finger printing are temporarily put on hold in Syria and Sudan.

- At retailers where beneficiaries are using e-cards to receive their food, WFP is ensuring that they have access to liquid hand sanitizers at points of service to be used before and/or after using the devices.

Food and Nutrition Assistance

- Given widespread school closures, school meals have been suspended in all countries across the region, except Tajikistan, where no COVID-19 cases have been reported as of 31st March. WFP is working with governments and partners to ensure that schoolchildren continue to receive support. In Libya, WFP and the Ministry of Education (MoE) provided take-home rations to all enrolled students aged 6 to 14 years and their families, covering 30% of daily nutrition needs for five days. WFP in Lebanon has ensured that cash-based transfers (CBT) for school students’ families will continue. In Armenia, WFP is exploring options to implement CBT as well as working with the Government to provide alternatives to students who were assisted under the school meals programme.

- Nutrition programmes have been severely affected across the region. Many cooperating partners have closed or scaled down appointments to avoid overcrowding at distribution points or visits to health clinics. WFP is currently collecting information on the impact on nutrition activities across the region in order to make informed decisions.

- Livelihoods programmes have been severely affected across the region with most activities, closed due to government COVID-19 measures. Activities have been suspended in Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan Libya and Turkey. However, in Iraq and Turkey several livelihood activities with strong online components may restart soon. In Syria, group training has been suspended but bilateral training activities remain running. WFP in Armenia is supporting the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs with assessments and mapping out joint interventions, targeting food security and livelihood needs.

- Cash-based transfers remain largely in place, except for when linked to livelihoods or nutrition activities that have been suspended. Mitigation measures have been put in place by Country Offices such as advancing cash to allow beneficiaries to stock up on essential commodities. Card distributions have been suspended in Lebanon and in Sudan with a total suspension of the collection of biometric data, as a risk reduction measure. Syria CO has responded by waiving the finger-printing verification on distribution and adding soap as a possible item to be included.
Supply Chain

- Supply Chain across the region remains functional, albeit with challenges due to restriction of movement causing delays in production and movement of goods.

- As an immediate action, WFP is focusing on prepositioning food stocks sufficient for three months distribution (Apr-June), as close as possible to the beneficiaries, to minimize the effects of any further movement restrictions, anticipated export bans and other developments that may negatively impact the supply chains globally, regionally and at country levels. Simultaneously, WFP is reviewing the effects of COVID-19 on the commercial supply chains at country levels with focus on fragile markets where WFP operations rely on CBT as assistance transfer modality.

Common Services

- WFP leverages its comparative expertise and its extensive footprint in the field to provide services to humanitarian/health communities and governments which are captured in the Global Humanitarian Response Plan.

- To deliver at full capacity, particularly in countries most vulnerable to pandemic-induced disruptions to supply chains, WFP plans to establish international and regional staging areas. This will facilitate the dispatch of essential cargo on behalf of partners; set up air transport links and contract charter vessels where shipping has been disrupted; and provide passenger air and Medevac services for humanitarian staff.

- The humanitarian community partners, and host governments have so far requested WFP to provide procurement and transportation services for non-food items (NFI), including medical items as well as other logistic services. Support in establishing isolation and medical facilities for the UN has also been requested in certain countries. Through the dissemination of timely guidance to Country Offices, WFP is working to ensure a harmonized approach to service provision across the region.

Business Continuity

- To guarantee corporate business continuity and staff safety, WFP activated Business Continuity Plans (BCP) at the Regional Bureau and across 16 out of 17 Country Offices, with only Tajikistan maintaining normal working arrangement, although with a reduced footprint in the office. The BCP includes the list of essential and business critical staff, telecommuting work and self-isolation guidelines for incoming staff.

Partnerships and Interagency Coordination

- Across the region, WFP is working closely with governments, local authorities and line ministries. WFP is supporting the World Health Organization (WHO) in information management, logistics and planning to the humanitarian and health response. In addition, WFP supports the intersectoral coordination with Humanitarian Coordinators and UN OCHA in HRP countries and with UNHCR/UNDP in 3RP countries.

- In Algeria, WFP has contributed to WHO’s contingency planning along with other UN agencies, as well as providing active participation in the Crisis Management Team and newly created COVID-19 taskforce and interagency efforts in Tindouf refugee camps. Joint inter-agency efforts have taken place in Algiers to update donor partners on continuity of humanitarian assistance provided to the Sahrawi refugees.

- In Syria, efforts have focused on aligning activities with the WHO on the dissemination of hygiene information.

Contacts

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