WFP Regional Bureau for the Middle East, North Africa (MENA), Central Asia & Eastern Europe
COVID-19 Situation Report #2
26 March – 2 April 2020

Highlights

- On 30 March, WFP declared its COVID-19 response as a Level 3 Corporate Emergency.
- WFP continues to assess the full impact of COVID-19 on all operations which support around 32 million people (March estimate) in the region.
- WFP’s priority is to ensure that its life-saving assistance continues by minimizing the potential risks the pandemic is posing on beneficiaries, staff and partners. WFP has been requested to support in new ways such as in Yemen where the organisation was asked to provide support in quarantine facilities.
- Supply chain across the region remains functional, albeit increasing challenges.
- Access to the most vulnerable including refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), camps, and new quarantine facilities continues to be a challenge.
- Social Protection and scaling up urban interventions are key components in short- and long-term response to the COVID-19 in the region.

People assisted in WFP MENA, Central Asia & Eastern Europe Region
March 2020
32 million

<table>
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<th>Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP)</th>
<th>Overall: USD 2 billion</th>
<th>WFP funding needs: USD 350 million</th>
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COVID-19 reported cases - regional overview*
(2nd April – Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University)

| Positive cases | 74,154 |

*The MENA, Central Asia and Eastern Europe region encompasses 17 countries: Algeria, Armenia, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Tajikistan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Yemen

Situation Update

- On 30 March, WFP declared its COVID-19 response as a Level 3 Corporate Emergency which requires the activation of enhanced response management mechanisms, additional flexible and timely funding and additional capacity to support Country Offices (CO).
- As of 2 April, there were over 74,154 officially reported cases of COVID-19 within the region. The largest increase in cases was seen in Libya. The pandemic continues to hamper mobility, strain health systems and put pressures on the economy.
- Accessing the most vulnerable people across the region remains a challenge. Humanitarian actors in countries affected by the Syria Crisis response face access restrictions to refugee camps, due to pandemic measures imposed by governments. Concerns have been raised in managing potential risks in Libya and Yemen where COVID-19 has not seen a scale back of conflict.
- All government and regional authorities have maintained measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 to different degrees. UNHAS operations have temporarily ceased in Yemen due to government measures blocking staff movement in or out of the country.
- Full access is not possible to any country within the region. Commercial aviation routes continue to be severely restricted with a massive reduction in routes and many airports closed for all commercial flights.

Impact of COVID-19 on WFP Operations

- Assessment continues across the region with CO exploring alternative ways to continue monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on food security indicators, food and non-food prices. Twelve out of 17 COs in this region are in the process or in preparations of conducting remote data collection through mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (mVam) tools. In order to better understand the impact of the COVID-19...
19 outbreak and better contextualize challenges and needs, WFP adapted its already established regular remote monitoring procedures in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Libya.

- Potential pandemic-induced disturbances to humanitarian supply could affect operations. WFP in coordination with partners and government authorities are prioritising mitigating the risks on humanitarian assistance.

- WFP is adapting delivery mechanisms and market-based assistance in response to new emerging needs, along with age and gender considerations posed by COVID-19.

- COs across the region have focused on revising their country strategic plans (I/CSP) in order to operationalize part of their COVID-19 response plan. To assist those most impacted by the crisis most effectively, COs are revising their budgetary needs.

WFP Response

Overall Risk Reduction Measures

- WFP continues to roll out risk reduction measures with an expanding number of COs investing in office hygiene items and personal protective equipment (PPE) for partners and front-line workers such as in Yemen, Jordan, Syria, Palestine. Likewise, an increasing number of COs, such as in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, are staggering the transfer of cash to people, to reduce the daily traffic to WFP retail outlets.

Social Protection

- Social Protection and scaling up urban interventions are key components in the short- and long-term response to the COVID-19. Social protection programmes have been introduced or changed in 11 out of the 17 countries in the region (Algeria, Armenia, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tajikistan, Tunisia and Turkey), mainly concerning assistance to vulnerable and at-risk populations, including refugees and children affected by school closures.

- WFP has already seen an increase in requests for technical assistance for social safety net measures largely in complementing government responses through new or scaled up WFP assistance. In Libya, the Ministry of Health requested the WFP-managed Common Feedback Mechanism to serve as information channel on COVID-19 related matters. In Armenia, WFP is participating in a joint-UN exercise to map requests made by the Government.

Food and Nutrition Assistance

- School meals continue to be severely affected, while supporting children’s nutrition needs remains a key priority. Across the region, schools remain closed (except in Tajikistan) with WFP focusing on re-programming of activities for the start of the new school year. In the locations where commodities are prepositioned, they are being turned into take-home-ration. Food rations not yet arrived have been reprogrammed into general food assistance (GFA). In addition, to support the most vulnerable households with children currently out of school, WFP is exploring alternatives to shift to CBT modalities. In Tunisia, as part of an inter-agency group (including UNICEF, the Resident Coordinator’s Office and the World Bank), WFP is leveraging its expertise by providing technical support to the Government on how to adjust social safety nets for the most vulnerable, that have been affected by the closure of schools and can no longer access school meals.

- Nutrition activities continue to be severely impacted. Many cooperating partners’ programmes remain closed or significantly scaled down. WFP is currently working on a regional nutrition programme oversight review and creating a preparedness framework for nutrition responses. In countries such as Algeria, difficulties in collecting data within the Sahrawi camps remain a concern. In Syria, all curative and preventative nutrition programmes are ongoing, however, due to movement restrictions, a decrease in the number of beneficiaries accessing the Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) centers for follow-up appointments has been noted and there has been a temporary halt of mobile clinics.

- Livelihoods and Food for Assets (FFA) programmes have undergone unprecedented adjustments. WFP group activities remain suspended in most countries, except Yemen, while some COs have adjusted activities such as by relaxing conditionalities and transferring entitlements upfront with an understanding that activities will be completed once the situation is back to normal. Activities targeting individuals are continuing while observing the health and safety standards in a limited number of countries. Online tools for consultations, training, orientation and knowledge transfer are being explored where possible. In Turkey, WFP was able to quickly bring its training programme ‘Kitchen of Hope’ online onto a Youtube channel. WFP will support each participant by providing data credit to ensure good-quality internet access required to follow the classes. The training sessions are also
recorded so that participants have access to the platform whenever they have internet. WFP is working with government line ministries and other humanitarian partners across the region to identify those whose livelihoods have been most affected by the crisis and assist where possible.

- **Cash-based transfers (CBT) and vouchers are an increasingly significant component of WFP food assistance in the region and remain feasible and reliable distribution modalities albeit some challenges caused by the pandemic.** Such challenges include price increases in essential commodities such as in pulses, oil, cereal, fruits and vegetables, essential non-food items (NFI) and medical items. This is already a reality in Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine and Egypt where there has been a significant increase in prices for key commodities.

- **WFP has enhanced partnerships to expand assistance to vulnerable communities through innovative technologies.** In Jordan for example, WFP received requests from partners to transfer CBT in camps through WFP’s blockchain technology. Also, in Jordan, a CBT coordination group with UNHCR and UNICEF has been activated and WFP is working with the World Bank to support the National Aid Fund (NAF). To enable beneficiaries to stock enough food as movement is restricted, more countries, including Lebanon and Algeria are transferring two-months’ worth of cash assistance to beneficiaries. Additionally, adjustments are happening in the face of liquidity and supply chain challenges, with Sudan and Egypt opting to change vouchers to cash. Iran has joined Jordan and Syria in expanding the use of food-restrictive vouchers to include hygiene products.

- **Supply chain across the region remains functional albeit facing increasing challenges.** Currently two food consignments have been blocked by export bans. One concerns a shipment of chickpeas to Syria (due to export-ban of pulses) and the second concerns rice deliveries to Algeria from Vietnam. WFP is following up with both cases as well as considering alternatives. Curfew and reduced working hours have also impacted the deliveries and release of commodities. Lead-time for the fortification premix, an important nutritional component in various WFP programmes, has increased from 8 to 12 weeks due to delays in shipping from Europe to the Middle East. This is expected to delay deliveries of High Energy Biscuits (HEB) and date bars to Yemen and Sudan and fortified wheat-flour deliveries to Syria and Yemen.

- **Enhanced sanitary inspections for cargo and trucks are creating delays,** and in Yemen, for example, trucks crossing south to north must observe a 14 days quarantine. Mitigation measures include the Jordan CO reaching out to main importers and food suppliers and Kyrgyzstan is carrying out a rapid assessment to identify key priority actions. In order to pre-position food, countries such as Lebanon identified additional potential warehouses.

### Common Services

- **As outlined in the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP), WFP will provide free-to-user, upstream supply chain services to the international humanitarian/health community.** These services will consist of: 1) strategic consolidation hubs and regional staging areas; 2) passenger, air and sea cargo transport to ensure the predictable and sustained movement of life-saving humanitarian and medical cargo and 3) medical evacuation services in seven regional hubs (including Cairo) for UN, humanitarian and health partners.

- **Country Offices have been receiving service provision requests from governments and partners,** including procurement of medical items (such as Armenia, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Tunisia), in-country transport of medical items and other non-food items (Tajikistan), upstream supply chain services (Tajikistan), and establishment of medical treatment/isolation units (Sudan).

### Business Continuity, Employee Safety, Security & Travel

- **Travel restrictions across the region have severely impacted WFP’s operations from a human resources (HR) perspective.** Various alternative options for Medevac and Rest and Recuperation (R&R) for staff are currently being explored in particularly for several hardship duty countries such as Yemen. Notably, the M5 route that crosses Syria has been cleared by security for use by WFP which is significant as the road is a core transport and supply route. The clearing of the route has reduced travel time between Damascus and Aleppo from nine to four hours.

- **Health and safety of staff remains a key priority.** Medevac options have been secured across the region. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) principals have endorsed a WFP proposal in which MEDEVAC services will be based out of seven regional hubs serving field operations across the globe.
Partnerships and Interagency Coordination

- Partnerships and inter-agency (IA) coordination has increased over the last week as the pandemic continues to spread. Armenia has activated several clusters, with WFP co-leading the Food Security/Food Systems Development and Supply Chain/Logistics sectors, while the Logistics Cluster has been activated in Palestine. In Algeria, WFP is part of the newly established inter-agency COVID-19 taskforce, as well on-going and regular inter-agency efforts mainly in relation to the Sahrawi refugees. In Turkey, the weekly Inter-Agency Emergency Response and Preparedness Working Group continue to provide assistance. In Kyrgyzstan, WFP is coordinating with the Food Security Group on behalf of Development Partners Coordination Council (DPCC) UN Crisis Communications Plan endorsed by UNCT. In Libya, WFP is working with WHO on sharing COVID-19 sensitization materials with beneficiaries at Final Distribution Points and in Yemen, collaboration with WHO consists of running a joint training for logistics service providers. Across the region, WFP is part of the UN Crisis Management Team (CMT).

Contacts

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