



WFP COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN THE REGION

REGIONAL BUREAU FOR MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, CENTRAL ASIA AND EASTERN EUROPE (RBC)

WFP/Syria

KEY MESSAGES

- With the scale and scope of the **COVID-19 pandemic**, the health crisis threatens to become a **hunger pandemic**, pushing more people into severe hunger globally due to its socio-economic impact.
- **In our region, the pandemic is exacerbating pre-existing crises of war, famine, economic collapse, and political unrest.** WFP operates in a diverse group of 17 countries facing various challenges. 43 percent of WFP's corporate budget already is attributed to this region, as needs continue to escalate. The impact of the pandemic could be most acute in conflict-stricken countries, and most vulnerable people continue to be most affected.
- **It is vital that we maintain food assistance, a lifeline to nearly 25 million people in the region who count on us.** In addition, WFP estimates that more than **9 million people could soon be struggling** to feed themselves. In view of the breadth and scale of this unprecedented crisis, WFP stands ready to ramp-up assistance and respond.
- **WFP is focusing our efforts on maintaining food assistance in the region, and rapidly adjusting programmes where needed.** WFP provides **life-saving interventions** through general food assistance or cash-based-transfers (cash or food vouchers); **support to governments'** social protection measures on technical, financial and operational fronts; **increased monitoring capacity** for remote access and real-time information; **vital logistics expertise** that enables humanitarian and health response; and **innovative solutions**, such as deploying mobile, digital, and cashless technologies.
- **The total needs for the region for the next 6-months (July to December) amounts to USD 1.6 billion.** Countries requiring most urgent food assistance following the impact of the pandemic are **Yemen, Syria and Sudan, followed by Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Iraq.**
- **Thank you to all the donors for the unparalleled support to operations in this region.** With strong support from over 30 partners, we continue to reach millions of people across 17 countries.

INCREASED CHALLENGES

With the effect of COVID-19, contracted economies, higher unemployment rates, elevated inflation rates, high food import dependency, and disruptions or delays in global food supply, all threaten households' ability to purchase food – particularly the most vulnerable ones.

The compounding effects is of utmost concern in our already fragile region. The slowdown in business activities will further decrease labor demand – for example, an estimated 80 percent of youth working in the informal sector across MENA are at risk of losing their jobs or income, with limited access to social safety nets. Food price increases have been observed, and most countries in the region are highly depended on food imports, making them vulnerable to trade restrictions and border closures.

- In Syria, the biggest challenge is the crippling economic situation, on top of ongoing conflict. As nationwide food prices continue to increase, salaries are no longer sufficient to cover people's basic needs.
- In Sudan, the already dire food security situation could worsen with the impact of COVID-19, high inflation and sustained increase in food prices. At the on-set of the crisis, Sudan was already recording an annual food inflation rate of 88.5 percent.
- In Yemen, in light of the currency depreciation, depleted reserves, anticipated fuel shortages and loss of livelihoods, WFP is extremely concerned with the likely deterioration in economic and living conditions, threatening 7 million people with increased vulnerabilities and hunger, in addition to the 13 million people already assisted.
- In Lebanon, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the significant economic challenges the country has been facing since late 2019. High price inflation of food and non-food products and services, combined with the loss of income from rising unemployment and salary cuts continues to reduce households' ability to afford adequate and sufficient food.



WHAT WFP IS DOING IN THE REGION



WFP is rapidly adjusting our programme design and deliveries to adapt to the changing environments, for example -

- **Distribution changes:** To reduce the number of beneficiaries at each site at any given time, distributions are being staggered to limit group gatherings, or the frequency of distributions have been increased.
- **School feeding programmes:** Most schools in the region remain closed. In Iran, Iraq, Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan and Yemen, WFP provides take-home rations or cash-based transfers, ensuring that almost 4 million children and their families continue to receive support during school closure.
- **Social protection:** Governments are increasingly setting up or expanding these programmes in response to COVID-19. WFP is providing **technical, financial and operational support** to planning and implementation in Armenia, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia and Turkey.
- **Livelihoods, resilience and climate:** Activities are being adjusted, such as through providing upfront advance payments to participants of Food for Assets (FFA) and Food for Training (FFT) activities to mitigate immediate socio-economic impacts and minimize risks.

WFP is also working with partners to train frontline workers and use every opportunity to disseminate appropriate hygiene messages and information on symptoms to beneficiaries, to raise public awareness and help curb the spread of COVID-19.

With our long-standing expertise in humanitarian logistics, WFP is also leveraging it to enable humanitarian and health response to the frontlines of the pandemic. As part of the updated global Humanitarian Response Plan, WFP's logistics services provide the **backbone for global COVID-19 efforts through a network of hubs, passenger and cargo airlinks and medevac services**. Air passenger services serving regional locations (Baghdad, Cairo, Erbil and Yerevan), as well as a link between the Sharjah (UAE) and Addis Ababa hubs are now available.

INNOVATION WITHIN CONSTRAINTS



- **Monitoring remains critical to understand the scale of needs** in the countries we operate in. Understanding the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is vital in order to plan and carry out the response. Now with face-to-face monitoring reduced, WFP teams have enhanced their remote monitoring capacity, **increasing mobile data collection, with remote monitoring and real-time capability** to track prices and peoples' access to food.
- **In Jordan**, WFP deployed **mobile ATMs** to assist refugees in redeeming their cash assistance. We focus on people with disabilities and those residing in remote areas, to overcome their mobility constraints. We also work with retailers to strengthen home delivery for this group.
- **In Turkey**, WFP is using **digital technologies delivering culinary training** to our beneficiaries via an online platform.
- **In Iraq**, WFP is pioneering **cashless payments**, so people can buy food via their mobile phones.
- The introduction of cash-based transfers (CBT) in both our Libya and Tunisia operations is a major milestone. **In Tunisia**, as part of their COVID-19 response, the new programme aims to provide CBT assistance to families whose children are part of the current school feeding programme.

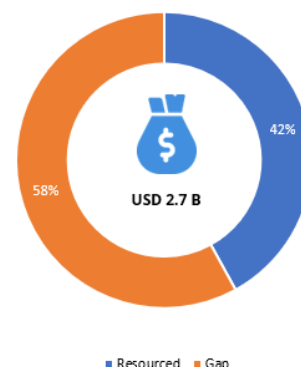
RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

The total requirements for the region for the next 6-months (July to December) amounts to USD 2.7 billion. So far this year, we have achieved a funding level of around 42 percent thanks to support from over 30 partners.

However, there is still a gap in our funding requirement, and the **total need is USD 1.6 billion for the next 6-months**. Countries requiring most urgent food assistance following the impact of the pandemic are Yemen, Syria and Sudan, followed by Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Iraq.

WFP encourages all partners to allow the utmost flexibility of resources, to ensure WFP can provide a dynamic response and prioritize the most urgent needs.

WFP thanks the following partners: Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Egypt, European Commission, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Private Donors, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, UN Funds (CERF, CBPF, other pooled funds), United Kingdom and the United States of America. (in alphabetical order)



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