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2. Remote food security monitoring (mVAM), conducted in July/August 2020 among a sample of 2,000 Syrian and Non-Syrian refugee households among the general refugee population in host communities. The mVAM followed a “rolling panel” approach where a percentage of respondents from the previous month are retained each month to strengthen the robustness of results.

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Drivers of food insecurity
Compared to September 2019

- Decreased income due to loss of informal labour opportunities
- Limited household budget to address competing essential needs (food, secondary healthcare, debt repayment, personal hygiene items)
- Increased food expenditure due to moderate price increases for some staple foods (such as bulgur and lentils)
- Loss of supplemental assistance, including suspension of WFP school-feeding
- WFP
  - 78% of households reported WFP assistance as their primary source of income
- Decreased market access associated with movement restrictions (lock-down, curfew, and quarantine)

In the wake of the pandemic, refugee households residing in camps experienced a deterioration in their food security. Refugees living in Azraq camp have been particularly affected.

In both camps, female-headed households showed disproportionately high losses in food consumption as they have less access to informal labour opportunities and loans than their male counterparts.

Widespread loss of income and assistance as a result of COVID-19 has increased the financial burden of households. For instance, school closure resulted in the suspension of school meals, thus forcing households to adopt harmful coping strategies to meet basic needs.

Qualitative data suggests that households are forced to monetise part of their WFP entitlement to meet essential needs other than food and this comes at the expense of household food security.

Continued movement restrictions and quarantine / isolation measures in the camps and communities will likely push more refugee households into debt and food insecurity.

In September 2020, household food expenditure was on average JOD 9 higher per person than the assistance they received from WFP, financed primarily through debt.
While the impact of COVID-19 on food security was most pronounced in the camps, refugees in host communities remain more food insecure, as shown by more frequent adoption of livelihood coping strategies to address essential needs that are partially provided free of charge in the camps such as shelter, utilities, basic healthcare and education.

WFP’s Food Security Index in July/August 2020 indicates that only 12% of households are food secure. As before the pandemic, female-headed households are more prone to food insecurity as they have limited access to informal labour opportunities and loans, and thus apply more severe coping strategies and show lower food consumption.

Loss of income in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic is the main driver behind deteriorating food security among refugee households in host communities. WFP food assistance serves as a lifeline for many households. However, on average households assisted by WFP still face a food expenditure gap of JOD 4 to 12 per person; depending on the value of the WFP assistance received. Previously, households filled this gap by relying on their own resources (e.g. informal income) and assistance (including WFP’s school-feeding programme).

Now, households are forced to adopt harmful coping strategies and take out loans. Anecdotal data suggests that refugees sometimes use part of the WFP entitlement to meet essential needs other than food, and this comes at the expense of household food security.

COVID-19 has had a particularly harmful impact on children as schools and school meals have been suspended since March. There have been increased incidents of child labour and early marriage.

Food insecurity disproportionally affects:
- Al-Balqa
- Madaba
- Al-Mafraq
- Female-headed households
- Small households (1-3 members)

Food insecurity in numbers

- 21% of households are food insecure⁴
- 67% of households are vulnerable to food insecurity

State of food security

Gradual deterioration in food consumption
Households show insufficient food consumption⁵
- 14% Apr 2018
- 19% Apr 2020
- 20% Aug 2020

Increase in adoption of harmful livelihood coping strategies
Households resort to at least one emergency livelihood coping strategy to meet essential needs
- 21% Apr 2020
- 34% Aug 2020

- 14% of households send children, mostly boys, under the age of 18 to work
- 3% of households marry off children, mostly girls, under the age of 18

Increase in adoption of consumption-based coping strategies

- 59% Aug 2020
- 41% Aug 2020
- 55% Aug 2020

- of household adults limit their food intake for children to eat compared to 30% in 2018
- of households borrow food or rely on help or friends
- of households limit the number of meals which now averages 2 per day

Drivers of food insecurity

- Decreased income due to loss of informal labour opportunities
- Limited household budget to address competing pressing needs (food, healthcare, rent, utilities⁶)
- Increased food expenditure due to moderate price increases for some food items, particularly in the early stages of COVID-19 with food inflation skyrocketing to 5.2% in March 2020
- Increased expenditure on some non-food items (e.g. hygiene items)
- Suspension of WFP school-feeding
- Decreased market access associated with forced movement restrictions and lack of financial resources (for transportation and purchase of groceries)

Conclusion

While the impact of COVID-19 on food security was most pronounced in the camps, refugees in host communities remain more food insecure, as shown by more frequent adoption of livelihood coping strategies to address essential needs that are partially provided free of charge in the camps such as shelter, utilities, basic healthcare and education.

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