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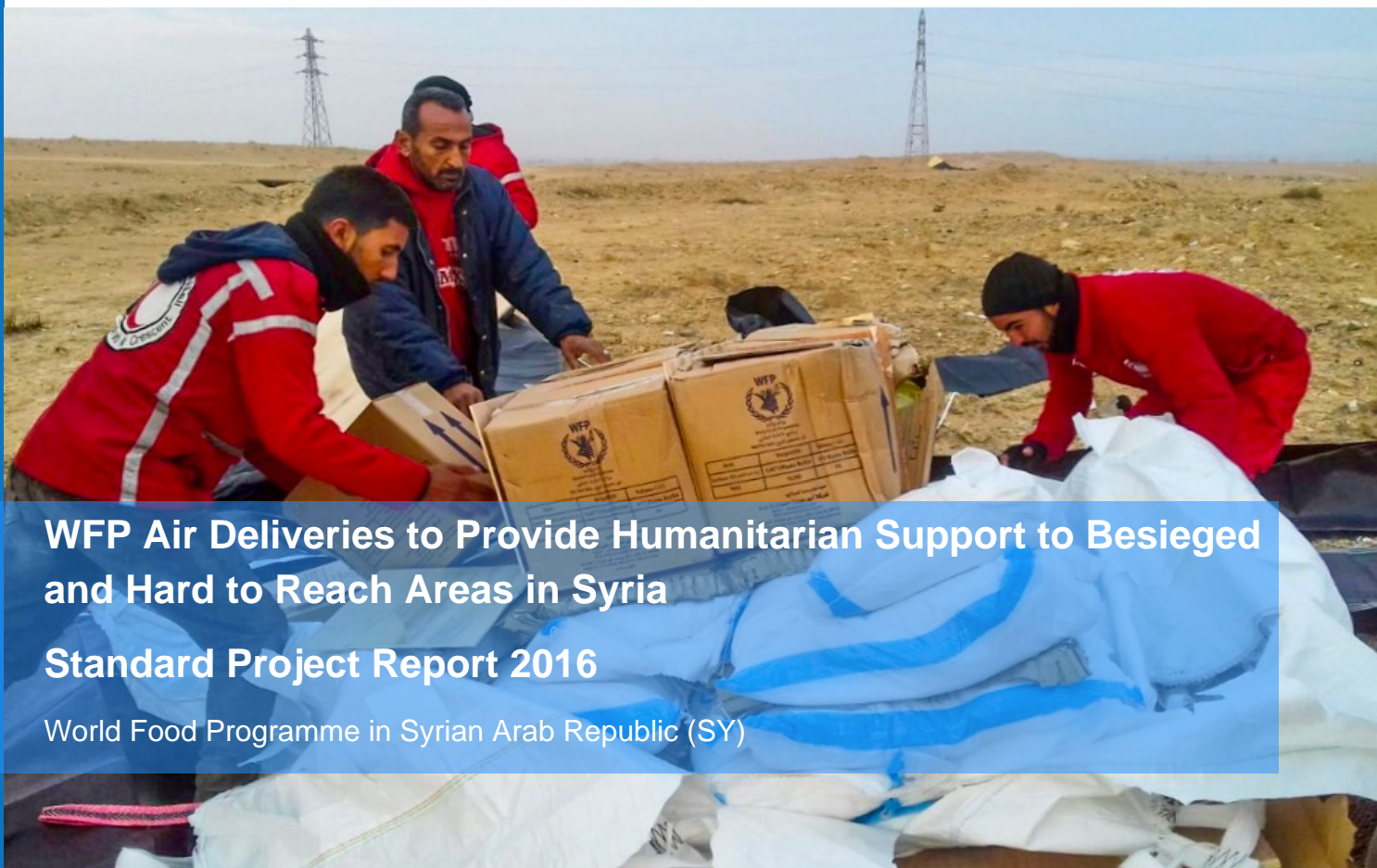
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SPR Reading Guidance



WFP Air Deliveries to Provide Humanitarian Support to Besieged and Hard to Reach Areas in Syria
Standard Project Report 2016

World Food Programme in Syrian Arab Republic (SY)

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Project Objectives

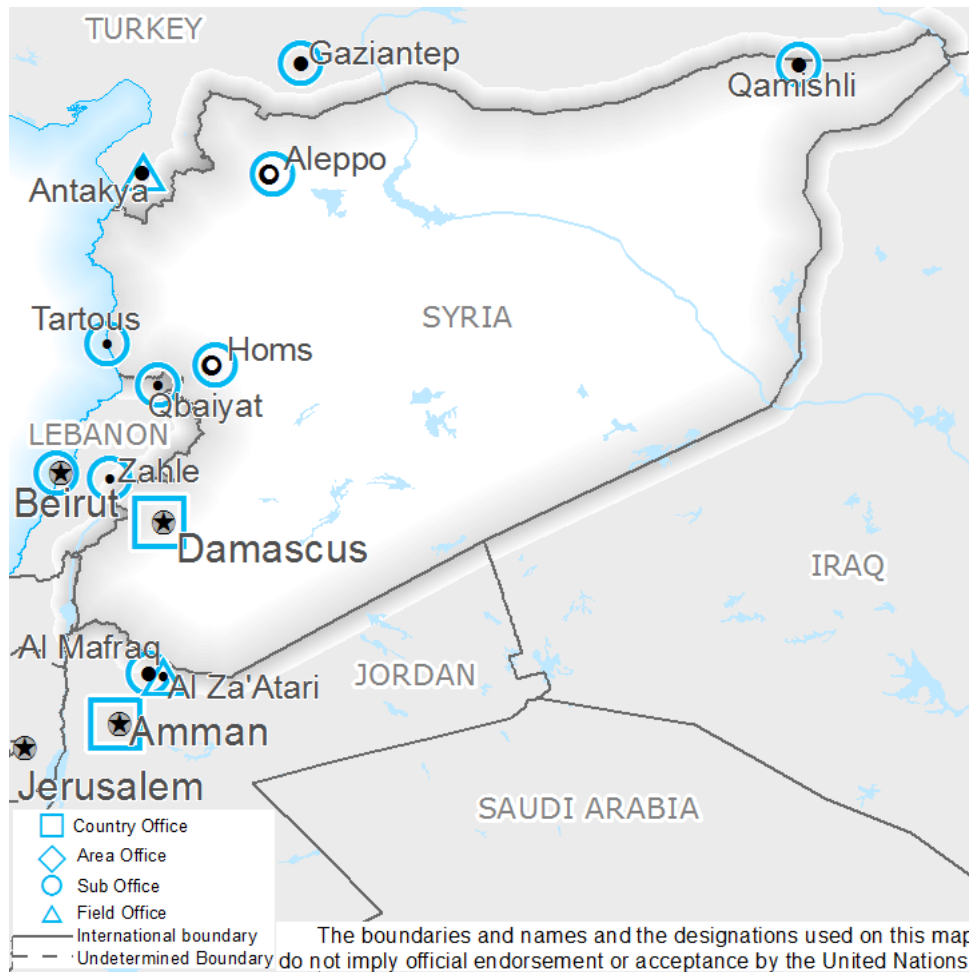
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Country Context and WFP Objectives



Country Context

The conflict in Syria has resulted in one of the largest humanitarian and protection crises of the twenty-first century. Since its onset in 2011, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and more than 11 million, over half of the pre-crisis population, were forced to abandon their homes. Of these, 6.3 million people have been displaced within the country, in many cases multiple times, while 4.9 million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries and in Europe.

Compounded by violence and displacement, a drastic economic recession further exacerbates the humanitarian crisis. Since 2011, the Syrian gross domestic product (GDP) has contracted by 55 percent, with losses estimated at USD 254 billion across all sectors. Subsequent spending cuts have significantly reduced salaries and government subsidies, while cutbacks across all sectors resulted in loss of employment opportunities. By the end of 2015, the unemployment rate stood at 53 percent, with peaks of 78 percent among youth, and was even higher among women.

Insecurity, reduced access to arable land, high inputs and transport costs, aggravated by erratic precipitation levels and damaged irrigation, continued to hinder adequate levels of agricultural production. According to the 2016 Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) jointly conducted by WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the area planted with cereals in the 2015/16 cropping season was halved and wheat production contracted by 55 percent, when compared to pre-crisis levels. Reduced production, heavier reliance on import and currency depreciation continued to inflate food prices. The average cost of a standard food basket was eight times higher compared to pre-crisis levels.

Amidst displacement, unemployment and loss of livelihoods, vulnerability levels reached unprecedented levels. Over two thirds of the Syrian population live in extreme poverty. According to the 2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), 13.5 million people need humanitarian assistance, including 5.8 million children. Of these, seven million people are food insecure and a further two million are at risk of food insecurity. Families are resorting to unsustainable and unsafe means of survival, such as reducing the quality and quantity of food consumed, selling assets, borrowing money and withdrawing children from school, which locks them in a vicious cycle of poverty and hunger and further compromises their food security and future opportunities.

Data from the 2015/2016 Standardised Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART) surveys raise concerns over the nutrition situation in Syria. The surveys were conducted in 11 of the 14 Syrian governorates, as data collection was not possible in Deir Ezzor, Ar-Raqqa and Idleb. Although the level of acute and chronic malnutrition among children aged 6-59 months (3 and 12.7 percent) remain within acceptable levels according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) classifications, high levels of acute malnutrition (7.8 percent) were recorded among women of child-bearing age (CBA). Anaemia is prevalent among both children aged 6-59 months and CBA women, 25.9 percent and 24.5 percent respectively, raising concerns about the presence of other micronutrient deficiencies. Amidst deteriorating food consumption and a worsening healthcare sector, 4.4 million children aged 6-59 months and pregnant and lactating women (PLW) are at risk of malnutrition, and need immediate preventive and curative nutrition services.

Between 2009 and 2014, Syria dropped from 107 to 134 in the Human Development Index ranking, with access to essential services, including healthcare, safe water, and education, being severely disrupted. The education sector suffered major setbacks, amidst loss of personnel and learning spaces: one in three schools is either damaged, used as collective shelter, or otherwise inaccessible. In 2016, 1.75 million children and youth were out of school and 1.35 million at risk of dropping out. This is all the more worrying when compared to pre-crisis levels, when Syria had achieved universal primary education.

Response of the Government and Strategic Coordination

WFP's response to the Syrian crisis is coordinated with a vast array of stakeholders, including United Nations agencies, international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government entities; providing a comprehensive and harmonised strategy towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. WFP's use of strategic partnerships is in line with SDG 17, to revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development, which strengthens the means of implementation and maximises the impact of WFP interventions.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator, guides the United Nations response in Syria, providing strategic and policy guidance. WFP is an active member of the HCT and contributed to all initiatives promoted by the committee to strengthen coordination among humanitarian actors and ensure a comprehensive and harmonised response. This also provides a platform for the humanitarian community to act as a united entity in negotiating with all relevant parties for humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas through a dedicated Access Working Group.

Operations are coordinated through an inter-sectoral working group, led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), comprised of eight sectors and two active clusters. Within this structure, WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) co-lead the Food Security and Agricultural Sector. Underpinned by the Whole of Syria (WoS) approach, the sector ensures joint strategic and operational planning, needs assessment, information sharing and harmonised interventions according to set quality standards for more than 100 humanitarian organisations operating from three different hubs (Syria, Turkey and Jordan). Further to this, WFP leads the Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications Clusters, providing vital storage, logistics and telecommunications support to the broader humanitarian community operating in Syria.

In addition to sector coordination, WFP closely coordinates with relevant United Nations-sister agencies for data collection and analysis, strategic planning and implementation of all its activities. These include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) for nutrition interventions; UNICEF for the promotion of access to primary education; the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on improved access to health services for pregnant and lactating women (PLW); FAO, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in the areas of livelihoods and resilience.

All WFP activities were aligned with, and contributed to achievements of, the 2016 Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), which was developed by the humanitarian community in consultation with the Government of Syria and provided the framework for the inter-sectoral response in Syria. The Syria HRP was underpinned by three overarching strategic objectives, focusing on saving lives and alleviating suffering, enhancing protection and building resilience.

Within its mandate, WFP objectives are aligned with the priorities identified by the Government of Syria, which include resilience, basic needs, nutrition, community infrastructure, plans to re-energize the agricultural sector, foster the return and integration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and strengthen institutional capacities. In the absence of an official national nutrition strategy, WFP, as an active member of the Nutrition Sector, contributed to the development of a comprehensive Sector strategy and work-plan for nutrition activities, guided by the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and endorsed by the Ministry of Health. Coordination with the Syrian Government continued to be required in a range of areas, including security, obtaining necessary approvals for dispatches and monitoring visits, conducting assessments and the provision of secondary data. Moreover, strategic coordination with line ministries, including the ministries of Health, Education and Agriculture, underpinned the implementation of nutrition, education and livelihoods activities.

Summary of WFP Operational Objectives

WFP's activities were aligned with the 2014-2017 WFP Strategic Plan, and specifically contributed towards achieving Strategic Objective 1, saving lives and protecting livelihoods, through the provision of food, nutrition and livelihoods to those affected by the crisis, while continuously seeking innovative approaches to delivering assistance.

EMOP 200339 (2011-2016), Emergency Food Assistance to People Affected by Unrest in Syria, approved budget for 2016 USD 655 million: In light of ongoing violence, population displacement and widespread food insecurity among the affected population, WFP continued to maintain a strong emergency relief focus, providing monthly food entitlements to families otherwise unable to meet their food requirements. Taking into consideration cultural dietary preferences, the food basket included staple commodities such as rice, pasta, bulgur, pulses and fortified vegetable oil. Fortified wheat flour, yeast and bread were provided in those areas where damaged milling facilities and scarcity of wheat flour resulted in a reduced availability of bread, a key component in the Syrian diet. Ready-to-eat parcels were provided to newly displaced families without access to cooking facilities.

While continuing to provide emergency food assistance, in safer and more stable parts of the country WFP introduced interventions to restore and protect livelihoods, thereby improving household food security and promoting social cohesion. WFP livelihoods strategy seeks to revitalise the agricultural sector through targeted interventions, enhancing the food value chain and boosting demand through increased use of cash-based transfers and local food procurement, thereby stimulating the local economy.

In addition to the emergency food assistance and livelihoods activities, WFP addresses the deteriorating nutritional situation in Syria through nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific activities aimed at preventing or treating moderate acute malnutrition and micro-nutrient deficiencies in children aged 6-59 months and pregnant and lactating women.

In line with the objectives of the "Back to Learning" Campaign, WFP continued to work closely with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Ministry of Education to reverse the dramatic impact of the conflict on the education sector, implementing activities aimed at incentivising enrolment and regularising attendance among pre-primary and primary school children, while contributing to improve their micronutrients intake.

Special Operation 200788 (2015-2016), Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications Augmentation and Coordination to support humanitarian operations in Syria, approved budget for 2016 USD 13 million: Through Special Operation 200788, WFP continued to fulfill its mandate as lead agency of the Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications Clusters providing essential transport, storage and telecommunications support to the wider humanitarian community operating in Syria, both from within the country and from the existing corridors in Turkey and Jordan to partners operating cross-border, in line with the Whole of Syria (WoS) approach. The Logistics Cluster continued to play a key role in facilitating joint humanitarian convoys to besieged and hard-to-reach locations and airlifts to the governorate of Al-Hasakeh, inaccessible by land since late 2015.

Special Operation 200950 (2016), WFP Air Deliveries to Provide Humanitarian Support to Besieged and Hard to Reach Areas in Syria, approved budget USD 37 million: This Special Operation was activated in 2016 to support air deliveries to besieged and hard-to-reach areas in Syria. Through this operation, since 10 April, WFP carried out a series of high-altitude airdrops providing life-saving food assistance and other supplies on behalf of other humanitarian actors to Deir Ezzor city, which had been cut off from humanitarian access since March 2014 due to a siege imposed by fighters from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Country Resources and Results

Resources for Results

EMOP 200339 received funds equivalent to 60 percent of its requirements for the year. This was aligned with the overall funding levels since the start of the operation, while representing a slight increase when compared to 2015. Special Operation 200788 was 72 percent funded, an increase by 3 percent from its cumulative past levels. Special Operation 200950, launched in February, received 80 percent of its requirements, enabling WFP to airdrop almost 3,000 mt of food and other humanitarian supplies in support of the besieged population of Deir Ezzor city.

During the first four months of the year, resource shortfalls impacted on WFP's ability to operate at planned scale, resulting in a reduced food basket thus cutting the planned caloric transfer by an average of 16 percent between January and April. Moreover, access and other operational challenges meant that some activities, particularly livelihoods, nutrition support for pregnant and lactating women and, in some months, school meals, could not be implemented at planned scale, which partially absorbed the impact of the funding shortfalls on the overall operation. In the second quarter of the year, generous donor pledges provided WFP with increased and more predictable funding levels, and consequently a healthier food pipeline. As a result, in May, WFP was able to distribute 100 percent of the planned food basket for the first time since the beginning of the operation, and maintain similar transfer levels for the rest of the year. WFP made strategic use of advance financing mechanisms to compensate the long procurement lead times, two to three months on average, and used generous donor contributions to cover these critical expenditures, thus avoiding pipeline breaks and ensuring the continuity of the operations throughout the year.

Given the scale and complexity of the operations in Syria, managing cost effectiveness remained a key priority. Accordingly, WFP continued to adopt measures to ensure the cost-efficient use of resources. Global and local food supply agreements were in place for most commodities, allowing WFP to mitigate the impact of price fluctuations in the global market. In particular, WFP progressively expanded its cooperation with suppliers in Turkey, which is a large manufacturing hub strategically located in proximity to Syria and thus offers optimal sourcing and transport conditions. Through a study conducted by the Nutrition team on the ground, WFP identified a range of locally preferred pulses, for which supply agreements were established. This allowed a high degree of flexibility in periodically determining the composition of the food basket, and resulted in significant savings in light of the worldwide hikes in the price of pulses following the 2015 poor harvest. WFP continued to use long-term agreements for frequently requested goods and services, including for courier services and armoured vehicles.

Since 2013, WFP adopted various mechanisms that led to a progressive decrease in Landside Transport Storage and Handling (LTSH) rates, including the introduction of a tariff system for transport and the diversification of transporters, which resulted in greater competition, larger trucking capacity and reduced demurrage costs. In 2016 only, transport rates were reduced by 38 percent, mainly due to the greater competition resulting from the increase of contracted companies from 14 to 18. In addition, in late 2016 a pilot initiative was launched to evaluate a move from the existing tariff system to competitive contracting. Initial results of the pilot were encouraging and will be reviewed upon completion of the six-month trial period to assess the most appropriate and cost-efficient modality. These measures enabled WFP to maintain stable LTSH rates in spite of greater costs incurred due to factors such as more flexible delivery terms for Qamishly to avoid bottlenecks resulting from access volatility, and expenses associated with the newly introduced commodity tracking system.

The prevailing security situation continued to require the adoption of costly security measures and resulted in high prices for some goods and services. Limited options for office space throughout the country meant that WFP was compelled to set up offices in restricted areas, where the rates tend to be significantly higher than elsewhere. Similarly, various security incidents have prompted plans to relocate some storage facilities, as is the case for two warehouses in rural Damascus, to safer, but more expensive areas. Moreover, WFP continued to put in place precautionary measures to ensure the safety and security of WFP staff, resulting in additional costs. Official staff movements across the country could only be effected in armoured vehicles, for which procurement and maintenance costs are high. Security trainings were conducted for WFP staff members, including Emergency Trauma Bag (ETB), first aid and firefighting trainings, to ensure staff preparedness to deal with emergency situations. To ensure staff wellness and wellbeing, a staff counsellor from WFP Headquarters was deployed on temporary mission to Damascus and sub-offices, while a permanent Cairo-base counsellor was also available to support staff in Syria.

Achievements at Country Level

Amidst growing food insecurity and poverty levels, WFP addressed the immediate food needs of more than 4 million vulnerable conflict-affected people each month, reducing the use of negative and irreversible coping strategies. The type of in-kind food assistance was tailored to specific beneficiary needs, and it included dry monthly family food entitlements, ready-to-eat food parcels, cooked meals for those lacking access to cooking facilities, and wheat flour in areas affected by bread shortage and widespread damage to milling facilities.

Where possible, moderately food insecure households were assisted through newly launched livelihoods protection activities aimed at supporting sustainable livelihoods and promoting self-sufficiency. Beneficiary categories with specific nutrition requirements, such as children aged 6-59 months and pregnant or lactating women, received specialised nutrition assistance, while access to education was promoted among pre-primary and primary school children.

Particular advancements were made in reaching people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas of the country. Through multiple access modalities, including cross-line inter-agency convoys, cross-border deliveries, high altitude airdrops and airlifts, WFP food reached 1.5 million people living in areas cut off from regular humanitarian access, multiple times throughout the year, albeit not regularly. This includes more than half a million people living in 17 areas besieged by various parties to the conflict. Beneficiaries received monthly family food parcels, along with wheat flour, Specialised Nutrition Foods (SNFs) and fortified nutritious snacks. This represents a significant increase compared to 2015, when 800,000 people were reached in these areas and only 30,000 people in four besieged locations could be assisted with a one-off delivery.

The use of cash-based transfers (CBT) for the nutrition support to pregnant and lactating women (PLW) was further scaled up, reaching twice as many beneficiaries when compared to 2015. Moreover, the use of this modality was expanded to a second activity, a voucher-based programme to promote access to primary education among out-of-school children. Extensive efforts took place to lay the groundwork for a further scale-up in the use of this modality across governorates and different activities in 2017, including market assessments, retailer identification and transition to e-card solutions. This will inject additional resources in the local economy, while stimulating local food production through increased demand.

WFP's large operation in Syria has also a direct impact on the local economy. WFP has created economic opportunities for 1,500 people employed to provide storage and packaging services in seven WFP facilities in five governorates (Rural Damascus, Homs, Lattakia, Tartous and Al-Hasakeh). Additional economic opportunities were created through the transport services required to support the large operation. WFP maintains a bakery project in Aleppo city, where wheat flour is provided directly to eight bakeries contracted by WFP's cooperating partners. Each bakery employs 11-13 people in the production process.

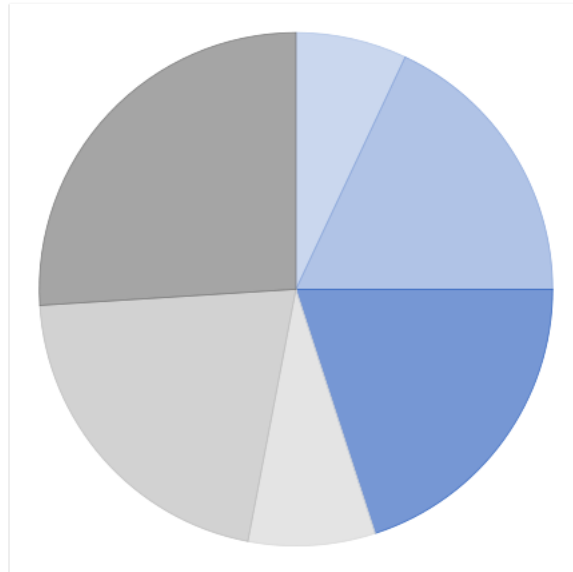


Annual Country Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries	Male	Female	Total
Children (under 5 years)	362,658	414,467	777,125
Children (5-18 years)	932,550	1,087,975	2,020,525
Adults (18 years plus)	1,036,167	1,347,018	2,383,185
Total number of beneficiaries in 2016	2,331,375	2,849,460	5,180,835

Country Beneficiaries by Gender and Age

- Children (under 5 years)
- Children (5-18 years)
- Adults (18 years plus)
- Children (under 5 years)
- Children (5-18 years)
- Adults (18 years plus)



Annual Food Distribution in Country (mt)

Project Type	Cereals	Oil	Pulses	Mix	Other	Total
Single Country EMOP	199,728	42,780	44,736	4,949	210,388	502,580
Total Food Distributed in 2016	199,728	42,780	44,736	4,949	210,388	502,580

Cash Based Transfer and Commodity Voucher Distribution (USD)

Project Type	Cash	Value Voucher	Commodity Voucher
Single Country EMOP	-	3,047,746	-
Total Distributed in 2016	-	3,047,746	-

Supply Chain

A complex supply chain network underpins the implementation of WFP programmes within Syria. With 3,000 trucks and three aircraft, WFP dispatched approximately 45,000 mt of food to four million people every month. Food commodities were imported into Syria through three ports: Lattakia and Tartous in Syria, and Beirut in Lebanon, and through three crossing points from Turkey and Jordan under the cross-border operations enabled by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2165 passed in July 2014.

Upon arrival into Syria, commodities were stored in seven warehouses and 65 mobile storage units strategically located in five governorates, with a total storage capacity of approximately 103,000 mt. Five of the seven warehouses incorporate packaging facilities with a total daily production capacity of 12,000 food rations. Food boxes were assembled prior to dispatch, thus mitigating the risk of losses and ensuring that each family receives the correct quantities and items. Once packaged, commodities were trucked or airlifted to each governorate according to their geographical proximity to each storage hub, reducing travel times and mitigating exposure of cargo to security threats. Due to difficulties in establishing storage and packaging facilities in the areas reached through cross border, WFP transported rations pre-packed outside Syria directly to partners in-country.

For transport from ports of entry to the WFP warehouses and subsequently to partners, WFP utilises existing commercial transport settings, encouraging local capacities where possible. The overall number of companies contracted to move commodities from ports of entry to partners' warehouses increased from 14 to 18. For areas affected by access constraints, other transport modalities were used, including cross-line inter-agency convoys, cross-border shipments, high-altitude airdrops and airlifts facilitated by the Logistics Cluster. The Logistics Cluster, led by WFP and active in Syria since 2013, fills logistics gaps faced by the humanitarian community by providing common services including transport, dedicated storage, coordination and information management support.

In 2016, 97.8 percent of the food commodities were procured internationally or regionally. To support a scale up in local procurement, WFP conducted a countrywide capacity assessment and expanded the number of shortlisted local suppliers, resulting in an increase in local purchases particularly in the fourth quarter of the year. By the end of the year, the share of local procurement had increased to 2.2 percent, up from 1 percent in 2015. Initially limited to salt and date bars, local procurement was extended to bulgur, rice, pulses, sugar and ready-to-eat food parcels, with plans to gradually scale up to 10 percent of overall purchases in 2017.

To reduce procurement lead times, WFP continued to make use of the Global Commodity Management Facility (GCMF) for commodities with long lead times, while global supply agreements continued to be in place for most food commodities, contributing to reduced procurement times and costs. Due to lengthy lead times and recurring quality issues for date bars procured regionally, the procurement of date bars gradually shifted to local sources to establish a more reliable supply. The harmonisation of the contents of pre-packed rations sourced in Turkey and destined to the Syria and Iraq operations, which was initiated in 2015, has allowed both operations to benefit from economies of scale generated by their combined demand. This aggregated demand of pre-packed rations from Turkey has also facilitated the process of setting up food service agreements for both countries. In addition, the harmonisation of food baskets provides greater flexibility in reallocating the food whenever either of the two operations does not receive timely funding.

In light of the strict Syrian food quality control measures, all commodity specifications were reviewed and updated where needed, to ensure compliance with Syrian standards and requirements and avoid import bottlenecks and delays. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) were reviewed to ensure that quality specifications are regularly shared and discussed with the procuring officers at headquarters and regional level, rigorously checked before the tendering process and clearly understood by the suppliers, to avoid risk of non-conformity. In addition, for local procurement, WFP provided training for food quality inspectors and recruited one additional quality assurance staff member to enhance the Country Office capacity to provide technical support and monitor the production process, in light of the planned increase in local procurement.

To accommodate the complexity of the Syria operations, WFP adopted an integrated supply chain approach, which ensures time-sensitive and cost-effective operations by promoting robust coordination between logistics, procurement and shipping activities, involving teams at country, regional and HQ levels. These efforts translated into enhanced communication across each link of the supply chain, encouraging joint rather than unit-specific planning. In April, WFP Syria implemented the Logistics Execution Support System (LESS), which provided a solid platform to facilitate the integrated approach, particularly at the downstream level. LESS is a corporate system that enables real-time tracking of WFP food commodities as they move along the supply chain, from the point of receipt up to the final delivery point for distribution, and ensures full traceability of individual food items in each ration delivered.

Post Deliveries Losses (PDL) accounted for a minimal percentage of the total quantities handled, and decreased by 26 percent when compared with 2015. This was mainly achieved through a reduction in losses during storage, resulting from continued efforts to improve storage conditions and safety at WFP warehouses, including measures to prevent fires and other hazards, and regular pest control evaluations. Losses due to poor handling in partners' warehouses were significantly reduced, owing to capacity strengthening efforts, such as warehouse management training for partners and the provision of equipment to improve storage standards. Losses at transport stage accounted for almost half of the total PDL. Losses due to poor transport conditions and handling by the transporter were minimised by requesting transporters to carefully and regularly check the condition of trucks, which were subject to further inspection by WFP staff prior to loading at warehouses. The bulk of the losses occurred mainly due to unpredictable security incidents during transport.



Annual Food Purchases for the Country (mt)

Commodity	Local	Regional/International	Total
Beans	360	38,415	38,775
Bulgur Wheat	499	67,131	67,630
Canned Chicken	175	75	250
Canned Fish	89	119	209
Canned Pulses	323	210	533
Canned Vegetables	92	60	152
Chickpeas	817	38,257	39,074
High Energy Biscuits	1,550	1,652	3,203
Iodised Salt	4,557	1,587	6,143
Juice	115	75	190
Lentils	360	40,503	40,863
Olive Oil	52	35	88
Rations	-	6,646	6,646
Ready To Use Supplementary Food	-	739	739
Rice	461	74,280	74,741
Spices	58	38	95
Split Lentils	-	2,873	2,873
Sugar	312	39,152	39,464

Commodity	Local	Regional/International	Total
Uht Milk	-	4,516	4,516
Vegetable Oil	-	36,091	36,091
Wheat Flour	-	78,134	78,134
Yeast	-	221	221
Total	9,821	430,809	440,630
Percentage	2.2%	97.8%	

Annual Global Commodity Management Facility Purchases Received in Country (mt)

Commodity	Total
Beans	3,356
Bulgur Wheat	7,267
Chickpeas	4,870
Lentils	4,584
Ready To Use Supplementary Food	297
Rice	6,375
Sugar	1,200
Vegetable Oil	17,524
Wheat Flour	362
Total	45,835

Implementation of Evaluation Recommendations and Lessons Learned

An evaluation was conducted in mid-2014 to assess WFP's response to the Syria Crisis, in order to facilitate learning and strengthen accountability. One of the key priorities identified was the need to strengthen analysis on markets, gender, food insecurity, socio-economic contexts and conflict dynamics to inform country-specific strategies and evidence-based decision-making, including on targeting and distribution modalities. Accordingly, in April 2016, WFP established a Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS) to regularly monitor the situation in the country and update the 2015 Food Security Assessment (FSA) findings, and started producing and disseminating regular monthly food security bulletins. Through the mobile Vulnerability and Assessment Mapping (mVAM) system, an average of 1,500 randomly selected households were interviewed by phone each month across the country, including in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, to collect data on food security outcome indicators, socio-economic status, displacement, coping strategies, household composition and food prices, and support systematic vulnerability-based targeting. In parallel, WFP worked closely with the Syrian Planning and International Cooperation Commission (PICC) and Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) to further enhance this mechanism, while strengthening local assessment capacity. A joint methodology was developed to include on-site data collection, to complement the mVAM system. In 2017, on-site visits will be carried out by PICC and CBS staff, who received training and technical guidance on tools, sampling and data analysis. In parallel, WFP's VAM unit supported the Food Security and Agriculture Sector to establish a harmonised food security outcome monitoring system by providing training and guidance to partners on tools and methodology, and supporting joint data analysis, to ensure a streamlined approach across all Sector's partners.

The existing market price watch system was further expanded, with data collected in 42 markets, up from 28, across all 14 Syrian governorates through direct WFP or partner visits, or phone calls with key informants in inaccessible areas. Monthly bulletins were regularly prepared and disseminated throughout the year, to identify price trends and fluctuations and assess their impact on the overall food security situation. To provide a comprehensive picture, WFP, in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, conducted a Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM). As part of the CFSAM steering committee, the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform was actively involved in all phases of the assessment, and its staff members received technical guidance from WFP and FAO on data collection and analysis methodology. The third since 2013, the CFSAM aimed to assess the impact of the conflict on food production and, in turn, food security. In addition to its regular products, VAM conducted emergency assessments as required for areas witnessing sudden deterioration of the humanitarian situation, as well as special reports for besieged areas.

Based on assessment findings, in late 2015 WFP developed a robust beneficiary targeting and selection tool to identify the most vulnerable households, which is based on vulnerability indicators such as length and number of displacements, sex of household heads and relevant socio-economic indicators. The tool was fully rolled out and all partners trained to implement it. Furthermore, rapid needs assessment tools guided cooperating partners in rapid emergency response to address the needs of households facing sudden displacement. Moreover, in line with the evaluation's recommendations, an in-country dedicated gender specialist was recruited to ensure gender analysis is systematically incorporated in programme design and implementation.

WFP continued to diversify both the type of intervention and the transfer modality to carefully tailor its assistance to specific social, economic and security contexts. Livelihoods interventions were launched and scaled up since the start of the year, targeting moderately food insecure households in stable areas of the country. These interventions were implemented through a variety of food assistance for assets (FFA) projects, aimed at enhancing local food production while supporting the development of sustainable livelihoods at households level. Building on these efforts, WFP developed a Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO), to be launched in 2017, aimed at shifting, over time and where possible, towards strengthening resilience to economic and conflict-related shocks for vulnerable households through scalable and sustainable solutions, and promoting food security through education, economic access and stronger national systems.

Following a review of the cash-based transfer (CBT) modality conducted in 2015, plans for the PRRO involve a progressive expansion of CBT across various programme activities, with the planned deployment of SCOPECARD where feasible, to further increase the beneficial impact on the local economy. As the banking system has been disrupted in Syria and internet and mobile coverage is not consistent throughout the country, SCOPECARD was selected as an ideal end-to-end payment platform able to function without electricity, off-line as well as on-line. New retailers were contracted in Homs and Lattakia to sustain the scale up of the ongoing activities, while market assessments, retailer selection and training were conducted to introduce the CBT modality in other governorates. Arrangements were finalised in late 2016 to launch a commodity voucher project through SCOPECARD in the hard-to-reach governorate of Al-Hasakeh, to enable families to purchase locally produced available food commodities, thus stimulating local production and markets while adopting a cost-effective response to the access constraints affecting the governorate. The appropriate modality selection will be informed by the ongoing cash-based response feasibility study, which examines the impact of CBT on both women and men, and on the food market dynamics.

Finally, in late 2016, WFP began preparation of a country-level case study as part of a WFP/World Bank global study on shock-resistant social protection and safety nets, with the aim of creating synergies and bridge humanitarian assistance with social protection programmes to be potentially supported by the World Bank.

WFP assistance to besieged populations

Zeinab is one of the 39,000 inhabitants of Madaya, a mountainous town 40 km northwest of the Syrian capital, Damascus. Since mid-2015, the population of Madaya has endured a strict siege, which further tightened existing humanitarian and commercial access restrictions and left the population without access to food, water and healthcare and exposed to grave protection threats.

Zeinab gave birth to her first son in December 2015, at a time when the humanitarian situation in Madaya had reached alarming levels and the population was facing severe hunger. "I was scared during my pregnancy, neither food nor medicines were available. There was simply nothing in town, except for some few food items in the market that I could not afford. The week I gave birth to my son Khaled, I had nothing but water, spices and wild plants to survive on", she says. Khaled was born underweight, due to his mother's poor nutrition intake during pregnancy. "I was weak and hungry, it was very hard for me to breastfeed".

Like Zeinab, in 2016 almost one million people lived trapped in areas besieged by various parties to the conflict. In these areas, food availability is severely compromised due to disrupted supply lines and limited local food production. Humanitarian assistance is the only source of food for many. The few commodities available on the markets are too expensive for most of the families, who have by now exhausted their resources and have little income generating opportunities, as ongoing fighting and the presence of landmines make it too dangerous to cultivate farmland. People had to drastically reduce the quantity and variety of food consumed, with long-term health consequences. In Madaya, severe malnutrition affected many children and adults, and cases of death by starvation were reported.

In early January, through a joint humanitarian convoy, WFP reached Madaya for the first time in months, providing nutritious food supplies and cooking fuel sufficient to support all 39,000 residents for one month. A WFP staff member who accompanied the convoy recalls that when the first trucks arrived, late at night, people ran to the team asking for food, "give us something now, biscuits, bread, anything", cried a hungry child when they explained food would be distributed the following day.

People in Madaya feared that the convoy would leave and not return for a long time. Thanks to relentless coordination efforts of humanitarian partners, joint convoys made it to Madaya four more times during the year, enabling WFP to provide food, including fortified wheat flour and Specialised Nutrition Foods (SNFs) to those most in need. The food basket was enhanced to provide 2,100 kcal per person per day for a family of five members, covering the minimum recommended caloric intake, acknowledging that people in besieged areas do not have access to other sources of food. In addition, after staff members participating in the first convoy verified the alarming nutrition situation, fortified snacks and Plumpy'Doz™, a SNF to prevent malnutrition, were added to the basket. Moreover, in coordination with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), specific malnutrition treatment products were provided to the health clinics to be administered to confirmed cases of acute malnutrition.

The assistance contributed to improve the nutritional intake of Zeinab and her son and alleviate the hunger of the people in Madaya. With improved food consumption and better vitamin micronutrient intake, Zeinab regained strength and energy to breastfeed her newborn. "We are grateful for this assistance, it is the only food we have. I could gain some strength to nurse my son". When Khaled reached six months of age, she started giving him the Plumpy'Doz™ provided by WFP to prevent malnutrition. Moreover, improved food availability in the area reduced the demand pressure on the local markets, contributing to significantly reduce food prices. For example, the price of 1 kg of rice, which had reached SYP 45,000 (approximately USD 133) in late 2015, had dropped to SYP 6,000 (approximately USD 17) by March, after humanitarian deliveries had reached Madaya twice. Overall, the cost of an average standard food basket almost halved during the first six months of the year, making the limited items available on the market more affordable for local families, and enabling them to complement the assistance received.

Intensified international advocacy efforts paved the way for a series of access breakthroughs, enabling increased humanitarian deliveries to people cut off from access for months or, in some cases, years. WFP adopted multiple delivery modalities to seize emerging access opportunities and reach people in need in the worst affected areas. Through cross-line inter-agency convoys, cross-border deliveries and high altitude airdrops, WFP food reached 550,000 people living under active siege.

In these areas, WFP assistance provided a lifeline for thousands of families who would not have access to food otherwise. WFP continues to advocate unhindered humanitarian access to all those in need, while recognising that only a political solution to this conflict can bring long-term safety and security to million of people like Zeinab and Khaled.

Project Objectives and Results

Project Objectives

The objective of this Special Operation was to create capacity for the humanitarian community to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance to the besieged parts of Deir Ezzor city, where the local population has been cut off from regular humanitarian assistance since March 2014.

Since 2014, United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2139, 2165, 2191, 2258 and 2332 have greatly facilitated humanitarian access through cross-border and cross-line deliveries; however, reaching thousands of families in besieged areas of the country continued to be severely constrained by various parties to the conflict.

In early 2016, increased international efforts culminated in a statement issued in Munich by the International Syria Support Group's (ISSG) calling for accelerating and expanding deliveries to besieged areas, including deliveries by air to the besieged parts of Deir Ezzor city.

The south-eastern governorate of Deir Ezzor is largely under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and has been cut off from WFP reach since May 2014, while Deir Ezzor city itself has not been reached since March 2014. Access restrictions further tightened since early 2015, when ISIL forces imposed a strict siege on the government-held part of Dier Ezzor city, leaving 110,000 people at grave risk of starvation as restrictions to commercial or humanitarian access led to widespread food shortages.

In February, WFP launched Special Operation 200950 to carry out air deliveries to provide humanitarian support to populations in besieged and hard-to-reach areas in Syria, and particularly to provide a lifeline for 110,000 people in Deir Ezzor city, through the provision of WFP food supplies and non-food relief items on behalf of other humanitarian actors .



Approved Budget for Project Duration (USD)

Cost Category	
Capacity Dev.t and Augmentation	42,826,260
Direct Support Costs	30,007
Indirect Support Costs	2,999,938
Total	45,856,206

Project Activities

As a result of the prolonged siege, the humanitarian needs in Deir Ezzor city continued to increase throughout the year. Through this project, WFP provided airdrop capacity to the humanitarian partners on a no-cost-recovery basis to ensure delivery of necessary supplies. Prioritization of cargo was based on humanitarian needs as determined by the Humanitarian Country Team.

One Ilyushin (IL-76) cargo aircraft, capable of conducting high altitude airdrops of up to 23 mt of palletized relief items was positioned in Amman, Jordan, to conduct one to two airdrops per day over Deir Ezzor for an initial period of three months, subject to the prevailing security situation and available resources. As this was the first time WFP had ever conducted high-altitude parachute airdrops, there were some operational challenges due to the complexity of dropping from such a high altitude. Improvements were made to the parachutes and to the guidance system for the airdrops themselves and the first successful airdrop took place in April. A series of trial airdrops were conducted in Jordan to ensure the accuracy of the airdrops to Deir Ezzor prior to full resumption of the operation in April.

Special equipment, including platforms and parachute systems, were prerequisites for high altitude airdrops and were positioned at the operational base. Certified specialists from the operation were deployed for cargo platform building and for supervision of the aircraft loading. Moreover, sensitization and necessary training were provided to

the ground teams that received the cargo.

Operational Partnerships

Activities on the ground were implemented by the Deir Ezzor branch of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), WFP's largest implementing partner in Syria. Close collaboration with SARC was crucial to have relief items collected at the drop zone and distributed to the intended beneficiaries. SARC teams on the ground received remote technical training on drop-zone identification and cargo receipt. As such, SARC was responsible for establishing the drop zone, identifying a new suitable landing area whenever security conditions on the ground made the existing one unsafe and collecting the pallets landing in the drop zone or in areas in the immediate vicinity of the drop zone that are deemed safe.

SARC was further responsible for beneficiary registration and updating the lists, carry out distributions at selected distribution sites and providing detailed distribution reports along with photographic documentation.

Performance Monitoring

Given the constantly changing security situation on the ground, the delivery and implementation plan was continuously monitored and revised as necessary to meet the objective. The achievements of this Special Operation were monitored and evaluated based on three key performance indicators quantifying relief items delivered versus planned figures; the percentage of cargo delivered within the promised lead-time and the percentage of airdrops conducted compared to the number which was requested.

Programme monitoring was carried out within the overall framework of EMOP 200339 Budget Revision 16, Emergency Food Assistance to the People Affected by Unrest in Syria, and complemented by the special measures on remote monitoring that include data from a variety of sources including local councils, affected populations and key sources within the community.

WFP Aviation staff were deployed to manage the air operation from Amman and Damascus. Logistics Cluster staff supported in cargo prioritization, information management and cargo tracking.

The main risks of this operation were aid diversion and non-adherence to humanitarian principles. Due to the sensitivity of the operating environment, WFP put in place special measures to mitigate the identified risks, including close coordination between all stakeholders, rapid distribution of received cargo, enhanced remote monitoring, remote training of partner staff and daily distribution reports. These daily reports were able to track the receipt of cargo before subsequent deliveries were made.

During project implementation, WFP Aviation maintained flexibility to align operational activities to the demands of the third-party organisations on behalf of which WFP dropped relief items.

Results/Outcomes

The project achieved target objectives despite the technical challenges encountered during the initial phase due to technical difficulties related to the altitude. During 2016, the project successfully flew 168 flights which dropped a total of 3,112 mt of cargo into Deir Ezzor. There were intermittent breaks in scheduled flights throughout the year due to operational constraints such as weather variations and pipeline related challenges.

All planned cargo was delivered within the promised lead time and 100 percent of requested airdrops were conducted. This enabled WFP and other aid organisations to reach the affected population with food and essential relief supplies. WFP Aviation delivered items on behalf of organisations such as the United Nations' Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to address all the needs of the vulnerable population of Deir Ezzor. Cargo dropped included commodities such as date bars, salt, beans, chickpeas, rice, sugar, bulgur, vegetable oil, lentils and water purification tablets; UNICEF high-energy biscuits and Plumpy Doz; canned tomatoes, canned ghee and operational support equipment for ICRC; and emergency health kits of WHO.

Data Notes

Cover page: SARC volunteers at the landing zone collecting WFP assistance airdropped on the besieged city of Deir Ezzor.

Photo © SARC Deir Ezzor.