



FAO requires
USD 155 million



to assist
11.7 million people



9.3 million people
food insecure and in need of
urgent assistance*



6.1 million internally
displaced persons (IDPs)



107% increase in average
price of a food basket in April
2020, compared with same time
last year

*Source: World Food Programme (WFP)
Syria Country Brief, June 2020



Impact of COVID-19 on food security and agriculture

- The Syrian Arab Republic is facing one of the most complex crises in the world. Almost ten years into the protracted crisis, hostilities continue with loss of lives, widespread displacement, limited economic opportunities, and destruction of livelihoods including agricultural infrastructure and services.
- The spread of COVID-19 is further exacerbating the impacts of the crisis. The average number of new cases has been increasing daily since 23 May. Some of the urgent and essential measures the Government has been using to control the spread of the virus include movement restrictions between cities, a curfew, banning public gatherings and shutdown of economic activities.
- COVID-19 containment measures in the Syrian Arab Republic have had the most significant direct impact on transport, retail, services and the daily waged labourers in and around the bigger cities. However, since remote and/or rural areas are also being impacted, the agriculture sector is heavily affected.
- In the past six months the number of food food-insecure people has risen dramatically. The most food-insecure areas include Lattakia, Ar-Raqqa and Aleppo. In May 2020, there were an estimated 6 million people with insufficient food consumption, while 6.4 million people were using negative coping mechanisms. Some of the most adopted coping mechanisms included reliance on less nutritious food, borrowing food, and restricting adult consumption to feed children. Vulnerable populations, including displaced people and female-headed households are are greater risk of food insecurity.

Some of the main impacts of COVID-19 on the agriculture sector and food supply chains include:

Production:

- Disruption to the 2019/20 cropping season has been relatively limited, helped by good rainfall, and an easing of more general security concerns – and the timing of the introduction of COVID-19 control measures, which was mid-season during the growing phase of the cereals.
- The prices of agricultural inputs (including seeds and fertilizers) and raw materials have increased, ultimately resulting in high retail prices of products.
- The livestock sector has been particularly affected by the COVID-19 control measures. The price of cattle and poultry feed,

and day-old chicks has doubled, while sheep farmers are facing constraints in accessing grazing land.

- Fisheries on the internal rivers (mainly in Al-Ghab and Deir-ez-Zor) were already severely damaged due to the conflict, and are essentially out of operation now due to the added restrictions.
- A shortage of agricultural labour, especially skilled labour was reported due to travel restrictions, increased cost of transport, curfew and risk of getting infected with the virus.

Marketing:

- Transportation costs have generally increased by about 30 percent, and by even more in remote areas, affecting the delivery of produce to markets.
- Both markets and input dealers closed at times due to COVID-19 control measures, which has also

reduced the sale of animals, which would normally take place at this time of year.

Market functionality:

- On 31 May 2020, the recent sharp depreciation of the country's currency led to the Government raising the 2020 purchasing price of wheat from SYP 225 to SYP 400 (around USD 0.44 to USD 0.77) per kg to support farmer's incomes and increase the stock of domestically procured wheat.
- On the other hand, broiler producers flooded the market with meat in order to reduce their stocks of chicken and the cost of their feeding, causing the broiler prices to fall by more than 30 percent. This is a partially attributed to the closure of restaurants (the main marketing outlet for poultry).

Likely evolution of the impacts of COVID-19 on food security

The control measures in place to curb the spread of COVID-19 were loosened in May. There is a high risk that this could result in an increase in COVID-19 cases, leading to tighter restrictions being imposed from July 2020 until the epidemic curve flattens (estimated to be around October 2020). This could have a significant impact on the agriculture sector. The wheat sowing season typically takes place between October and January, and the harvest season between May and July. From July to September, it is also critical to prepare livestock for the upcoming winter season – in particular feed storage to keep animals alive and healthy through the cold months.

Major projected impacts on existing vulnerabilities include:

- **Livestock body conditions affected and milk production reduced, resulting in economic losses for livestock keepers.** Breeders could continue to have limited or no access to necessary feed to maintain milk production during the critical July to September period, which could result in below-average body conditions and reduced milk production. Such conditions will further aggravate the challenges faced by the most vulnerable livestock keepers to sustain their livelihoods and access to food over the coming six months.
- **Shortage of labour for the summer harvest.** Although COVID-19 has had a relatively limited impact on the ongoing agricultural season, labour shortages could continue throughout the harvest, which typically ends in July. Should COVID-19 control measures continue over the autumn, these could affect the wheat sowing season set to begin in October. Along with harvest operations, the food production cycle could be impacted as transportation is affected by movement restrictions, resulting in difficulties with food distribution.
- **Decline in purchasing power.** Border closures coupled with internal movement restrictions (increasing transportation costs) could contribute to a continued increase in food prices, and make it difficult to import vital food commodities (which usually covers around 50 percent of demand). COVID-19 control measures will also continue to damage economic activity, resulting in a lack of income opportunities and increased unemployment, which could manifest in more vulnerable households resorting to negative coping mechanisms. The decline of the Syrian Pound is further reducing purchasing power.

- **Potential resumption of large-scale military operations and challenges to humanitarian assistance.** The ceasefire in Idlib province which was agreed in March is in large part holding, partly as a result of fears of COVID-19 impacts. However, successive ceasefires in Idlib have collapsed in the past, and the potential of a resumption of large-scale military operations remains a risk.

This could result in a humanitarian catastrophe, particularly if COVID-19 cases increase in the area, as military operations complicate the implementation of mitigation measures. A continuation of lockdown measures could further hinder humanitarian operations in the country, with significant repercussions for food-insecure people, particularly IDPs.

Anticipatory actions and response

Under the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is increasing its support to improve agricultural production and enhance livelihoods, as well as strengthen food security coordination. So far, FAO has provided animal feed to increase production and protect livelihood assets; distributed vegetable seeds and established nurseries to increase the availability of vegetables in local communities and improve nutrition of vulnerable households, particularly female-headed households; increased the availability of improved seeds through multiplication of early generation seeds; vaccinated livestock to improve animal health and increase livestock productivity; improved access to water through infrastructure rehabilitation and installation of alternative energy sources; and provided capacity building on agricultural technical subjects as well as entrepreneurship, marketing and project management.

Anticipatory action is critical to safeguard the livelihoods of vulnerable farmers and herders affected by movement restrictions and other COVID-19 control measures. The objective of anticipatory action is to protect people before they resort to negative coping mechanisms to compensate for declining purchasing power and increasing food and animal feed prices. Anticipatory action is based on a forward-looking analysis on how the health crisis is likely to affect the agriculture sector and food security, taking into consideration agricultural seasonality, the livestock calendar and other contextual elements.

Within the framework of FAO's Corporate COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, the following anticipatory actions have been identified to meet the urgent short-term needs of the most vulnerable food-

insecure populations and protect their assets. It also represents FAO's contribution to the United Nations Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19.

- Input distribution of silage feed to support the livestock of small-scale vulnerable breeders during the critical July to September period. The aim is to reduce the risk of animal health deteriorating during the winter season, maintain animal productivity and help households to keep their livestock alive.
- Cash+ in the form of cash transfers and provision of inputs for household gardening and small stock rearing (vegetable and poultry). The focus of this intervention is to support vulnerable households during the critical times in which COVID-19 mitigation measures are in place, especially labourers who lost their jobs, female-headed households and people with disabilities; and to minimize post-harvest losses following the main wheat harvest from August onwards.
- Cash+ in the form of cash transfers and provision of agricultural inputs to small-scale farmers to cushion the impact of high input costs ahead of the wheat and barley seasons, which typically begin in October.
- Awareness-raising campaigns on methods and practices to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the livestock supply chain. This includes sensitization on safe practices to adopt during market participation and transhumance to summer and winter pastures. Coupled with awareness-raising is the distribution of safety materials like personal protective equipment, hygiene kits/disinfectants as appropriate.



Funding



FAO requires
USD 155 million

- **USD 4 million** under the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19
- **USD 151 million** under the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020



to assist
11.7 million people

FUNDING GAP

USD 141 million

91%



9%

RECEIVED

USD 14 million

Resource partners

the European Union, the Governments of Germany, Japan, Kuwait, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Coordination and partnerships

FAO is working with the United Nations Development Programme and WFP, to strengthen coordination and avoid overlaps in response and assessments, including the ongoing assessment analysing the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

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