



FAO requires
USD 25.1 million



to assist
47 900 people



1.7 million people

food insecure in need of urgent assistance – 80% in the Gaza Strip and 20% in the West Bank*



130 000 applications for support received by Palestinian Ministry of Social Development, as people have fallen into poverty due to COVID-19



14% expected decrease in gross domestic product in 2020 compared with 2019

*Source: Food Security Cluster and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) Socio-Economic Food Security Survey 2018



Impact of COVID-19 on food security and agriculture

- The humanitarian situation in Palestine is characterized by persistent restrictions on access to natural resources, as well as on the movement of goods and people. This is exacerbated by natural and environmental hazards, such as winter storms, and the longer-term effects of climate change.
- In the Gaza Strip, recurrent conflict spikes and restricted access to markets for inputs and exports have deepened the vulnerability of livelihoods, causing unemployment and poverty rates to soar.
- The situation in the West Bank remains tense, with continued restrictions on access to land and natural resources, as well as displacements due to demolitions. These issues continue to erode the resilience of vulnerable households. The protracted crisis poses a range of protection strains on the livelihoods of Palestinians, including the destruction of productive assets and lack of access to essential inputs, services and livelihood opportunities.
- The nutrition situation is characterized by the double burden of malnutrition driven by poverty, food insecurity, poor dietary habits and sedentary lifestyles. Micronutrient deficiencies and the prevalence of overweight and obesity pose significant challenges to health and well-being. On the other hand, the prevalence of undernutrition, stunting and wasting in particular, at the national level, is lower than the global and regional average.
- After the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in Bethlehem city on 5 March, the Palestinian Prime Minister declared a state of emergency across Palestine and imposed a lockdown that was eased on 25 May 2020. On 2 July 2020, the West Bank returned to a complete lockdown following a record number of new infections.
- The pandemic is currently causing a major negative shock to Palestinian socioeconomic development, putting public welfare, employment and livelihoods at risk, threatening a further deterioration in poverty and food insecurity levels, social cohesion, and financial and fiscal stability. Specifically, in addition to the public health and humanitarian implications of COVID-19, the essential health-related measures restricting the movement of people, and the associated economic slowdown, negatively affect poor and vulnerable populations that were already facing a protracted conflict/insecurity condition.
- Challenges have emerged for food logistics and marketing as well as for the production of high-value commodities (such as dairy, fruits and vegetables). In addition, restrictions on movement and fear of contagion, as well as the implementation of physical distancing and health and sanitary measures are broadly

affecting farming and processing. Traditional credit arrangements have been disrupted by the risk and uncertainty generated by the pandemic. As a result, producers' access to fertilizers, pesticides, seedlings, veterinary medicines and other inputs (including fodder and feed) has been disrupted with foreseeable adverse impacts on agricultural production.

- For the first time, Palestinian food security can be significantly affected by reduced availability of food. Closures of restaurants and less frequent grocery shopping diminished demand for fresh produce and fisheries products, affecting producers and suppliers. Smallholder farmers are particularly affected by the decreasing demand for their produce,

combined with reduced access to inputs and credit. Additionally, delays in the payment of government salaries by the Palestinian Authority has reduced consumers' capacity to cope with food insecurity and nutrition threats.

- In order to examine some of the disruptions to the food system, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) surveys a panel of key informants weekly, composed of small and marginal farmers, herders, fishers, traders and cooperatives. These surveys point out that despite a recent easing of movement restrictions, farmers have not been able to resume production at full capacity yet. Availability and access to inputs, including fodder, is improving but prices are rising.

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

With the introduction of COVID-19 control measures in March, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) estimated that the economy would incur USD 2.5 billion in losses if the pandemic continued for three months. More than three months later, the situation is far from returning to pre-crisis conditions.

- A "Preliminary Assessment of the Possible Impacts of COVID-19 Health Crisis on the Palestinian Economy" conducted by the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute foresees losses between 5.1 and 6.2 percent during 2020, in the value-added of the agriculture and livestock sector. Economic forecasts from PCBS for 2020, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, expects that losses in agriculture, forestry and fishing will amount to around USD 200 million.
- The full impact of COVID-19 on food security in Palestine is not yet known. However, as the crisis extends, it is clear that the pandemic, and the essential measures in place to control its spread, will continue to have devastating effects on vulnerable people and the food system – from producers to processors, marketers, transporters and consumers. It could be expected that up to 50 percent of the population might face severe food insecurity.
- The effects of COVID-19 worsen the already challenging employment environment with 320 000 people estimated to be working in the informal sector, and most formal sectors facing recurrent lockdowns. Access to working opportunities in Israel and the settlements are also becoming increasingly uncertain.
- As the crisis continues, there are increasing negative impacts on the food security and livelihoods of the most vulnerable populations, including small farmers, herders and fishers. The current resurgence of COVID-19 cases could have devastating impacts, especially on these vulnerable groups that have already demonstrated low resilience to additional shocks. Furthermore, some of the most vulnerable groups, including pregnant and lactating women, and children, might not be able to receive essential healthcare because of health service re-prioritization.
- The increased risk of doing business will continue to restrict producers' access to inputs as suppliers require cash up front and no longer accept informal credit arrangements. Reduced access to inputs threaten the production cycle and the availability of fresh food products in the coming months. It will also impact the income of small and marginal producers.

- Market disruptions will continue to affect food prices. The price of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides are likely to continue to increase, further reducing

the purchasing power of households, particularly affecting those with limited or seasonal income.

Anticipatory actions and response

Under the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020, FAO is increasing its efforts to restore agricultural production; support vulnerable women and youth in herding communities; provide emergency livelihood support; and strengthen food security coordination.

Within the framework of FAO's Corporate COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, the proposed 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.

1) Ensuring availability of and stabilizing access to food for the most food-insecure populations

- Provide essential productive inputs to small-scale farmers and herders (including animal feed, seeds and seedlings, fertilizers, and green house covers).
- Support homestead and community-level food production of the most vulnerable people, including female-headed households in the Gaza Strip.

2) Ensuring continuity of the food supply chain

- Provide in-kind and technical support to small-scale food processors – especially women's cooperatives and associations – to improve the quality, safety and shelf life of their produce.
- Protect and stimulate pro-poor private sector investments in the agri-food value chain. This will focus on small and medium enterprises, as well as individual businesses within the food system, who have been heavily impacted by COVID-19.
- Improve market access for Palestinian agri-food products through a multi-faceted approach to develop marketing and distribution systems. This includes supply-side improvements in marketing and wholesaling, consumer awareness on quality, safety and origin, and better linkages to markets in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. FAO will leverage strategic partnerships to ensure ownership and transparency, and better seize market opportunities.

3) Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of transmission

- Provide technical assistance to ensure the timely delivery of public services required to sustain the production and distribution of safe food. This will include:
 - I. providing tailored technical and in-kind support to strengthen the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health's food microbial contamination surveillance, sampling and testing, and inspection;
 - II. designing and conducting an awareness-raising campaign to inform practices and behaviours of farmers, herders, processors, traders, and consumers to deal with COVID-19 related challenges; and
 - III. providing in-kind and technical assistance to reinforce the national Sanitary and Phytosanitary System's capacity to ensure food hygiene in processing, storage and transport, as well as occupational health for farmers, herders, and fishers.

4) Information, monitoring and coordination

- Monitoring and analysis of the impacts of COVID-19 on the food chain, to inform interventions by public and private actors.
- Advocate for emergency support and strengthen Food Security Sector coordination.



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Funding



FAO requires
USD 25.1 million

- **USD 11.5 million** under the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19
- **USD 13.6 million** under the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020



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Coordination and partnerships

FAO works in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security Sector partners.

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