



Global Humanitarian Response Plan Addressing the impacts of COVID-19 and safeguarding livelihoods in food crisis contexts

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The issue

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the greatest global shocks in generations. Around the world, livelihoods have been disrupted, while poverty and hunger are rising. The full impact of the pandemic, however, is yet to be seen, as the virus ebbs and flows in different regions.

The situation will be most acute in countries already experiencing food crises or those that are extremely vulnerable to shocks. Last year, 135 million people experienced crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity, of whom 27 million were in emergency conditions. For these populations, the impacts of COVID-19 could be catastrophic. As the pandemic progresses in food crisis contexts, there is a real concern about the growing risk of famine.

Rising levels of acute food insecurity are already being recorded in countries including Afghanistan and the Central African Republic. In Somalia, between July and September 2020, around 3.5 million people are expected to face crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity. This corresponds to an almost threefold increase from pre-COVID-19 levels, as the country faces multiple shocks: an upsurge in swarms of desert locusts, floods, the impact of the pandemic and the lasting effects of drought and displacement.

As many as 80 percent of people living in food crisis contexts rely on some form of agricultural production for survival. Their food security is inextricably linked to local production and often informal markets. Unless we act fast to pre-empt further deterioration and protect livelihoods, the humanitarian implications will be enormous.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, at least 100 million people have been forcibly displaced within the last decade, with most remaining in countries that are experiencing or vulnerable to food crises. These populations are highly exposed to the impact of the pandemic, both from a health and socio-economic perspective. They make up a significant proportion of the people working in the informal economy in agriculture, as do women, who have been hit particularly hard by the crisis and who represent a large majority of informal workers in food production, processing and sales. Women are also overwhelmingly responsible for caring for family members. In some complex crises, many families are effectively headed by women, as men have migrated in search of employment. These women rely on remittances, which have almost completely stopped during the pandemic. They also face numerous protection risks, including greater exposure to gender-based violence. The prevention of food crises cannot wait until the health crisis is over. Instead, it must be at the core of the humanitarian response. Anticipatory action and swift response to safeguard livelihoods and increase access to food in emerging hotspots is crucial. Due to the seasonality of local agricultural production, the bulwark of food security, urgent support is critical to avoiding a substantial rise in the number of people experiencing crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity, especially as other shocks persist alongside the pandemic. Acting now means targeted interventions to safeguard food supply chains and protect food access and availability for the

Budget

USD 428 million

Time frame

April–December 2020 (nine months)

SDGs



Related FAO policy notes on COVID-19

- ▶ Anticipating the impacts of COVID-19 in humanitarian and food crisis contexts
- ▶ Social Protection and COVID-19 response in rural areas
- ▶ FAO's Programme Clinic: Designing conflict-sensitive interventions
- ▶ COVID-19 and smallholder producers' access to markets
- ▶ Mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 on the livestock sector



most vulnerable. Waiting too long means lives and livelihoods lost, and much more costly humanitarian food assistance and investment in rebuilding livelihoods.

The action

FAO's response plan is part of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-led Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. This plan is regularly revised in order to reflect the evolving nature of the pandemic, as well as its emerging needs. As of May 2020, FAO is seeking USD 350 million to urgently save lives and livelihoods. FAO's planned interventions are based on scenario-planning of COVID-19 impacts and adjusted to consider emerging needs and changing circumstances. Key activities include:

- 1 Rolling out data collection and analysis.** Pre-empting and responding to the impacts of the pandemic requires close monitoring and continuous on-the-ground assessment. FAO is setting up data collection and analysis to monitor risk factors in local food supply chains and to identify emerging trends. This facility contributes to FAO's Hand-in-Hand initiative and associated data platform, while informing the humanitarian community and beyond to guide anticipatory actions, response and recovery programmes. Data collection and analysis are, by necessity, largely based on remote mechanisms, such as mobile surveys, which require close partnerships with local organizations and other partners.
- 2 Ensuring availability of and stabilizing access to food for the most acutely food-insecure populations.** FAO's immediate priority is to ensure the continuity of essential operations and mitigate the pandemic's impact upon vulnerable people. This includes ensuring that input distribution continues in time for upcoming seasons. In South Sudan, for example, FAO has been able to continue its provision of vital agricultural inputs to more than 4 million people, despite movement restrictions and in full alignment with World Health Organization (WHO) and national health and safety guidelines. In Somalia, as a result of the already challenging context prior to the pandemic, FAO has in place the partnerships, systems and tools to deliver a large, successful, remotely managed programme and has fully transitioned to mobile money, including e-vouchers for the distribution of inputs for the main rainy (gu) season. Amid a rising risk of post-harvest losses as markets close or transport is interrupted in many areas, FAO is enhancing storage facilities and opportunities for small-scale processing and the conservation of perishable commodities.
- 3 Ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations** is a key determinant of food security and nutrition. FAO's interventions will seek to maintain and support the continuous functioning of local food markets, value chains and systems, focusing on vulnerable smallholder farmers and food workers, as well as areas that are critical to the food supply for vulnerable urban areas.
- 4 Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of virus transmission** is crucial to maintaining food supplies. FAO is already undertaking awareness-raising campaigns and training on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19, in addition to disinfecting markets to facilitate their continued functioning. FAO's primary target beneficiaries are people who, by nature, are hard to reach, in particular those living in rural and often remote areas with limited access to basic health services or to media used by the state to raise awareness. Over decades, FAO has built strong relationships with local actors, working with women's groups, Dimitra Clubs, community radios, Farmer Field School groups and others to raise awareness, together with government services and in line with WHO guidance.

Expected results

- 1** Ongoing, near real-time assessment and monitoring the food security impacts of COVID-19 facilitate timely, rapid and targeted response by the humanitarian community and governments to avert a deterioration in food security.
- 2** In food crisis contexts, producers are able to increase food production and income, store and transport their produce and safely access markets.
- 3** The most vulnerable are able to continue producing and accessing food, while levels of acute food insecurity do not rise as a result of COVID-19.
- 4** Food chain actors are well informed on how to reduce the transmission risk of COVID-19, including through training, demonstrations, social messaging campaigns, disinfecting markets and similar activities.



Partnerships

FAO will draw on its partnerships with the Global Food Security Cluster, Global Network Against Food Crises and other United Nations agencies, especially the World Food Programme. FAO will also work closely with the Early Action Focus Task Force, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, WHO, non-governmental organizations, local-level community organizations and extension workers.

Programme links

FAO's plan is part of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-led Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 and is a key component of FAO's comprehensive COVID-19 response package. It is fully embedded within and lays the foundations of FAO's programme to boost the resilience of smallholders for post-COVID-19 recovery, focusing on anticipatory action and emergency livelihood support. It also contributes to FAO's Hand-in-Hand initiative in food crisis contexts.

Regional and country focus

The impact of the pandemic on food security is constantly evolving and varies as the virus peaks and lockdown measures are tightened and eased in different regions and countries. This impact is further exacerbated by pre-existing and new shocks. For example, in the Caribbean, where the upcoming hurricane season is projected to be above average in intensity, efforts in Haiti focus on anticipatory actions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and of potential hurricanes. These actions include Cash+, which provides access to food now alongside the means to produce food.

There are currently 34 countries¹ facing high levels of acute food insecurity or that are extremely vulnerable to a rise in acute food insecurity. These countries represent FAO's main focus within the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. The number of countries could increase depending on the evolution of the pandemic. Data collection and analysis are being rolled out in food crisis and at-risk countries and are constantly informing scenario-planning, as well as the reprogramming and realignment of priorities to avert and address emerging acute food insecurity hotspots.

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