

164th Session of the FAO Council

Item 10: Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on food security and food systems

The combined impacts of COVID-19, its suppression measures and subsequent global recession, will make hunger and malnutrition worse, increasing the number of people who are hungry and poor, especially in low-income countries that rely on food imports. The global recession is likely to erase a decade of progress on poverty reduction.

FAO has been working on assessing the threat of COVID-19 to food security and nutrition and providing evidence-based policy to Members. Unlike during the 2007-2008 food price crisis, today's challenge is not food availability but food access. While the food supply chains are holding together, countries are beginning to experience recession, and this is a serious threat because economic downturn makes hunger worse. According to revised FAO estimates, as many as 120.3 million people could become hungry because of the reduction in economic growth.

The fall in demand for commodity exports, including oil, cotton, and minerals, the collapse of tourism, and reduction in remittance flows have hit developing countries especially hard. Food demand will fall as the number of unemployed people rises. The extent of the pandemic's impact on food demand depends on the depth and length of economic shock, and access to credit and social safety net programs. This is why economic stimulus measures in all countries should be geared towards meeting the food needs of the most vulnerable people. Without access to food and nutrition, there can be no health.

Council document, *Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on food security and food systems* (CL 164/10) also highlights FAO's efforts to assess the impact of COVID-19 on food and agriculture across the globe and to support policy analyses. FAO has also convened high-level meetings to encourage Members to work in concert to overcome the challenges of the pandemic, and FAO is working with UN Country Teams and other international partners to boost efforts to prevent the emergence of food crises and improve food security during the pandemic.

While FAO Members have successfully applied the lessons of past food crises to avoid exacerbating an otherwise challenging set of circumstances, avoiding a generalized food crisis will remain a challenge. Apart from known hotspots, which are expected to increase in scale and intensity in the coming months, there is the distinct possibility that food insecurity will grow rapidly in countries, or in areas of countries that have not seen food crises in many years. Keeping food value chains functioning will remain among the highest policy priorities, but the range of support activities will require an ability to provide timely policy, technical and investment support at the regional, national and even territorial level.

FAO's Comprehensive Response to COVID-19 under an Umbrella Programme will be built around the 6+1 thematic areas of work, as follows:

1. Providing trade policy support, with a special focus on intra-regional trade and ensuring public confidence in food safety through targeted support for adherence to food safety standards;
2. Maintaining support for poverty reduction and economic inclusion, ensuring that social protection works for rural as well as urban residents;
3. Preventing pandemics of animal origin through an extended One Health approach;
4. Boosting the resilience of smallholders for COVID-19 recovery;

5. Collecting and analysing data and providing timely information to guide the policy response;
6. Seizing opportunities not only to address current food supply bottlenecks and vulnerabilities, but also to promote Food Systems Transformation; and
7. FAO Humanitarian Response, addressing the impacts of COVID-19 in Food Crisis contexts.

In all of these areas, FAO seeks to bring the best policy and technical support the Organization can provide where it is needed most and can be most effective – at country, sub/regional and global levels – to help Members quickly and effectively address a complex and rapidly evolving challenge. The goal is to save lives and livelihoods, minimize development reversals in scope and time, and lay the foundation for an accelerated and transformative recovery.

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