Data for decision-making
Rapid, repeated assessments to monitor food insecurity at national and regional level

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The issue

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified development challenges across Europe and Central Asia, generating ever more demand for rapid, accessible and reliable data to guide decision-making. The evolving pandemic and associated economic crisis are impacting food security and jeopardizing countries' progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Identifying and evaluating the multi-faceted impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the food security situation requires real-time, quality information that enables the measurement of changes in people's access to food and an assessment of the underlying causes.

Countries in the region urgently need to improve the quality and availability of data if they are to gauge and tailor their response to the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. To this end, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has fast-tracked assistance in collecting and analysing food security data, both at country and regional level. In view of the projected long-term implications of COVID-19 on the global economy, however, these efforts need to be scaled up to ensure that adequate processes, systems and capacity are in place to generate the evidence needed, to support the formulation and implementation of informed, effective and targeted policies and programmes aimed at combatting food shortages, and to maintain food security and proper nutrition across the region.

The action

FAO's Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) measures the severity of food insecurity at household and/or individual level. It produces estimates for SDG indicator 2.1.2 on the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population (an indicator for which FAO is custodian). FAO has developed a FIES Survey Module for SDG monitoring (with two versions: one for individuals and one for households). The module can be adapted to measure and monitor food insecurity in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, ensuring both the rigour and reliability of data. The adapted module can capture the extent to which food insecurity experiences are linked to the effects of the pandemic. The individual version of the module, if applied to a sample with adequate statistical representation, also allows the sex-disaggregation of data on the prevalence of various forms of food insecurity.

This programme will build on FAO's current corporate work to implement the FIES COVID-19 module. The surveys that feed the module will be carried out in three rounds as part of other sociodemographic data collection activities and will be representative of the national populations of five countries in Europe and Central Asia (see next page for the country focus).
The countries have been selected based on the implementation status of the FIES modules and their expression of interest in adapting the modules to support monitoring and analysis of the food security situation with respect to COVID-19 to ensure an effective policy response. The data will be collected by a contracted service provider and shared with national statistics agencies.

Budget: USD 1.5 million

Time frame: 2020–2022

SDGs

Related FAO policy notes on COVID-19

▶ COVID-19 and the risk to food supply chains: How to respond?

▶ COVID-19 global economic recession: Avoiding hunger must be at the centre of the economic stimulus

▶ Mitigating risks to food systems during COVID-19: Reducing food loss and waste

▶ Simulating rising undernourishment during the COVID-19 pandemic economic downturn

Partnerships

To implement the programme, FAO will continue to leverage its strategic alliances in the relevant technical areas, particularly with the European Union, and seek engagement with new partners among governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies and organizations, international financial institutions, development banks, the private sector and academia.

The high-quality data produced will enable decision-makers to draw on enhanced analytical progress reports to identify the key determinants of COVID-19-driven food insecurity and to formulate policies and programmes to address them.

Expected results

▶ **FIES-based data and analytics, including sex-disaggregated data, to measure and monitor moderate and severe food insecurity will be readily available and provide information on the evolution of COVID-19 effects at country and regional level.**

▶ **Microdata will be more accessible through FAO's Microdata Catalogue, informing needs-tailored analyses for data users and decision-making processes at national and regional level.**

▶ **The capacity of national food security analysts to collect and analyse data on food insecurity will be strengthened through remote technical assistance and training.**

Programme links

The programme is linked to the FAO's Voices of the Hungry initiative, spanning more than 140 countries, funded in the first phase (2012–2019) by the UK Department for International Development, the Government of Belgium and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (currently being redesigned for the second phase). The results will inform FAO's COVID-19 response programmes in the region and feed analytics to the Common Country Analyses performed by United Nations Country Teams, FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative and the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Country focus

The initial focus countries include Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.[1]

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[1] The list of the recipient countries may be expanded based on the evolving situation and FAO's ongoing country and regional assessments in the context of COVID-19.