As of 20 September, there were 1,517,312 reported cases of COVID-19 within the countries in which WFP is active in the region. There has been a 15 percent increase in cases over the last two weeks (6 September – 20 September) and a 29 percent increase in cases over the last month (24 August – 20 September).

Children are returning to schools in September. The new academic year has started, or is set to start, in Algeria, Armenia, Iran, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia and Turkey. However, several other countries such as Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Sudan and Yemen have postponed the beginning of the next academic year due to COVID-19.

A total of USD 1.7 billion is required to maintain WFP activities in the region for the next six months (October 2020 to March 2021). This represents 66 percent of the total requirements for the same period (of USD 2.7 billion).
WFP RESPONSE

Social Protection

WFP continues to support host governments to adopt social protection measures in response to the pandemic. As part of the COVID-19 response plan, WFP is supporting the Government of Egypt through establishing the Egyptian COVID-19 Response Hub. The online hub aims to support the government in the preparation and implementation of the socio-economic response plan, with a focus on vulnerable communities, through consolidating information on the government response to the social and economic impacts of Coronavirus in Egypt. The Egyptian COVID-19 Response Hub is a GIS-based platform that consolidates data from both government and non-government entities.

Livelihood Programmes

Livelihood and resilience building activities have resumed in most countries in the region with risk mitigation measures in place to sustain the livelihoods of the most vulnerable people against the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. In Turkey, in August, the soup kitchen project - a COVID-19 mitigation measure and project adaptation sponsored by WFP, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and IOM – continued to prepare and provide 11,500 hot meals per day for vulnerable refugees and Turkish nationals in seven provinces. In Lebanon, in response to the Beirut blast, 100 participants of a WFP and Lebanese Reforestation Initiative (LRI) livelihoods project supported relief efforts at the damaged Rosaire Hospital in Beirut. Thanks to the participants, the emergency room is once again functional.

Nutrition

WFP continues implementing Social Behaviour Change Communications (SBCC) to positively influence behaviour during COVID-19. In Tajikistan, WFP started the implementation of SBCC nimble trials in pilot schools of Jaloliddini Balkhi District in Khatlon Region. The nimble trials focus on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) issues to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and improve the hand-washing behaviours of schoolchildren. This activity focuses on primary schools to create good hand washing and hygiene habits from early school years. A baseline data collection was conducted prior to the implementation of this intervention. WFP plans to expand this in all schools of targeted districts.

Cash-based Transfers

As the COVID-19 situation evolves, WFP continues to adjust its cash-based transfer (CBT) support to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. In Palestine, WFP has ensured beneficiaries uninterrupted access to all participating shops in the CBT programme in Gaza despite the lockdown and movement restrictions applied following the detection of the first COVID-19 cases inside communities on 24 August. In close coordination with technical staff at line ministries, including the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), shops opened their doors allowing redemption of food vouchers while following strict precautionary measures, including crowd management and use of personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, hygiene materials). Moreover, starting 1 September, WFP is topping up the full voucher value on a monthly basis, instead of a bi-monthly voucher top up. This mitigation measure is intended to give beneficiaries the freedom to redeem their vouchers fully in one visit to the shop during the month, hence decreasing the risk of leaving their homes and minimizing pandemic contagion.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent is WFP’s cooperating partner and handles food distributions.
WFP/Jessica Lawson
School Feeding

As schools in the region begin reopening, WFP is preparing for a safe start to the new academic year. In Algeria, in collaboration with UNICEF and other partners, WFP is contributing to the ‘back to school campaign’, which supports local efforts to offer comprehensive support to the health and nutrition status of learners. Specifically, WFP is going to work with its implementing partner Italian NGO CISP on COVID-19 sensitization in the schools, which includes the provision of information material and messaging on COVID-19 related health and safety measures to teachers, students and the cooks preparing school meals. Parents and caretakers are targeted with messages through the local radio and TV show and posters. WFP will also provide hydroalcoholic gel for the school kitchens. In Jordan, schools resumed on 1 September with school feeding programmes starting on 13 September in refugee camps and are planned to commence in the host community’s schools on 1 October.

Monitoring

WFP regularly monitors the food security situation in countries in the region in order to adapt activities based on current needs. WFP Armenia preliminary findings of the assessment on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the food security situation of the Armenian population, conducted among 4,217 households nationwide between 22 June and 3 August, indicate that approximately 90 percent of respondents applied coping mechanisms during the pandemic, such as borrowing money or using savings to buy food, and reducing the quantity and quality of daily meals. More than 70 percent reported to have experienced significant food insecurity in the 30 days before the interview, and particularly people living in urban areas have lost their jobs during the pandemic. Thanks to this study, WFP is developing its evidence-based emergency response to support 43,000 individuals with food and cash assistance to prevent further deterioration of their food security levels.

Supply Chain

WFP’s supply chain support has managed to minimize the impact on humanitarian operations in the region through preparedness and mitigation measures. In Palestine, WFP continues facilitating the movement of humanitarian assistance by humanitarian actors and donors through the WFP-led Logistics Cluster. Since July, the Logistics Cluster has processed 78 requests for coordination of COVID-19 related commodities, including medical supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE).
COMMON SERVICES

As of 8 September, WFP has operated 1,227 passenger flights, transporting 21,803 passengers across the global network for 345 partners. Moreover, a total of 49,228 m³ of cargo has been dispatched to 157 countries on board 876 flights on behalf of 41 partners as part of the free-to-user service under the Global Humanitarian Response Plan. With the resumption of commercial flights in some countries within the region, WFP Aviation Services will likely be either reduced or suspended.

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

UN agencies and partners continue to coordinate a joint response to the pandemic. As part of the Health Sector-led response to COVID-19 in Syria, WFP, in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) has so far provided food assistance to 10,800 people in 17 quarantine centres across Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Lattakia, Rural Damascus, and Tartous governorates. Under the COVID-19 Institutional Feeding programme, WFP is providing food assistance to vulnerable Syrians in COVID-19 quarantine centres. Moreover, in Iraq, the Food Security Cluster, which is co-led by WFP and FAO, distributed 10,000 food baskets to host community populations in Ninewa, Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah.

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

A total of USD 1.7 billion is required for the region for the next six months (October 2020 to March 2021). This represents 66 percent of the total requirements for the same period (of USD 2.7 billion). Countries with the highest level of funding needs are Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Sudan, Egypt and Palestine. As the situation in most countries in the region continues to impact food prices, unemployment and incomes, timely contributions from WFP's partners remain critical to ensure the impact is not carried over to the most vulnerable individuals and that beneficiaries continue to receive an adequate level of assistance.

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