GIEWS Country Brief
The Syrian Arab Republic

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FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT
- New agricultural season about to start, but production constraints continue to prevail
- Some recovery in 2017 cereal production due to better rains and localized improvements in security, but still less than half of pre-conflict average
- Food security situation severely impacted by prolonged conflict, especially for most vulnerable groups
- About 6.9 million people food insecure

New agricultural season about to start, but production constraints still prevail
The planting of the 2017/18 winter season wheat and barley crops will start in the second decade of October. Current climatic conditions remain favourable for land preparation. However, high production costs, lack of inputs and damaged or destroyed infrastructure, including irrigation, continue to constrain agricultural production.

Below-average cereal harvest in 2017
A joint FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) was conducted in May 2017. The Mission estimated the 2017 wheat harvest at about 1.8 million tonnes, some 12 percent more than last year’s record low harvest, but still much less than half of the pre-conflict average of 4.1 million tonnes (2002-2011). The slight increase in production was attributed to better rainfall and some local improvements in civil security, which allowed for a larger share of the planted area to be harvested. Being predominantly rainfed and more resilient than wheat, barley production was estimated at 777 000 tonnes, almost 8 percent higher than last year. Barley production varies greatly from year to year. Livestock often graze the unharvested areas of barley.

Over the past two years, herd sizes have stabilized albeit at a very low level. The main constraints restricting livestock production continue to be high fodder prices, insufficient coverage of veterinary services and access to grazing areas in parts of the country due to the compromised security situation. Improved pasture conditions, benefiting from higher rainfall, should ease the pressure from high fodder prices, provided that the access is possible.
Import requirement to increase in 2017/18 marketing year

The country normally relies heavily on food imports, amounting to almost half of the total domestic utilization. Overall, the cereal import requirement in the current 2017/18 marketing year (July/June) is forecast at 3.4 million tonnes, with an increase of 17 percent compared to the previous year.

Economic prospects still deteriorating

The GDP in 2016 contracted by 3.4 percent, less than the 5.3 percent contraction recorded in 2015. A positive GDP growth of 1.8 percent is forecast for 2017 as some limited reconstruction efforts are likely to begin, hampered by lack of finances. Inflation in 2016 increased to an estimated 43.9 percent, up from 38 percent in 2015 reflecting general shortages and cuts in fuel and some food subsidies. Although precise statistics are not available, the unemployment rate is estimated at about 50 percent up from about 10 percent at the beginning of the conflict. The official exchange rate for the US Dollar (USD) against the Syrian Pound (SYP) was set by the Central Bank of the Syrian Arab Republic in June 2017 at SYP 517 per USD.

About 6.9 million people are food insecure

The CFSAM estimated that 6.9 million Syrians are food insecure in terms of current consumption. In addition, the situation of 5.6 million Syrians would likely be worse off without the food assistance provided. An additional 3.1 million people are at risk of food insecurity as they are using asset depletion strategies in order to meet their consumption needs and only 3.5 million can currently be considered as food secure.

Syrians have to resort to food coping strategies to cover the severe food shortages they are facing. Some 50 percent of the households have reduced the number of meals and more than 30 percent have restricted the consumption to adults to prioritize children. In the seventh year of the crisis, the large majority of the households have depleted their assets and are no longer able to draw on stocks or other reserves. They resort to child labour or have to withdraw their children from school to cope.

As of late September 2017, over 5.2 million refugees were registered in the region covering Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. In addition, a large share of the population lives abroad without seeking refugee registration.

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