



FAO requires
USD 18.7 million



to assist
323 760 people



920 000 internally displaced
persons (IDPs) and returnees in
severe acute food insecurity



2.5 million people
(6.5%) have insufficient food
consumption countrywide
(World Food Programme [WFP],
12 June 2020)



5.4 million people
(13.9% of households) already
adopted food-related negative
coping mechanisms

Impact of COVID-19 on food security and agriculture

- Iraq is vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19 due to pre-existing vulnerabilities, including poverty, dwindling natural resources and ongoing displacement due to past conflicts.
- The collapse of the global oil market in April has also had serious implications for Iraq's capacity to import food. Approximately 90 percent of the Government's income derives from oil revenue. The Government built the state budget under the assumption that oil would trade at USD 56 per barrel. Therefore, there are concerns relating to the funding of Social protection programmes.
- While the full impact of COVID-19 on food security is not yet known, the measures in place to control its spread have exacerbated the effects of the ongoing humanitarian situation.
- From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Iraq has exempted agricultural stakeholders from movement restrictions, allowing them to continue production and transport of agricultural goods. However, challenges facing the development of major value chains remain and unless the constraints facing agricultural supply chains are addressed, food security and job opportunities will be affected.
- Until now, food and non-food items have been allowed into the country and Iraq's major trading partners continue to export as normal. However, since Iraq imports roughly 50 percent of the country's food, this import dependency leaves Iraq vulnerable



to food shortages or major price increases. The Government of Iraq has emphasized the need to boost strategic food reserves and closely monitor global food trade trends. It has also placed tariffs on 25 agricultural products to protect local production and improve self-reliance.

- COVID-19 containment measures, including lockdowns and restrictions on movement between governorates, have highly affected certain livelihoods such as day labourers and workers employed in the construction, hospitality and food industries, thereby increasing the adoption of negative coping mechanisms.
- Mounting fiscal pressure has already begun to place stress on the nation's Public Distribution System (PDS), which provides food entitlements to almost all of the country's population. This programme has been fundamental in ensuring household's

basic nutrition requirements, especially amongst displaced populations. Iraq primarily depends on imports to fulfil the basket of food entitlements under PDS. Although local wheat production will meet PDS demand for 2020, the Government only has 190 000 tonnes of rice in reserve, enough to cover only two distribution cycles.

- In an attempt to support vulnerable households affected by the COVID-19 crisis, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs established a one-time financial relief package called the *Minha* programme, where approximately 11.6 million people will receive a one-time cash transfer of IQD 30 000 (around USD 25). The Ministry has also expanded its regular social protection programming compared with previous months, allocating USD 328 million to the programme and increasing the caseload to 1.3 million pre-registered households.

Likely evolution of the impacts of COVID-19 on food security

In June/July, the number of COVID-19 cases has risen dramatically. Indicating that the pandemic has not yet reached its peak in the country. The Government's exemption of movement restrictions for agricultural stakeholders should prevent major disruptions to the summer planting season. Despite these directives, both the enforcement of these exemptions, and continued market access should be monitored closely. If cases continue to increase, the Government may enforce harsher restrictions and rescind the movement waivers.

Returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are less resilient to shocks and are therefore more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19. Certain segments of the population are also more vulnerable, including the elderly, young children, and pregnant and lactating women. Women's engagement in economic activities, especially in the agriculture sector, may be threatened as opportunities dwindle, exacerbating the existing gender gap.

As people lose their sources of income due to movement restrictions, they suffer from diminished purchasing power. Many more people may have to resort to negative coping mechanisms if the situation continues to deteriorate. Overall health and future labour productivity will also suffer.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) focuses on resilience-building activities for vulnerable households (including IDPs and returnees) to strengthen livelihoods, diversify food production, rehabilitate agricultural infrastructure and restore agricultural value chains. FAO encourages crop and livestock owners to adopt agricultural best practices and climate-smart approaches through farmer field schools, and supports extension officers, thus improving natural resource management. Furthermore, FAO supports animal husbandry and health services by training extension workers and providing essential vaccines, equipment for processing of animal products and animal restocking.

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, FAO is adapting ongoing projects to the current operating context by integrating more virtual training, distributing personal protective equipment (PPE) and enforcing physical distancing measures. FAO is also expanding its programming to include the additional caseload impacted by COVID-19, implementing new agriculture-focused activities.

1) Data and analysis facility

- FAO has been closely monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on food security. FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), WFP and the World Bank have issued joint weekly bulletins, providing regular snapshots of the food security situation.
- AO, IFAD, the World Bank and WFP are releasing detailed periodic reports on the impact of COVID-19 on food security, analysing ongoing trends and providing policy recommendations.
- FAO will roll out a remote study in the coming months to track the impact of COVID-19 on crop and livestock production by surveying farmers, agricultural input suppliers, extension officers and government officials. This data will feed into a joint FAO and Government-led assessment that will inform the development of an early warning food security monitoring system.
- FAO, the International Organization for Migration and the International Trade Center have started a quarterly monitoring system that will track the impact of COVID-19 on the business sentiments of agricultural small- and medium-sized enterprises.

2) Ensuring availability of and stabilizing access to food for the most food-insecure populations

- As part of the 2020 HRP, FAO plans to distribute agricultural inputs and animal fodder to vulnerable smallholder farmers and livestock owners. As the production cycle of vegetables is short, FAO will prioritize the distribution of vegetable seeds and associated supplies so that multiple harvests are possible, regardless of the season. FAO's fodder distribution programmes will support local livestock assets, increasing their productivity and ensuring sustainable access to food and income.

FAO also plans to implement two new activities in response to COVID-19:

- Cash+ schemes will add an additional layer of social protection for vulnerable smallholder farmers by providing an immediate influx of unconditional cash to smooth household consumption patterns, while simultaneously providing training and inputs to improve agricultural production, generate income and increase asset ownership for longer-term dietary diversity and food security.
- Animal health services will ensure that livestock – an essential livelihood source for vulnerable households – remain healthy and protected. FAO will conduct vaccination and parasite treatment campaigns to support vulnerable livestock owners against common diseases, such as foot-and-mouth disease and brucellosis. Supporting animal health is critical during the COVID-19 pandemic to reduce the potential of a secondary zoonotic disease outbreak, which would burden an already stressed health system.

3) Ensuring continuity of the food supply chain

- Outside of the humanitarian response, FAO plans to pilot a farmer-to-farmer digital extension platform in collaboration with the Government of Iraq, leveraging available technology and local knowledge to improve agricultural productivity. The growing number of online and mobile applications – paired with increased smartphone usage amongst rural populations – presents an opportunity to harness technology to facilitate peer exchange in the agriculture sector. This is of particular importance in the context of COVID-19, as physical distancing and

other mitigation measures limit in-person extension services.

4) Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of transmission

- FAO has been actively disseminating information and raising awareness on proper COVID-19 mitigation measures. In collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund, WFP, WHO and Food Security Cluster

partners, FAO developed key messages on food safety, hygiene and nutrition both for vulnerable households and for actors along the food supply chain.

- FAO is already providing PPE to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources-Directorate of Planning in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; and will conduct an online training for government extension officers on COVID-19 mitigation measures with an emphasis on the food supply chain.

Funding



FAO requires
USD 18.7 million

- **USD 9.7 million** under the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19
- **USD 9 million** under the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020



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Coordination and partnerships

- Food Security Cluster (co-led by FAO and WFP)
- Donor Coordination Group for Agriculture and Water Resources (co-led by FAO together with the Embassy of the Netherlands to Iraq).
- FAO has also been instrumental in developing the UN's Iraq Recovery Strategy, an initiative spearheaded by the United Nations Development Programme. In collaboration with WFP, FAO has developed a food security strategy by analysing potential scenarios, linking responses to the UN Strategic Country Development Framework and identifying synergies with other sectors.
- FAO, jointly with IFAD, WFP, and the World Bank, is assessing the impact of COVID-19 on food security and agriculture with weekly and bi-monthly reports.

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