

World Food Programme COVID-19 Messages 31 March 2020

WFP has elevated its pandemic response to its highest level of corporate emergency. Announcing the move on 30 March, Executive Director David Beasley said: “WFP urgently requires the activation of enhanced response management mechanisms, additional flexible and timely funding, and extraordinary additional capacity to support the Regional Bureaux and Country Offices. In order to support the global emergency response, the current COVID-19 crisis is therefore categorized as a WFP Level 3 Corporate Surge Emergency with immediate effect until 30 September 2020.”

PUBLIC MESSAGING

Sustaining WFP operations

- It's vital that at this time of global crisis that WFP maintain its food assistance programmes which offer a lifeline to 87 million vulnerable people around the world. WFP is on the frontlines, assisting hungry people in more than 80 countries that are often ill-equipped to respond to the pandemic.

Enabling the global health and humanitarian response objective

- WFP is extending its supply chain infrastructure, assets and partnerships to serve the wider humanitarian and health community, providing logistics support to the global response. WFP is already working closely with the World Health Organization and health partners, providing support in logistics information management, supply chain planning, and supply chain services.



Building on its global network of strategically-placed Humanitarian Response Depots ([UNHRD](#)), WFP will establish international and regional staging areas to facilitate the dispatch of essential cargo on the behalf of partners; set up air transport links and contract charter vessels where shipping has been disrupted; and provide passenger air and Medevac services for humanitarian staff.

Tracking impacts and inform decision-making

- The pandemic is affecting countries in different ways. On behalf of the international community, WFP will provide real-time tracking of changes in the areas of food security, health and trade in vulnerable countries. Monitoring will be complemented with early warning and security analysis of how the pandemic is impacting food and other fragilities. Data and analysis will be visualized through static and web-based platforms.

DONOR MESSAGING

- WFP's priority is to ensure it has the resources in place to address the food and nutrition needs of the 87 million people it plans to assist in 2020. In addition to offering a lifeline to these vulnerable people, our programmes provide stability and strengthen the resilience of the communities in which they live.
- WFP appeals to government partners to accelerate an estimated \$US1.9 billion of contributions to enable the forward procurement and pre-positioning of buffer stocks of food and cash so that at least 3 months of assistance can be provided in fragile places.
- WFP is asking government partners to allow maximum flexibility in the way that resources are used so that food assistance programmes can respond dynamically to the rapidly changing outlook.

INTERNAL MESSAGING

- Staff wellness is critical if WFP is to maintain its capacity to respond to the needs of the millions of people who require urgent food assistance in 2020.
- Business continuity during the pandemic will place an additional strain on WFP staff but every possible measure is being taken to ensure that technology and support will be made available to allow colleagues to continue to work.
- WFP staff should follow corporate guidance on travel and working practices and avoid any activities that could lead to the further spread of the virus.



- Staff should wash their hands regularly and take other measures to protect themselves as advised by WHO and the health authorities of the countries where they are based. WFP Medical Services will provide regular updates.

FUNDING

On 25 March, the United Nations Office Coordinating Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) launched a humanitarian response plan featuring an appeal for \$2 billion to help the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. WFP's requirement as outlined in the Global Inter-Agency COVID-19 Response Plan is **US\$350 million**. This is needed to fund common humanitarian services including vital aviation, shipping, storage and transport, as well as engineering services in areas affected by the pandemic. The OCHA appeal is additional to WFP's existing plans to provide food assistance to 87 million people in 2020.

WFP has separately asked donors to expedite an estimated **US\$1.9 billion** in already pledged but not yet received contributions so that forward procurement and the pre-positioning of three months' worth of buffer stocks can be accelerated. Any new food security needs generated by the crisis will be captured in revisions to country humanitarian response plans.

SCHOOL MEALS (note figures change by the day)

A new WFP map showing how COVID-19 is disrupting children's school meals - [Global Monitoring of School Meals during COVID-19 School Closures](#) - provides daily on-screen updates on school closures and the number of children no longer receiving school meals as a result.

More than 1.5 billion children and youth – that's about 87 percent of enrolled learners around the world – are having to stay away from schools and universities due to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO figures).

Nationwide closures are in force in some 184 countries while, in many others, there are localized closures which could become countrywide. These developments are having huge implications for students' learning – but also for other key aspects of their lives such as school meals. Because of the COVID pandemic, more than 367 million schoolchildren are now missing out on school meals on which they depend.

Partial or country-wide closures of schools have been reported in 49 countries where WFP implements school feeding programmes. This means that some 11.6 million children are no longer receiving WFP school meals.



WFP is working with governments and partners to ensure that school children and their families continue to receive support that addresses their food and nutritional requirements during the COVID-19 crisis. In countries where schools are still open, the priority is to ensure that hygiene, behaviour and food safety standards are followed and that social distancing measures are addressed to mitigate the risk of increased infections. WFP is working with partners to improve access to water and sanitation. Jointly with FAO, WFP is developing guidance for government led programmes to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on food and nutrition of schoolchildren.

In countries where schools are closed, WFP is evaluating possible alternatives. This includes providing take-home rations in lieu of the meals, home delivery of food and provision of cash or vouchers.

In Libya, WFP in coordination with local teachers is distributing take-home rations of fortified date bars for children and their families. The ration is intended to cover the nutritional needs of children and up to five family members for five days. Teachers and school feeding focal points have been trained to ensure safe delivery of packages from house to house.

Following Colombia's decision to close schools due to COVID-19, WFP in coordination with local school authorities began distribution of take-home rations to school children and their parents in La Guajira department which borders Venezuela. 34 MT of food from the local School Feeding Programme's warehouse has been repackaged and distributed as take-home rations.

Where emergency safety net programmes are being introduced by the governments in response to COVID, WFP is advocating that primary schoolchildren are included as part of the vulnerable population.

WFP's school feeding programmes spans 61 countries globally and serves as a critical social safety net for poor and vulnerable households. Some programmes provide complete meals, while others distribute fortified snacks. In countries with high levels of poverty, WFP offers take-home rations which have proven nutritional benefits for younger siblings.

NUTRITION

During an infectious disease outbreak, like COVID-19, malnutrition rates can increase sharply, leading to even higher mortality rates. Pregnant women, young children, the chronically ill and the elderly often have compromised immune functions making them vulnerable to infection and at risk of death.



Meeting one's nutritional needs can maintain health and fortify the immune system to fight off infection. This involves consuming adequate micronutrients, like zinc and vitamin A, that play an important role in the functioning of the immune system. In addition, a person dealing with an infection requires more micronutrients to fight off the infection and replenish body reserves.

In addition to maintaining acute malnutrition prevention and treatment programmes during the pandemic, WFP continues to evaluate and identify populations vulnerable to COVID-19 and adjust nutrition support. This means supporting those most at risk (the elderly and the chronically ill) and those who are at risk due to overstretched health services and disrupted food systems (young children, pregnant and nursing women, and people living with HIV/TB).

WFP is working to ensure the uninterrupted delivery of life-saving nutritious food to vulnerable communities at risk of infection. WFP is pre-positioning nutritious food supplies and coordinating with governments and partners to ensure that supply chains of specialized nutritious food are not disrupted by transport and cross-border restrictions.

BIOMETRICS

WFP uses biometric data collection and other forms of technology to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of how we deliver food assistance. However, because of COVID-19, we are having to review all our processes and systems and this includes biometrics.

The biometric registration or verification of beneficiaries using fingerprinting, for example, could pose a risk of spreading infection. For that reason, WFP is recommending to its regional and country offices that they review their processes based on the use of biometric data and – in active contamination environments – that they avoid the use of biometrics unless absolutely critical.

The decision to use or drop biometrics will be made in consultation with the health and other authorities in the individual countries where we operate. All decisions regarding changes in processes and practices will be communicated to our beneficiaries and to the partner organisations with whom we work.

GENDER

COVID-19 is affecting women and men in different ways. WFP recognises that women's workloads have and continue to increase. Also increasing for women and girls are the risks of violence and poverty, both of which undermine their health, including food security and nutrition.



In order to ensure that WFP's response to the impacts of COVID-19 improves, not worsens gender inequalities, WFP is focusing on effective and equitable actions that take into consideration the diverse needs of women and men – especially in times of a pandemic.

Q & A

How can we continue distributing if everything is on lockdown - how are beneficiaries even able to come to food distributions or whatever if they can't leave their houses?

WFP monitors the situation on the ground to ensure that our operations are minimally impacted. Our plans include the strategic repositioning of three months of food supplies or cash for priority operations to counter the effects of the lockdown.

The food supply chain is a complex web that involves producers, agricultural inputs, transportation, processing plants, shipping etc. As the virus spreads and cases mount, and measures tighten to curb the spread of the virus, the global food system will surely be tested and strained in the coming weeks and months.

For example, and as part of this forward-looking operational plan, some of our country offices like Bangladesh and Zimbabwe already started providing double ratios of assistance in advance or have increased the number of distribution sites in anticipation of lockdown effects.

Is WFP reviewing the way it distributes food assistance, particularly for refugees and IDPs which involve large gatherings of people in one place?

This is an area in which WFP acquired specific experience during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014. WFP is abiding by recommendations from local health authorities to protect the health and safety of our beneficiaries and our staff. As a preventative measure, WFP has reviewed food distributions and other operations so as to reduce the risk of infection to beneficiaries, partners, and WFP staff. In some countries, COVID-compliant measures have already been introduced and these are being extended as required.

WFP has amended its food assistance feeding cycle to ensure beneficiaries receive the full entitlement both as part of the in-kind distribution and the e-voucher modality once every month. Only one person per household will be allowed to come into the distribution points to receive food. Extra porter service will be provided wherever there is a need. WFP has taken preventive measures in the office space including distribution of hand sanitizers and thermal thermometers, construction of handwashing blocks and targeted awareness on handwashing and health and hygiene. In the WFP distribution outlets, everyone is required to sanitize their hands



before entering WFP premises. Cooperating partners have set up handwashing stations and are screening the body temperature of people at the entrance of every outlet.

Has WFP started stockpiling commodities to make sure it doesn't run out of food if borders are closed and trade and movement is restricted?

WFP monitors the situation on the ground to ensure that our operations are minimally impacted. It should also be noted that cash and vouchers are an increasingly significant component of WFP food assistance, so stockpiling of food aid is not always essential. Our plans include the strategic prepositioning of three months of food supplies or cash for priority operations.

Are we facing a food crisis? Could COVID-19 have a major impact on food production, agricultural supply chains and markets?

The food supply chain is a complex web that involves producers, agricultural inputs, transportation, processing plants, shipping etc. As the virus spreads and cases mount, and measures tighten to curb the spread of the virus, the global food system will surely be tested and strained in the coming weeks and months.

As of now, disruptions are minimal as food supply has been adequate and markets have been stable so far. Global cereal stocks are at comfortable levels and the outlook for wheat and other major staple crops for 2020 is positive.

Although less food production of high value commodities (i.e. fruits and vegetables) is already likely, they are not as yet noticeable because of the lockdowns and disruption in the value chain.

We are already seeing, however, challenges in terms of the logistics involving the movement of food, and the pandemic's impact on livestock sector due to reduced access to animal feed and slaughterhouses' diminished capacity.

We may soon expect to see disruptions in the food supply chains. Blockages to transport routes are particularly obstructive for fresh food supply chains and may result in increased food loss and waste. Transport restrictions and quarantine measures are likely to impede farmers' access to markets.

Shortages of labour could disrupt production and processing of food, notably for labour-intensive crops, particularly in vulnerable countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Price spikes are not expected in the major staples but are more likely for high-value commodities, especially meat and perishable commodities.

What countries is WFP most worried about?



The situation is rapidly evolving, and WFP must ensure its response is flexible and adaptable to new circumstances. WFP is analyzing developments and impact of COVID-19 spread in real time to inform WFP's response and priorities.

The global pandemic is impacting all countries – and the country's most vulnerable will be those with fragile economies, services, and health systems. These are also the countries where WFP works.

WFP has carried out an analysis that looks at a range of factors including our own capacity to respond in-country, alongside a number of indices that track levels of development, capacity of national health authorities and national reliance on food imports, to name but a few. Based on this analysis, the Middle East and West and Central Africa are of the greatest priority, followed by East Africa.

The countries which we absolutely have to prioritise are those with high pre-existing vulnerability and compounding economic, socio-political, security and climate fragility factors; and within these, there are countries which are reliant on imports and which have weak logistics performance & supply chain systems. In Africa, think countries including Burkina Faso, DRC and Libya.

Most of these countries - the ones already dealing with multiple crises and reliant on international assistance to meet minimum essential needs - are also those covered in the Global Humanitarian Response Plan.

Why should people give money to WFP or any aid agencies when there is so much need in countries in the developed world?

This is a global crisis and no one is immune as the virus spreads from one country to another. That's why we need a response that is truly holistic and international. This virus knows no borders. It might be rampant in the developed world right now but it risks spreading throughout the developing world, among some of the most fragile communities on earth, countries which are already grappling with conflict, climate change and high levels of economic marginalisation. WFP is on the frontlines in these same countries, making sure that millions of vulnerable people do not tip over into starvation. Without funding, WFP cannot provide the assistance that these people so desperately need.

Here's what Canada's International Development Minister Karina Gould recently had to say on the subject: "Canada absolutely has to protect our own citizens, but part of protecting our own citizens is being part of that global response. It's a bit of an enlightened self-interest. We absolutely need to be thinking about the world's poorest and most vulnerable because if we're not thinking about them, we're also



putting ourselves at risk. If we were to take a step back from those, the collateral damage and the generation of children that could be left behind because of this is even greater than the risk that we face with COVID.”

SNAPSHOT OF WFP RESPONSE TO COVID-19 AROUND THE WORLD

Supporting the public health response

In China, WFP has provided support to the Chinese government’s efforts to curb the spread of the virus by [delivering lifesaving medical equipment](#) to hospitals in Hubei province.

WFP has deployed a team of supply chain experts to the WHO Headquarters in Geneva to provide planning and logistics support to emergency teams, and - through the WFP-led UN Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD) - has delivered vital health and protective equipment to 67 countries across the world on behalf of the WHO. WFP is also designing a prototype field treatment centre with WHO.

In Iran, WFP is providing a three-month supply of (Japanese-funded) personal protection equipment – masks and coverall gowns - for more than 5,000 staff and volunteers from the Iranian Red Crescent Society. WFP arranged for the material to be airlifted via the UN Humanitarian Response Depot in Dubai.

Mitigating the impact on food assistance operations

In Angola, WFP will be conducting double distributions to refugees in April and is increasing the number of final distribution points, hand-washing stations and social distancing to reduce the risk of infection to beneficiaries and personnel during distributions.

In Afghanistan, WFP has started collecting the prices of staple foods in eight major urban markets on a daily basis following a spike in prices observed in Kabul on 16 March due to COVID-19.

In Bangladesh, WFP put in place a double-ration system for refugees in Cox’s Bazaar whereby monthly rations are given every two months instead, reducing excess movement of people and supporting social distancing efforts. WFP is also prepositioning and stockpiling food stocks.

In Colombia WFP has introduced packaged food kits and vouchers to reduce congestion at community kitchens providing daily meals to vulnerable migrants crossing the border.



In **the Philippines**, WFP is supporting the Government by transporting more than 400 metric tons of rice for the assembly of Family Food Packs. In addition, the Government has requested WFP to provide 31 trucks.

In **Somalia**, WFP will provide two-month rations (both food and cash-based entitlements for relief) for April and May. This move is intended to reduce the exposure to COVID-19 posed by large gatherings at food distribution sites. WFP's Logistics Unit has begun the transfer and prepositioning of commodities to key hubs. For all nutrition activities, recipients of WFP assistance already registered in the programme will receive two months of entitlements.

In **Syria**, the frequency of food distribution days has been increased in order to reduce the total number of beneficiaries at each site. WFP is encouraging partners to operate two distribution shifts per day and increase the number of food distribution points.

In **Uganda**, WFP life-saving assistance (GDF & Nutrition) in Karamoja camp continue. WFP has revised food distributions by ensuring hand washing, disinfection of sites, temperature checks and establishing isolation facilities as well as temporary suspension of biometric identity verification through fingerprint readers and Iris scans.

In **Zambia**, WFP and partners have put in place measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 such as distributing two months' worth of rations (in case of a nationwide lockdown), spacing out distributions to avoid congestion, installing hand washing facilities and providing chlorinated water and soap at distribution sites.

WFP is expanding the use of remote food security monitoring tools like its phone-based mVAM vulnerability monitoring system, looking at supply chain disruptions, market functionality, access to markets and health care, and the impact of COVID-19 on food security.

