

SYRIA

EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE TO THE PEOPLE AFFECTED BY UNREST IN SYRIA

February 2016



WFP/ Hussam Al Saleh

HIGHLIGHTS

- In February almost 3.8 million Syrians received WFP food assistance.
- 28 percent of the food assistance was delivered to hard-to-reach and besieged locations across the country through cross-border and cross-line deliveries.
- WFP delivered food assistance to people in seven besieged locations in East Ghouta (Rural Damascus) for the first time since 2012.
- Over 150,000 people were displaced by escalating violence in Aleppo and Dar'a during February.
- Over 7,200 pregnant and lactating women, 96 percent of the planned beneficiaries, received CBT (Cash-based Transfer) nutrition support in Lattakia and Homs governorates.
- Food security in Al Hasakeh governorate further deteriorates as the protracted closure of the Nusaybin border crossing is preventing humanitarian assistance for 275,000 people in need.

In numbers

6.5 million people internally displaced
13.5 million people require humanitarian assistance
8.7 million people require food assistance

Funding update

WFP has confirmed funding until the end of May 2016, and once the generous pledges from the London Conference are confirmed, needs will be covered until end of October.

SITUATION UPDATE

Aleppo Governorate

At the beginning of February, the Syrian army, backed by the Russian air force, launched a large-scale military campaign in northern rural Aleppo seizing control of several villages located along the supply route from Turkey to eastern Aleppo city. As of the end of February, it was confirmed that over 75,000 people from the affected areas were displaced. The bulk of the displaced families moved towards Bab al Salam (BAS) border crossing point and other areas of A'zaz sub-district, where they stayed in IDP camps or were hosted by families and friends. Others sought refuge in western Rural Aleppo (Afrin, Daret Azza and Atareb) and in nearby Idleb. During February, WFP in cooperation with its cross-border partners provided food rations and ready-to-eat parcels for almost 70,000 displaced people in Aleppo governorate (A'zaz, Daret Azza, Atareb and Idleb). Moreover, in response to reports of additional displacement within eastern Aleppo city, due to increasing levels of violence throughout February especially prior to the cessation of hostilities, WFP provided 3,000 ready-to-eat rations to meet the most urgent needs of 15,000 newly displaced people. In addition, WFP prepositioned food assistance from April allocations from Turkey for 117,000 people in opposition-held areas in eastern Aleppo city as contingency stock in anticipation of potential access disruptions and a consequent besiegement.

An eight-day closure of Khanaser road, the only access route from Homs to Aleppo, following heavy clashes between government forces and ISIL along the road, prevented the delivery of WFP food assistance for 32,730 people in Western Aleppo city. The disruption of the supply line resulted in drastic increases in food and fuel prices (up to 200 percent) and shortages of fresh products such as vegetable and fruit. However, Khanaser road reopened to traffic on 29 February after government forces secured control of the area and carried out maintenance and rehabilitation works to restore the full functionality of the route. WFP food deliveries resumed during the first week of March after the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) conducted an assessment mission to assess the security conditions on the road and recommended the resumption of humanitarian deliveries. However, the road is still inaccessible by UN staff until further road assessment have been conducted.

Al Hasakeh Governorate

Following the eruption of clashes between ISIL and the Syrian Democratic Forces in Shaddadi, in southern rural Al Hasakeh, on 19 February 3,600 people were reportedly displaced. The affected families sought refuge in surrounding rural areas, or moved towards north to Al-Hole and Tel Brak sub-districts. WFP, in coordination with third party monitoring staff and partners on the

ground, conducted a rapid needs assessment among the newly displaced families. Findings highlighted dire humanitarian conditions among the newly displaced, with food reported as a priority need.

Rural Damascus Governorate

Reports are surfacing about worsening food security conditions in the besieged town of Darayya, Rural Damascus, which witnessed heavy bombardment during the month, especially prior to the cessation of hostilities. The escalation of violence cut off all channels previously used to smuggle food and other goods into the area, resulting in sharp price increases of basic food items. The people of Darayya have been surviving through communal farming. The limited available food has been shared to ensure that people have at least one meal a day. Meals are meagre and comprise leaves, vegetables, cereals and pulses. Families with children are prioritized to receive milk and dairy products produced from cows and sheep hidden in underground sheds for protection from aerial bombardment. Although the forces in charge of Darayya established price control measures to prevent traders from exploiting the situation, reports indicate that the system is not being followed. The price of fuel is SYP 3,000/L compared to SYP 160/L in Damascus, while bread is simply not available due to a lack of wheat flour. The UN has made repeated requests to deliver aid to approximately 4,000 people inside Darayya, but has so far received no response.

Dar'a Governorate

The southern governorate of Dar'a has witnessed large-scale population displacements since late December, as government forces launched a large-scale military campaign to regain control of opposition strongholds in the governorate. It is estimated that over 70,000 people had been displaced within the governorate and in neighbouring Quneitra by the beginning of February as conflict lines continued to shift. Over the course of February, thousands of families returned to their homes as localised truce agreements led to a lull in fighting in the central parts of the governorate. In parallel, fighting escalated in the eastern and western rural areas, forcing over 50,000 people to be on the move again during the month of February, including both new IDPs and families who had already been displaced during the previous six weeks. In response, WFP stepped up deliveries from Jordan, allocating additional food supplies for 55,500 people. Using these quantities, as well as redirecting food assistance from areas that became inaccessible or were completely evacuated, WFP partners were able to provide support to over 73,000 newly displaced people in both Dar'a and Quneitra governorates. In addition, WFP prepositioned 15,000 food rations from April allocations from Jordan sufficient for 75,000 people in opposition-held areas in Dar'a as a contingency stock in anticipation of potential access disruptions.

WFP RESPONSE

Overall Achievements

In February, WFP delivered food assistance for 3.78 million people in 12 of the 14 Syrian governorates, achieving 95 percent of its monthly plan. Of this, 876,505 people living in areas suffering from access constraints in Aleppo, Idleb, Hama, Dar'a, and Quneitra were reached through cross-border deliveries from Turkey and Jordan, representing 23 percent of the total food assistance delivered in February. In addition, cross-line deliveries to besieged and hard-to-reach areas amounted to five percent of the total deliveries with a 60 percent increase compared to January 2016 following access improvements after the Munich meeting on 12 February.

In locations that have bread shortages, WFP partners continue to channel their allocation of wheat flour to contracted private bakeries to bake bread bundles, while WFP fully covers production and transportation costs. The bread production project is absolutely vital for beneficiaries receiving food rations, especially as most families do not have adequate access to the cooking facilities and fuel they need to bake the bread. In February, an average of 43,000 bread bundles were produced daily meeting the needs of approximately 236,500 people per day.

In coordination with SARC, WFP delivered life-saving food assistance across the lines of active conflict to 19,000 people in hard-to-reach locations of Rural Damascus and rural Hama. This includes a breakthrough delivery of food assistance for 10,000 people in Jirud and Raheiba (Rural Damascus) for first time since June 2015. These areas, home to approximately 60,000 people, have witnessed significant levels of fighting over the past year, while restrictions have limited the movements of people and goods and resulted in limited food availability and inflated food prices.

Joint Humanitarian Deliveries to Besieged Areas in Rural Damascus, Idleb and Homs Governorates

- At the Munich meeting held on 12 February, the International Syria Support Group agreed to accelerate and expand aid deliveries to the besieged locations across Syria, which paved the way for a series of inter-agency convoys to besieged locations in Rural Damascus and Idleb governorates during the month of February and early March.
- On 17 February, through simultaneously coordinated inter-agency convoys from Damascus and Homs, WFP delivered food assistance for 60,000 people besieged in

Madaya, Zabadani (Rural Damascus), Foah and Kefraya (Idleb). This was the third inter-agency delivery since government and opposition forces reached a localised ceasefire agreement in September 2015 to end hostilities in the "Four towns". Following reports of severe malnutrition among the besieged population found during the missions previously conducted in January, WFP supplies included nutrition products for the prevention and treatment of malnutrition and fortified date bars.

- On 17 and 23 February, two inter-agency convoys led by WFP's Country Director reached the besieged town of Moadamiyah in Rural Damascus delivering food rations, wheat flour, nutrition supplies and fortified date bars for 44,000 people. A severe humanitarian situation was witnessed by WFP staff members who accompanied the convoy to Moadamiyah. Only a few shops were selling commodities at highly inflated prices and people were living off grass and a bowl of rice per day. The town, besieged since 2013, was last reached by WFP in July 2014 following a local truce agreement, which allowed the resumption of movement of goods and people, albeit with some limitations. The situation deteriorated again over 2015, and since December 2015, severe movement restrictions were imposed with the closure of the only entry point to the town. Residents have faced a sharp deterioration of their situation due to increased access restrictions, particularly with regards to food and medical care, and cases of severe malnutrition have been reported.

- Through a series of three inter-agency convoys to East Ghouta in Rural Damascus conducted between 23 February and 7 March, WFP delivered life-saving food assistance to a total of 47,590 people in seven besieged locations: Kafr Batna, Beit Sawa, Jisreen, Hamoryah, Terma, Saqba, and Hazzeh. Each family received a family food ration sufficient for one month, including two bags of fortified wheat flour. Prior to these deliveries, the areas had last been reached in late 2012. WFP staff members who accompanied the first convoy on 23 February reported that the majority of the civilians appear to be living off vegetables and legumes grown on every available patch of land. A chronic shortage of bread was also reported. Fuel appeared to be available, although 75 percent more expensive than in Damascus city. People surveyed said they eat only once a day and children often go to bed crying of hunger.

- Prior to the Munich meeting, WFP delivered food assistance for 40,000 people in need in the hard-to-reach neighbourhood of Al-Waer in Homs city on 4 February as part of an inter-agency convoy. This delivery was the fourth in a series of joint humanitarian convoys since a localised ceasefire agreement was reached between parties to the conflict in early December. The first three convoys took place between 5 December and 12 January, delivering WFP food for all 75,000 people estimated to be living in the area. Now, given the recent access improvements, WFP hopes to restore sustained humanitarian access to the area, to enable regular food deliveries as well as needs assessment and the implementation of livelihoods projects.

CHALLENGES

ISIL-controlled areas in Deir Ezzor and Ar Raqqa governorates in eastern Syrian remain inaccessible to United Nations agencies, hence preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance to more than half a million people in need of life-saving assistance. In addition, although access to besieged and hard-to-reach locations has relatively improved after the Munich meeting on 12 February, access restrictions to some areas and the overall security situation have hindered the supply of humanitarian assistance to conflict areas in Rural Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Idleb governorates.

Food security indicators in Al Hasakeh governorate raise serious concerns as the protracted closure of the Nusaybin border crossing since 27 December is cutting the flow of humanitarian and commercial supplies, leading to severe food shortages and dramatic price increases. Unofficial import channels from Turkey are also cut off, while those from neighbouring Iraq have very limited capacity and are tied to highly unstable security conditions. Food items coming from within Syria are sold at prohibitive prices, as transporters are facing very high transaction costs. As a result, the price of most basic food commodities have reportedly increased up to 100 percent since November 2015. At present, WFP has food rations for only 2,400 people, less than one percent of the 275,000 people planned to be assisted in the governorate, in addition to 7,000 ready-to-eat rations. These limited quantities are being carefully prioritised to address critical needs in camps hosting internally displaced people or to meet the most urgent needs of the newly displaced families.



NUTRITION PROGRAMME

Blanket Supplementary Feeding Programme

WFP delivered supplementary nutrition products for 127,638 children aged 6-59 months through both in-country and cross-border dispatches from Jordan and Turkey under the Blanket Supplementary Feeding Programme (BSFP), achieving 54 percent of the plan to reach 240,000 children. Of these, 33,340 children were assisted in opposition-held areas of Aleppo, Idleb, and Hama through cross-border deliveries, while the remaining 94,298 children were reached through both regular deliveries to Idleb, Rural Damascus, Quneitra, Homs, Lattakia, Aleppo, Hama and Tartous as well as cross-line deliveries to Moadamiyeh and Madaya in rural Damascus and Kafraya in Idleb. Low stocks of supplementary nutrition products in Mersin, Turkey accounted for the relative low achievement in the deliveries implemented through cross-border operations from Turkey.



Cash-Based Transfers for Pregnant and Lactating Women

Over 7,200 pregnant and lactating women, 96 percent of the planned beneficiaries for the February cycle, received CBT (Cash-based Transfer) nutrition support to purchase locally produced fresh products from selected retailers in Lattakia and Homs governorates. Amidst rising food prices and the progressive devaluation of the Syrian pound against US dollar, the monthly value of the CBT provided to Pregnant and Lactating Women was increased by 14 percent, from SYP 7,300 to 8,300, based on February UN exchange rate (334 SYP per 1 US dollar). The change will take effect starting from March 2016 cycle. This is the third time the transfer value was increased since the beginning of the programme in July 2014, which highlights the progressive erosion of purchasing power of Syrian families.

FORTIFIED SCHOOL SNACKS PROGRAMME

In February, 288,000 children in primary schools in Rural Damascus, Damascus city, Aleppo, Homs, Tartous and Al-Hasakeh received fortified date bars during school days under the WFP Fortified School Snacks Programme. In addition, WFP signed a second contract with a local manufacturer for the production of 27 metric tons of fortified date bars. The first contract, for the production of 22 metric tons of commodities, had been signed in August 2015 and quantities produced were distributed in participating schools in Rural Damascus during December 2015. The manufacturer sources the raw materials from Syrian wholesalers and employs 15 individuals, including five women.

LIVELIHOOD AND RESILIENCE

As part of its overall efforts to support 500,000 people through livelihood and resilience activities in Syria during 2016, WFP has so far launched two livelihood projects in Tartous and Al Hasakeh governorates in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, FAO, and local partners.

The first project will be implemented between January and July 2016 and is aimed at the restoration of livelihoods for greenhouse vegetable producers in Tartous governorate; 2,000 local producers, whose greenhouses were damaged by the severe snowstorms in early 2015, will be provided with plastic sheets. The project also provides 3,000 vulnerable and affected households (corresponding to 15,000 individuals), including food insecure farmers, workers and IDPs, with food assistance during the lean season (before the harvest).



In February, WFP distributed 996 plastic sheets to the targeted beneficiaries in five locations in Tartous and Baniyas sub-district in cooperation with Al Batoul Cooperating Partner and the Directorate of Agriculture.

The second project is designed to provide early recovery support on food security and livelihoods in Al-Hasakeh governorate. It aims to strengthen agricultural production, improve knowledge and practices of farmers, support household food diversification, and address the urgent food needs of assisted households during the lean season. The project will assist approximately 1,500 farming families (7,500 individuals), of which 30 percent are women-headed households. The project will be implemented in the agri-ecological zones of Al-Hasakeh, particularly in the districts of Al Shaddadi, Tal Brak, Amouda, Tal Tamr and Qamishli which have been affected by drought conditions and have suffered from a declining availability and higher prices of agricultural inputs, damage and destruction of irrigation infrastructure like the rest of the agricultural areas in Al-Hasakeh.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

In February, WFP and third-party field monitors conducted 403 monitoring field visits in 12 of the 14 Syrian governorates. The overall number of monitoring visits increased by 30 percent compared to January 2016 as a result of an increase in field visits to locations reached with WFP food assistance through cross-border deliveries from both Turkey and Jordan.

Findings from a WFP field visit to the besieged town of Moadamiyeh in Rural Damascus on 29 February, where some 44,000 civilians have been under a strict siege since the end of December 2015, confirmed dire humanitarian conditions. Food supplies in the markets have completely dried out, and families are completely reliant on humanitarian assistance to meet their food needs. Similarly, fuel and electricity are unavailable and families are resorting to burning plastic and trees for cooking or heating purposes. However, many families reported improvements in their food consumption patterns following the food assistance that WFP provided on 17 and 23 February, as food rations are now enabling people to consume at least two meals a day, compared to only one prior to receiving WFP assistance. "The Food Ration saved our lives. I cried when I saw my husband coming home with the food" one woman told a WFP field monitor.

FUNDING

WFP highly appreciates the generous pledges, totalling approximately USD 675 million, which donors made during the Supporting Syria and the Region Conference held in London on 4 February to support WFP Syria-related operations. Once these unprecedented pledges materialise, WFP will be able to provide a full food basket and livelihoods support to 4.5 million people inside Syria from April until October 2016 providing that operational conditions are in place. At present, WFP operational funding requirements are covered until the end of May.



CONTACT

Jakob Kern, WFP Syria Country Director
Email: jakob.kern@wfp.org
Telephone: +963 993 117 100