

SYRIA

Emergency Food Assistance to the People Affected by Unrest in Syria

January 2016



Madaya / WFP

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3.6 million people received WFP food assistance in January
- 24 percent of the food assistance was delivered to high conflict areas
- 97,500 people in several hard to reach and besieged locations in Rural Damascus, Idlib and Homs governorate received lifesaving WFP food assistance
- Various donors, including Germany, made unprecedented pledges at the London Conference to WFP's Syria response

In numbers

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

Funding Update:

USD 120 million needs to be secured by late February for commodities to be available for distribution in May

SITUATION UPDATE

Aleppo Governorate

The Syrian army, backed by the Russian air force, launched a large scale offensive at the end of January on the northern rural countryside of Aleppo governorate. Continuous fighting and fierce aerial bombardment resulted in the displacement of some 50,000 to 70,000 people from targeted areas around Aleppo city to date. The majority of the people sought safety in areas surrounding the Bab al Salam crossing point as well as in A'zaz city, while others fled to the Kurdish controlled area of Afrin, northern Idlib governorate and ISIL controlled areas. The situation remains extremely fluid, and as violence continues, many more people may be displaced. In response, WFP has provided food assistance in support of 10,000 newly displaced civilians through cross-border partners working from Turkey as of 11 February, while an additional 40,000 IDPs will receive food assistance in the coming days. In addition, WFP provided 50 mt of wheat flour to Nobul and Zahra, following the governments advance on the two towns in central northern Aleppo governorate that broke a three-year siege by opposition forces.

Dar'a Governorate

In the southern governorate of Dar'a, government forces continued the offensive launched in November and took control of Sheikh Meskin and Atman at the end of January and beginning of February respectively. The fighting to take control over the cities and the subsequent displacement of civilians from surrounding villages in eastern and western rural Dar'a governorate led to the displacement of some 65,000 people within opposition-held areas, with some towns such as Sheikh Meskin and Western Ghariyyeh completely devoid of civilians. In response, in early February, WFP delivered supplies for 48,000 people through its cross-border operations from Jordan as contingency stock to assist the newly displaced families.

Deir Ezzor Governorate

ISIL launched an assault on the besieged government-held enclave in Deir Ezzor city in mid-January, resulting in fierce clashes in neighborhoods bordering the Euphrates River as well as in the vicinity of the Deir Ezzor airbase. The assault led to the displacement of some 16,000 civilians with most seeking refuge in other government-held areas while fewer people were displaced to ISIL controlled areas of the city. Recent developments are likely to further compromise an already alarming food security situation among the estimated 150,000 people residing in five government-held neighbourhoods of the city, besieged by surrounding ISIL forces since early 2015. The siege is resulting in critical food shortages, while the limited available items are sold at prohibitive prices and are unaffordable for most of the families. As a result, the entire besieged population in the city is severely food insecure and needs urgent humanitarian support. Since mid-2015, WFP has been attempting to facilitate emergency airlifts to

deliver life-saving food supplies to the besieged population. However, in spite of obtaining the necessary approvals, efforts have so far been hampered due to the insecurity around the airport and damaged runways, which make it too risky for aircrafts to land.

Rural Damascus and Idlib Governorates

Alarming food insecurity levels were reported in besieged towns in Rural Damascus and Idlib governorates during the reporting period, following months of restricted humanitarian and commercial access that hindered essential food, nutrition and health supplies from entering the locations while people were unable to leave.

In Moadamiyeh, a town south of Damascus city and home to 45,000 civilians, residents have faced a sharp deterioration of the humanitarian situation over the last months due to increased access restrictions, particularly with regards to food and medical supplies. Although no deaths from starvation were reported, cases of malnutrition emerged while eight people died due to a lack of proper medical care in January alone. In response, the UN, including WFP, submitted two requests to deliver food and other humanitarian supplies inside the town, which have not been approved to date.

In the besieged towns of Madaya and Bqine in Rural Damascus, where 84 percent of the 42,000 civilians are food insecure according to WFPs 2015 Food Security Assessment, credible sources reported numerous cases of malnutrition and subsequent deaths from starvation, as almost no humanitarian or commercial supplies have reached the towns since mid-October 2015. As a result, essential food supplies were unavailable at local markets while remaining commodities were sold at incredulous prices; one kg of sugar was sold at SYP 80,000 (USD 205) and the price of 900 grams of baby milk rose to SYP 110,000 (USD 282). As a result, residents have been forced to subsist on soup made of boiled grass and at most a fraction of a cup of rice daily.

Similarly, in the besieged towns of Foah and Kefraya in Idlib governorate, credible sources reported acute shortages of food, medical items and fuel in the enclave. Local sources reported that up to 70 percent of the farmland was inaccessible while the two bakeries in the villages were forced to close down due to a lack of flour, yeast and fuel. As a result, prices have increased sharply, with sugar for example being 20 times more expensive than at local markets in Damascus.

In response to the dire humanitarian situation in the aforementioned locations, WFP submitted numerous requests to access the locations following the last delivery of humanitarian supplies in mid-October 2015. Access approval was finally granted at the end of December, after which WFP delivered life-saving food and wheat flour assistance for a total of 80,000 people as well as much-needed fuel in January (see WFP response section for details).

WFP RESPONSE

WFP delivered food assistance for 3.6 million people in 12 of the 14 Syrian governorates during the reporting period, achieving 91 percent of its monthly plan. In areas that were affected by bread shortages, assistance included wheat flour that was either provided directly to the beneficiaries in rural areas, or channeled to bakeries for bread production in urban areas where beneficiaries are less likely to have access to baking facilities.

Deliveries to hard to reach and besieged locations

WFP delivered 24 percent of its total assistance to civilians living in areas subject to various access restrictions in January, including hard to reach and besieged locations. This includes the delivery of food assistance for 800,000 people in opposition-held areas through cross-border deliveries from Turkey and Jordan, which was delivered to Aleppo, Idleb, Hama and Dar'a governorates.

Joint Humanitarian Deliveries to Besieged Locations in Rural Damascus, Idleb and Homs governorates.

Under the "Four Towns Ceasefire Agreement" that was reached by different parties to the Syrian conflict on 22 September, WFP actively participated in a series of three inter-agency convoys to the besieged locations of Madaya, Zabadani, Bqine, Foah and Kefraya during the reporting period.

Convoys from Damascus delivered food and wheat flour assistance for 40,000 people in Madaya, Bqine and Zabadani, while simultaneous convoys departed from Homs and delivered food rations and wheat flour assistance for 20,000 people in Foah and Kefraya. In addition, through the third and last inter-agency convoy, WFP delivered 10,000 liters of fuel to Madaya and 10,000 liters of fuel to Foah and Kefraya. Following the successful delivery of life-saving food assistance to the besieged locations, additional requests were submitted to the authorities by WFP and the UN to deliver extra humanitarian assistance, including much needed nutrition supplies and fortified date bars. However, as of 12 February, approval to access the besieged locations again remains pending.

In addition, as part of the implementation of the localized ceasefire agreement in Al-Wa'er, the last of a series of three inter-agency convoys delivered humanitarian supplies to the partially besieged neighbourhood in Homs city during the reporting period. WFP delivered food assistance for 37,500 people in January, hence complementing the deliveries from December and providing assistance to all the 75,000 civilians in the neighbourhood. Given the recent access improvements, WFP is hoping 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

Following the brief reopening of Nusaybin border crossing between southern Turkey and the northeastern governorate of Al Hasakeh in mid-December after a three month border closure, the border crossing was once again closed at the end of December due to escalating violence in the Turkish areas surrounding the crossing-point. As a result, food dispatches to partners in the governorate fell below planned levels, with food for only 100,000 people, or 36 percent of the targeted beneficiaries, delivered during the January cycle. In addition, reports of high food prices and shortages in some essential commodities like yeast and sugar surfaced as commercial goods could also not be delivered from southern Turkey. WFP is monitoring the food security situation closely, as well as exploring other access points to the governorate, which are limited at this time.

NUTRITION PROGRAMME

Blanket Supplementary Feeding Programme

WFP delivered supplementary nutrition products for almost 144,000 children between 6-59 months through both in-country and cross-border deliveries, achieving 60 percent of the plan. This includes the delivery of nutrition supplies for more than 13,000 children to opposition-held areas in Aleppo, Idleb and Hama governorates through cross-border deliveries from Turkey. The remaining children were reached through regular deliveries in Al Hasakeh, Rural Damascus, Quneitra, Homs, Lattakia, Aleppo, Hama and Tartous governorate. However, due to low stocks of the supplementary feeding products that were available in Turkey, deliveries through the cross-border modality fell below planned levels.

Voucher based Nutrition Programme for Pregnant and Lactating Women

More than 7,500 women received food vouchers in Lattakia and Homs governorate during the reporting period, enabling them to purchase fresh products at locally contracted shops to complement and diversify their daily diet. Meanwhile, preparations to expand the coverage of the voucher scheme to Tartous, Aleppo and Qamishly governorates continue.

FORTIFIED SCHOOL SNACKS PROGRAMME

More than 177,500 children in primary schools in Rural Damascus, Damascus city, Aleppo, Homs, Tartous and Al-Hasakeh governorates received daily fortified date bars during school days in January. Due to the winter holidays, primary schools were closed for most of the month, whereas WFPs fortified school snacks programme reached fewer children than in previous months. The local production of fortified date bars continued, and they were distributed amongst students in a district in Rural Damascus that has a high concentration of IDPs.



LIVELIHOOD AND RESILIENCE

The first two livelihood and resilience projects were launched by WFP in Al-Hasakeh and Tartous governorates in early January. The first project promotes livelihoods and productive assets for 1,500 farmer and herder households in Al-Hasakeh governorate, which will benefit approximately 7,500 people. This project seeks to provide a combination of agriculture training and inputs, livestock fodder, herding kits and increase access to veterinary services, while supporting the food security through the provision of monthly food rations.

The second project rehabilitates greenhouses that were affected by the snowstorm last winter through the provision of plastic sheets. This project benefits 3,000 households whose immediate food needs will be addressed through the provision of monthly food rations during the lean season. In parallel, FAO will provide the households with quality tomato seeds and agricultural training. In addition, in order to further scale up the livelihood and resilience activities during the second half of 2016, WFP conducted a mission to Hama and Homs governorates to assess the possibility to launch livelihood recovery projects and identify potential partners.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

WFP and third-party monitors conducted a total of 311 monitoring visits in 12 of the 14 Syrian governorates in January. The overall number of monitoring visits decreased by seven percent compared to December, mainly due to the lack of approval to visit distribution points in Damascus governorate. However, areas covered through cross-border deliveries that were conducted by

third-party monitors increased by 14 percent when compared to the previous month.

Monitoring findings from the reporting period confirmed the devastating impact that the conflict has had on families' livelihoods. In rural areas in Al-Hasakeh governorate, many farmer households are now unable to cultivate their land because it has been destroyed or it is too dangerous to access. Those who still have their land face enormous challenges due to the lack of proper irrigation systems and the unreliability of the power supply and high costs of inputs, which makes farming simply not profitable.

PARTNERSHIPS

WFP finalized the field level agreements with its cooperating partners for 2016 during the reporting period, with 34 partners currently implementing WFP activities throughout Syria. This includes 24 partners who are currently operating from inside Syria, including the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), 21 local NGOs as well as two international NGOs. In addition, ten NGO partners facilitate cross-border deliveries from Jordan and Turkey to opposition-held areas in Aleppo, Idleb, Hama, Quneitra and Dar'a governorates.

Compared to December 2015, WFP's partnership base decreased from 40 to 34 partners throughout Syria. The reduction was due to the removal of four NGO partners in Deir Ezzor and Ar-Raqqqa governorates, as WFP is currently not able to implement activities in those governorates. However, stand-by agreements will be signed with the partners to resume cooperation should access become available. In addition, WFP suspended one agreement with a partner located in Zabadani in Rural Damascus, as the city cannot be accessed by WFP on a regular base. The last agreement with a partner in Rural Damascus was suspended due to protection concerns at the food distribution point.

FUNDING

WFP is grateful for the generosity demonstrated by donors on the occasion of the London Conference on 4 February, including Germany's unprecedented USD 670 million pledge for the Syria crisis response. These generous contributions, once they materialize, would enable WFP to rely on a solid and predictable funding situation, and to provide sustained life-saving food and livelihoods support to 4.5 million people in Syria, should all operational conditions be in place. At present, WFP operational requirements are covered until the end of April, while USD 120 million need to be secured by the end of February in order to cover the needs for the May – July period.

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