SITUATION UPDATE

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) captured the al-Qayyarah airfield, 60 km south of Mosul, from ISIL militants on 9 July. With the ISF consolidating their hold on the airbase, the Iraqi Air Force is likely to resume operations from this facility, thus improving its aerial capabilities over Mosul and other locations. As military operations have intensified along the Mosul corridor, the situation remains fluid and thousands of people are on the move in the area.

On 18 July, OCHA released a Mosul-specific Humanitarian Response Plan detailing the expected impact of the anticipated Mosul offensive. The plan defines three scenarios – the worst case scenario foresees 1 million additional IDPs, displaced from their homes for over one year. The food requirements for this scenario are US$180 million, with US$50 million needed for food-related preparedness.

METHODOLOGY

In July 2016, mVAM conducted household food security monitoring using live telephone interviews throughout Iraq. Data was collected from a sample of 1,550 respondents via Korek, a major mobile network operator. WFP monitored respondents living in Iraq’s conflict hotspots, drawn from Korek’s database. The data was weighted by the number of mobile phones owned by the household.

In addition to monitoring household food security, WFP collected market information in central and northern governorates of Iraq, using live telephone interviews. In collaboration with Islamic Relief, 170 calls were successfully made in July, obtaining information using a simplified market questionnaire. Responses covered 30 different locations (sub-districts) in six governorates: Anbar (5), Diyala (5), Kirkuk (8), Ninewa (4), Baghdad (3) and Salah al-Din (5).

Highlights

- As displacement has increased in Salah al-Din and Kirkuk, food consumption has deteriorated and the use of negative coping strategies is on the rise, especially among IDPS in Tikrit.

- The average cost of a standard food basket remained stable in July, but food markets are highly volatile in conflict-affected governorates. Food prices in Anbar continue to rise, reaching a new peak in al-Qa’im where fighting is ongoing to secure the border with Syria.

- After the liberation of Fallujah, respondents are still suffering the aftershocks of months of siege and continue to report severe shortages of food and very high food prices.
FOOD CONSUMPTION DETERIORATES IN TIKRIT

In July, the food consumption of sampled households in conflict-affected locations remained largely unchanged compared to June. Data indicated that 90 percent of sampled households have an acceptable diet in terms of diversity and food frequency. However, there were considerable differences in food consumption between districts (see Map 2). More households reported poor food consumption in Tikrit in Salah al-Din governorate (rising from 2 to 15 percent of respondents) and in Kirkuk governorate. The intensification of military operations in the Mosul corridor is causing many more people to be displaced to Tikrit: in July, over 60 percent of the respondents reached in Tikrit were IDPs.

Although the percentage of sampled households that have acceptable food consumption remains high and stable, in July there was a significant increase in the number of people reporting borderline consumption in most of the surveyed districts. This means that more people are at risk of slipping into food insecurity.

IDPs, returnees and residents continued to exhibit different levels of food security in July. IDPs and returnees are especially vulnerable: 23 percent of IDPs (n=383) and 17 percent of returnees (n=102) said that their household is eating an “inadequate” amount of food (see Figure 1).

MORE IDP HOUSEHOLDS RESORTING TO NEGATIVE COPING STRATEGIES

Households were asked if there were times in the week before the survey when they did not have enough food or money to buy food. Perceived poor food access remains high in al-Shikhan, Akre and Sinjar in Ninewa governorate; in Tikrit in Salah al-Din governorate; and in Daquq in Kirkuk governorate where more one third of surveyed households reported resorting to negative coping strategies (see Map 3). In Sinjar, Tikrit and Daquq, households were using more negative coping strategies in July than in June.

Moreover, negative coping was most prevalent among IDP and returnee households. Compared to June, a higher proportion of IDPs reported resorting to negative coping strategies in July. However, fewer returnees used coping strategies (see Figure 2).
OVERALL STABILITY IN THE PRICES OF MAIN FOODS

In July, the cost of the main monitored foods has been generally stable. There were minor increases in the price of rice (+4%), vegetable oil (+1%) and sugar (+3%). By contrast, the price of lentils in the six monitored governorates dropped by 8 percent. However, the stability of average prices masks some anomalies within governorates. Kirkuk has seen a significant increase in the price of most main foods: sugar was 25 percent more expensive in July than in June. The price of vegetable oil (+11%), rice (+11%) and onions (+7%) also rose sharply.

The relative price stability is reflected in the average cost of the food basket across all monitored governorates, which was only IQD 6 more in July than in June and is IQD 28 cheaper than at the beginning of the year.

At the governorate level, the cost of the food basket in Anbar (excluding Fallujah) increased by 11 percent compared to June: this is the most expensive food basket of all the monitored governorates (IQD 1,133 – 23 percent above the average). Relevant decreases were recorded in Salah al-Din (-5%) and Diyala (-8%), while in Kirkuk, the cost of the minimum food basket rose by 9 percent (Table 1).
AVERAGE DECREASE OF WAGES OF UNSKILLED LABOUR

The salaries for unskilled labourers have fallen significantly in all monitored governorates. The daily wage, which was relatively stable in June, decreased in July by 12 percent, reaching a low of IQD 18,496. Wages fell most sharply in Anbar (-22%), Diyala (-12%), Ninewa (-20%) and Baghdad (-7%); the drop was less pronounced in Salah al-Din (-2%) and Kirkuk (-4%).

As a direct consequence, wage-to-food terms of trade have deteriorated in all governorates except Salah al-Din, where there was an increase of almost one food basket per day of work, reflecting the sharp drop in the cost of the food basket (Figure 3).

Despite this improvement, terms of trade are still the worst in Salah al-Din. In Anbar, the fall in salaries coupled with the rise in the cost of the minimum food basket mean that purchasing power is at 15 food baskets per day of work (compared to 22 food baskets in June).

HOUSEHOLD ACCESS TO THE PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM (PDS)

In July, household access to PDS rations continued to be very low, in particular in Diyala (Muqadiya and Baquba) and in Salah al-Din (Tikrit, Balad and Samarra) where more than 60 percent of all respondents said they did not receive PDS rations (Map 4).

The majority of respondents in the other monitored locations reported receiving a partial ration, and most of them complained about the quality of the food received and delays in the distributions.

There was no significant difference in the level of access to PDS rations between IDPs and non-IDP households.
MARKET INTEGRATION AND FOOD AVAILABILITY IN ANBAR

In Anbar, ongoing conflict has heavily impacted market integration. In July, the difference between the most expensive and the least expensive food baskets in the monitored governorates reached a new peak, indicating even weaker market integration (Figure 4).

The highest prices within Anbar were recorded in al-Qa’im (IQD 1,841 – 68 percent higher than in June and 62 percent higher than the governorate average), while the lowest prices were in Heet, where food items have been amongst the cheapest in the governorate for the last six months.

The availability of food price data on Fallujah has been scattered and insufficient to calculate the cost of the minimum food basket in July. Food prices in Fallujah have been even higher than in al-Qa’im, indicating further isolation between districts in Anbar. Respondents in Fallujah districts have reported that there is no food available because the roads are still closed and major cities are under siege by armed groups. Key informants have reported that in order to cope, people are selling personal belongings (furniture, household items and jewelry), eating vegetables that are being grown on the farms nearby and relying on food from relatives, friends or neighbours.

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