UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: COVID-19 Food Insecurity In West and Central Africa - WFP

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Shotlist

1. Wide shot: exterior, UN Geneva flag alley
2. Wide shot: Podium Press room, UN Geneva
3. SOUNDbite (EN) – Elisabeth Byrs, Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP): “WFP estimates that the number of food insecure people in the region could more than double to 57.6 million by the end of the year – up from the 36 million before COVID-19”.
4. Wide shot: Press Room
5. SOUNDbite (EN) – Elisabeth Byrs, Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP): “Price increases of between 15-25 percent were observed in April in the Central African Republic, Chad and Nigeria. In Liberia, the price of fresh cassava, which is the main staple, spiked by 60 percent – five times higher than in the past five years”.
6. Medium shot: Journalists in press room
7. SOUNDbite (EN) – Elisabeth Byrs, Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP): “COVID-19 unfolds at the peak of the lean season when hunger and malnutrition are the most severe. Even before the pandemic, over 21 million people were estimated to struggle to meet their food needs”.
9. **SOUNDBITE (EN)** – Elisabeth Byrs, Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP): “WFP and UNICEF estimate that 11.6 million children will be acutely malnourished in the region in 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic, an 18 percent increase on pre-COVID levels”.

10. Medium shot: journalists

11. **SOUNDBITE (EN)** – Elisabeth Byrs, Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP): “WFP plans to assist 23 million people in the region with lifesaving food and nutrition support and this is an 8.9 million increase from the initial plan at the start of the year”.

12. Close up: hands typing

13. Medium shot: journalist

14. Wide shot: journalist and screen
WFP: Tens of millions more people to go hungry in Africa this year because of Covid-19

A near doubling of food-insecure people in West and Central Africa -- up to 57.6 million from 36 million -- is expected by the end of 2020 as a result of measures necessary to contain the spread of Covid-19, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) announced today.

With border closures and suspension of open-air markets in countries across the region, farmers have been prevented from selling their products, sometimes leading to localized food scarcity and increased prices.

Of the people most at risk for food insecurity, 23 million live in Africa’s most populous nation: Nigeria. A further 10 percent are in Niger, with some 5 percent in Burkina Faso, Chad, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Mali and Senegal.

“Price increases of between 15-20 percent were observed in April in the Central African Republic, Chad and Nigeria”, WFP spokesperson Elisabeth Byrs said. “In Liberia, the price of fresh cassava, which is the main staple, spiked to 60 percent – five times higher than in the past five years”.

Another aggravating factor is the current lean season, the period between June and August. In agricultural regions of many developing countries, it is the dangerous period between planting and harvesting when job opportunities are scarce and incomes plummet. Food stocks dwindle and poor families regularly skip meals.

“COVID-19 unfolds at the peak of the lean season when hunger and malnutrition are the most severe”, WFP’s spokesperson said. “Even before the pandemic, over 21 million people were estimated to struggle to meet their food needs”.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also a heavy impact on children’s nutrition. Before the outbreak, 4.5 million children were anticipated to suffer from acute malnutrition in 2020 in the six countries of the Sahel region: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. Today, with growing insecurity and COVID-19, that number has jumped to almost 5.4 million children, according to UNICEF and WFP.

“WFP and UNICEF estimate that 11.6 million children will be acutely malnourished in the region in 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic, an 18 percent increase on pre-COVID levels”, WFP’s Byrs said. WFP requires an additional US$ 770 million to provide crucial assistance for the next six months in West and Central Africa, she added.

“WFP plans to assist 23 million people in the region with lifesaving food and nutrition support and this is an 8.9 million increase from the initial plan at the start of the year”, Byrs said.