

170th Session of the Council

Item 7: Update on FAO's Response to COVID-19: Building to transform

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected economies worldwide, with millions of people losing their jobs and income, and being pushed into poverty and hunger. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2021 estimated that between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020 - as many as 161 million more than in 2019.

The 2022 Global Report on Food Crises estimated that 193 million people in 53 countries and territories experienced acute food insecurity at crisis or worse levels (IPC/CH Phase 3-5) in 2021. This represents an increase of nearly 40 million people compared with the already record numbers of 2020. This number includes conflict as a main driver, pushing 139 million people in 24 countries/territories into acute food insecurity, up from around 99 million in 23 countries/territories in 2020.

In 2022, COVID-19 recovery efforts have been affected by the war in Ukraine, which is having various repercussions across the world. According to the recent World Economic Outlook by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), global economic growth is projected to slow from an estimated 6.1 percent in 2021 to 3.6 percent in 2022 and 2023. This represents 0.8 and 0.2 percentage points lower for 2022 and 2023, respectively, than projected in January 2022.

FAO has been intensively working on the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme since the start of the pandemic and has extended this comprehensive programme to July 2023.

With operational requirements totalling USD 1.32 billion, this Programme has, as of February 2022, received confirmed and pledged contributions totalling USD 466 million, or approximately 35 percent of the target.

In terms of regional focus, the African Region has so far received the largest (and increasing) amount of voluntary contributions and FAO's resources – 38 percent of the total – followed by the Near East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean Region, respectively, currently standing at 30 and 13 percent.

The Programme has mobilized political, financial and technical support to reach a large share of rural populations and to relaunch the economic activities. These efforts included innovative data sources to monitor and rapidly assess the impact of COVID-19; scaling up and expanding national social protection programmes across different regions; analytical work on the impact of the pandemic on agrifood trade, including e-training on food safety; early warning systems together with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to monitor the animal-human interface while advancing the comprehensive One Health approach, as well as contingency planning for pastoralists' safe transhumance to winter pastures (e.g. Afghanistan), etc.

The Programme further demonstrated the critical importance of a robust monitoring system for real time data and analysis, including early warning systems, price monitoring and identification of vulnerability hotspots and bottlenecks, as well as the need for a strong link between short, medium and long-term policy decisions and measures, with an emphasis on women as the group hardest hit by the pandemic in agrifood systems.

The process also highlighted the need for policies and strategies that would address structural issues related to inequalities and immediate and concrete responses required to ensure decent work and economic undertakings in the informal economy.

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