



World Food Programme



## WOMEN AT THE CENTER

### *Joint cash-based assistance for women's food security, nutrition, health and protection in Syria*

#### **What is happening in Syria?**

##### *Severe deterioration in the food security and nutrition situation*

As of January 2021, a record 12.4 million Syrians are assessed to be food insecure. The scale, severity and complexity of humanitarian needs have significantly worsened since 2019 due to a dramatic economic downturn, soaring food prices, and the rampant devaluation of the local currency, compounded by the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and protracted conflict.

Women and girls were disproportionately affected. COVID-19 has exacerbated the exposure of women and girls to gender-based violence and restricted their access to sexual and reproductive health services.

Households headed by women were also more likely to be food insecure (55 percent) than those headed by men (50 percent). The nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women and girls (PLWG) had already been aggravated by the ten-year crisis, with maternal anemia reaching 30 percent (2019 SMART Survey). Limited access to health services and food insecurity lead to poor maternal health and nutrition outcomes and put PLWG at an increased risk of malnutrition, spurring concerns for the consequent

and often irreversible negative impact on the growth and development of infants and young children.

#### **What are WFP and UNFPA doing in Syria?**

##### *Joint programming that puts women at the center*

WFP and UNFPA have been working together since 2015 to prevent malnutrition among pregnant and lactating women and girls (PLWG). In 2020, considering COVID-19's impact and the deteriorating economic, food security and nutrition situation, the collaboration expanded further to include broader and greater assistance to protect the health and nutrition of PLWG.

WFP and UNFPA joined forces to support the dietary diversity and health of PLWG from vulnerable food insecure households through the provision of fresh and nutritious food, hygiene items, nutrition and health awareness, and sexual and reproductive health services.

Enrolled PLWGs receive a joint cash-based transfer (CBT) delivered by WFP and including complementary nutrition and health transfers that can be spent respectively on fresh food and selected hygiene items at over 180 contracted retailers across Syria.

This dignified assistance modality puts the beneficiary and their needs at the center of humanitarian programming, enabling them to make informed decisions on the assistance they receive. The value voucher provides beneficiaries with choice and flexibility to collect their entitlement when they want and to purchase the items that they require according to their particular living conditions and self-assessed needs.



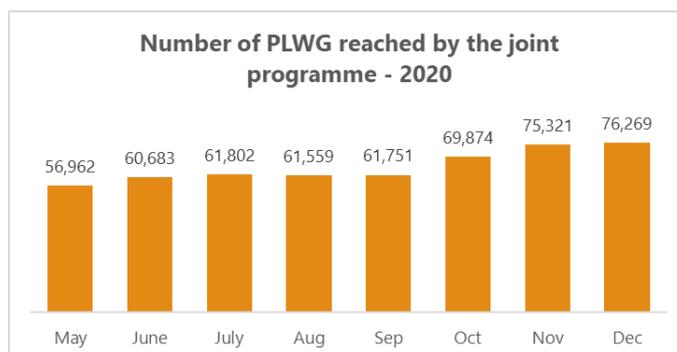
Women participating in the programme not only receive a monthly value voucher for fresh food and selected hygiene items, but also benefit from a variety of other services that accompany their pregnancy and breastfeeding period. These include sensitization on healthy nutrition, reproductive health and gender-based violence (GBV), antenatal and postnatal services in UNFPA-affiliated clinics and access to UNFPA-supported Women and Girls Safe Spaces for integrated reproductive health and GBV-related services. The UNFPA-WFP partnership in Syria is currently the largest joint CBT initiative being implemented by UNFPA globally.

## How does it work?

### *A common platform for cash-based assistance in Syria*

The programme leverages WFP's pre-existing CBT framework (including its retailer network and technology solutions) to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance from both agencies through a single transfer mechanism.

To increase efficiency, the programme takes advantage of WFP's existing beneficiary identity and benefit management system (SCOPE). Each beneficiary eligible to receive the voucher is registered by WFP's cooperating partners and receives an individual electronic card that allows them to redeem their entitlements in WFP-contracted retailers. This setup allows WFP and UNFPA to ensure that the right beneficiaries receive the right assistance, including through periodic spot-checks and verifications.



## What are the additional benefits of cash and voucher assistance?

### *Compounded impact*

Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)/Cash-based transfers (CBT) is the provision of cash transfers or vouchers to individual, household or community recipients. CVA/CBT redeemed at local vendors and delivered through local financial service providers boost local market actors, including women. CVA/CBT also reduce financial barriers to women's access to essential services by increasing the household's disposable income.

CVA/CBT has been shown to alleviate household stress, which can reduce intimate partner violence and also contribute to mental health and psychosocial well-being. A number of studies from the field have shown that cash transfers as part of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health (SRH), gender and gender-based violence (GBV) programming can contribute to improved access to services, life-saving emergency obstetric care and life-saving safe housing, as well as increased feelings of empowerment and potentially reduced violence for women and young people in emergencies.

## Why is funding urgent?

Humanitarian needs in Syria have reached unprecedented levels due to protracted conflict and economic deterioration. Syrian women and girls are facing the worst humanitarian conditions in the country's recent history and could fall deeper into poverty and food insecurity and malnutrition without the required humanitarian support.

The joint programme is needed more than ever to safeguard the access of pregnant and lactating women to nutritious, diverse, and healthy food and adequate health services. The programme, which targets 200,000 PLWG, currently reaches 80,000 women across 12 governorates\* each month due to funding constraints.

*\*Aleppo, Al-Hasakah, Damascus, Daraa, Deir ez-Zor, Hama, Homs, Latakia, Quneitra, Raqqa, Rural Damascus, Tartus*

Even with a reduced target of 80,000 women, UNFPA's resources will be exhausted in March 2021 while WFP's contributions last until August 2021.

A lack of additional contributions would leave the most vulnerable women of Syria without vital and life-saving food security, nutrition, health and protection support, undermining their safety and wellbeing as well as that of their children.

In order to continue the program through 2021 and reach 200,000 food insecure women per month, a total of USD 97 million is required.

Shortfall for 2021 (US\$)	
WFP	76,000,000
UNFPA	21,370,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>97,370,000</b>



“This is my first time using this card. I’m three months pregnant. I think it will help a lot. We live in a rural area and my husband, son and I travelled into the city today so we could use this card. We bought tuna, chicken, diapers, laundry powder and wet wipes. We are stocking up on diapers before the next baby comes.”

Noor from Aleppo is pregnant with her 8th child and is struggling to stay healthy and make sure that all of her children have enough to eat. “It’s a big challenge for us to buy enough food for our family so we prioritize and only buy the basics,” she said. “Food prices are making our lives harder. We have a farm and own sheep and chickens, and this helps us to meet some of our basic needs. We haven’t bought dairy products for months – we can’t afford it.” Noor does not have to choose between food and hygiene; the transfers she receives from WFP and UNFPA enable her to buy the nutritious food and hygiene items she needs to improve her nutrition and stay healthy during her pregnancy and lactating period.