

COVID-19 UKRAINE FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS CLUSTER GUIDANCE NOTE

1. BACKGROUND

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to spread rapidly across the world. Ukraine's first COVID-19 case was reported on March 3, 2020. As of May 6, there were 13,184 confirmed cases of the virus, and 327 deaths (Ministry of Health of Ukraine, 2020). To curb the pandemic, Ukraine has been under quarantine, which presents an array of challenges impacting basic services. Quarantine will have enormous consequences on the nation's economy, which was already slowing down towards the end of 2019. As the virus spreads, cases mount and measures tighten. Restrictions of movement may impede farmers from farming and food processors—who handle the vast majority of agricultural products—from processing. Shortage of fertilizers, veterinary medicines, and other inputs could affect agricultural production.

The quarantine measures are disrupting agricultural value chains, limiting food production, access to markets, and livelihood opportunities of the most vulnerable who were already disproportionately affected by the consequences of the Ukraine conflict. These combined effects necessitate the provision of humanitarian aid to ease the immediate consequences of the pandemic,¹ especially in Eastern Ukraine.

The Global Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) COVID-19 pinnacles the unprecedented impact of public health preparedness, and response and protection of vulnerable populations in terms of mitigation of broader social and economic impact.² The Ukraine 2020 Emergency Response Plan for the COVID-19 pandemic also highlights the public health and socio-economic impact of the pandemic on people's well-being in Ukraine.³ Even though COVID-19 is a health crisis, it risks undermining food security and livelihoods gains by reversing success trends. Prolonged quarantine measures may lead to a food security crisis and limit the ability of the vulnerable population (including jobless breadwinners) to adhere to quarantine measures. There is already disruption of markets and a noticeable increasing trend in food prices. The implications of COVID-19 on food security and livelihoods in Ukraine are still being assessed but the massive pandemic is already spurring striking changes to the economy, production, and access.

In view of the ongoing situation, the Food Security and Livelihood Cluster (FSLC) partners are preparing to respond to the immediate food needs of the vulnerable population while preserving livelihood gains in the Eastern Conflict Area of Ukraine (Donetska and Luhanska oblasts), which are at higher risk of overlapping menaces. Despite the ongoing armed conflict and the limited outreach capacity of humanitarian actors to the non-government-controlled area (NGCA), the cluster partners are stepping up coordinated efforts in providing response to prevent, mitigate, and minimize the potential humanitarian consequences of food insecurity and loss of earning capacities due to the COVID-19 threat in the conflict-affected region.

¹ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/projected-impact-covid-19-ukraines-economy>.

² <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Global-Humanitarian-Response-Plan-COVID-19.pdf>.

³ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/operations/ukraine>.

The FSLC partners will target 97, 800 vulnerable people living mainly in the conflict-affected Donetsk (67%) and Luhanska (32%) oblasts; IDPs in other regions of Ukraine make up the remaining 1%. Elderly comprise 49% of the total targeted population. Sixty-five percent of the most vulnerable targeted, of which 20% live in NGCA, will receive food assistance through various modalities to ensure immediate access to food. Twenty-nine percent of the total target will receive agricultural support, and less than 1% will receive support through cash-based interventions.

This guidance note is not an exhaustive document but rather a live one for FSLC partners. It is a document aimed at addressing the immediate needs of the affected population while preserving livelihoods in the COVID-19 response in both the government-controlled area (GCA) and the NGCA.

This guidance note covers the following regarding the FSLC COVID-19 response:

- Objectives
- Response
- Coordination and bilateral discussions
- Monitoring

2. COVID-19 RESPONSE OBJECTIVES

The FSLC has identified three objectives for the COVID-19 response:

- Ensure immediate access to food for the people most vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Improve food security of the most vulnerable populations through provision of emergency agriculture assistance.
- Improve access to income-generating opportunities for vulnerable individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective 1. Ensure immediate access to food for the people most vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the vulnerable population through immediate access to food via an integrated cluster approach. Restrictions on movements result in decreased access to food, markets, livelihoods sources, and transport, and spiraling prices of food and basic commodities. Early action in addressing the immediate food needs will limit negative coping mechanisms, and encourage compliance with quarantine and all measures to ensure social distancing.

For the food security dimension, partners should consider the impact of the quarantine measures on stability, availability of quality and diversified food, utilization, and physical access.

Potential activities under Objective 1:

Activity
Provision of food assistance through various modalities (in-kind, cash, or voucher).

The indicators for this objective is in the monitoring section of this guidance note.

Recommendations

1. Quarantine measures increase the risk of exclusion errors when targeting; therefore, partners are encouraged to work with the local authorities and community leaders, and to coordinate their interventions with other partners while targeting.
2. The pandemic has altered the humanitarian needs and the modalities that can be used to meet those needs. Therefore, partners should carefully evaluate their delivery modalities, with COVID-19 smart programming based on the quarantine restrictions and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by staff. Partners should adhere to the COVID-19 Ukraine Assistance Protocol, which provides guidance on the minimum requirements to deliver aid safely and the modalities.
3. The partners should consider risk and exposure when determining which food and livelihood assistance modality to use to deliver assistance in both the GCA and NGCA. Due consideration should be given to already established modalities in the GCA (cash assistance) and NGCA (in-kind and voucher) while taking into account those in the COVID-19 Ukraine assistance delivery protocol who may benefit from the modalities of cash assistance, home delivery (in-kind), and distribution delivery point (in-kind).⁴ World Food Programme (WFP) interim recommendations for adjusting food distribution standard operating procedures in the context of COVID-19 outbreak—version 2 provides additional guidance on food modalities.⁵
4. Cash transfer modalities for income support to vulnerable households who are experiencing loss of employment should also be considered where the market is still functioning and vulnerable households can access it.
5. As a precautionary and preparedness measure, FSLC recommends a three-month food ration, to avoid frequent contact with the beneficiaries. This will also reduce the operational cost of the preferred modality and contribute to adherence to the “do-no-harm” principle. FSLC has harmonized the food basket and encouraged partners to use the recommended food basket⁶ to avoid conflict.

⁴ COVID-19 Ukraine assistance delivery protocol.

⁵ <https://fscluster.org/coronavirus/document/iasec-recommendations-adjusting-food>.

⁶ Food basket recommended by FSLC is accessible both in English:

<https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/2409-fsc-targetingration-planning-eng.pdf>
and Ukrainian:

<https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/2409-fsc-targeting-ration-planning-updated-ukr-o.pdf>

Objective 2. Improve food security of the most vulnerable populations through provision of emergency agriculture assistance.

Potential activities under Objective 2:

Activity

Provision of livestock/veterinary support, animal feed assistance, distribution of fodder, distribution of agricultural seeds and equipment, restocking of essential livestock, and distribution of vouchers or cash for agriculture inputs.

Objective 3. Improve access to income-generating opportunities for vulnerable households affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 quarantine measures will harm the most vulnerable population in the absence of social safety net support systems, especially for households who rely on the informal economy and lose employment as a result of the quarantine measures.⁷ Preserving livelihoods in the COVID-19 response will require innovation by the partners around cash transfers and duration of response to avoid the risk of dependency.⁸

According to State Statistics Service of Ukraine, an estimated 17.0% of the employed population is engaged in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries.⁹ Therefore, there is a need to ensure that farmers keep producing food and have access to markets to avert long-term consequences. This effort would require, for example, testing of farmers for COVID-19 and provision of personal protective equipment for them to continue their livelihood activities. Small livestock owners may need veterinary services and feed to keep their animals alive during the quarantine. Partners considering cash should continue to evaluate the risk and benefits of cash transfer modalities in a safe way.

The quarantine measures put in place are impacting negatively on production. Perishable farm products could be in excess and spoil due to the lack of storage, trade flows, and distribution networks. Farmers have already started to express concerns about the decrease in demand for animal products. Reduced food availability and access as a result of road blockages, border closures, and export logistics would further exacerbate the situation.

Potential activities under Objective 3:

Activity

Provision of in-kind and livelihood assets and provision of livelihood grants (non-agriculture) targeting small and micro enterprises.

⁷ <http://www.foodsecurityportal.org/covid-19-spreads-no-major-concern-global-food-security-yet?print>.

⁸ <https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Interagency-GBV-risk-mitigation-and-Covid-tipsheet.pdf>.

⁹ http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2014/rp/zn_ed/zn_ed_u/zn_ed_2013_u.htm

The indicators for this objective in the monitoring section of this guidance note.

Recommendations

1. There is a need to implement the response using a humanitarian development nexus approach and to work closely with partners involved in development activities in the region.
2. Partners should not undermine the recent gains during this response but rather reinforce them through COVID-19 smart gender-sensitive programming when reprioritizing activities or adapting existing activities to address humanitarian needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. RESPONSE

The strategic objective of the FSLC is to decrease the deterioration of food security and livelihood assets.

Awareness creation of the COVID-19 pandemic and measures to prevent and control the infection in complementarity with Water Sanitation Hygiene (WASH) interventions should form part of the response package.

Partners should evaluate each activity alongside the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and assess what is implementable based on quarantine restrictions. The modalities should be carefully evaluated, with the beneficiaries at the center. The staff who are implementing the project must also be considered, and assessment of their risk of exposure must be taken into account.

To ensure the quality of the response amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, partners will need to consider the following:

- **Assessment**—Adjust assessment methodologies and instruments based on the COVID-19 pandemic. To respect social distancing measures, the FSLC encourages the use of mobile phones. The FSLC will coordinate partners' assessment needs and encourage joint assessment to avoid assessment fatigue. The food security tools remain relevant to COVID-19 assessments. Assessment of market and food prices is essential to understanding the impact of the quarantine measures.
- **Targeting**—Partners should be aware of exclusion error when targeting of the most vulnerable in the community by working with and through the local structure. FSLC partners should also triangulate the information to ensure that the most vulnerable are reached. It is often difficult to target the most vulnerable even in normal times because they are often out early in search of work or food, or they are isolated. Therefore, measures should be in place to mitigate exclusion error in the COVID-19 response. The FSLC targeted groups are the elderly, individuals, households with disabled members, households with unemployed members, female-headed households, single-headed households with children, people with chronic illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, TB, and diabetes, and IDPs in host communities.



- **Precautionary measures**—FSLC partners are encouraged to utilize remote online monitoring for market information gathering, normal project monitoring, and other functions that can be done remotely. However, if the partners deem it necessary to physically conduct the assessments or the project monitoring or beneficiary targeting, we strongly encourage them to implement COVID-19 precautionary measures and follow the minimum standards of the Ukraine Assistance Delivery Protocol. This common protocol developed by the humanitarian community enforces the use of mandatory personal protective equipment (PPE), the frequent washing of hands, and a 1.5 meter distancing between people. Partners are also advised to follow the guidelines when distributing assistance.

4. COORDINATION AND BILATERAL DISCUSSION

The role of the cluster is to ensure predictable leadership and support the partners in coordinating the humanitarian response. Coordination by the cluster is critical to maximizing the impact of the humanitarian response, and the efficiency and effectiveness of the response. The cluster strives to mitigate duplication of efforts, ensure a harmonized approach to modalities, and reduce unnecessary competition. The cluster encourages partners to work closely in the field, share real-time experience, exchange notes on how to deal with a particular situation, and strive to ensure harmonized modalities, with the beneficiaries at the center of their endeavors. The ways of working have significantly changed, and projects have been disrupted by the pandemic response and subsequent restrictions. However, we have coined new ways of working and coordinating our response. Therefore, partners need to continue the dialogue in their areas of work to ensure efficient use of resources guided by the “do-no-harm” principles.

The FSLC partners are encouraged to closely coordinate with other clusters to promote inter-cluster response to maximize the impact of the COVID-19 response.

5. MONITORING

The FSLC will be monitoring the COVID-19 response in addition to the ongoing Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) response. Partners are expected to periodically share information on the status of their achievements against targets through the monthly 4W-reporting matrix. This information will form the basis of the monthly 4W snapshots and food security dashboards to support cluster coordination while ensuring that humanitarian needs are met without gaps or duplication. It will also be shared with OCHA to report progress in the Humanitarian Dashboard.

Therefore, the FSLC is encouraging partners to submit sex- and age-disaggregated data on the ongoing non-COVID-19 response and on the COVID-19 additional response to the cluster on the fifteenth of each month to info.ukraine@fscluster.org.

Food Security Livelihood Cluster (FSLC) indicators

COVID-19 response Objective 1: Ensure immediate access to food to the people most vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indicator	Target	Data source/collection method(s)	Organization(s) responsible for data collection	Frequency of reporting
# of individuals receiving in-kind food/voucher assistance to improve immediate access to food in the COVID-19 pandemic	63.5K	4W matrix	FSLC partners at oblast (region), raion (district), and council levels	Twice a month

COVID-19 response Objective 2: Improve food security of the most vulnerable populations through provision of emergency agriculture assistance.

Indicator	Target	Data source/collection method(s)	Organization(s) responsible for data collection	Frequency of reporting
# of individuals benefiting from emergency agriculture assistance	28.4K	4W matrix	FSLC partners at oblast (region), raion (district), and council levels	Twice a month

COVID-19 response Objective 3: Improve access to income-generating opportunities for vulnerable households affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indicator	Target	Data source/collection method(s)	Organization(s) responsible for data collection	Frequency of reporting
# of individuals benefiting from income-generating support and small grants aimed at increasing home-based subsistence activities	0.9K	4W matrix	FSLC partners at oblast (region), raion (district), and council levels	Twice a month

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