

# ENSURING FOOD ASSISTANCE AND SAFETY DURING COVID-19

## WFP ROHINGYA REFUGEE RESPONSE

Throughout 2020, WFP has consistently scaled up, increased, and improved food assistance amid COVID-19 mitigation measures and within restrictions put in place by the Government of Bangladesh.

### Precautionary Measures

WFP began implementing precautionary measures throughout its operation upon the discovery of the first case of COVID in Bangladesh. Measures included:

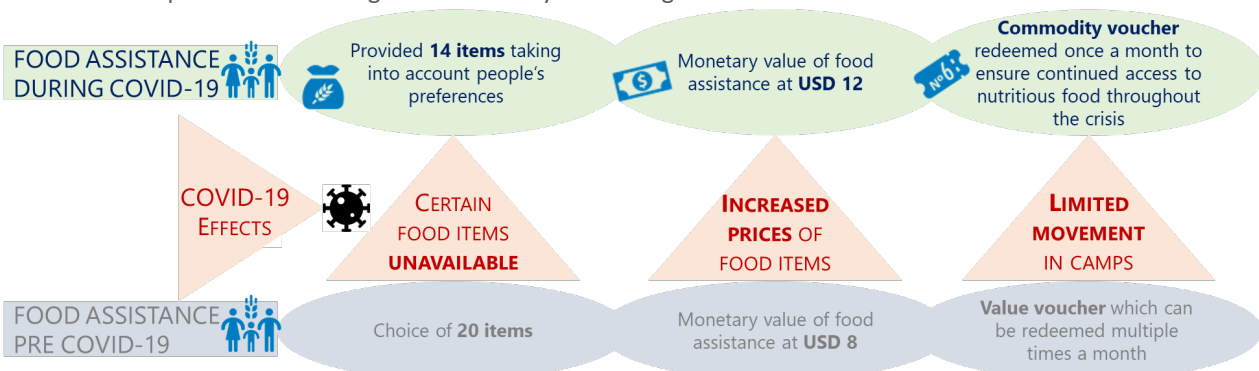
- Mandatory **handwashing and temperature checks** at all sites for beneficiaries and staff.
- Introduction of a **no touch policy**, by which contactless cards or QR codes were introduced for beneficiaries to redeem their entitlements in place of biometric and PIN code authentication.
- Only one member of each household could collect the food assistance entitlement to **reduce crowding** in the outlets. A maximum of 400 households would visit an e-voucher outlet each day to **ensure social distancing**.
- As the **importance of masks** became more evident later in the pandemic, people were also requested to wear masks when coming to outlets.

### Temporary Change to Food Assistance Modalities

From 1 April 2020, beneficiaries received a **fixed, pre-packaged food basket** referred to as a commodity voucher. The only difference to the previous method of assistance provided (through value vouchers) is that people cannot choose food items from the outlets and everyone receives the same products **scaled to family size**. The food basket was diversified to allow consumption of different food groups and ensure households met the 2100 k/cal daily requirement. Throughout the pandemic, households were only allowed to come to the outlets once a month.

#### WHY?

- Providing a fixed food basket **reduced the amount of time people spent in the outlets**, which was vital to ensure WFP could provide food assistance to all 860,000 refugees while ensuring caps on the number of people entering outlets each day so distancing could be maintained.
- Lockdowns resulting from COVID-19 put **stress on food supply chains globally** and WFP had to ensure retail partners had enough food for the entire Rohingya refugee population in the immediate and medium term future. Some items were in short supply and the fixed food baskets ensured WFP retailer partners had enough food for everyone throughout COVID-19.



## The Facts: improvements made during COVID-19

A total of 58,920 Rohingya refugee households received complementary food vouchers from two partners to access items in addition to the in-kind food rations (rice, oil and pulses).

Throughout COVID-19 high-energy biscuits (HEB) and a nutritional supplementary food called Super Cereal were distributed to all refugee households with food assistance to increase nutritional intake.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, most refugees, over 70 percent preferred a one-off bulk purchase each month meaning the shift to monthly distributions is unlikely to have had a significant impact on patterns of food collection.



Additional porters were made available throughout COVID-19 to support households who needed the service. Family members could still come to the outlets to help carry the food but were requested to wait outside. Retail porters help carry the food from the outlets to outside the gates.

In coordination with the WFP Nutrition Unit, partners ensured that the food basket met refugees' daily nutritional needs. Refugees were also consulted throughout about the food basket to ensure preferred food items were being included in the basket as much as possible.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, the number of e-voucher outlets in the camps increased from 12 to 20 with a total of 41 shops, increasing the coverage of e-voucher assistance to 97 percent of refugee households and improving access to diverse foods.

## Communication with Communities (CwC)

In coordination with Health Sector and CwC Working Group, WFP scaled up its CwC efforts to notify people about changes to food assistance and COVID-19 precautions. This was done through the mobilization of door-to-door volunteers as well as messaging at food assistance facilities through posters, voice messages and focus group discussions with support from Majhis, radio programmes in cooperation with BBC Media Action and Radio Naf, and roving tom toms playing audio messages across all camps.



Jeyabol, a CwC volunteers, shares messaging on COVID-19 preventative measures

## Supporting Partners

WFP co-leads the Food Security Sector and has been working with partners implement programmatic adaptations in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Food Security and Livelihoods Sector partners made the following programmatic changes to support vulnerable groups during COVID-19:

- A dedicated inter-sector response to protect older persons and minimize their exposure to COVID-19 was delivered by Protection, Shelter/NFI, CWC, FSS and WASH partners.
- This included delivery of specialized NFI care kits, home delivery of LPG and food assistance to those without caretakers, distribution of key messages on COVID-19 prevention and installation of handwashing stations outside of individual shelters and distribution sites.
- WFP ensured refugees had access to masks through participating in the FSS Mask Making Initiative and supporting production (through self-reliance programme) and distribution (through GFA programme).
- Joint distributions of food assistance with supplementary feeding and HEBs increased refugee households nutritional intake while optimizing staff foot-print in the camps.