Executive Summary

- The conflict in Syria continues to severely impact the humanitarian condition of vulnerable populations throughout the country and the entire region. While advocacy with all relevant parties for a political solution to the conflict is essential, humanitarian organisations must be able to continue scaling up operations to meet the ever growing humanitarian need in Syria and throughout the region.

- With an estimated 9.9 million people estimated to be vulnerable to food insecurity in Syria alone, 6.3 million of whom are believed to be in critical need of assistance, WFP and partners must continue to expand its coverage of food assistance. In the context of deteriorating access and lack of security, the implementation of (sometimes costly) mitigating measure is at times the only option for humanitarian partners to reach those made most vulnerable from the conflict.

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Introduction

1. The humanitarian situation inside Syria has worsened significantly over the past year. The numbers are staggering - over 100,000 people are estimated to have lost their lives over the past 12 months, while an additional 650,000 people have been injured. Within the country, a total of 9.3 million are in need of humanitarian assistance, 46 percent of whom are children. Of these, some 6.5 million Syrian women, children and men are internally displaced, with an additional 2.4 million people having fled Syria to seek shelter in neighbouring countries.

2. As the political aspects of the crisis further compounds the social and economic impact of the conflict, the vulnerability of these groups continues to grow. Families are repeatedly forced to flee from their homes, in some cases up to as many as ten times, further eroding their coping capabilities. As they move to seek shelter inside Syria and the region, whether with friends and relatives, in abandoned buildings or in camps, the ability to feed and take care of their families remains paramount. Without sufficient food and nutrition people are forced to continue to move in search of sustenance, resorting to extreme measures in order to survive.

3. Negative coping strategies include reducing the quantity and quality of the food consumed, decreasing their dietary diversity, withdrawing children from school and selling assets. These mechanisms are increasing the vulnerability of people to malnutrition, particularly in those categories typically more exposed to the negative impact of the conflict such as women, children, elderly and disabled, as well as those with specific nutrition requirements such as young children and pregnant and nursing women.

SYRIA: Evolving Needs and WFP Operations

1. In October 2011, WFP launched an emergency operation to provide relief food assistance to some 50,000 affected families, in what was then a localized conflict. As the conflict intensified and spread, the population suffered from combined effects of decreasing agricultural production, difficulties marketing available produce and importing required goods, as well as the decreasing purchasing power of households. As a result, an estimated 9.9 million people, approximately half the country’s population, are currently estimated to be vulnerable to food insecurity. Around 6.3 million of these are believed to be in critical need of sustained food assistance, including the most vulnerable groups such as female headed households, the unemployed and urban poor, casual labourers, host communities, and small-scale farmers and herders.

2. WFP’s response has rapidly been scaled up and adjusted to meet the growing needs and the changing availability and accessibility of individual commodities. From an initial 1.2 million in January, 2013 WFP reached 3.4 million people through October distributions, and dispatched (food transported to partners, for distribution) enough food rations for 3.8 million people inside Syria in December.

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Table 1. WFP operations in Syria over 2013

Operational infrastructure and modalities

3. With some 175 national and international staff employed in country, WFP’s broad operational infrastructure maximizes coverage across Syria. With a country office in Damascus and sub-offices in Tartous, Qamishli and Homs, six warehouses and packaging facilities in Damascus, Lattakia, Tartous and Qamishli, some 1,000 trucks deliver assistance to approximately 400 distribution points throughout the country every month. Of particular importance are the extensive local networks of WFP’s partner organisations - the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, 1 international NGO (The Aga Khan Foundation) and 27 local NGOs – through which local authorities and community leaders are mobilized to help ensure and organize the safe delivery of assistance.

Map 1. WFP’s operational capacity
4. WFP and partners implement three main schemes to meet the food assistance needs across the country - general food distribution, wheat flour distribution and blanket supplementary feeding programmes for young children. In addition, ready-to-eat rations are distributed to newly displaced families with limited access to food or cooking facilities, during the initial days of their displacement.

5. General food distributions (GFD) target the most vulnerable families across all 14 Syrian governorates, prioritizing displaced households who have lost their main source of income and poor resident communities in urban and rural areas hosting a large number of displaced families. Sufficient to feed a family of five for one month, the baskets consist of commodities such as rice, bulgur wheat, pasta, pulses, vegetable oil, sugar and salt, depending on commodity availability and pipeline status.

6. Given that bread is a staple food of the Syrian diet, fortified wheat flour is distributed to areas with decreased availability and reduced milling and bakery capacities covering some 70 percent of WFP’s total beneficiary caseload. Where home baking is common, wheat flour is distributed directly to beneficiaries, while in other locations, wheat flour is supplied to functioning bakeries.

7. Specialised nutrition support is also provided to young children. In partnership with the Ministry of Health and UNICEF, monthly rations of the nutritional supplement Plumpy’Doz® are distributed to children aged 6-59 months in IDP collective shelters, while
WFP and three partner NGOs target vulnerable children residing in host communities in Tartous, Homs and Hama. In addition, the nutritional supplement Nutributter® is distributed in the north-eastern governorates of Al-Raqqa, Deir Ezzor and Al-Hasakeh and in Aleppo.

Challenges and Risk Mitigation

Security and Access constraints

8. Since the beginning of operations in October 2011, WFP has progressively increased its presence on the ground, reaching beneficiaries in all 14 Syrian governorates. However, severe access restrictions and security concerns over the last few months have constrained WFP's ability to reach some of the most vulnerable conflict-affected people living in hotspot and besieged locations.

9. Restrictions to access currently concern several besieged areas in Rural Damascus, Der’a, Quneitra, Hama, Homs, and Idlib governorates. In particular, in Ghouta, the crescent surrounding the east and southern sides of Damascus city, most of the villages, including Moadamiyeh, have been under siege for more than a year.

10. In addition, widespread violence and insecurity since August 2013 have severely constrained deliveries to the north and north-eastern areas of the country. This includes the governorate of Aleppo, the most fertile and densely populated area of the country which prior to the conflict accounted for over 20 percent of Syria’s population. While improved security conditions on the main access routes at the end of October allowed WFP to resume regular deliveries to the city of Aleppo, access to the rest of the governorate, including some neighbourhoods in the eastern parts of the city, continues to be restricted.

11. With the main transport routes falling under the control of a variety of armed groups, assistance to the fertile and mostly agriculture-based region in the north-eastern area of the country has been progressively interrupted (including the governorates of Deir-ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh). The effects of consecutive droughts between 2006 and 2010 further compromise the resilience of the population and their capacity to cope with the negative effects of the conflict.

12. In particular, Al-Hasakeh, which includes the unilaterally declared autonomous region of Western Kurdistan, has experienced major access disruptions since June 2013. No humanitarian assistance has been received since September, with the exception of a limited amount of food rations airlifted from Iraq at the end of December. Similarly, Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa, whose main cities are located on the banks of the Euphrates river, have received none of the planned food assistance in December, making it the second month of interrupted access in the case of Deir-ez-Zor.

In response to these challenges, WFP enacts a variety of measures to mitigate the impact on its ability to assist those in need. With the insecure and volatile security situation exposing food transports to possible forced detention of trucks by ‘official’ or ‘unofficial’ armed actors, WFP developed a Standard Operating Procedure in 2012 that includes the negotiation of the safe release of high jacked commodities. While such incidents steadily
increased between January and July, followed by a decrease since August, the total amount of food lost in these incidents in 2013 amounted to just 0.79 percent.

13. To mitigate access restrictions, WFP collaborates with sister agencies working in Syria to jointly negotiate access to besieged locations through the use of inter-agency convoys. In addition, WFP constantly seeks alternate routes and channels to reach areas where access is a major challenge. In December, following months of disrupted access, WFP delivered food assistance, as well as hygiene support on behalf of UNICEF to Al-Hasakeh through a series of airlifts from Iraq. While such airlifts increase the costs of humanitarian operations, they are essential for ensuring the delivery of assistance to people in need where no other options exist.

14. Moreover, WFP’s partnerships, with reliable and respected local partners facilitate the distribution of WFP assistance. A thorough due diligence process underpins the selection of these partners on the basis of exclusionary criteria such as neutrality and operational capacity. Furthermore, finding drivers available and willing to travel to areas affected by volatile security conditions has posed constraints to deliver assistance at planned scale. As a result, WFP diversified the portfolio of transport service providers in September 2013, thus ensuring that each area is covered by transporter partners with the best possible knowledge of, and access to, the final delivery points.

**Monitoring**

15. WFP has its own dedicated programme monitoring unit and conducts monitoring visits during the course of food distributions and/or at the post-distribution stage. While all 14 governorates have been monitored at some point in 2013, the changing security situation and the shifting patterns of active conflict and access across the country are causing the extent of WFP monitoring coverage at any one time, to vary. Over the past year, monitoring coverage has risen from an average of 12 percent of the FDPs operated countrywide between January and August 2013, to 26 percent in December. WFP continues to do work to increase this coverage.

**2014 plans**

16. With the humanitarian situation of people within the country expected to worsen further, WFP is scaling up its operations to reach 4.25 million people inside the country by the end of 2014. The operational plans for 2014 are designed to save lives, support the nutritional needs of babies and young children (between the most critical age group of aged 6-23 months), establish the provision of food in schools for some 350,000 children in four critically affected governorates, and establish a voucher programme targeting pregnant and lactating women. The vouchers allow participating women to increase their dietary variety by purchasing nutritious food items not included in the regular WFP basket, such as meat, vegetables and dairy products. At the same time, this kind of intervention is expected to benefit the local economies by injecting cash into functioning markets, while helping restore a sense of normalcy in the beneficiaries’ daily lives.
THE REGION: Evolving Needs and WFP Operations

17. More than 2.3 million Syrians, half of whom are children, have fled to neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt, resulting in significant humanitarian needs across the region. Projections for 2014 indicate that some 4.5 million people will be seeking refuge in the region by the end of the year.

18. WFP operations have grown significantly since the start of the crisis, in both camp and non-camp settings across the region. In 2013, almost 1.5 million people, 78 percent of whom are women and children, were reached with in-kind food assistance, voucher assistance programmes, school feeding programmes and nutritional support programmes. By the end of 2014, the target number of beneficiaries for food assistance is expected to rise to some 2.7 million refugees throughout the region.

Modalities of distribution

19. Functioning markets and financial infrastructure has enabled WFP to provide 90 percent of assistance to refugee populations through food vouchers, injecting over US$ 300 million in to host communities in 2013 alone. With all paper voucher assistance transitioning to electronic cards (functioning as prepaid debit cards) over the coming year, the programme is expected to reach some 2.7 million refugees by the end of 2014. Bringing benefits such as allowing multiple purchasing visits and the ability to acquire fresh foods and meet particular dietary needs, they also eliminate the costly need to travel and congregate at distribution points. In 2014, the scheme will be further developed through the piloting of the One Card system throughout the region, enabling beneficiaries to cover their food, non-food and cash needs through one single electronic card.

20. With the aim of increasing enrolment and attendance while addressing short-term hunger, WFP's emergency school feeding programme distributes daily fortified snacks to some 20,000 refugee children attending camp schools in Jordan and Iraq. Over 2014, the programme will be expanded to some 60,000 Syrian students in the two countries.

21. To prevent malnutrition, nutritional support is provided to some 35,500 refugees in Iraq and Jordan, while a specialised nutritional commodity is being distributed to children aged 6-24 months, pregnant women and nursing mothers in Al Za'atri camp in Jordan. In 2014, this programme will be expanded to children under five and pregnant and lactating women with moderately acute malnutrition in both camp and non-camp settings. In Iraq, Plumpy' doz is being distributed to children aged 6-23 months in Domiz camp, with expansion to other camps expected in 2014.

Challenges and Risk Mitigation for WFP Operations in the Region

22. While each country operation faces its own particular challenges, some overall concerns affect WFP's ability to effectively deliver food assistance throughout the region: security, host community tension and addressing protection concerns of refugees.

Security
23. Security concerns continue to impact operations, particularly in Iraq and Lebanon. Despite operations in Lebanon experiencing some delays, suspensions and even cancellations of food and voucher distribution, monitoring visits and other activities, WFP has successfully delivered assistance to its entire caseload each month. However, the worsening security situation and the increasing prevalence of violence in WFP areas of operations are threatening to disrupt distribution cycles and prevent WFP from reaching all beneficiaries. Meanwhile, given the volatile security situation across Iraq, WFP must continually monitor security developments throughout the country to ensure the continuity of its programming. Liaison with authorities to develop contingency plans is an on-going endeavour.

Addressing Protection concerns

24. In the context of ongoing fighting and severely limited access to food, medicine and shelter, ordinary Syrians are facing a myriad of protection concerns. Those seeking refuge in surrounding countries are not faring much better, relying on humanitarian assistance and the generosity of host countries with little prospect of return. As long as there is no political solution to the conflict, advocacy must continue for stakeholders to adhere to international humanitarian law and unimpeded access for humanitarian actors to the people in need.

25. In addition, humanitarian organisations must seek to address protection concerns through their own operations. As the organisation with the greatest coverage across Syria and the region, WFP staff are able to register and refer concerns to relevant agencies in areas not accessible to protection mandated agencies. During regular monitoring visits, negative coping mechanisms can be identified, such as the sale of family assets, using young boys in child labour activities, changes in household feeding / meal practices, etc. In particular, WFP’s electronic voucher system inherently strengthens the protection of vulnerable population by eliminating, as mentioned above, the need to travel long distances or to congregate at distribution points; by allowing greater purchasing flexibility, meeting of particular dietary requirements and access to fresh foods; and by injecting funds into local communities, in turn easing tensions between host communities and affected populations.

Host communities

26. Host communities bear a heavy burden, with the influx of refugees into already poor and vulnerable areas depleting local safety nets and increasing the competition for jobs. Frustrations are further increased by assistance being targeted to the refugee population, leaving vulnerable families in host communities without any support.

27. To build national capacity and reduce tensions, WFP is expanding its support to host communities in Egypt and Lebanon in 2014. In Lebanon, WFP and partners in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs continue to enhance the capacity of government institutions that are impacted by the refugee influx and support some 326,000 vulnerable Lebanese in host communities – prioritizing areas with both high concentrations of Lebanese poor and high numbers of Syrian refugees. In Egypt, in collaboration with UNHCR and the Government, WFP will provide assistance through community-driven quick impact projects in the poorest host communities experiencing a high concentration of Syrian refugees, by addressing jointly expressed needs in the community.
Funding for WFP Operations in Syria and the Region

28. The funds required to meet the overall operational costs of humanitarian programmes in Syria and the region are immense, increasing from US$ 1.12 billion in 2013 to US$ 2.02 billion in 2014. Through its provision of life-saving food assistance, WFP requirements form the largest part of these requirements, constituting 41 percent of the 2014 appeal for Syria and 24 percent of the appeal for the region.

2013 requirements, funding and expenditure

29. As part of the 2013 Syrian Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) and the Regional Response Plan (RRP), WFP appealed for a total of US$ 1.12 billion to meet food assistance needs in Syria and the region. Of these, 479 million were to meet operational costs in Syria, while US$638 million was requested for the refugee crisis in the five neighbouring countries.

30. WFP received a generous 77 per cent of the funds requested, enabling operations to continue, without a pipeline break, through the year. The UK Department for International Development has contributed generously to the operation from the start of the conflict, increasing its funding from an initial US$ 24 million in 2012 to US$ 138 million in 2013. A total amount of US$ 162 million has provided life-saving assistance to vulnerable displaced families inside Syria, as well as support through voucher assistance for Syrian refugees in Iraq, Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon.

2013 Requirements, funding and expenditure

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2014 requirements
31. With the planned scale up of operations in Syria and the region in 2014, WFP is requesting US$ 947 million for Syria (41 percent of the SHARP) and US$ 1.08 billion for the region (25 percent of the total appeal).

![2014 Funding Requirements](image)

### Conclusion

32. The provision of food assistance is a stabilizing factor in an extremely volatile region. Food assistance, alongside medical assistance, is the one means of support that influences both the movement and the security of people. As such it is often the key to mitigating tensions and providing an environment where families can return to some sense of normalcy and possibly even return home.

33. WFP’s operations have been designed to enhance, where appropriate, both the resilience of vulnerable populations as well as the possibility of rebuilding their lives. With widely differing needs across the country and region, operations must remain flexible, with implementation modalities varying according to the circumstance. In certain parts of Syria the devastation is so vast that only the continued delivery of nutritious food will hold families back from the brink of starvation. In some cases they cannot even move in search of sustenance as fighting surrounds them from all sides. In other parts of the country and region, while shops are functioning and traders are able to provide supplies, the price of food has increased dramatically, leaving families unable to feed their families. In such cases, the provision of WFP food vouchers enables access to food, whilst also supporting local markets. This will in time constitute a vital component of the development of war torn Syria and its neighbouring countries and pave the way towards realising WFP’s ultimate objective, whereby its presence is no longer required. Until this situation arrives, WFP and other humanitarian organisations remain the only lifeline for millions of families in Syria and across the region.