

A Crisis within a Crisis: Early Impacts of COVID-19 on the Food Security of Displaced Syrian Farmworkers in the Middle East

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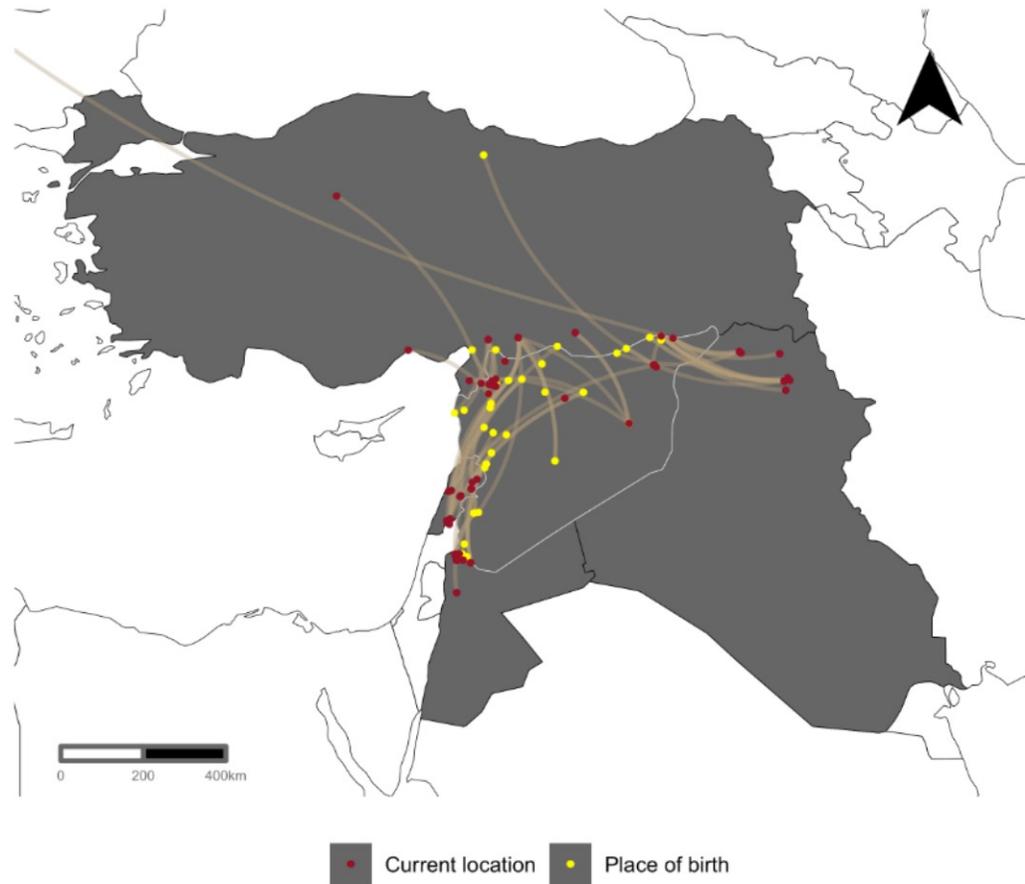
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One Health FIELD Network

From the FIELD Project (April - July 2020)



- Interdisciplinary team (One Health FIELD Network) led by Professor Lisa Boden, University of Edinburgh
- Funded by the SFC-Global Challenges Research Fund, in collaboration with Cara Syria Programme

Research aims:

- Study the impacts of COVID-19 on displaced Syrian agricultural workers (a group highly food insecure even before the pandemic)
- Pilot remote ethnographic research methods to understand lived experiences of food insecurity

Study locations: Northern Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Methodology and Participant Demographics

- 20 household surveys and 5 'digital food diaries' **per study country** via WhatsApp
- Remote visual ethnography offered rich insights into **lived experiences** of food (in)security, grounding survey findings in socio-cultural context
- Data collection done by Syrian, Lebanese and Jordanian researchers
- Syrian participants were mostly male heads of household (76%) and all work in food production
- Participants live in protracted displacement largely outside of official refugee/IDP camps → limited access to aid networks



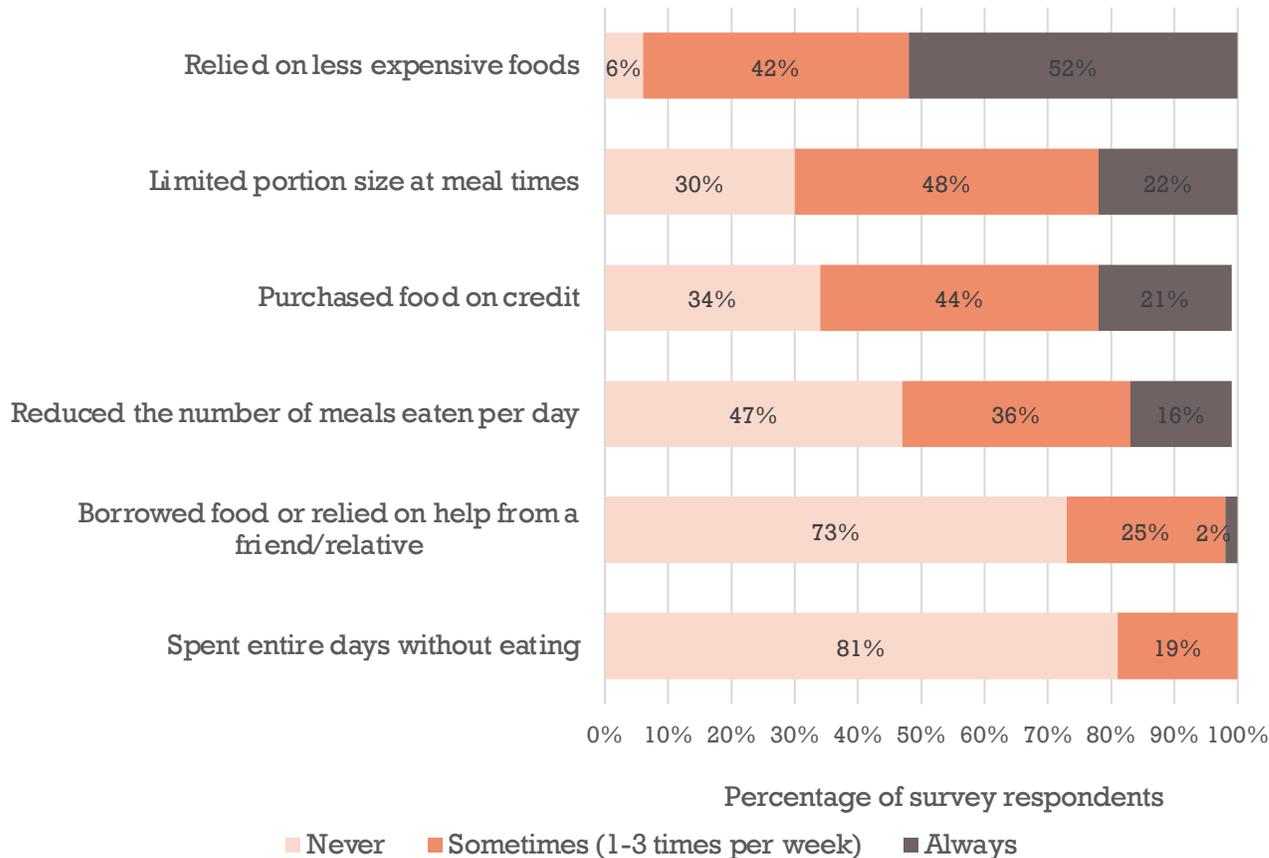
The economic domino effects of COVID-19 mitigation measures had a quick & punishing impact on the food security of displaced Syrian agricultural workers



- Overall, **food availability** did not decrease
- However, **access to food** was threatened by lower incomes and rising prices for food and public transport
 - 2/3 were working less hours and reported a decrease in income
 - 90% reported higher food prices
 - 40% had no access to cash

“This dish is left-over food from yesterday. Before the Corona situation, I was able to provide food, but now I can't. I don't go out, there is no work, no NGOs.”

Lacking financial safety nets, displaced Syrian households were forced to rely on negative coping strategies



- Households drastically **changed their food consumption patterns**
- **High reliance on credit/loans** to afford food
- **Limited ability to draw on social safety nets**
 - Only 20% of respondents received remittances, and mostly within Syria
- **Lack of support from UNHCR/NGOs**
 - Only 23% had received food assistance

Coping strategies over a 7-day period, by descending frequency
(n=100; Syria=20, Lebanon=20, KRI=20, Jordan=20)

Conclusion

- For displaced Syrian farmworkers, the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic were a food crisis. Even short-term changes to food prices and employment were devastating to Syrian families
- Policymakers and humanitarian/development actors must increase social protections for refugee and migrant agricultural workers, and prioritise these groups during future emergencies
- Remote visual ethnography holds promise as a means of complimenting quantitative food security assessments, when travel to the 'field' isn't possible



Learn more at www.onehealthfieldnetwork.org
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