

UN food agency forced to slash Syria aid by about half

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United Nations, June 18 (RHC)-- The UN food agency has said it will slash aid to Syrians in need of basic food supplies by about half because of a lack of funding. "An unprecedented funding crisis in Syria is forcing the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) to cut assistance to 2.5 million of the 5.5 million people who rely on the agency for their basic food needs," the organisation said on Tuesday.

The announcement comes as the European Union prepares to host the seventh Brussels Conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region" on Wednesday. It said it took the decision "after exhausting all other options" and planned to stretch its "extremely limited" resources by prioritising "three million Syrians who are unable to make it from one week to the next without food assistance".

The WFP said that if it kept providing aid to 5.5 million people, it would "run out of food completely by October." "Instead of scaling up or even keeping pace with increasing needs, we're facing the bleak scenario of taking assistance away from people, right when they need it the most," said Kenn Crossley,

WFP's representative in Syria.

Syria's 12-year war broke out after President Bashar al-Assad's repression of peaceful anti-government demonstrations escalated into a deadly conflict that pulled in foreign powers and global armed fighters. The conflict has killed more than half a million people and displaced millions.

In February, parts of Syria and Turkey were hit hard by devastating earthquakes in which more than 50,000 people were killed on both sides of the border. Even before the quakes, 12.1 million people across Syria were suffering from hunger, said the UN agency.

Syria is also still emerging from the devastation of the coronavirus pandemic, which deepened the existing economic crisis and pushed prices to record highs. The WFP said that currently "an average monthly income covers only around one-quarter of a family's food needs," and that even those receiving regular food assistance from them were already struggling to cope.

The agency first tried to gradually reduce the size of monthly rations to half, but this proved to be untenable with rising fuel and food costs that were not matched by its funding. "Further reductions in ration size are impossible. Our only solution is to reduce the number of recipients. The people we serve have endured the ravages of conflict, fleeing their homes, losing family members and their livelihoods. Without our assistance, their hardships will only intensify," Crossley said.

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