Chronic Malnutrition in North West Syria:

Health facility nutrition surveillance data indicates that Chronic Malnutrition (stunting) rate among children under 5 years in North West Syria is currently at 34 percent showing a consistent increase throughout 2020 where levels of stunting increased by 5 percent between January and October 2020. The risk of death because of stunting is increased nearly two folds1.

Children that are both stunted and wasted have a 12-fold increased mortality risk compared to the otherwise healthy children2. In NWS it is estimated that at least one child out of each three children are at risk of losing their future because of chronic malnutrition.

Chronic Malnutrition once it occurs, becomes irreversible and a stunted child will less likely reach his/her full potential because of chronic malnutrition (stunting)3.

Maternal Malnutrition in North West Syria:

Maternal Malnutrition continues to be a major public health problem in NWS especially in areas affected by displacements where 20 - 37 per cent of mothers are malnourished and at risk of suffering the various consequences of malnutrition. This includes reduced immunity and mothers exposed to COVID-19 infections, which will render these mothers not being fully capable of properly feeding and caring for their infants and this could partially explain the 63 per cent of mothers in NWS who are not appropriately breastfeeding their children in NWS4. It is well documented that maternal malnutrition is impacting both child and mother’s health and nutrition status. COVID-19 outbreak also poses very serious risk to the nutrition status

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4. Nutrition Surveillance System Jan-October 2020
of vulnerable population such as children and mothers as well as poor mothers in urban areas and internally displaced children and mothers. In NWS, 65 percent of women at child bearing age have access to antenatal care services, while 11 percent of mothers completed their 4th ANC visits. Women at child bearing age accessing PNC remains low at 4.6 percent while the over all 77 percent WCBA accessing Basic Emergency Maternal and neonatal care (BEMONC). Without a comprehensive maternal health and nutrition approach, maternal anemia and malnutrition can not be rolled back in North West Syria.

**Acute Malnutrition, infant and young child nutrition in North West Syria:**

Even though Acute Malnutrition among children under 5 years is not a major nutrition problem in NWS, Nutrition Surveillance report shows that Global Acute Malnutrition remains at sub-emergency levels but nearly doubled compared to 2019.

Levels of moderate acute malnutrition is 13-folds the levels of severe acute malnutrition which suggests increased food security problem among households. This will necessitate to scale up both prevention and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition.

This correlates well to the fact that exclusive breast feeding has been reportedly low at only 31 percent. While 50 percent of children are meeting minimum dietary diversity, 35 percent of the children are eating a minimum acceptable diet. The risks of increased malnutrition trends among mothers and children as well as inappropriate infant feeding practices are therefore of serious concern with the ongoing economy deterioration and continuous devaluation of local currency.

A spike in the cases of complicated severe acute malnutrition was observed during 2020 compared to the similar reporting period during 2019. Severely malnourished children in need for hospital admissions increased three folds from January to October 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. Nevertheless, this cannot be directly linked to COVID-19 but yet it is a possible contributing factor.

Nutrition Surveillance System also shows that 32 percent of children are not receiving the recommended minimum meal frequency which correlates with the deterioration in the nutrition status of children.

Overall, there is an obvious deterioration in nutrition indicators in 2020 depicted by the nutrition surveillance system compared to the results of nutrition surveys conducted in 2019.

Another SMART survey is required to detail nutrition situation across sub-districts and to clarify the nutrition vulnerabilities among displaced and host communities. The SMART survey is planned to be implemented in December 2020, including information on child protection, disabilities, anemia among children and mothers as well as reproductive health indicators.

**Geographic and population distribution of Nutrition vulnerability and services:**

The nutrition vulnerability is mostly seen among displaced and hard to reach population, overall children and mothers in Idlib show worse nutrition situation in compared to Northern Rural Aleppo. Nutrition services are provided in 113 primary health care services out of 150 functional health services. Nutrition life-saving interventions are reaching 588 high-severity communities out of the 867 accessible communities in 38 sub-districts in North West Syria.

**Nutrition Sector Response (January-October 2020):**

Integrated nutrition preventive and curative services through Nutrition, FSL, Health and WASH sectors (Coordination and actions are ongoing).

Nutrition interventions are implemented through Health facilities, Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) and also in close collaboration with WFP in Gaziantep and WOS.

By the end of October 2020, nutrition life-saving interventions reached one Million beneficiaries, including 204,876 boys and 221,435 girls and 567,449 pregnant and lactating mothers and caregivers in 588 accessible communities in 38 sub-districts in NWS through nutrition cluster support via its 31 implementing partners on the ground including partners implementing also WASH, Health and FSL programs.

Since the January 2020, 1.34 Million Mothers and children were screened for acute malnutrition out of which 8,910 severely malnourished children

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identified were admitted to appropriate treatment with **2,871** additional children reached compared to 2019.

Additionally, **0.6** Million mothers and children of the age **36-59** months were reached with age-appropriate micronutrient supplementation and **0.54** Million mother of children under **2** years received counselling on optimal infant and young child feeding and caring practices.

Nutrition cluster is supporting **149** RRTs (**105** supported directly through UNICEF, **60** supported by the SCHF and **2** supported by operating agencies) through **14** sector partners. Rapid Response Teams are delivering life-saving integrated nutrition services and have reached **817,914** children and mothers since January 2020 (Detailed RRT report is attached to this brief). By the end of November 2020, the total functional RRTs will increase to **167** RRTs.

Nutrition cluster will continue scaling up life-saving nutrition services in NWS through a COVID-19 sensitive approach and a do no harm way using the nutrition services such as the treatment of acute malnutrition and infant and young child feeding as entry points for COVID-19 risk communication and community engagement.

**Challenges:**

Nutrition Sector remains over **60** percent under-funded. Even though nutrition sector has been investing heavily in integration with the support of UNICEF and WFP, without significant increase in funding nutrition situation of child and mother in NWS will continue to deteriorate during 2021. COVID-19 links with malnutrition in children and mothers with a vicious cycle. The continuous deterioration of the economy and local currency devaluation will hit household food security, and will also worsen the nutrition status among mothers and children.

COVID-19 outbreak is a potential threat for worsening nutrition situation in NWS and deteriorating access of the mothers and children to the essential health and nutrition services. EWARS system is showing **31** children already infected with the virus with a mortality rate of **6.5** percent. Economic deterioration and devaluation of the local currency in Syria is likely to worsen access of families to food and hence increases the proportion of population in need for food assistance and hence children and maternal nutrition status will deteriorates significantly. This impact will also interplay with the COVID-19 impact on local economy where projections indicate a possible decrease of Gross National Income (GNI) and consequently child nutrition situation will be adversely affected.

During 2021 nutrition vulnerabilities will continue to be multifactorial with the following determinants: spread of COVID-19 outbreak in North West Syria, local economic situation, the scale and the depth of nutrition program.

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8. In LMICs such reduction could reach 8 percent which could lead to up 14.3 percent increase in global acute malnutrition; Lancet, July 27 2020, Impacts of COVID-19 on childhood malnutrition and nutrition-related mortality

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ANNEX

MAPS AND INFOGRAPHICS
IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND THE ECONOMICAL DETERIORATION ON THE NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF MOTHERS AND CHILDREN IN NWS
Rapid response teams presence and distribution

By Severity

Reach by Severity

Severity

S4

S5

Governorate
North West Syria
Rapid Response Teams presence and distribution by severity areas

Reach by Severity
RRT
Severity
S4
S5
Governorate

RRT

Ehsem
Janudiyeh
Jisr-Ash-Shugur
Badama
Jandairis
Ariha
Idleb
Salqin
Harim
Qourgeena
Saltjin
Kaf' Takharim
Maaret Tamarin
Darboush
Darkosh
Idleb
Ehsem
Atareb
Maaret
Mhambali
Aiha
Anfa
Dana
Zarbah
Bennah
Tafnes
Idleb
Saraqab
Sarmin
Kafr-Takharim
Idlib
Maaret
Sharan
Jandairis
Mabtali
Sheikh El-Ha'id
Bubul
Raju
North West Syria
North West Syria
Rapid Response Teams presence and distribution by IDPs
North West Syria
Nutrition programmes coverage by severity
Severely malnourished children in need for hospitalisation in NWS Jan-Oct 2019-2020

- January 2019: 10
- February 2019: 20
- March 2019: 30
- April 2019: 40
- May 2019: 50
- June 2019: 60
- July 2019: 70
- August 2019: 80
- September 2019: 90
- October 2019: 100

- January 2020: 20
- February 2020: 30
- March 2020: 40
- April 2020: 50
- May 2020: 60
- June 2020: 70
- July 2020: 80
- August 2020: 90
- September 2020: 100
- October 2020: 110