

Call to the members of the Global Network For the Right to Food and Nutrition in the Context of the COVID 19 Crisis

FIAN International, in its role as Secretariat of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition (GNRTFN), expresses its concern about the current global situation triggered by the pandemic of COVID-19. The rapid expansion of the virus is exacerbating systematic violations of the right to food and nutrition (RTFN) that we have been fighting against for decades. We also express our solidarity with all those affected by the virus, as well as those impacted by the negative consequences of measures put in place to halt its spread.

While we do not underestimate the widespread negative impacts COVID-19 is leaving in its wake, we believe this crisis also offers the opportunity to strengthen our joint work around the RTFN.

COVID-19 is leading to health emergencies in **many countries around the world, potentially leading to both a food and broader human rights crisis. The impacts of the pandemic and the measures to counteract it are expected to intensify** ongoing human rights violations as well as the structural causes that prompt them. These include the abandonment of small-scale food producers in favor of agro-industrial food production by transnational corporations, as well as lack of social protection and policies assisting those most affected by crises of this scale. More concretely, it is concerning how dominant practices such as land grabbing, large-scale monocultures **and industrial livestock breeding** are contributing to the spreading of viruses and pathogens, intensified by environmental destruction and climate change.

The impacts of the current pandemic are worsened by the reduced response capacity of public services, caused by the privatization and financialization of the health sector, the dismantlement of public social protection systems, and the reduction of labor protection standards. We recognize that those **who are already** in situations of marginalization and vulnerability will suffer most, especially due to racism, sexism and other types of discrimination. Furthermore, increasing repression and criminalization **in the context of rising authoritarianism provide** fertile ground for further abuse of power and human rights violations **under the excuse of “state of necessity or exception”**.

As COVID-19 continues to spread, several members and partners of the GNRTFN have identified and tracked the impacts of the crisis on people and communities. They have also witnessed the measures adopted by national or local governments, negatively affecting the quality, access, availability and sustainability of food. In response, members and partners of the GNRTFN have identified and developed proposals to **uphold the RTFN and other related human rights in the current situation**.

In the paragraphs below, we have summarized several positive and negative measures announced and implemented by governments, and observed by the members and partners of the GNRTFN. We have also included some alternative solutions to some aspects of the crisis proposed by the members.

- In some countries, the closure of schools implies the suspension of school feeding programs. This means children living in poverty can no longer access the only meal available to them. In Madrid, food provision has been left to big food chains, who are providing pizzas and sandwiches to children. This measure affects the adequacy of food. Local peasant groups propose food provision by local farmers who would ensure adequate food for the families. Meanwhile, the cities of Sao Paulo and Pernambuco in Brazil proposed that schools continue providing food for the families once a week.

Some of these schools carry out food procurement programs in partnership with local small food producers.

- Authorities in Madrid closed social assistance centers and food shelters. Even if the authorities announced the distribution of food for homeless people, this did not happen immediately. In Rio de Janeiro, the supervision entity of the National Food Security issued a regulation to ensure that more than 2,000 people access adequate food **at people's restaurants**. The measures include: continuing **with the work of the "Programa Restaurante Cidadão"**; adopting measures to reduce the flow of visitors; distributing food packages outside the restaurants; establishing a minimum distance between users in cues; informing about sanitary measures to be taken; disinfectant supply and; the provision of adequate food including cooked vegetables, salads and fruits.
- In Brazil, the Brazilian Forum for Food Sovereignty and Food and Nutritional Security (FBSSAN) launched a set of recommendations to protect the right to food and to fight hunger. These recommendations to the federal, state and municipal administration emphasize that current decisions and policies to tackle COVID-19 must put life and human dignity at the center, and must be based on a human rights approach. One of the urgent actions should be, for instance, the establishment of Emergency Committees Against Hunger and measures that include strengthening **peasant's** farming, guaranteeing food distribution to the most vulnerable groups, and protecting public policies such as **the "Bolsa Família"** as well as controlling food storage and prices.
- In Switzerland and Italy, authorities ordered the closure of peasants' markets and restricted the weekly food distribution by agriculture cooperatives, while supermarkets remain open. Peasants' organizations highlight that these measures clearly favor supermarkets. More concretely, this leads to the loss of adequate food produced through agro-ecological practices, the reduction of prices achieved through direct distribution, diminishment of **people's** access to organic vegetables and fruits, and the reduction of peasants' **income**. In Switzerland, peasants' organizations sent a letter to the authorities urging proportional solutions: Opening of the markets and ensuring adequate physical distance between stands, guaranteeing support by social services to regulate the flow of clients, and ensuring compliance with sanitary measures.
- **The shutdown of local markets in Honduras and severe restrictions over food procurement have led people to defy the national curfew declared by the government and take to the streets. Protests demanding access to food were countered with disproportionate use of tear gas and detentions. In the meantime, supermarket chains with delivery services have kept operating**
- In Romania, the Romanian Market Administrators Association (AAPR) has taken a decision to keep food markets open to support Romanian agricultural producers sell their fruits and vegetables, whereby ensuring the supply of local fresh and healthy products to the population.
- Groups from Sweden express their concern about the confinement of older people, who lost physical access to food and are facing situations of hunger and malnutrition. Local and national governments could avoid this situation through diverse support mechanisms. In Geneva and Madrid, for example, an online portal service allows people to help those who are at risk and in need by buying and delivering food under strict hygienic conditions, or by accompanying those who may face psychological stress due to isolation.
- In Belgium, some groups are concerned about the digitalized means of payment for food aid or, in general, about such payment methods. If people can only pay for food by digital means, those who do not have digital access lose access to food. Authorities should never disallow cash payments.
- In the USA, many people are losing their jobs, schools providing food assistance to children have shut down, and migrant workers have stopped receiving daily income. Why Hunger has proposed a rapid response fund to support grassroots and community-based organizations working on access

to food, small farmer and food justice organizations, unions and other organizations working on behalf of food chain workers.

- In India, many states have closed *Anganwadi centers* (rural child care centers), thereby stopping the provision of food to children below 6 years old, pregnant women and lactating mothers. On this note, the **Supreme Court has issued an order stating that “it is necessary that all the states should come out with a uniform policy so as to ensure that while preventing the spread of Covid-19, the schemes to provide nutritious food to the children and nursing and lactating mothers are not adversely affected.”** **Right to Food Campaign India** has proposed the home-delivery of the nutrition meals to these target groups.
- In general, many people are experiencing food shortages in supermarkets caused by the panic of lockdown. Even if calling for moral and social responsibility may work in some situations, reasonable and proportional state regulations are required during these times to ensure food access for all. An example is Argentina, where authorities have introduced price regulation for some food and hygienic items.

Due to the rapid spread in Europe, the majority of the examples referred to above come from this region. We do not have yet direct testimonies from other parts of the world where GNRTFN members are active, particularly from the Global South.

*In our collective efforts to hold states accountable vis-à-vis their RTFN obligations in the face of COVID-19, we would like to invite all GNRTFN members to join hands monitoring the impact of measures aimed at containing COVID-10 on **people’s and communities’ RTFN**. We especially call upon collective reflection about what our local and national governments are doing and what we can do jointly to face this current situation.*

We created a closed Facebook Group so you can share your work and we can learn from each other. We will send you invitations that you can accept to be part of this [Facebook Group](#). Of course, you can also send us information per email (see contact below). We plan to have a series of webinars so we can collectively assess the current situation and come up with potential strategic actions as the GNRTFN.

For questions please contact: secretariat@righttofoodandnutrition.org