



Image: Mercy Corps staff work with Health Ministry employees in Galbet IDP Camp, Somalia, April 25

COVID-19 SECONDARY IMPACT ANALYSIS

29 April 2020

Acute conflicts and humanitarian crises are often the result of the complex interactions of many factors. The majority of these factors will be altered by the spread of COVID-19.

This product will provide field-driven analysis to identify emerging trends relevant to operational decision-making. It will be updated on a biweekly basis.

Notes on use

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Overview

Last week Ghana was the first to lift its lockdown, in the cities of Accra and Kumasi. Parts of the DRC, Jordan and Iraq have also moved to relax regulations, and Tunisia, Nigeria, Lebanon and parts of Syria have announced plans to do the same within the next week.

Africa's communities continue to struggle to cope with governments' COVID-19 response measures. In terms of the disease itself, Africa registered a 43% jump in reported cases in the week to 23 April. Only 500,000 tests have been carried out on 1.3 billion people¹ (and 140,000 of these tests have been in South Africa). Health infrastructure will not be able to scale up in a requisite time period, and the true scale of death on the continent from COVID-19 will not be known for years. In Mogadishu, field staff report that grave diggers are burying 50 people a day, up from the usual 10. Somalia has 28 deaths officially attributed to COVID-19.

The WHO stated this week² that the lockdowns have allowed African countries to make tangible health system capacity "gains". It is unclear however what gains have been made in the majority of low income countries, but what is clear is that urgent action is needed to rebuild lost livelihoods.

Societal and economic factors linked to violent extremist recruitment have increased across sub-Saharan Africa, including unemployment, youths out of education, economic optimism, poverty, and perceptions of government legitimacy. The most common narratives focus on governments 'saving people from a virus but condemning them to hunger'.

The question of whether extremist groups have the means to take advantage of the opportunity remains. This will largely depend on their cash reserves, as it is likely that a number of their revenue streams via the illicit economy will have been impacted. Downstream demand for timber, charcoal, gems, drugs, and other black market produce have dropped, and replacement of disrupted transport links take time to be arranged. The downturn in illicit economies may be partly offset by the beginning of Ramadan, where Islamist groups can expect to receive an increased amount via *zakaat* (donations from the community) sourced locally and from abroad.

Governments and the international community will need to find ways of rapidly restarting economies, and rebuilding legitimacy in order to close off opportunities for expansion of violent, non-state actors.

¹ Devex, '[Low coronavirus testing in Africa leads to blind spots: Africa CDC chief](#)' April 2020

² WHO, '[African countries start easing COVID-19 confinement measures](#)', April 2020

Africa

Summary and Forecast

COVID-19 continues to affect the region primarily through the impact of government restrictions. Food security is an ongoing need across countries, several of which have also been affected by desert locust outbreaks. Third locust swarms are expected in June and July in East Africa, a time when much of farmers' harvests are due. Vaccination campaigns and responses to other disease outbreaks have also been negatively affected by COVID-19 related restrictions, due to diverted capacity and disinformation.

Mercy Corps' Markets Analysis team is identifying trends suggesting that price increases are sharper in low income economies with a larger informal sector, which would partly explain the increased pressures in eastern and southern Africa.

With several countries entering prolonged lockdown periods, opportunistic crime such as robbery, looting, and vandalism has increased. The potential for civil unrest resulting from limited food supply and the high prices of basic commodities continues, even in countries that have begun to ease their movement restrictions. Civil disobedience could also occur if governments continue to use harsh measures to enforce lockdowns.

Data shows a significant increase in security incidents in North and West Africa over the past four weeks, compared to the four week average over the past year, with a smaller rise for Middle and East Africa. The Middle East in comparison has seen a drop.

North and West Africa³

Humanitarian Need

Over the reporting period, wider needs have increased and food security is no longer the principle cited humanitarian need, though it is still the most critical. Prices continue to rise, as supply is constrained by limitations on transport, and seasonal price increases associated with Ramadan commence in some areas. **Northeast Nigeria** saw some outbreaks of panic buying.

Conflict-driven displacement is occurring in **Mali** and **Nigeria**, and to a lesser extent in **Libya**. The vast numbers of children out of education, cited in many reports, is an issue from the perspective of learning, but also in terms of the risk of

recruitment in areas where violent extremist groups operate.

Early in the reporting period, **Nigeria's** government claimed to have increased testing capacity and had resumed daily updates of infection numbers, however last week two state governments were complaining of insufficient capacity, and reverted to a pause on sharing of numbers. There are suspicions within **northeast Nigeria** that there has been a large increase in the rate of deaths in the community, not being linked with COVID-19. Movement restrictions mean Nigerians and foreign workers cannot travel to medical facilities in Lagos and Abuja.

The principle testing clinic for COVID-19 in **Libya** is within the airport used by the UN-backed Libyan government to launch drones, and so is the subject of regular shelling by opposing forces.

³ According to United Nations geoscheme

In **Liberia** there were increased reports of pharmacies running out of stock towards the end of the reporting period, due to transport restrictions. Similarly, those with illnesses are struggling to access medical facilities.

In **Mali**, the response has gained momentum with the government partnering with NGOs and UN agencies. It has been noted that IDP and refugee populations are not included in the national response plans, and that rural areas remain underserved.

Security

Data from ACLED shows a 70.6% increase in security incidents in **North** and **West Africa** over the past four weeks, compared to the four week average over the past year, significantly more than **Middle** and **East Africa** (itself showing an 18.1% rise)⁴.

Crime in **Nigeria**, previously peaking in Lagos and Abuja, is reported to be increasing across the country, though not as much in the militarised northeast. This is following the widening imposition of movement restrictions within the country.

Workers at a shoe factory in **Morocco** clashed with security forces amid protests against lack of COVID-19 preventive measures on 29 April. This followed government warnings the day prior about poor adherence to health standards within industry.

Access

Aid agencies are generally able to move around with exemptions from movement restrictions, though crossing between internal administrative borders pose challenges.

The system of exemptions for NGOs is not yet running smoothly in **Nigeria**. INGOs in the

northeast were allocated to receive one or two movement exemption passes each – around thirty were distributed to UN agencies, and local organisations received three between them. UNHAS helicopter services in the northeast resumed early in the reporting period.

In **Liberia**, aid to communities from NGOs has become extremely limited, or ceased entirely.

Narrative Tracker

Across the region, community attitudes towards the government appear to have worsened, principally driven by the difficulty of accessing food and general price increases. The risk of this leading to crime or civil disobedience is growing, particularly in **Liberia** and **Nigeria**. In **Burkina Faso** and **Sudan**, as diagnosed COVID-19 cases increased, there was some increased acceptance of the necessity of movement restrictions.



Article from Mali on tensions between religious leaders and government over mosque closures, 28 April. Credit: Field staff

Aid is needed from the international community, but it will need to be delivered and branded in a way that allows acceptance from communities as there is increasing suspicion on the role of

⁴ ACLED, '[Data: Security incidents mapping](#)', 25 March–25 April 2020

INGOs and foreigners in the spread of the disease.

Access in **northeast Nigeria** could be challenging as anti-INGO sentiment is particularly acute in Borno state.

Conflict

No major changes over the reporting period. **Nigeria** noted that though conflict is still worsening in parts of the northeast, its acceleration has slowed.

Tripoli, **Libya** saw more casualties in April than in any month since the beginning of the war. With Turkey's backing, the UN-recognised government is taking an assertive position.

Rule of Law & Governance

Protests were observed in Lekki, **Nigeria** over the lockdown not being applied to a refinery owned by a friend of the political establishment (Aliko Dangote).

Elections in **Mali** took place on 19 April, amongst community rumours that the government had been suppressing COVID-19 numbers to allow the elections to proceed. Voter turnout was around 35%.

In **Tunisia**, early in the reporting period two bloggers were detained and are facing several criminal charges of "insulting state officials", "causing disturbances to the public" and defamation. They have been charged for posting videos on social media criticising the government's response to and its impact on the population.

There are reports from **Sudan** of refugees being bussed from Khartoum to **South Sudan**.

Markets and Economy

A Nigerian fertiliser company noted they are seeing an almost 50% increase in demand from large farmers, state governments and agro-dealers compared to previous years, as end-users buy ahead of time in case of breaks in supply. Despite this, the company is only producing on demand due to increased transportation costs and delays at checkpoints.

Closure of the border with **South Sudan** has reportedly led to a spike in prices inside **Sudan** for basic commodities. Movement restrictions in Sudan are also impacting small farmers being able to get their agricultural produce to markets as well as their ability to access agricultural inputs.

Liberia and **Nigeria** are seeing impacts on supply due to interruptions throughout market chains. For example, availability of finance is dropping, and there are limits on the number of goods that can be bought on credit.

Northeast Nigeria's local economy was brought to a halt over the past week as Borno state brought in lockdown measures, in an area already considered to have a complex humanitarian crisis pre-outbreak. Income for a large portion of the population effectively ceased on 22 April.

Niger and **Mali** recorded price spikes in line with the beginning of Ramadan, as is expected during this period.

Middle and East Africa⁵

Humanitarian Need

Food security is an emerging need in the region, with WASH, health, and protection concerns continuing.

The desert locust outbreak in **East Africa** remains a significant threat to food security, especially in **Ethiopia**, **Kenya**, and **Somalia**. A third generation of locusts will emerge in June and July, coinciding with the start of the mid-year harvest. The Global Report on Food Crises predicts a worsened food insecurity situation in **Zimbabwe**, with an estimated 4.3 million rural Zimbabweans in need of urgent support up to June 2020.⁶ Urban areas are also projected to be affected, with a possible spike in cases of acute malnutrition due to limited economic activities.

In **Zimbabwe**, people who already have limited access to safe drinking water are spending time at crowded boreholes or narrow water wells to collect potentially unsafe water. Urban centers are rationing water in the face of shortages of water treatment chemicals and electricity power cuts.

COVID-19 has exacerbated outbreaks of other diseases. As of 18 April, **Zimbabwe** registered malaria outbreaks in 201 locations, with over 135,000 total cases. **DRC** has reported several new Ebola cases in Beni. A number of patients consulted traditional healers for treatment before being diagnosed with Ebola, and there is a large number of unknown contacts. The resurgence of Ebola was poorly received in Beni, with calls for protests and the partial destruction of three health centers in the city. An INGO car driving past protesters was stoned, and the Ebola response team that attempted to disinfect the

home of the first positive Ebola case was stoned by youths. In **South Sudan**, COVID-19 restrictions stopped a measles vaccination campaign that would have vaccinated over 700,000 children. According to a survey of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, Africa has the largest number of reproductive healthcare mobile clinics closing, with 447 shut.

Protection concerns tied to the lockdown continue. Since the beginning of **Zimbabwe's** lockdown, calls to the national gender-based violence hotlines increased by over 90%, and daily calls to the child helpline increased by 43%.

Security

There are reports of criminal groups carrying out robberies of shops during curfews and lockdowns. Along the **Kenya–Ethiopia** border, there was a confrontation between government security forces and an ethnic militia involved in smuggling. Militias may profit by smuggling goods between countries where there are price differences.



Market stalls demolished on the evening of 28 April by Kenyan police west of Nairobi. Credit: TV 47 Kenya

In **Zimbabwe**, criminals have taken advantage of the lockdown in Harare by posing as police officers and setting up fake police checkpoints where they stop and rob residents.

⁵ According to United Nations geoscheme

⁶ Food Security Information Network, [Global Report on Food Crises](#), April 2020, p. 211.

In **Somalia**, the government has imposed a curfew in Mogadishu, taking security forces away from counter-insurgency operations.

Access

Access restrictions continue to affect humanitarian operations. It is reported that in **Ethiopia** and **South Sudan** humanitarian organisations have continued to be exempt from movement restrictions. In **Kenya** and **Somalia** aid organizations are not exempt, however security forces will allow organization's movement on some occasions. The exemptions in **South Sudan** appear to be discretionary and not from the central government.

In **South Sudan**, there were several cancellations of intra-country flights by UNHAS due to lack of clearance from the High Level Task Force. Since inter-state travel restrictions were imposed, UNHAS has not had a single flight out of Juba. This has affected the ability of humanitarian workers to reach areas of need. In **DRC**, Ituri has maintained mandatory quarantine for anyone entering the province, including humanitarian actors. Some organisations have negotiated exemptions.

DRC relaxed some restrictions in parts of Kinshasa, as well as North Kivu (with the exception of Beni). **Tanzania** remained the regional outlier, with limited restrictions. The situation in **Malawi** also differed markedly from other areas, since the government's proposed 21-day lockdown was blocked in court after being challenged by the Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC).

Narrative Tracker

Xenophobic sentiment against the humanitarian community was observed in **South Sudan** and **CAR**, and anti-Chinese rhetoric was noted in **Kenya**. In **South Sudan**, after the declaration of the country's first case, the majority of rumors became about cases being hidden within

UNMISS and other UN agencies' compounds. Misunderstanding of the virus's ability to infect anyone regardless of race or nationality persists; in **Kenya** a Red Cross worker reported that some people in informal settlements do not think that COVID-19 affects Kenyans.

Anti-COVID-19 response messages have been circulating in **DRC**, tying the return of Ebola to NGOs and the WHO not wanting to lose funding. This is likely to have a direct impact on COVID-19 response if more cases are detected in the east as citizens may conflate the two or accuse INGOs of using COVID-19 as well as Ebola as a tool for profit. Larger trends on medical misinformation are occurring around the measles vaccine. There are rumors that children who receive the measles vaccine are also immune to COVID-19.

Conflict

In **DRC**, tension between the Virunga National Park authorities and the population living along the park's borders continued, despite the extension of a three-month grace period to allow farmers to harvest foods growing within the park's boundaries. The URDPC, a local militia, have increased attacks on strategic positions in Ituri, including gold mines, stretches of commercial road, and water supplies. Seven commercial trucks were ambushed north of Bunia, including a fuel delivery truck. In **Ethiopia**, insecurity in the Guji zone continued.

A summit to address tensions between **Ethiopia**, **Kenya** and **Somalia** has been postponed, although discussions between the federal government and Puntland are continuing.

Rule of Law & Governance

Reports of police brutality in enforcing the lockdowns continued. People attempting to leave Goma, **DRC**, have faced violence, with some requiring medical attention. A video from

Zimbabwe reportedly showed police beating motorists traveling in a vehicle during the lockdown, even though the motorists claimed to be essential workers who were permitted to travel.

In one of **Zimbabwe's** busiest markets, police confiscated and set fire to three tons of fresh fruit and vegetables, and forcibly dispersed the group of rural farmers who traveled overnight to sell their produce.

Ugandan police used tear gas to disperse traders who opened their shops in the capital, Kampala. Police in **Somalia** and **Kenya** shot and killed civilians who violated curfew orders, prompting protests in the former.

Zimbabwe and **Tanzania** have restricted press freedom in the midst of the pandemic. Reporters Without Borders identified **Zimbabwe** as Africa's biggest press freedom violator⁷ in connection with COVID-19 after several journalists were arrested in early April. In **Tanzania**, the authorities suspended a journalist for six months for reporting on COVID-19, and revoked the license of a newspaper after its photo of the president shopping while surrounded by a crowd of people.

In **Zimbabwe**, there are allegations that the ruling Zanu-PF party writes only names of party members on lists of informal traders eligible for humanitarian assistance.

Markets and Economy

The region is now well into what should be a peak planting period. Farmers may have difficulty procuring inputs such as fertilizers and agro-chemicals, and will encounter decreased demand for some harvested crops for export. There have also been disruptions within the livestock market.

As restrictions continue, emerging disruptions include manufacturing, tourism (**Ethiopia**, **Kenya**, **Uganda** and **Tanzania**), transportation (Addis Ababa and Nairobi as regional travel hubs) and the construction sector. In **South Sudan**, businesses are beginning to feel the impact of the closures, through disruptions in supply chains and scarcity of essential commodities such as fuel. Zimbabwean business leaders project that 25% of formal and 75% of informal jobs in the country will be lost as a result of COVID-19.

In **Zimbabwe**, cattle have been affected by a theileriosis disease outbreak, but people have not been able to buy chemicals to treat this, so the cattle are dying in large numbers. Additionally, the president has extended lockdown exemptions to key foreign exchange earning industries, including tobacco and mining.

In **Somalia**, the federal government announced a tax exemption on some basic commodities for three months. The livestock market to Saudi Arabia and the UAE is expected to resume soon.

There was a slight additional increase in food prices in a few locations due to panic buying at the start of Ramadan.

Migration

Ethiopia has seen an influx of thousands of migrants deported from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Djibouti, Kenya, and Somalia, while **Botswana** deported hundreds of Zimbabwean nationals.

The extension of confinement measures in **Rwanda** will have a direct impact on many Congolese citizens, especially those living in Gisenyi and working in Goma, **DRC**. There are reportedly 135,000 Congolese in Gisenyi stranded by these measures, unable to cross the border to go to work.

⁷ VOA News, '[Voices From Africa: The Challenges of Covering COVID-19](#)', April 2020

Middle East

Summary and Forecast

With the beginning of Ramadan, communities have responded negatively to the enforcement of COVID-19- related trading and movement restrictions. Though these restrictions are likely to ease in the coming weeks in Jordan and Lebanon, in areas of Iraq, Syria, Gaza, and Yemen they have added to public frustrations due to their negative effects on livelihoods. COVID-19 preventative measures are tied to disruptions in trade and market activity, compounded by governments' inability to provide services or alleviation for longstanding socioeconomic grievances pre-COVID. This is particularly true in Lebanon, which witnessed an increase in violent protests last week. Overall, governments are struggling to strike a balance between reopening key sectors of the economy to preserve market activity, while also implementing minimum COVID-19 mitigation measures.

Disjointed responses continue in areas with contested governmental authorities and protracted conflict, including in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Authorities in these areas have notably increased their investments in COVID-19 response infrastructure, though cases remain underreported and health infrastructures inadequate. In these same countries, armed groups have seized the opportunity to cause disruption at a time when incumbent security forces are splintered.

Governments in the region have generally responded to the crisis with a security-focused approach, and through restricting freedom of speech related to COVID-19 in Syria, Jordan, and Iraq. Misinformation narratives and stigmatization related to COVID-19 are rampant throughout the region. This exacerbates existing political and social grievances, while creating protection concerns for already vulnerable populations, including IDPs, particularly in Yemen and Iraq.

Increased easing of COVID-19 related restrictions could coincide with marginal increases in public satisfaction levels. However, restrictions are also likely to damage economies in the long term, particularly in food and health sectors. Areas with contested political authorities are facing challenges from their respective constituencies, while armed actors opposed to incumbent governing authorities are predicted to continue to exploit instabilities resulting from COVID-19 in order to advance political, social and military gains.

Of all countries Yemen continues to face the most difficult humanitarian challenges. Renewed flooding, slashes to humanitarian aid and COVID-19 related border restrictions could create unprecedented challenges for the country's population at a time when confirmed cases are starting to come up. The latest declaration of autonomous rule by the Southern Transitional Council, the southern separatist ruling authority backed by the UAE, is by far the most notable political development in the region. The announcement is likely to intensify competition and muddle coordination between governing authorities, affecting implementation of COVID-19 mitigation measures and humanitarian programming.

Humanitarian Need

In **Yemen**, new quarantine measures at port entries created unique disruptions to supply chains and drove up prices. Forecasted flooding threatens to upend the country's agricultural supply in the long-term, though February deliveries are expected to supply segments of the population through the end of Ramadan. Severe funding cuts and staff withdrawals from large INGOs, including the World Food Programme and WHO, will exacerbate humanitarian needs and lead to reduced visibility of marketing data. Heads of households in camps and informal settlements throughout **Iraq** lack access to food. Governments across the region are struggling to regulate prices in response.

Health sectors throughout the region remain ill-equipped to respond to COVID-19, though various countries reported improvements in response measures. Governing authorities in **Syria** notably increased their investments in testing, including the opening of quarantine centers in government-controlled Rural Damascus and in opposition-controlled Idlib, and the delivery of new testing devices by the Iraqi-based Kurdistan Regional Government in the northeast. Medical facilities in **Palestine** are under-resourced and struggling to respond to an outbreak in cases at a hospital in East Jerusalem. The Saudi Arabia-backed government in **Yemen** allegedly created 27 isolation centers in nine governorates, while authorities in Anar Allah created a COVID-19 specific committee to review mitigation measures.

Shelter and cash needs were reported in **Lebanon**, with anecdotal reports of citizens undergoing forced evictions and not being able to pay rent. A preliminary assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the Lebanese labor market

revealed that over 90% of male and female survey respondents had lost income.

Security

Government authorities have generally increased their security presence at border crossings, and there have been increased arrests to enforce COVID-19 measures. Notable security incidents over the reporting period included violent protests in **Lebanon** and clashes between armed actors in **Iraq**. At the time of writing, further clashes are expected in Lebanon during International Labor (Workers') Day, on 01 May. These incidents are likely to have occurred due to circumstances prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, though the effects of the disease have added to instability.



Demonstrations resumed in Lebanon due to the economic situation. Protesters banks' offices in Beirut, 30 April. Credit: Twitter

Incidents reported directly as a result of COVID-19 restrictions related to closure of mosques and/or markets occurred in disputed territories in **Yemen** and in northeast and northwest areas of **Syria**. These included clashes between local police forces and Turkish-backed Ahrar al-Sharqiya in the northwest, and between Syrian Democratic Forces and Syrian National Defense Forces in the northeast.

Access

New movement restrictions stemming from COVID-19 and government regulations

pre-COVID-19 continue to affect access for humanitarian programs. Those which affected Mercy Corps programming were reported in all countries, though Mercy Corps staff reported NGO-specific exemptions being available in most (**Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria**). In **Syria**, international aid organisations continue to advocate for the opening of cross-border operations through Al Yaroubiyah crossing between **Turkey** and the northeast.

In **Iraq over the reporting period**, some NGOs were required to resubmit applications for movement exemptions through the National Operations Center (NOC).

In northeast **Syria**, INGOs successfully created an emergency procedure for INGO staff to leave through the Semalka–Faysh Khabor crossing point. Within **Syria**, NGOs in the northwest began implementing COVID-19 mitigation measures to promote social distancing, including a switch to door-to-door distributions instead of at large distribution centers.

Narrative Tracker

In the latest reporting period, narratives related to the outbreak of COVID-19 centered on three themes: (1) accusations regarding source of the virus (2) gaps in public expectations regarding governments' announced and actual response to the outbreak of the virus, and (3) stigmatisation of infected persons within vulnerable populations, including women and IDPs. **Iraq** stands out as a country in which the public does not acknowledge risks related to COVID-19. Rumors are widely circulated that the purpose of COVID-19 measures are to prevent demonstrations against the formation of a new government.

Field staff reported the spread of accusatory narratives related to the source of COVID-19 throughout the region. **Iran** and its affiliated proxy militias featured prominently in accusatory narratives related to the source of COVID-19,

specifically in **Syria, Iraq, and Yemen**. Narratives have also taken a more political tone in contexts like **Yemen**, with continued references by Ansarallah that the **Saudi-led** coalition introducing COVID-19. In **Syria** rumors are circulating that **Iran** and its militias are responsible for the outbreak of COVID-19 areas of south and central Syria and in Deir-ez-Zor in the northeast. Accusatory narratives towards **Israel** continued in **Palestine**.

In Kurdish-controlled areas of Manbij, **Syria**, residents are holding the Kurdish self-administration responsible for extending lockdowns; residents in northern Aleppo have expressed frustration towards Turkish government-supported officials for the lack of price monitoring; and in Idleb traders have protested against the Syrian Salvation Government for not opening crossings between Government of Syria-held areas, leading to the accumulation of unsold produce.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has revealed countries' longstanding discrimination towards vulnerable populations, including women and migrant populations. This is observed in **Lebanon** towards Syrian refugees, in **Yemen** towards African migrants, and in **Iraq** towards women, where females are prevented from taking quarantine measures or considered a "disgrace" to have the virus.

Conflict

Conflict developments have increased notably in **Yemen** and **Iraq** in recent weeks and remained constant in **Palestine** and **Syria**, the latter amidst the continuation of the 05 March ceasefire agreement between the governments of **Turkey** and **Russia**.

In **Yemen**, the Saudi-led coalition announced on 24 April that it would extend its ceasefire by one month, in part due to COVID-19, after parties failed to reach a resolution following a two-week

ceasefire. Meanwhile, the Southern Transitional Council's declaration of self-rule threatened to spoil any peace deals.

Iraq continues to see increases in ISIS-led attacks in the wake of international coalition withdrawals and internal redeployments by Iraqi Security Forces to support the implementation of COVID-19 restrictions. ISIS is increasing attacks in Anbar and Baghdad along the commuter belt and around Kirkuk at a time when the Security Forces, Popular Mobilization Units, and peshmerga forces are divided.

Iraq's Foreign Ministry summoned the Turkish ambassador in response to a Turkish operation against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Zini Warte, the party's base in **northern Iraq**.

Markets and Economy

Market price increases and heightened food insecurity were consistent throughout the region. The exception to this trend is **Iraq**, where, despite reported increases in food prices, the food security consortium reported that market prices remained stable and that NGOs would continue to import goods. Dialogue is ongoing between the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government regarding the status of oil. The **US** announced a 30-day waiver extension on the import of Iranian energy products on 27 April.

Agriculture continues to be one of the worst hit sectors of the economy due to restrictions on farmers' movement and shortages caused by disruptions in supply chains. This was specifically reported in the **West Bank** and in Deir-ez-Zor, northeast **Syria**.

Governments in **Lebanon**, **Syria**, and **Jordan** announced an easing in restrictions to open key industries. Countries with pre-existing economic crises are struggling to cope with devaluation and resultant foreign currency shortages.



Outlet of the Government Syrian Trading Establishment, which sells food items at 30% below market prices. Credit: Twitter

Rule of Law & Governance

In south and central **Syria**, the Government of Syria announced an easing in restrictions, the postponement of elections for the People's Assembly, and banned the publication of information contradicting official government statistics.

In **Iraq**, the prime minister-designate continues to hold meetings with political blocs attempting to form a government.

Jordan and **Lebanon** announced broad lifts in curfew restrictions. **Jordan** lifted restrictions in five governorates (Aqaba, Ma'an, Tafilah, Karak, Mafraq) and approved the opening of shops across sectors. The Lebanese cabinet approved a five-phase plan to lift restrictions.

Migration

Reports that Yemenis and Horn of Africa migrant workers are being released by **Saudi Arabia** into **Yemen**, which Ansar Allah claims to be a specific move intended to spread COVID-19.

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