Caribbean COVID-19 Food Security & Livelihoods Impact Survey

Regional Summary Report | February 2021

CARICOM
CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY
A Community for All

CDEMA
CARIBBEAN DISASTER EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
Resilient States · Safer Lives

WFP
World Food Programme

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Caribbean COVID-19 Food Security & Livelihoods Impact Survey

Foreword | February 2021

A year since the global declaration of the pandemic, the deepening socio-economic impacts in the Caribbean are of grave concern. Under the leadership of CARICOM, the World Food Programme has supported the three rounds of the CARICOM COVID-19 Food Security and Livelihoods Impact Surveys, which have provided a wealth of information for national governments, regional entities and other stakeholders to make more informed policy and programmatic decisions to best meet the varied needs of the people throughout the Caribbean.

In times of crisis, existing inequalities in access to employment, food and other needs intensify and become more visible. Those living in poverty and facing vulnerability feel it most, and their food insecurity increases. At the onset of the pandemic, people tapped into their resources and made lifestyle changes to cope with movement and other restrictions, increasing food prices and lost jobs and income.

Over time, the realities of those earning above and below average wages tell a more nuanced story. While households with above and well above average incomes are better equipped to manage up to this point, poorer households are increasingly relying on reducing food consumption and negative coping strategies that undermine their wellbeing in the long run in order to keep food on the table today. They are increasingly struggling to access food due to lack of resources. The longer this crisis goes on, the greater the risk of deepening inequalities unless more is done.

The crisis has highlighted the importance of expanding social protection to reach those most in need, however gaps remain in providing assistance to some of the poorest households, including migrant communities. The crisis has also brought to greater prominence the well known need to strengthen Caribbean food systems from production to marketing to transportation to consumption.

While local production is more important than ever, evidence suggests that measures designed to curb the spread of the virus have also impacted livelihoods of people engaged in farming and fishing, highlighting a major gap in promoting and achieving food security in the region.

Caribbean governments face many challenges ahead. It is a balancing act to address the toll on major industries like tourism, navigate limited fiscal space while clearing external debts, supporting increasing needs due to loss of livelihoods, while managing a COVID-19 response that protects both the health and the wealth of the nation. The availability of vaccines in the region represents a positive development in the fight against the spread of the virus with hopes of a return to a sense of normalcy and a greater predictability to pursue livelihoods.

The pathway to managing these impacts relies on strong partnerships in support of countries throughout the Caribbean, putting people at the centre of economic response and recovery efforts. There is a need to balance macro and microeconomic perspectives in the recovery from COVID-19. Governments, regional institutions, the international community and the private sector can come together to help countries get back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

WFP Caribbean is grateful to partner with the CARICOM Secretariat, to administer these surveys and to the Caribbean Disaster Emergency management Agency (CDEMA) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for their contributions. These surveys are also made possible in partnership with the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) and the USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA).

Regis Chapman,
Representative and Country Director, a.i.
WFP Barbados and the Multi-Country Office for the English and Dutch Caribbean

Caribbean COVID-19 Food Security & Livelihoods Impact Survey

Regional Summary Report | February 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic is dramatically altering how people earn a living and meet their critical needs. The Caribbean COVID-19 Food Security and Livelihoods Impact Survey was launched by CARICOM to gather data on livelihoods, access to markets and food security and provide snapshots of these impacts over time. This report analyses data collected from 25 January to 12 February 2021 and complements the findings from the previous survey rounds conducted in April and June 2020. Implemented by the World Food Programme, the short online survey was circulated via social media, traditional media outlets, and emails. The survey link was also distributed by telecommunications service providers via text messages in Barbados, Dominica and Trinidad and Tobago.

February 2021

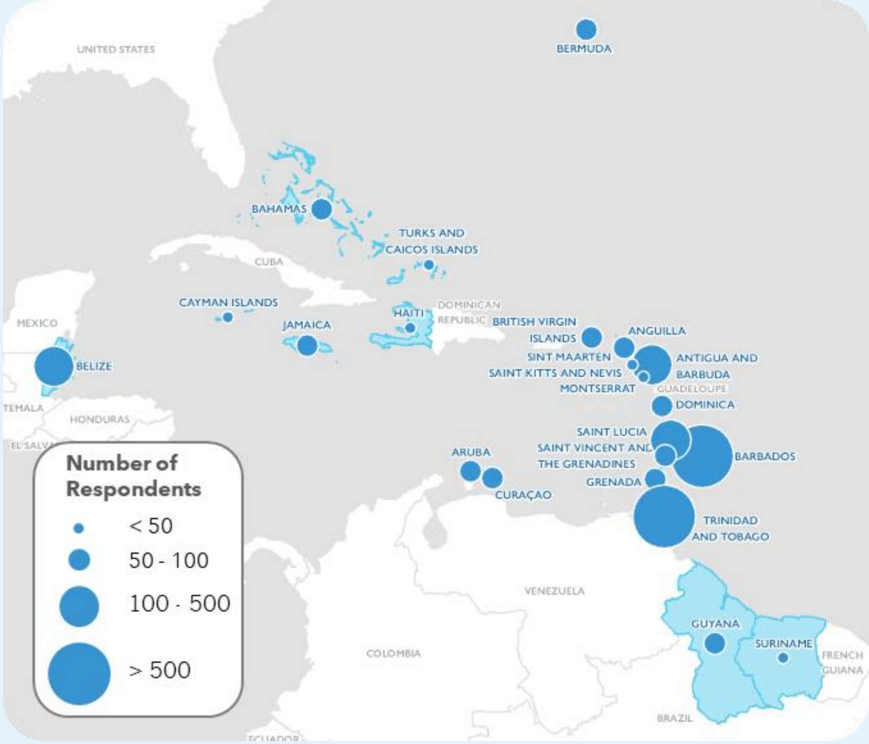
4186 Respondents | **69** Female | **31%** Male | **43** Average age | **4** Average household size

June 2020

5707 Respondents | **69** Female | **31%** Male | **40** Average age | **4** Average household size

April 2020

4501 Respondents | **71** Female | **29%** Male | **41** Average age | **4** Average household size



CARICOM CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY A Community for All

CDEMA CARIBBEAN DISASTER EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY Resilient States · Safer Lives

WFP World Food Programme

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

SUMMARY | February 2021

- The impacts of COVID-19 continue to evolve nearly one year on from the initial declaration of the pandemic, with spikes in cases in late 2020 and early 2021. People in the English-speaking Caribbean have endured multiple lockdowns, changes in travel protocols and drastic declines in tourism during this time.
- Governments have put in place various measures to provide support, with food hampers and income support or cash transfers the most widely reported. While 15% of respondents have received some form of government assistance, only 3% still received it in February 2021.
- Impacts to livelihoods remain widespread, reported by half of respondents. The main factors behind the disruptions continue to be concerns about the outbreak, movement restrictions and increasingly the price and accessibility of livelihood inputs. Nine out of ten respondents continue to predict at least moderate impacts to their livelihoods in the future.
- Job loss and income reductions are still common, affecting 63% of overall respondents and 90% of those from lowest income groups. Disproportionally affected are households whose primary income sources are petty trade, informal/casual labour or external assistance and younger age groups.
- The availability of key products in markets has improved consistently since the beginning of the pandemic, particularly for staple foods and hygiene items which are reported as almost universally available. Still, the availability of fresh foods or medicines remains partial or limited for 20-40% of respondents.
- Most respondents (71%) observe higher than usual food prices, with lowest income groups more commonly reporting increases. Access to markets remains difficult for one third of respondents. The main reason for this is the lack of financial means, which has increased significantly since April 2020 when restrictions and concerns about leaving the house were most common. This has influenced shopping behaviour, with preference increasing towards cheaper foods or smaller quantities.
- Food insecurity remains a concern, with a third of respondents cutting down food consumption in the week leading up to the survey, and average household food stocks continue to decrease. The number of people in the region estimated to be moderately food insecure has decreased slightly from 2.5 to 2.2 million between June 2020 and February 2021, but the number of those estimated to be severely food insecure has risen from 407,000 to 482,000 in this period. The total of 2.7 million people currently estimated as food insecure represents an increase of 57%, compared to 1.7 million food insecure from April 2020.
- Negative impacts on food security disproportionately affect respondents from low-income households. They are also the ones most worried about not being able to meet their food or other essential needs. They are much more likely to meet their food needs at the expense of selling productive assets and cutting spending on other priorities such as health and education.
- Negative impacts across key metrics of well-being are most acutely felt by households who perceive their income levels as well below average, who earn income from informal and casual sources or rely on external assistance, younger respondents and Spanish-speaking respondents residing in Trinidad and Tobago. On average, differences on key metrics of well-being appear minimal between men and women.
- Some signs of recovery are beginning to emerge, primarily among economically better off households, business owners and people relying on salaried work. However, poorer and younger respondents continue to struggle and seem to increasingly rely on external support, which suggests widening disparities and growing inequality.
- While the survey contributes to a better overview of impacts, the data are not representative, and the use of an online questionnaire limits inputs from those without connectivity. Responses were skewed towards Barbados with 36% and Trinidad and Tobago with 26% of total responses.

SUMMARY | February 2021

All respondents

		Feb-21	Jun-20	Apr-20
LIVELIHOODS	Disrupted livelihoods	51%	54%	74%
	Reduction/loss of income	63%	69%	48%
	Moderate to severe or severe future livelihoods impacts	48%	48%	47%
MARKETS	Lack of market access	30%	27%	38%
	Change in shopping behaviour	84%	87%	84%
	Increase in food prices	71%	78%	59%
FOOD SECURITY	Reduced food consumption	32%	32%	17%
	Lack of food stock	17%	13%	3%

Respondents with well below average perceived income*

*This information was not collected in the April 2020 survey round.

		Feb-21	Jun-20
LIVELIHOODS	Disrupted livelihoods	73%	73%
	Reduction/loss of income	90%	88%
	Moderate to severe or severe future livelihoods impacts	81%	78%
MARKETS	Lack of market access	59%	54%
	Change in shopping behaviour	93%	93%
	Increase in food prices	80%	85%
FOOD SECURITY	Reduced food consumption	68%	69%
	Lack of food stock	40%	31%

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COVID-19 | Situation and response

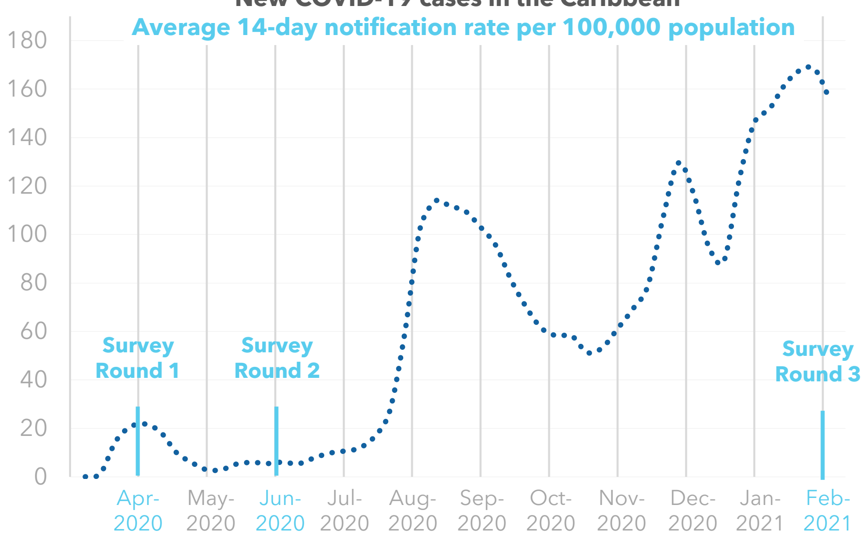
COVID-19 cases and government responses

Following the first registered case of COVID-19 in the Caribbean in early March 2020 and the official declaration of the pandemic, most governments in the region closed their borders to commercial travel, while establishing curfews and business and school closures. The first Caribbean COVID-19 Survey was launched in late March 2020 when most countries and territories had movement restrictions or lockdowns in place. Many governments extended these measures in the months that followed.

At the time of the second survey at the end of June 2020, many governments had begun to relax restrictions as cases decreased. Several reopened their borders, while introducing strict entry protocols to curtail the spread of the virus. Others though continued or re-introduced measures as cases increased or resurged.

New COVID-19 cases in the Caribbean*

Average 14-day notification rate per 100,000 population



* Average rate for the 23 countries and territories covered by this survey
Source: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2021

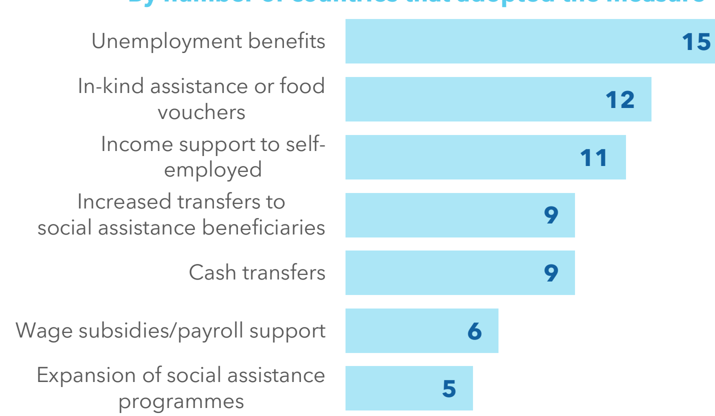
In January 2021, cases in the Caribbean increased to their highest levels since the beginning of the pandemic. When the survey was implemented in January/February 2021, some governments had again put in place restrictions on movement, commercial activity and in-person school attendance.

Social protection measures

Faced with the widespread economic repercussions of the pandemic, all governments in the English- and Dutch speaking Caribbean have turned to social protection to support people, through existing programmes or ones introduced in the wake of COVID-19. Target groups have been primarily people and businesses who have lost jobs and income as a result of movement restrictions, declining tourism and disruptions to commercial activities. In some countries, farmers and fisherfolk have also received assistance in the form of food, seeds, tools, fertilizers, animal health interventions, animal feeds, provision of livestock, fishing gear and farm labour assistance.

Main social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Caribbean*

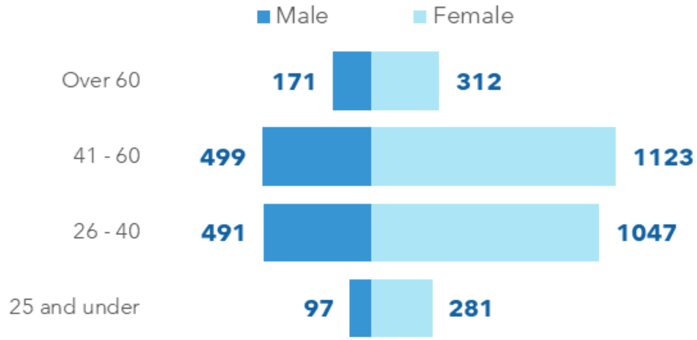
By number of countries that adopted the measure



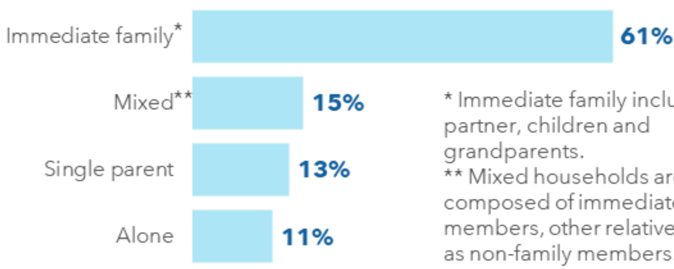
*Includes all survey countries and territories except for Haiti
Source: Authors' own compilation

RESPONDENTS | Demographics

Age and sex



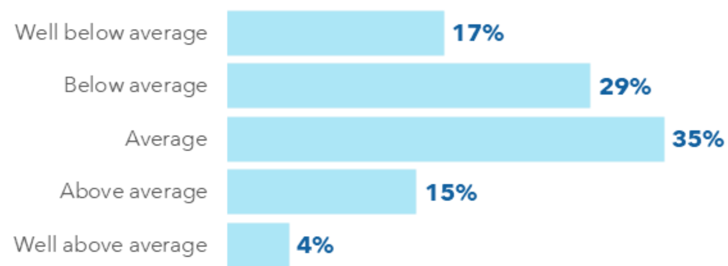
Household composition



* Immediate family includes partner, children and grandparents.
** Mixed households are composed of immediate family members, other relatives as well as non-family members.

Perceived income levels

Respondents were asked to compare their household's income with the rest of their country



Main income sources

Respondents were asked to indicate the main income source(s) for their household. Multiple choices could be selected.