



WFP/Dalia Khamissy

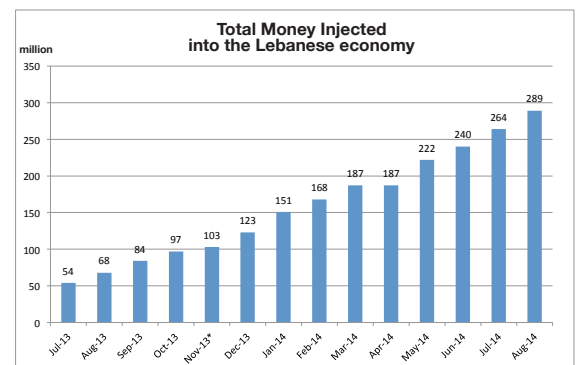
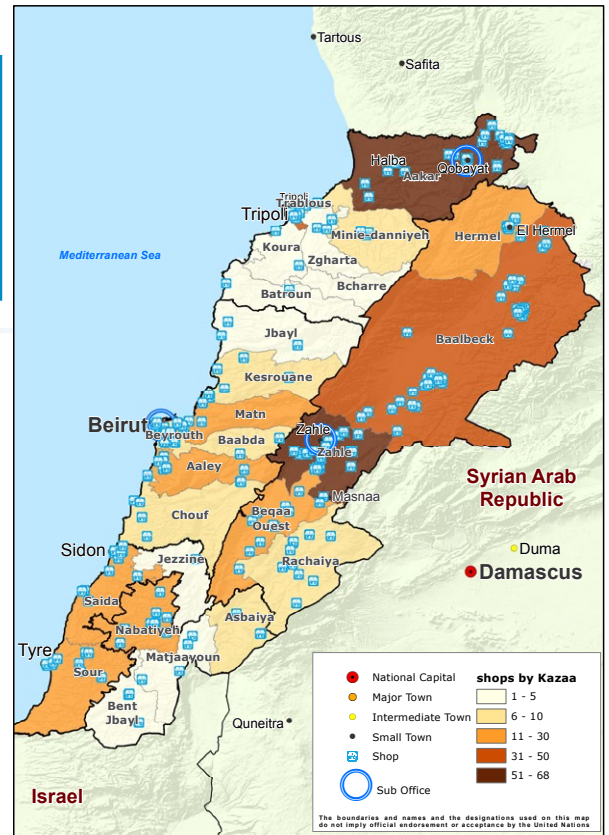
WFP began operations in Lebanon in June 2012 following an official request from the Government of Lebanon. Since the start of the operation, refugee numbers have sharply increased, with WFP delivering monthly assistance to over 800,000 vulnerable Syrians across Lebanon through food vouchers and one-off food parcels.

Voucher Programme

The voucher programme has been WFP's principal means of providing food assistance to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, accounting for over 95 percent of the monthly caseload. Each month WFP delivers vouchers worth US\$30 to beneficiaries, which can be exchanged for food items of their choice in any of the 350 WFP-contracted shops across the country. Since the start of the programme, WFP has injected over US\$289 million into the local economy.

Vouchers were adopted as the primary modality of assistance in Lebanon as the local market is capable of providing sufficient food for host and refugee populations alike, eliminating the need to import large quantities of food. In addition, vouchers change to allow vulnerable Syrian families to select their preferred food items and thereby meet their individual consumption and nutritional needs more effectively.

Assistance was initially provided in the form of a paper voucher, but despite the success of the voucher programme, challenges remained. As the number of refugees in Lebanon continued to increase, printing, distribution and reconciliation of paper vouchers absorbed the majority of WFP and partner staff time, limiting the time available for monitoring, evaluation and programmatic work. Beneficiaries also faced extended waiting periods, as well as time-consuming and expensive journeys to and from the distribution sites.



*Distribution on-going

E-Cards

In 2013, WFP began shifting from the paper voucher system to an electronic voucher system (e-card). Following several months of planning and research, WFP contracted a local bank in partnership with MasterCard, WFP's global private partner since 2012. After the completion of a successful pilot scheme of e-cards in South Lebanon in September 2013, WFP began a general roll-out in the following months. Meanwhile, WFP contracted shops opened accounts with the partner bank and installed Point of Sale machines in their businesses. A major information campaign was launched in parallel to the roll-out to train beneficiaries and shop owners on how to use the cards correctly.

May 2012	•Government requests WFP assistance
June 2012	•Start of WFP's operation in Lebanon to provide food assistance •Start of WFP's food vouchers in the Bekaa Valley
July-Aug 2012	•Expansion of WFP food vouchers to cover the whole country
September 2013	•Pilot project of WFP's e-card in Nabaytieh, South Lebanon
October 2013	•Roll out of the e-card in Beirut, Mount Lebanon and South Lebanon
November 2013	•Expansion of the e-card in the Bekaa Valley
December 2013	•Expansion of the e-card to the whole country, including North Lebanon and to include North Lebanon

Since December 2013, the e-card modality covers WFP's caseload across the entire country and is being implemented by the same extended network of cooperating NGO partners that conducted the paper voucher system. It is currently also WFP's largest voucher programme worldwide.

Economic Impact Study

In May 2014, WFP conducted an assessment of the direct and indirect impact of WFP's e-card programme on the Lebanese economy. The results show that e-cards offer a quick and efficient mechanism for delivering food assistance to beneficiaries. Transactions data indicate that beneficiaries spend two thirds of their monthly e-card allocation within five days, confirming that e-card transfers circulate rapidly through the economy. The e-card programme has had a large direct impact on participating stores, where revenue has doubled on average. It has created 1,300 jobs in participating stores and has led to US\$3 million investments in capital expenditure, as larger stores have increased floor space and storage. Generally, out of every dollar spent through the e-card, 84 cents go towards purchasing goods; 5 cents for wages; 4 cents for operating costs; 1 cent for taxes; and 6 cents for profit.

The study also found that for each dollar spent through the e-card programme, additional indirect economic benefits worth US\$1.50 accrue to the Lebanese economy. This means that a planned voucher transfer of US\$345 million in 2014 will result in as much as US\$517 million in indirect benefits for the Lebanese food products sector.

Future Commitments

Throughout the course of the emergency response, WFP Lebanon has been involved in discussions with other humanitarian partners on using a single electronic card that would be available to all humanitarian agencies planning for either electronic vouchers or cash transfers to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This single card, which is better known as the OneCard, will include the possibility to provide assistance using the point-of-sale (POS) terminals at selected retailers and a cash modality through ATM. Through the OneCard, humanitarian agencies will be using WFP's e-card platform, inclusive of data management, service delivery and implementation as a common platform to provide food and non-food item assistance to Syrian refugees. Thus far, WFP, UNHCR and a consortium of international NGOs are committed to the concept of the OneCard platform. Preparations are ongoing anticipating to commence in January 2015.

The Council of ministers has recently approved WFP's project to provide assistance to vulnerable Lebanese affected by the Syria crisis, in line with Government's National Poverty Targeting Programme. The assistance is planned to start in October, with beneficiaries receiving a monthly voucher worth US\$30 per month, redeemable in any of WFP-contracted shop in the country. Co-funded by UNHCR and the World Bank, WFP plans to reach 27,300 vulnerable Lebanese by December 2014 through this project.