

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN COMMUNITIES IN LEBANON

Impact of Reduced Assistance

May 2015



WFP/Joelle Eid

Whilst WFP has been striving to determine the varying levels of vulnerability of refugees in Lebanon in order to channel assistance to those most in need, limited resources since January have necessitated a prolonged decrease in assistance of 30 percent whereby the voucher value was reduced from US\$27 to US\$19 per month.

Given that the full voucher value was determined based on the price of a basic and balanced food basket, the reductions have had serious consequences on the refugee families and host communities in Lebanon. In order to understand these implications, WFP held focus groups with 850 people across the country to collect qualitative feedback. This in conjunction with preliminary findings from WFP's regular post distribution monitoring provides important insight into the impact of the reduction in assistance.

14 percent of Syrian parents have removed their children from school

KEY FINDINGS

- The number of refugees struggling to keep food on the table has increased by 12 percent as a result of the reduction in assistance. Currently, almost 70 percent were found to be reducing the number of meals eaten in a day.
- Some 80 percent of families reported that they were forced to borrow food or money for food on credit. Savings that were put aside by 50,000 families to cope with the harsh winter, in particular to buy fuel, clothing for their children, and essential medicines have now been used up to put food on the table.
- Most worrying is the impact on children. The reduced food assistance has directly affected their schooling. By March, almost 14 percent of the families have pulled their children out of school – around 4 percent have forced their children into employment, exposing them to serious protection concerns.
- Furthermore, the number of families that have had no choice but accept high risk, illegal and exploitative jobs has doubled.

“Almost all families reduced meal portions, the number of meals per day, or were relying on only one type of food”
Syrian refugee, Beirut

HOW DO FAMILIES EXPECT TO COPE OVER THE COMING SIX MONTHS?

When beneficiaries were asked how they would cope if reductions were sustained for another six months, multiple worrying concerns were voiced, including:

- Relocating and/or returning to Syria;
- Further increasing debts and borrowing from neighbors, family and friends;
- Seeking additional employment opportunities with longer hours and other high risk activities including begging;
- Turning to criminality.

CONSEQUENCES OF PROLONGED REDUCED ASSISTANCE:

The impact of prolonged reduced assistance will have far-reaching and detrimental implications on the vulnerabilities of the Syrians and their ability to live peacefully alongside Lebanese nationals.

Increased tensions with host communities - All groups voiced concerns that the already tense relations with – and burdens placed upon – host communities would deteriorate further if they were forced to consider all possible means of survival. This could in turn worsen the already fragile security situation in the country.

Falling further into debt, evictions and return to Syria
Families will be expected to repay their debts including outstanding rent in the coming months. However, as they continue to struggle to meet their food needs – this will become ever more challenging, if not impossible. Hence, leading to evictions – leaving them with little choice but to move in search of shelter – a fear that was expressed by 53 percent of the families interviewed. In the event that this becomes a reality, an increase in internal displacement, a rise in the number of informal settlements as well as movement within the region and possibly to Europe, is likely. As the conflict in Syria continues to intensify, those who would consider returning home would be at serious risk.

A lost generation - As more and more savings are depleted and access to social safety nets through relatives and friends are reduced, the ability to put food on the table will become impossible. Those hardest hit will always be the children – as insufficient food at a young age will forever hamper their growth and their learning ability, which in turn will negatively affect their contribution to society in the future. Furthermore, the current trend of families putting their children to work at the expense of their education will worsen – making the likelihood of the lost generation ever more imminent.

Impact on the Lebanese economy - The impact will also be felt by the Lebanese, as the amount of cash directly injected into the local economy through over 400 WFP-contracted shops will continuously decrease – affecting jobs and revenue.

The full voucher value was determined according to the price of the food basket in the local market. The food basket is composed of different items which provide the WHO recommended nutritional value of 2,100 kcal per person per day, such as rice, bulgur wheat, lentils, oil, poultry, eggs, dairy and vegetables and takes into account the shopping patterns