



Assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese in Tripoli (Lebanon)

SEED and People in Need Slovakia, Tripoli, May 2020



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This assessment was carried out within the project 'Education as a pathway to better living conditions for vulnerable Lebanese and refugee children and youth in Tripoli' implemented from August 2019 to July 2020 with the financial support of the Official Development Aid of the Slovak Republic (SlovakAid).



Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic's public health impact and containment measures including nationwide lockdown have raised significant challenges for the humanitarian community in Tripoli (North Lebanon) to access vulnerable refugee and host communities to continue providing them with assistance and protection. Relief services have been drastically reduced and aid programs had to quickly adapt their modus operandi and re-adjust the method and/or type of activities delivered according to the needs expected and assessed. Meanwhile, the pandemic and its consequences are having a critical impact on vulnerable communities and families, limiting access to: basic services and goods, livelihoods, protection, health, education etc.

In order to meaningfully adapt to the crisis and adjust assistance to prioritize beneficiaries' current needs and support their recovery without causing harm, SEED, together with its partner People in Need Slovakia (PIN-SK), conducted in the second half of April 2020 a multi-sectorial assessment aiming at capturing the impact of the pandemic, the confinement and containment measures primarily at household-level and, to a lesser extent, at community-level. SEED (Socio-Economic Enhancement and Development) is a National NGO based in Tripoli which aims to inspire and empower individuals and communities to fulfil their rights and create a safe, educated and prosperous society in Lebanon for all. The results of this assessment are being used to inform the organizations' priorities and strategy for the coming months.

The purpose of this report is to document SEED/PIN-SK's findings through the assessment and resultant recommendations in order to inform their programming, now and should the pandemic persist or other such epidemics occur. It is also hoped that this report will add to the evidence base for current and future responses to support vulnerable households in Tripoli and be of support to other relief actors in the short and medium term in their needs assessments, readjustment of activities and fund-raising efforts in order to meaningfully address the crisis in Tripoli, particularly given the exceptional socio-economic crisis Lebanon has been facing since October 2019.

Key Findings

96% of respondents declared not having any household member working
65% of respondents declared that their households have lost over 50% of their income
Coping mechanisms declared by respondents include increasing debt and debt-bonded labour (94%), reducing quantity of meals (65%) and moving to a more affordable house or shelter (17%)
At community level, major protection concerns include discrimination of access, exacerbated challenges with local authorities and eviction, family separation and child abuse.
At household level, major protection concerns include increased intimate partner violence and abuse and neglect of children.
80% of adults are experiencing increased stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, with increased loneliness and hopelessness
84% of children are perceived to feel increasingly sad, with increased stress, anxiety and fear.
92% of respondents declared they received enough information about the pandemic and 98% are not looking for additional information
Almost all respondents reported challenges, among their households' members, to follow risk reduction practices; especially social distancing, regular handwashing, and confinement at home
92% of respondents declared food and cash assistance as being their priority needs to address the current crisis (on the short-term).
80% said access to livelihoods and job opportunities are key for the households to further recover when the lockdown ends

Methodology

In the second half of April 2020, SEED and PIN-SK conducted remote individual phone-interviews with a representative sample of 50 persons that were already, directly or indirectly, receiving assistance from SEED/PIN-SK prior to the COVID-19 pandemic: beneficiary children’s caregivers, caregivers enrolled in positive parenting programming and beneficiaries of vocational training programs. Considering the challenge to access children during the lockdown, only adults were included in the survey sample.

All phone interviews were conducted in Arabic. The interviewers solicited consent to participate from each respondent prior to the interview. Participation was voluntary, anonymous and optional for all respondents.

Key WHO/UN/governmental messages related to advice on COVID-19 prevention, symptoms and support were integrated in the interview process. Similarly, this exercise has also been used to identify protection concerns within households and to link, in a safe and confidential way, persons of concern with SEED’s Social Worker. The interviewer was qualified and trained to raise protection-related questions and to conduct referrals when needed.

Alongside qualitative data analyses from the 50 interviews conducted, this report triangulates findings with quantitative data collected during a SEED April 2020 Food Insecurity Assessment that targeted 133 households aiming at assessing household food insecurity and access to food vulnerabilities in order to prioritise limited SEED/PIN-SK assistance. The purpose of triangulating results of both exercises aimed to avoid any “assessment fatigue” and duplication of similar questions. Respondents of the survey also participated in the aforementioned assessment.

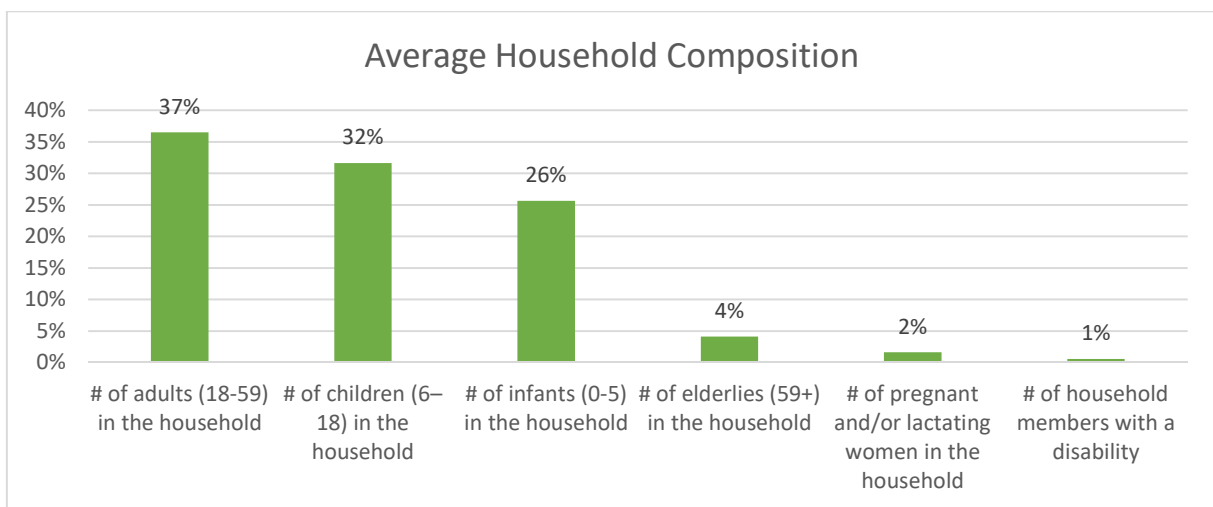
All chart bar and visual statistics available in this report are retrieved from the 50 interviews conducted. Data retrieved from the Food Basket Assessment results were used in the process of interpretation of data and included in the report with the caption ‘(SEED Food Basket Assessment results)’

Interview Respondents’ profile

GENDER	76% of the respondents were female and 24% male.
AGE	64% of respondents were 26-40 years old, 18% 18-25 years old and 18% 41-60 years old.
STATUS	92% of respondents were Syrian refugees and 8% Lebanese nationals.
RELATION WITH SEED	20% of respondents were enrolled in a SEED vocational training program, 80% were caregivers of children beneficiaries (among them, 36% were enrolled in SEED’s positive parenting program).
CHILDREN BENEFICIARY	Among caregivers interviewed, 72% of respondents have at least one child enrolled in ECE and 18% in homework support.
LOCATION	32% of respondents were from Abu Samra, 24% Tripoli-Nejmeh and Al Tal, 16% from El Mina and 28% from other areas including Azmi, Hadid, Maarad, Tabbeneh, Zahriyeh and Bedawi.

Households' profile

HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD	88% of respondents declared living in a male-headed household and 12% living in a female-headed household.
HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS	60% of households had between 4-6 members in the household, 18% 7-10 members and 16% 11-16 members.
HOUSEHOLDS COMPOSITION	On average, the households were composed of 26% infants (0-5), 32% children (5-18) and 37% adults (18-59). Elderly persons, pregnant and/or lactating women and persons living with a disability represented 4%, 2% and 1% of the households' members respectively on average.



Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Impact on livelihoods and education

Prior to the pandemic, 74% and 22% of respondents' households had respectively one and two members working¹. **Since the start of the nationwide lockdown on 15 March 2020, 96% of respondents declared not having any household member working.** For those who continue working, the SEED Food Basket Assessment showed that part-time and temporary employment represent a major source of income (45% of respondent were part-time and temporary workers, and 13% were working full time)

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, 40% of respondents declared that their respective households have lost between 50-75% of their income and almost 25% reported that they have lost more than 75% (SEED Food Basket Assessment results).

To overcome exacerbated economic hardship resulting from the lockdown and containment measures, 86% of respondents declared using or planning to use new and/or more coping mechanisms to generate income and cover basic needs of the household's members. **Those coping mechanisms**

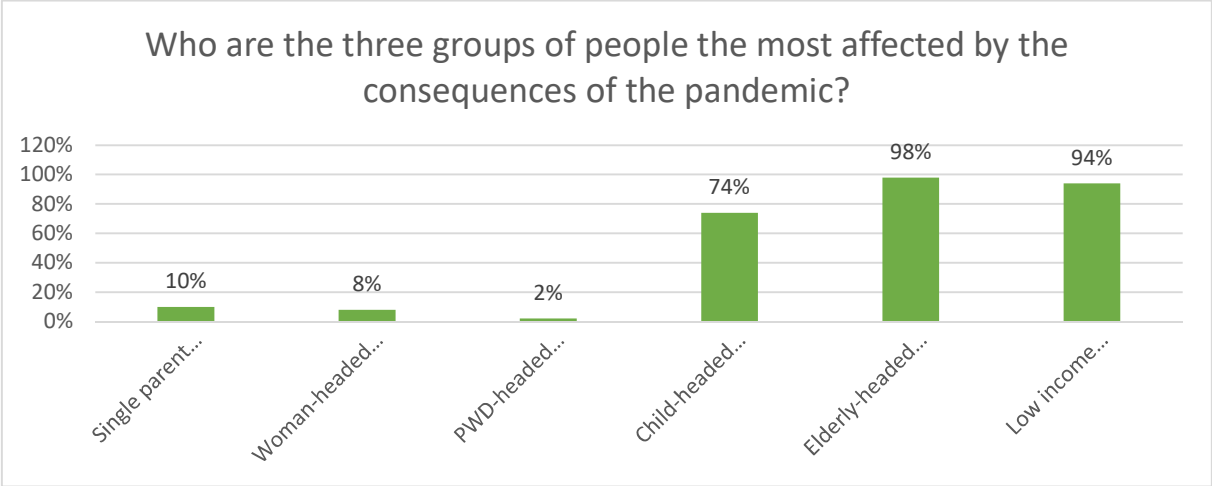
¹ Interviewees were not requested to specify how many hours per week they were working nor how regularly.

include increasing debt and debt-bonded labour (94%), reducing quantity of meals (65%) and moving to a more affordable house or shelter (17%). The SEED Food Basket Assessment results also showed that for 55% of respondents’ households, the current crisis has led to a deterioration of nutritional quality and diversity of daily food consumed. None of the respondents declared child labor and/or child marriage as being a current / planned coping strategy in relation with the pandemic and its economic consequences, although it is acknowledged that there may not be comfort in sharing this information with an interviewer.

20% of respondents said their children are not pursuing their education since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. However, 80% of those interviewed were caregivers of SEED/PINSK’s children beneficiaries enrolled in SEED/PINSK’s remote education services, and therefore the 20% finding cannot be seen as representative of all vulnerable children in Tripoli at this time. No respondent mentioned relying on any other type of initiatives (e.g.: caregiver-led, online-based and community-based initiative).

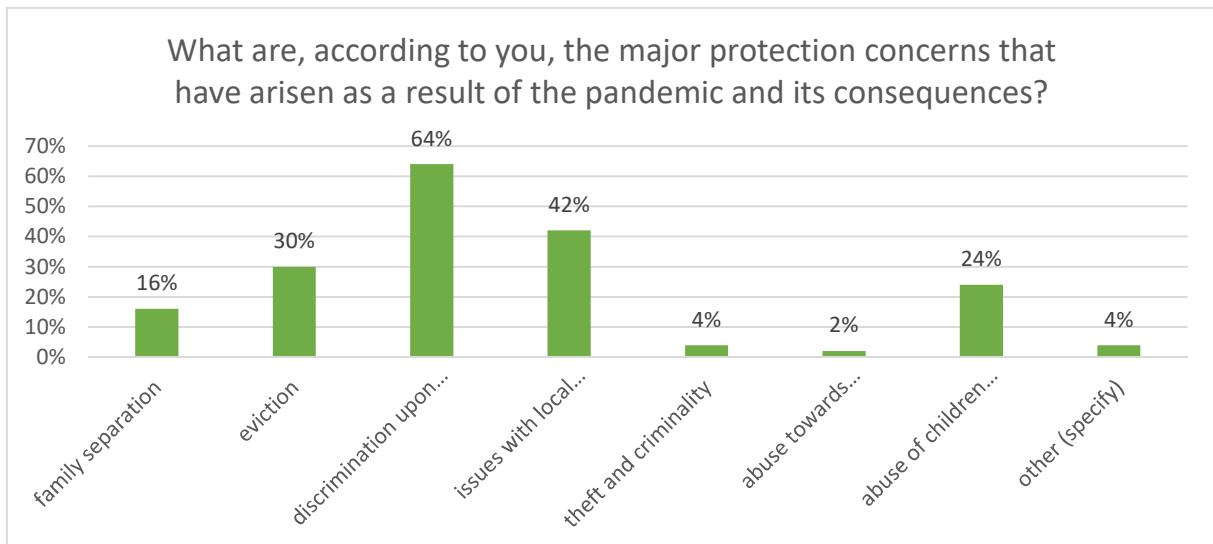
Impact on protection and psychosocial well-being

According to respondents; **child and elderly-headed households as well as low income households are the ones the most affected by the consequences of the pandemic.**

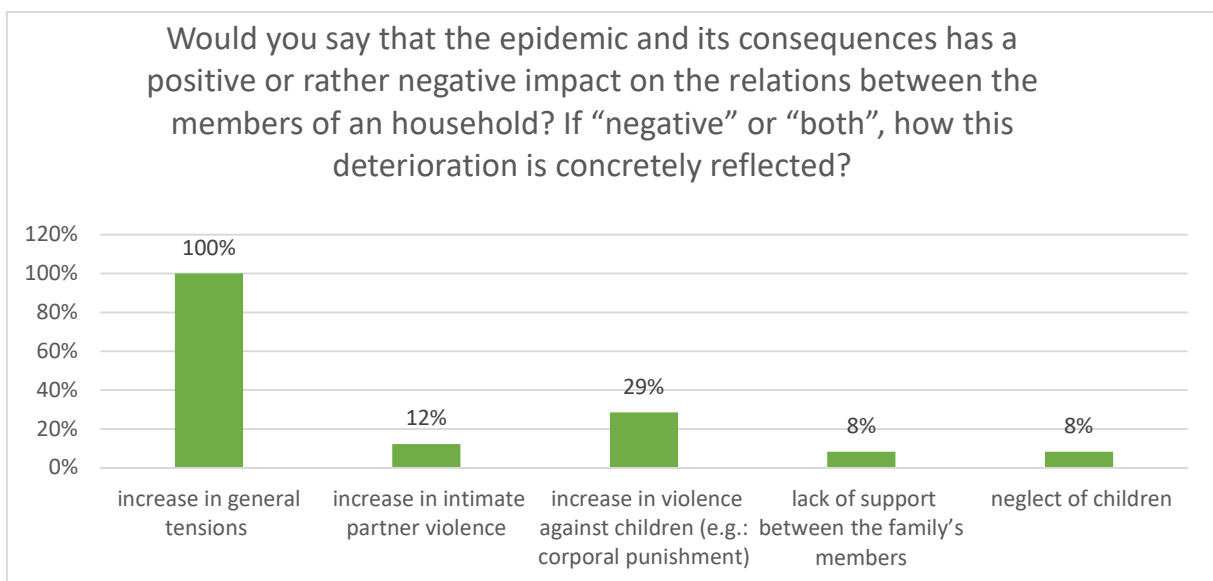


According to the respondents, at community-level **discrimination of access to services, resources and opportunities (64%) and exacerbated challenges with local authorities such as harassment and arbitrary arrest and detention (42%) as well as land / house eviction (30%) are major protection concerns** resulting from the pandemic and the lockdown. Other respondents highlighted risks of family separation (16%) and increase in child abuse (24%) as significant protection risks. Very few respondents pointed out an increase in gender-based violence (GBV) and we can assume that this is due to the high sensitivity level around GBV².

² It is interesting to note that people surveyed (the majority of which were women) did not consider GBV as a major protection concern at community level. Yet, when the question was raised at household level, respondents disclosed their concerns about the rise in intimate partner violence.



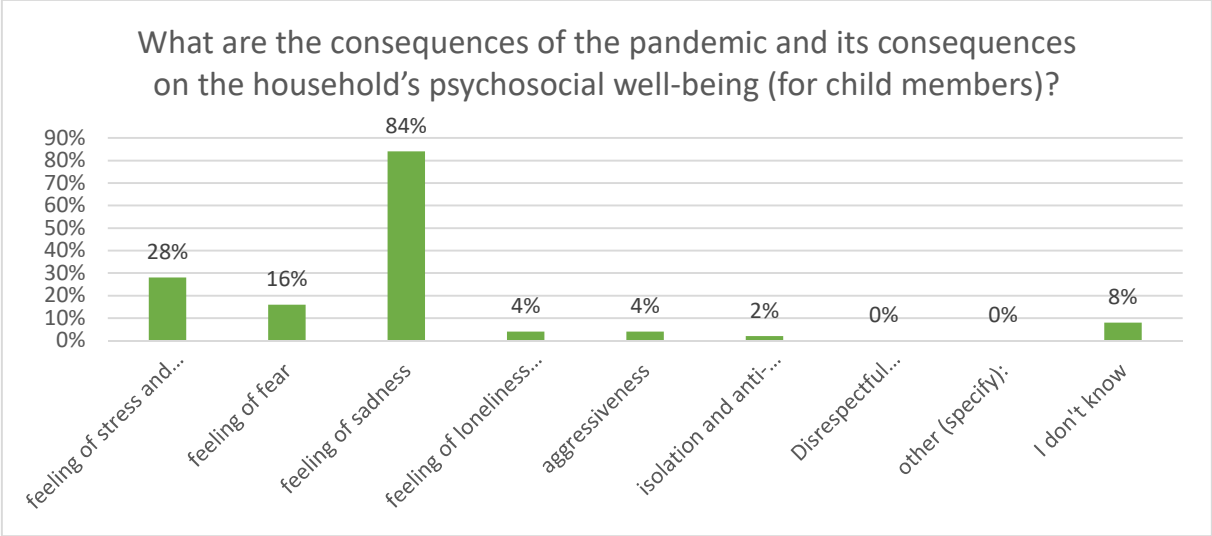
At household level, 90% of respondents declared the pandemic and the lockdown have affected relations between the household’s members (both positive and negative)³. Of them, **100% agreed that the current situation is exacerbating tensions within the household. In addition, 12% disclosed an increase in intimate partner violence, 29% an increase in violence towards children and 8% a rise in neglect of children.**



The assessment results confirm the pandemic and the lockdown is having critical consequences on vulnerable people’s mental health and psychosocial well-being. **Around 80% of respondents declared the household’s adults are experiencing an increase in stress and anxiety, fear, and sadness. More than 50% highlighted an increased feeling of loneliness and hopelessness.** Respectively 34% and 24% of respondents highlighted exacerbated aggressive and anti-social behaviors. However, none of the respondents mentioned a rise in risky behaviors (abuse of drug and alcohol, risky sexual practices etc.).

³ 2% of the respondents considered that the epidemic and its consequences had only a positive impact on the relations between the members of a household, and 8% noticed a negative impact only.

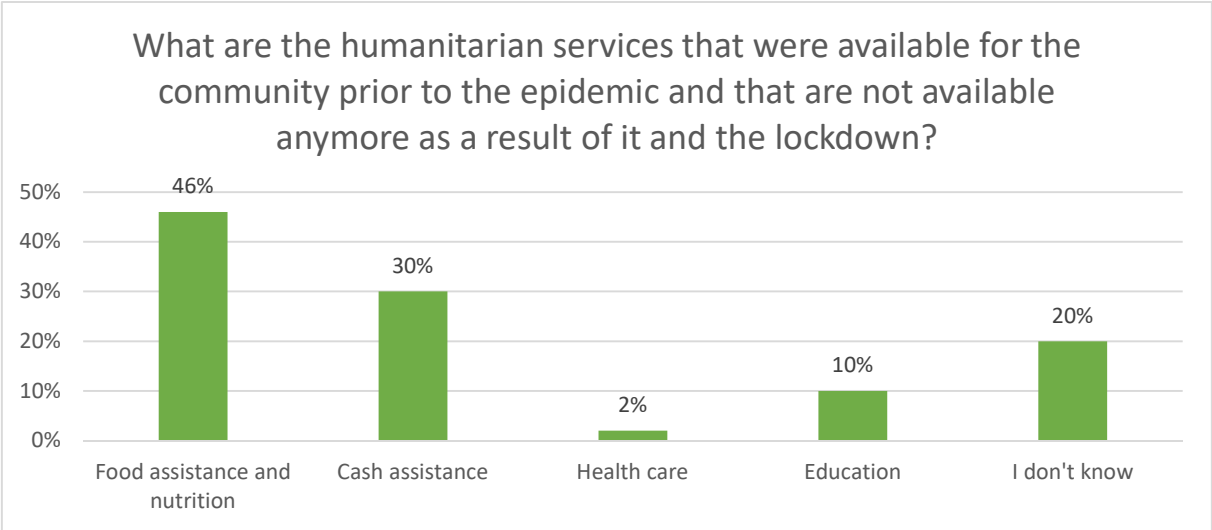
Furthermore, **84% of respondents declared the household’s children feel increasingly sad due to the current situation. 28% of children have an increased feeling of stress and anxiety and 16% are experiencing fear.** The aforementioned results should be analyzed with great care since children did not participate in the survey and 8% of respondents did not answer to this question.



Capacities of affected communities to access services

The pandemic and the lockdown have strongly affected community-based capacities (assistance and protection) and in turn abilities for communities to access service. 76% of respondents reported that their respective community’s members are showing deteriorated capacities to provide care to the most vulnerable people, as a result of the current crisis. Food donation and financial loan represent the main types of assistance provided by community members (respectively 22% and 12% of respondents’).

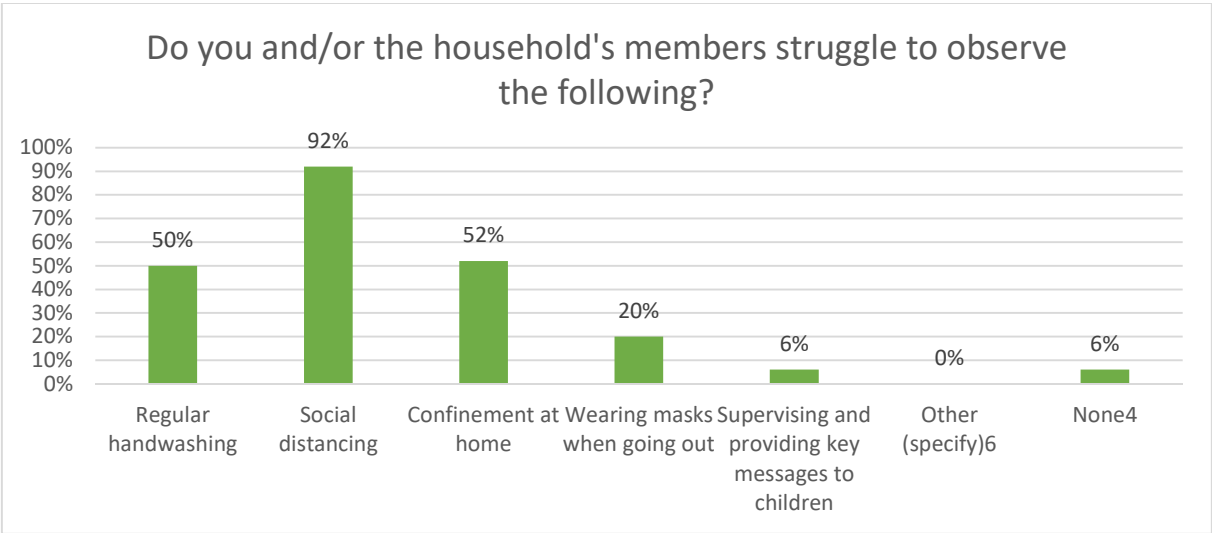
46% and 30% of respondents highlighted that, respectively, food and cash assistance are humanitarian services that are not available anymore as a result of the crisis and 20% of respondents did not know what services have stopped due to the pandemic and the lockdown.



Access to information

92% of respondents declared they received enough information about the pandemic and 98% are not looking for additional information on a) the virus, ways of transmission and symptoms; b) services available⁴; c) messages for children). Sources of information used by respondents and their household’s members are diverse and include: SEED’s COVID-19 Information Hotline (72%), social medias (68%), word-of-mouth (20%) as well as information from community leaders (18%) and from UN agencies (18%). None of the respondents mentioned using governmental / official sources of information.

The survey results also show the contradiction between people’s feelings of having access to information and their ability to implement risk-reduction practices. **Almost all respondents reported challenges, among their households’ members, to follow risk reduction practices; especially for social distancing, regular handwashing, and confinement at home (respectively 92%, 50% and 52% of respondents).**



Priority needs

Unsurprisingly, **92% of respondents declared food and cash assistance as being their priority needs to address the current crisis (on the short-term). Similarly, 80% said access to livelihoods and job opportunities are key for the households to further recover when the lockdown ends.** Finally, 77% of respondents to the SEED Food Basket Assessment conducted during the second week of April declared they and their families did not receive any form of assistance in relation to the COVID-19 crisis.

⁴Although it could seem contradictory in the current time, the fact that people surveyed are not looking for further information on available services may be observed in light of the high concerns the communities raised on discrimination upon access to services, resources and opportunities. This result can indeed illustrate a lack of trust towards service providers. It could also illustrate an information fatigue from beneficiaries over COVID-19-related updates.

Recommendations

Key Finding	Recommendation
Basic Assistance	
92% of respondents declared food and cash assistance as being their priority needs to address the current crisis in the short-term.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash assistance (multipurpose, for rent or for food) and food assistance should be prioritized to support the most vulnerable households to overcome the current crisis. • A multi-sectoral response should focus on avoiding the increase of dependency on humanitarian assistance and rather build capacities of local communities to effectively reduce risks of transmission while providing assistance to those who need the most. • Assessments need to continue to be conducted by actors in North Lebanon in order to continually assess needs and prioritize activities, with particular attention to providing assistance to child and elderly-headed households, low-income households and those living with chronic health conditions and who are therefore particularly vulnerable at this time.
Coping mechanisms declared by respondents include increasing debt and debt-bonded labour (94%), reducing quantity of meals (65%) and moving to a more affordable house or shelter (17%)	
Child and elderly-headed households and low-income households are perceived to be most affected by the consequences of the pandemic.	
Health and Hygiene	
Almost all respondents reported challenges, among their households' members, to follow risk reduction practices; especially for social distancing, regular handwashing, and confinement at home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All local and international organizations or initiatives carrying out distributions should develop and follow strict protocols involving social distancing, use of PPE and raising awareness of the community about precautionary sanitary measures • All partners to consider (where procurement is possible) including soap and/or hydro-alcoholic gel in all in-kind assistance provided (e.g.: food assistance) in order to support the household more generally.
Livelihoods	
96% of respondents declared not having any household member working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEED/PIN-SK have continued vocational training programmes remotely and encourages partners to continue to seek innovative ways of continuing service delivery. • An assessment of the needs of the current market should be carried out, to tailor vocational trainings and livelihoods opportunities in order to support community members to sustain themselves, support their communities and/or access the job market as early as possible.
65% of respondents declared that their households have lost over 50% of their income – with a resultant increase in negative coping mechanisms.	
80% said access to livelihoods and job opportunities are key for the households to further recover when the lockdown ends	

Education	
Reduction in children pursuing their education since the start of the COVID-19 crisis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEED/PIN-SK have moved classes for Early Child Education and Homework Support onto WhatsApp in order to continue to support learning and encourage partners to continue to seek out innovative ways of continuing service delivery. • In order to minimise learning delays and the risk of drop-out, education actors should switch to remote learning practices while building the capacities of caregivers to enable home-based learning. • Given risks of further waves of COVID-19 and further social unrest, the education sector should develop a consultation/coaching system and draw best practices and lessons from current remote practices in North Lebanon in order to further improve and be better prepared – should a resurgence occur.
Protection	
At community level, major protection concerns include discrimination of access, exacerbated challenges with local authorities and eviction, family separation and child abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEED/PIN-SK have continued their protection activities and referral mechanisms through developing hotlines for any protection concerns to be raised, and encourage protection activities and awareness to be mainstreamed across all partner activities. • Contact must be maintained between persons of concern (PoC) and organizations through effective, safe and accessible remote mechanisms, involving strategies for PoC to alert the organization of any kind of mistreatment or abuse – without being put more at risk of their perpetrators in times of lockdown (e.g.: use of passwords...). • Specific assessments should be conducted to explore new / increasing risks children are facing and to get more information about their current psychosocial status and well-being. • Legal actors should focus on issues related to eviction and, perhaps, a joint advocacy should be conducted towards national authorities. • Considering the risks of a second wave of COVID 19 as well as the deterioration of the economic situation in Lebanon, community-based initiatives aiming at strengthening solidarity networks and protection mechanisms among community members should be further encouraged and built upon in the North of Lebanon.
At household level, major protection concerns include increased intimate partner violence and abuse and neglect of children.	
80% of adults are experiencing increased stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, with increased loneliness and hopelessness	
84% of children are perceived to feel increasingly sad, with increased stress, anxiety and fear.	

Information Sharing	
<p>92% of respondents declared they received enough information about the pandemic and 98% are not looking for additional information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEED/PIN-SK have successfully created and rolled-out a COVID-19 Information hotline to share facts and advice, which is recommended for other partners. • Whilst sufficient information appears to be being received by respondents, it is important for all partners to continue sharing COVID-19 related prevention messages until the country gets out of the sanitary crisis, given that the end of lockdown is not related to the end of the crisis, and in order to prevent a renewed wave of contamination. • All organisations must ensure that they have designed remote-based solutions for programming should a resurgence occur, and share with staff in advance, including a communications plan for how to communicate changes with beneficiaries.