
VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES 2018

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

The Government of Lebanon (GoL) estimates that the country hosts 1.5 million Syrian refugees who have fled their country's conflict since 2011, resulting in the largest concentration of refugees per capita and the fourth largest refugee population in the world. **The Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR)** evaluates the living situation of a representative sample of refugees that have approached UNHCR. Between 16 April and 4 May 2018, the survey team visited a representative sample of 4,446 Syrian refugee households across Lebanon's 26 districts and conducted face to face interviews. As the sixth survey of its kind, the VASyR identifies changes and analyzes trends in the situation of refugee households, using a multi-sectoral household questionnaire.

A robust response has been mounted by the GoL in partnership with the international community, helping to avert dire consequences and support positive outcomes for Syrian refugees. This response, however, has been inhibited by insufficient funding. In 2018, funding requirements for adequate support to Syrian refugees in Lebanon was estimated at US\$ 2.291 billion. As of 30 September 2018, those needs were only one third funded. In addition, the crisis has exacerbated pre-existing development constraints in Lebanon, and the worsening economic situation in Lebanon (with an inflation rate estimated at 6.5% for 2018) negatively impacts response interventions. In this context, sufficient assistance and protection, safe shelter and effective education, and the ability to adequately support the most vulnerable refugees, including women, children and individuals with disabilities, are all at risk. Continued fine-tuning of programming based on targeting, improved livelihood opportunities and a significant injection of funding will all be essential to build on successes and address shortcomings.



Key findings

Demographics

Survey results indicated that the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon is almost equally split between males and females, with a gender gap in favor of females for the 20-29 age group. Fifty-four percent of the refugee population was under the age of 18.

Challenges in civil and legal documentation

Obtaining both legal residency and birth registration continued to be a challenge for Syrian refugees. Overall, 73% of interviewed refugees aged 15 and older reported not having legal residency, similar to 2017. While the share of households where all members reporting legal residency was stable (18%), the share of households in which no member had legal residency grew by six percentage points, to 61%. Refugees frequently reported being unable to afford the annual renewal fee of US\$ 200.

Lack of birth registration can lead to serious long-term consequences for those concerned. While the vast majority (97%) have some kind of documentation attesting to the birth of their child in Lebanon, a large proportion of children (79%) remain without having completed the birth registration process. Dialogue with the Directorate General of Personal Status is also needed to support implementation of recent measures to facilitate civil registration.

Seeking safety

The majority of Syrian refugee households (51%) reported that their relationship with the host community was positive or very positive. Only 3% of households reported having experienced a security incident during the previous three months. Children are particularly vulnerable in a crisis environment. Two percent of Syrian refugee children between the ages of 5 and 17 were engaged in child labour, with boys more affected than girls. Parents in over half of households (59%) reported resorting to physical aggression as a form of discipline.

Shelter

Looking at shelter, two thirds of households were living in residential buildings. There was, however, a shift toward non-residential structures, where rents are cheaper, across almost all governorates compared to 2017. Refugee households residing in non-permanent structures were paying an average monthly rent of US\$ 58, while those residing in non-residential and residential accommodations were paying on average US\$ 149 and US\$ 221 respectively.

Three in ten refugee households were residing in shelters where conditions did not meet humanitarian standards, and another 5.5% living in shelters in dangerous conditions (i.e. in danger of collapse). One third of refugee families continued to live in overcrowded shelters.

AT A GLANCE

951,629

Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR as of 31 October 2018



Share of children enrolled in school:



20%

Aged 3-5

68%

Aged 6-14

23%

Aged 15-17

69%

of Syrian refugees families are below the poverty line



73%

of interviewed refugees aged 15 and older reported not having legal residency



18%

of households are headed by females



51%

of Syrian refugees are below the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket



Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Energy

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) indicators generally improved compared to 2017. In terms of access to drinking water, the vast majority reported use of improved drinking water sources (91%; note that the water quality was not tested), and access to improved sanitation facilities (87%). Reliance on bottled water, however, continued to increase (to 43% in 2018), and more than half of households reported paying for drinking water. Over half of the population also relied on private generators as a source of electricity, reflecting the unreliability of the national supply.

A generation that will not be lost

While school enrollment for children aged 6 to 14 was just 52% in 2016, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) received international donor support during the last four school years to ensure that every child has access to formal education. Enrolment rates for children aged 6 to 14 rose substantially in 2017 and remained stable at 68% in 2018. Enrolment was also stable for children aged 15 to 17, at 23%, while enrollment in pre-primary education (ages 3 to 5) increased by five percentage points, to 20%. Nevertheless, more than half of refugee children (aged 3 to 17) were still out of school, mainly adolescents and youth. Starting at age 12, boys are especially vulnerable to school abandonment. Additionally, children with disabilities still faced challenges accessing education, with only 44% of children with a disability aged 6 to 14 enrolled.

Sixty-one percent of Syrian refugees aged 15 to 24 were not employed, not in education, and not attending any training (NEET). While more girls are enrolled in secondary school than boys, the NEET rate is higher for female youth (79%) than for males (41%), reflecting significantly lower levels of female employment.

Health

Access to primary health care (PHC) services remained relatively stable, with 87% of households reporting that they received the required care. Half of surveyed households reported receiving subsidized health care and 7% reported accessing free health care, while 20% reported having had to pay in full. Similar to 2017, three quarters of those who required hospitalization were able to access it. For both PHC and hospitalization, cost was the biggest barrier to access.

With regards to children's health, the prevalence of children under two years old who were sick increased by 7% from 2017, reaching 41%. Fever was the most prevalent type of sickness at 82%, followed by cough (67%) and diarrhoea (53%).

Two thirds of households have at least one member with a specific need such as illness, disability or in need of support in daily activities.

Food security

While food security for Syrian refugees improved in the last year thanks to the extensive humanitarian response in the country, one third (34%) of Syrian refugee households remained moderately to severely food-insecure. Food-insecure households had lower per capita expenditures and more debt, and they allocated the majority of their expenses to food.

The share of households with acceptable food consumption increased by nearly five percentage points, yet one third of Syrian refugees continued to consume an inadequate diet. Overall, there was a slight improvement in the daily dietary intake compared to 2017, as well as improvements in nutrient consumption. Analysing by gender, female-headed households were more likely to have both poor food consumption and lower dietary diversity than their male counterparts.

Looking at food consumption for children, the average number of meals consumed per day increased for children under five. However, less than half (44%) of infants under 6 months were exclusively breastfed and 17% of children between 6 and 23 months had the minimum diet diversity. The figures decrease as the households become poorer.

Economic vulnerability

A decrease was seen in poverty levels and average per capita monthly expenditures increased in 2018, indicating that households are less economically vulnerable. However, 69% remained below the poverty line, and just over half of households (51%) still did not reach the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) threshold of US\$ 2.90 per person per day, unable to meet survival needs of food, health and shelter. To cover essential needs, nearly 9 out of 10 households acquired debt and 82% borrowed money during the three months prior to the survey.

Employment and economic activity

The total labour force participation rate was 43%, and on average, 68% of households had at least one working member. Nearly one in five working males (and one in ten working females) had more than one job. Monthly income for working adults was on average US\$ 209 for men, and US\$ 92 for women. WFP assistance and informal debt continued to be key sources of income for households, indicating the challenges Syrian refugees have faced in covering expenses through employment.

Seventy-one percent of Syrian refugee youth (between the ages of 15 and 24) reported not having worked any day in the previous 30.

Strategies to cope with vulnerability

Refugees continued to adopt a range of strategies to cope with a lack of food and/or the means to buy it. Although fewer households were adopting food-related coping strategies (such as consuming cheaper food or fewer meals) than in 2017, the vast majority still did so, indicating food insecurity. There was a reduction in the share of households applying livelihood coping strategies that can be categorized as crisis or emergency (such as reducing expenditures on health or involving children in income-generating activities), but nearly all households (97%) applied a strategy of some form. In particular, 15% of households moved to cheaper accommodations, an increase of nine percentage points compared to 2017.

Assistance helps fill the gap

Overall, UNHCR and WFP are the two main assistance actors in Lebanon. WFP assistance was received by 113,000 of the most vulnerable households. UNHCR's winter assistance reached over 165,000 families living below the poverty line and UNHCR multi-purpose cash assistance reached nearly 33,000 of the most vulnerable families. In-kind assistance was less common: 10% of households reported receiving in-kind food assistance in the previous three months, 4% received education training on hygiene and less than 1% reported receiving assistance in the form of capacity building or training.

The VASyR with a gender lens

Despite significant improvements compared to 2017 across all food security and vulnerability indicators, female-headed households remained more vulnerable than male-headed households. A partial explanation could lie in the fact that 55% of female-headed households did not have any member working, while only 27% of households headed by males had no working members. In addition, female-headed households were less likely to have at least one member with legal residency.

Female-headed households continued to resort to more negative coping strategies than male-headed households. Female-headed households were also less likely to live in a residential structure, with 45% residing in non-permanent and non-residential shelters, compared to 33% of male-headed households.

The gender parity index indicated that the number of girls in primary school remained almost equal to that of boys. For secondary school, more girls are enrolled than boys, particularly in upper secondary (grades 10-12). Possibly related to this discrepancy, there was a significant difference in the rates of child labour between boys and girls (3.4% and 0.9%, respectively).

Child marriage remains a concern for girls, with three in ten girls between the ages of 15 and 19 currently married, a notable increase of 7% from 2017.

Priorities:

- *Continued access to safety and non-refoulement*
- *Civil status and legal documentation*
- *Shelter, water and sanitation that meets humanitarian standards*
- *Improving food security and ensuring food access*
- *Addressing economic vulnerability*
- *Safeguarding children's well-being (education, health and protection)*
- *Special attention to female-headed households and ensuring a gender lens in all programming*

Recommendations

The vigorous response to the Syrian crisis, coordinated by Government of Lebanon and the international community through the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, has provided a crucial safety net for Syrian refugees. Significant assistance has been provided to meet basic needs such as food, water/sanitation, secure accommodation, education and public health care. For many refugees, however, well-being remains precarious.



To protect refugees, UNHCR has made a commitment with the Government of Lebanon to support GSO capacity to be able to process the increasing number of residency applications. Support and advocacy should remain a top priority for tackling the issue of illegal residency and to increase capacity for processing birth and marriage registration.

Programmes that center around poverty alleviation are key to enabling families to meet their needs and increase the overall resilience of the population.

Meeting funding requirements is crucial to ensure and maintain food security for all Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The unified targeting and vulnerability method that have been established enable actors to better link assistance with interventions, and strong linkages with the livelihoods, basic assistance and food security sectors must be maintained. The food security strategy must include coordinated actions that address economic vulnerability, with a special focus on women and youth, to be sustainable.

The access of vulnerable refugees to affordable occupancy in residential shelters at adequate conditions should continue to be facilitated through an integrated Shelter/WASH response, ensuring sustainable upgrades and security of tenure agreements. Immediate assistance is required to meet the increasingly acute needs of the refugee population living in substandard shelters, non-permanent and non-residential in particular. Rights should be enhanced for refugees to improve security of tenure. Ongoing support for access to improved water supply and sanitation facilities is required to ensure it is safely managed based on agreed standards, irrespective of shelter type. Related to this, in addition to ensuring proper electricity connections, it is important to decentralize energy-generation capacity and enforce associated distribution networks to improve availability and affordability of electricity.

The education response should focus on the retention of students in schools by improving the quality of education, promoting a violence-free school environment, and providing transportation when needed. Pre-primary education presents another opportunity for improving children's long-term well-being. Lastly, education interventions should be systematically linked to child protection systems and livelihood opportunities for youth.

More evidence should be generated on the multiple deprivations of persons with disabilities and respond to their needs through mainstreaming and targeted programmes in protection, education, child protection and WASH.

To increase the engagement of Syrian refugee youth in particular, efforts must be redoubled to lower the NEET rate by increasing school enrolment, increasing participation in alternative education and vocational skills-training programmes and improving employment opportunities for youth.

Nearly one third of households remained unaware of where to access medical services in case of an emergency, suggesting that there continues to be a need for strengthened communication on which health clinics are affiliated with the refugee response.

Both men and women cited the need to take care of household members, along with a lack of skills and experience to apply for jobs, as reasons for not looking for work. Addressing these barriers may open doors to employment and self-reliance for refugees.

Looking at the data with a gender lens, female-headed households remain more vulnerable than male-headed households, despite significant improvements. Special attention should continue to be paid to female-headed households, given their greater vulnerability and more limited employment opportunities.

To address geographic disparities across governorates, systems to identify and recognize pockets of vulnerability will ensure an appropriate and fair level of assistance to vulnerable households, regardless of their location.

Inclusion in assistance programmes and discontinuation of benefits should continue to both be accompanied by messaging, communication, advocacy efforts and feedback mechanisms.

From education to food security, basic assistance to health care, meeting the funding requirements with predictable, longer-term funding is crucial to the response.

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