

7 SEPTEMBER — 20 SEPTEMBER 2013

SYRIA **JORDAN** **LEBANON** **TURKEY** **IRAQ** **EGYPT**

Highlights

- WFP responds to the needs of newly displaced families in Syria including those in Mukharrem and rural Idleb.
- Prices of various food commodities have increased by up to 30 percent in surveyed markets inside Syria.
- WFP distributed partial value vouchers to all refugees in Al Za'atri camp alongside WFP dry rations. Profits from shops support charitable activities in the communities around the camp.
- WFP began piloting electronic vouchers in Lebanon.



WFP plans to assist 3 million people with food assistance during the September cycle. As of 20 September, over 258,000 family food rations have been dispatched to assist almost 1.3 million beneficiaries across Syria. However, restrictions on access resulting from active fighting, bureaucratic impediments, increasing road blockages and a proliferation of non-state actors controlling transit routes, continues to slow or stall the delivery of humanitarian assistance to many areas in need. Particularly critical is the situation in the northern governorates of Al-Hassakeh and Aleppo. In Al-Hassakeh, the expanding presence of militant groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Al Nusrah Front has impeded WFP food dispatches for more than four months. In Aleppo, as a result of access constraints The September cycle food dispatches to both governorates have yet to commence.

The development of a Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) for 2014, tentatively scheduled for release in early December, has begun. Sectoral needs analyses and response strategies are under preparation, using available information. WFP and FAO have obtained approval to conduct a rapid food security assessment, for which arrangements are being finalized with SARC and the Ministries of Social Affairs and Agriculture and Agrarian Reform.

Security

Ongoing clashes across Syria continue to restrict the movement of humanitarian staff in a number of regions.

UNDSS has suspended travel through Harasta in Rural Damascus until further notice, while insecurity is preventing direct UN access to some parts of the northern governorates of Al-Hassakeh, Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor. In Al-Hassakeh, active fighting between

the Al Nusrah Front and Kurdish militia continues to slow the pace of food deliveries, while creating additional needs.

Due to escalating insecurity, WFP is operating with a reduced staffing presence at its office premises across the country; those not reporting to duty are working from alternative locations.

Population Movements & Growing Needs

During the last two weeks, a number of new displacements have been reported in different governorates. An attack by the Al Nusrah Front in a village 65 km north of Homs led to the displacement of an estimated 1,470 Families (7,350 people) to Mukharram, where they are being hosted by local families or accommodated in schools. An assessment mission conducted by WFP Homs team and SARC on 12 September reported that affected families are in need of food, medicines, clothing and hygiene facilities. An estimated 500 people remain inside the attacked village, where WFP and partners are unable to assess at present. WFP has allocated 2,000 family food rations to provide initial assistance to displaced families.

Clashes in rural Idleb is generating a new wave of displacements. An inter-agency convoy is being organized this week to deliver 2,500 food rations, wheat flour and high energy biscuits to provide initial assistance to 12,500 IDPs. A second delivery of an additional 2,500 food rations will be arranged in a second stage to support an extra 12,500 people.

Across the country, the coping strategies of families experiencing multiple displacements are being rapidly exhausted, as their possessions are depleted, their living conditions deteriorate further, and their access to basic services becomes more compromised.

Rises in Food Prices

In surveyed markets, food prices continue to rise, increasing overall inflation and further eroding families' purchasing power, thereby reducing their access to basic food items. Prices for commodities such as rice, lentils, oil and tea have registered the largest increases, at up to 30 percent in some governorates over the past month.

Logistics Cluster

The Logistics Cluster is planning to increasingly use Tartous as an origin point for upcoming Joint Humanitarian Convoys to locations in Northern and Central Syria. The Cluster's augmented storage space in Safita (30 km from Tartous), allows for increased storage of participants' relief items for onward transport.

Logistically, sending convoys from Tartous is ideal as distances to nearby governorates are shorter than from Damascus. To mitigate the challenge of finding

drivers willing to transport items to particular locations, the Cluster has registered additional transport companies in Syria. The Cluster is in constant communication with each of the transport companies regarding future convoys, and trucks and drivers from each company remain on standby for transport to their respective planned locations. The planned set-up of the UN Hub in Tartous, led by the Logistics Cluster, is another driving factor in using Tartous as an important staging area for the response in the coming months.

FEATURED UPDATE

The Benefits of Vouchers

Almost 90 percent of all Syrian refugees assisted by WFP are reached through a voucher programme. Since Syrian families are accustomed to shopping in commercial market environments, vouchers allow them to continue their regular approach to purchasing food. This helps to return a sense of normalcy and dignity to their lives.

Using vouchers provided by WFP, beneficiaries can select their preferred food items and meet their individual consumption needs. This is especially important for children, the elderly and those with specific dietary needs. Vouchers also ensure that beneficiaries have better access to more diverse foods with greater nutritional value, including fresh fruits, dairy products, meat, chicken, fish and vegetables.

It is important to note that vouchers also increase women's control within households in coordinating and meeting food needs, as they are fully involved in the selection of food for their families. Moreover, voucher assistance provides a low profile for beneficiaries, as they are able to shop normally and do not need to attend large-scale in-kind food distributions. Vouchers are a more discrete form of food assistance, allowing for greater protection of beneficiaries who are hence not necessarily visible or differentiated as a result of WFP assistance.

Food vouchers also help to simulate local communities including the promotion of local production and markets. Some 250 jobs have been created for Jordanians in WFP partner shops as a result of the WFP food voucher programme.

Although vouchers are more costly than in-kind food distribution, a smaller percentage of the total cost of the voucher modality is due to implementation/management costs. Hence, a large portion of the money spent on vouchers goes back into the local economy and benefits host countries. Once the transition to e-vouchers is complete, the implementation cost will be further reduced.



WFP/Rein Skullerud

Electronic Vouchers

Vouchers will become even easier to use as WFP transfers to electronic vouchers, which will function like pre-paid debit cards. E-vouchers (also referred to as e-cards in some countries) allow beneficiaries to spend the balance of assistance in multiple visits. This offers beneficiaries who often have limited food storage capacity with greater flexibility over food purchases and a greater sense of normalcy. E-vouchers also provide beneficiaries with a more discrete assistance modality, therefore helping to ensure their safety in host communities.

E-vouchers also negate the need for beneficiaries to come to distribution sites as the card will be automatically recharged monthly through the partner bank. Given that WFP has already been forced to delay or cancel voucher distributions as a result of security concerns in Lebanon and Egypt, e-vouchers allow WFP to provide consistent food assistance while ensuring the safety of beneficiaries, as well as that of WFP and partner staff.

E-vouchers are more secure than in-kind food assistance or paper vouchers as they require a personal identification number (PIN) to access assistance and can be canceled if lost or stolen, hence lowering costs incurred as a result of losses.

WFP already uses e-vouchers in Turkey and is currently piloting the assistance modality in Lebanon, with plans for a similar limited launch in Jordan next month, as well as plans to expand to Iraq and Egypt in 2014.

JORDAN

The Government of Jordan estimates that 600,000 Syrian refugees now reside in Jordan; both the Government and the international community have made great strides in response to immediate and protracted needs of the crisis. On 3 September, WFP launched its transition to vouchers in Al Za'atri camp, the second largest refugee camp in the world, and is prepared to provide food assistance in Azraq camp once it is operational.



Transition to Vouchers in Al Za'atri Camp

WFP successfully began the transition to vouchers in Al Za'atri camp on 3 September, injecting money into the local Jordanian economy through the engagement of local supermarkets to provide food assistance to vulnerable refugees. WFP is now distributing individual food vouchers to all refugees in the camp valued at JOD 3 (US\$4.23) during the first September cycle alongside WFP dry rations and UNHCR complimentary food distributions. Beneficiaries receive vouchers once per cycle, for a total of JOD 6 (US\$8.46) per month. They can redeem these vouchers in community based shops in the camps, and all profit made supports charitable activities in the communities around the camp. The vouchers replace the distribution of oil and will leave beneficiaries with a small amount to purchase other commodities. Once large markets are in place, WFP will progressively increase the voucher value while reducing dry ration commodities in the food basket until the camp is assisted entirely through food vouchers.

Transition to E-Vouchers

WFP is launching a pilot program for the use of e-vouchers in two Amman governorate locations (urban/rural), one location in the Mafraq governorate and one small transit camp. The pilot will allow WFP to test the system of the e-card (which will function like a pre-paid debit card), and ensure that programme and financial processes are in place and effective. The pilot distribution of e-vouchers will take place at the beginning of October and will reach approximately 200 families. In line with the normal voucher distributions in Jordanian communities, the WFP partner bank will then transfer the monthly voucher value of JOD 24 (US\$33.90) per person for October to the e-cards and the selected beneficiaries will be able to purchase food at WFP partner shop

Azraq Camp

WFP is fully prepared to begin General Food Distribution (GFD) in the new camp, Azraq camp and is currently awaiting UNHCR's opening date. WFP has erected three rubhalls, two of which will be used for storing food commodities and one for daily bread distributions. Furthermore, WFP established a location for distributing welcome meals to new arrivals in the interagency reception area and cooperating partner, ACTED, will distribute dry food rations and complementary food to beneficiaries from shared distribution sites.

Contingency Planning

WFP Jordan has increased its state of readiness for a large influx with current food stocks for 100,000 individuals for two weeks, or 50,000 for a month. Approximately 70,000 welcome meals are packed and ready to be transported in the event of a large influx, and another 30,000 welcome meals can be packed within 24 hours. Current suppliers have the ability to produce and pack more than 80,000 welcome meals per week.



Monitoring

In Al Za'atri camp, WFP monitored 11 distributions and conducted 35 household post-distribution monitoring surveys. In Jordanian communities, WFP monitored eight partner shops and seven distribution sites.

WFP continues to expand its network of partner shops in the voucher programme in all governorates of Jordan in order to minimize travel costs and accommodate for the increasing number of Syrian refugees. WFP conducted an assessment of four shops in Irbid, two in Balqa and one in Aqaba. WFP will recommend two shops from Irbid and one from Balqa for inclusion into the voucher programme (to the cooperating partners) by the start of the October cycle. In Al Za'atri camp, beneficiaries have appreciated the transition to food vouchers, noting they are now able to select the food they prefer from shops.

LEBANON

WFP's operations in Lebanon continue to grow, currently assisting over 550,000 Syrian refugees, with plans to reach over 1.2 million Syrians by the end of the year. Currently, over 95 percent of all beneficiaries are reached through paper vouchers which are collected at almost 30 distributions sites and redeemed in almost 300 sites.

Transition to E-Cards

Transitioning all paper vouchers to electronic cards will allow WFP and its cooperating partners to spend more time evaluating the quality of programming, while monitoring the effectiveness of assistance through follow-up interviews with families across the country. Furthermore, the programme could also potentially offer a single-channel for delivering different forms of assistance, together with other agencies and NGOs, such as rental subsidies, fuel subsidies or non-food assistance.

WFP has finalized its agreement with its partner bank and has received almost 2,000 of the e-cards for distribution. WFP's Beirut office has trained partners on the technical implementation of the e-card programme as well as its implications on monitoring activities. Distribution of the e-cards began on 20 September to some 1,900 beneficiaries as part of a pilot starting in Nabatieh.



LEBANON - Beneficiaries Assisted Through Vouchers



Targeting

Due to the increasing number of refugees and funding constraints, WFP will begin providing targeted assistance in Lebanon with the objective of prioritizing those most in need. The second phase of the mass information campaign on WFP's upcoming targeting activities started at the beginning of September. The feedback from the field has been

positive as WFP, UNHCR and partners increase their presence among beneficiaries at distribution sites. Training for both WFP and UNHCR personnel who will staff the Information Desks on issues related to beneficiary targeting has occurred in Bekaa, Beirut, Mount Lebanon and South Lebanon offices.

Assessments

After being suspended due to security concerns, data collection for the Vulnerability Assessment of Lebanese Returnees has resumed. As part of the assessment, food security indicators will be examined in order to better understand the food needs of Lebanese families returning to Lebanon from Syria. WFP is providing technical support for this UN-led assessment. WFP will also provide similar assistance for the Inter-Agency Follow-Up Nutrition Survey, funded by WFP, UNICEF and WHO. The survey will assess the nutritional needs of both refugees and vulnerable host communities. Training for enumerators is scheduled to start next week. UNICEF will share the final questionnaire and methodology for comments prior to training.



WFP/Laure Chadraoui

TURKEY

Through August 2013, WFP has assisted 115,000 Syrians in Turkey and invested US\$98.5 million in the country, US\$29.5 million of which has been transferred directly to beneficiaries' electronic food cards. Turkey has also been instrumental in the procurement of food commodities destined for WFP's Syria operation, valued at US\$69.5 million.

In mid-September, the WFP Bangladesh Country Director will visit Turkey with Bangladeshi government officials on a study tour of the WFP and the Turkish Red Crescent's electronic food card programme. The WFP Bangladesh office, in coordination with the Bangladeshi Government, is hoping to develop a programme similar to the electronic food card programme in Turkey.

Monitoring

Throughout the reporting period, monitoring staff in Hatay were advised against going to the field due to intensive military preparedness activities in their area of operation.

WFP briefed the Deputy Governor of Adyaman camp on issues pertaining to the quality and availability of produce in participating markets. The Deputy Governor then requested an inspector from the Ministry of Agriculture to conduct an assessment of all shops in the camp.



WFP/Christina Hobbs

Funding

As a result of funding constraints, WFP capped its electronic food card programme at 115,000 Syrian refugees residing in 14 camps of the 20 established camps. The funding constraint prohibits WFP from meeting the Government of Turkey's request to cover 100 percent of the camp population (which recently surpassed 200,000 people). It also means that WFP is unable to consider any large-scale support to populations in need outside of camps.

IRAQ

Since the start of the refugee influx in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq on 15 August, over 60,000 refugees have crossed the border into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. More than 50 percent of these new arrivals are living in 11 temporary settlements, some of which may become established refugee camps in the near future.

Since 29 August, over 16,000 people have received WFP food assistance in Arbat, Kawr Gosk and Qushtapa transit camps. In order to mitigate potential malnutrition among children, 1,212 families with children under 5 also received a 6 kg ration of high-energy biscuits (HEBs). UNICEF has also donated 15 mt of HEBs as complementary distribution to families with children under 12 years old in Arbat transit camp. The HEBs are stored in the warehouse provided by Sulaymaniyah Governorate and are being distributed alongside family food rations in Arbat transit camp.

Distribution in other transit camps that have been established in Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah governorates are scheduled to follow in conjunction with UNHCR registration efforts. In an effort to prevent acute malnutrition and stunting among children in this new caseload, WFP also plans to distribute 10 mt of Plumpy'doz®.

The continued influx of refugees into Kurdistan has placed a strain on the humanitarian community as both the scale of the influx as well as dispersion of transit camps have further complicated operations. As a result, several established refugee camps are being prepared.



Assistance to Non-Camp Refugees

A brief mission was sent to Erbil to explore vulnerability and targeting of urban refugees during the reporting period. 30,000 Syrian refugees were found to be at-risk and in need of assistance.

Partnership with ACTED

WFP established a Field Level Agreement with ACTED on 8 September. This cooperating partner will be responsible for the distribution of 1,104 mt of food assistance to Syrian refugees in Dara Shakran, Kawr Gosk, Qushtapa and Arbat camps.

Despite delays due to continued civil unrest across the country and travel restrictions, August voucher distributions were completed in the first week of September, reaching approximately 45,500 beneficiaries or 90 percent of the targeted 50,000. In September, WFP plans to reach 60,000 Syrian refugees and 1,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria with food voucher assistance.

UNHCR is reporting 20-50 case closures per day with most of the cases planning to leave Egypt, largely due to growing anti-Syrian sentiment. Around 375 closures were reported in the first week of September. Meanwhile, the number of Syrians seeking registration has increased significantly due to security concerns and the growing need for humanitarian assistance. There are currently over 125,000 Syrians registered or awaiting registration.

Security

The interim Prime Minister has announced that the state of emergency will be extended until mid-November, with the 23:00-6:00 curfew remaining in place, and extended hours (from 19:00) on Fridays. The curfew has had an effect on supermarket deliveries, resulting in delays in restocking,

particularly fresh goods. Although the number and frequency of protests has subsided, they continue in many parts of the country, including in areas where WFP is operating in in Cairo, Alexandria and Damietta.

Voucher Distributions

Security restrictions and delays in August have pushed back distributions in September, now scheduled for 16 to 28 September. Increasing beneficiary numbers are also requiring more distribution days and expanding the distribution schedule.



WFP/Terri O'Quinn

The transition to e-vouchers is expected to alleviate pressure as cards will only need to be distributed to new beneficiaries. One beneficiaries have their e-card, they will not need to attend distributions as the card will be automatically recharged monthly through the partner bank.

Monitoring

Field investigations have been conducted to look into complaints by beneficiaries and supermarket owners in Damietta and 6 of October. Focus group discussions, supermarket inspections and meetings with supermarket owners have resulted in recommendations to extend the voucher validity date for beneficiaries in order to reduce overcrowding in the supermarkets. WFP field monitors continue to liaise between the supermarket and refugee committee leaders to address issues as needed.

WFP is responding to 250-325 phone calls on the hotline per week with over 90 percent of calls related to requests for inclusion in the food voucher distribution list. The demand for food assistance has been increasing, particularly with a marked decrease in livelihood options for Syrians due to the challenging economic situation in Egypt and rising discrimination by the host community.

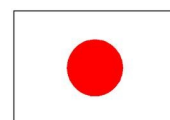
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