

The events in the Syria have led hundreds of thousands of Syrians to flee to Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt. As a result, starting in July 2012 (and February 2013 in Egypt) WFP began providing food assistance to Syrian families seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. To date, WFP has assisted almost 1.2 million refugees, nearly 90 percent of whom were assisted through a voucher programme. WFP plans to reach 2.6 million refugees by the end of 2013.

access to more diverse foods with greater nutritional value, including fresh fruits, dairy products, meat, chicken, fish and vegetables.

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, vouchers are a more discrete form of food assistance, allowing for greater protection of beneficiaries who are hence not necessarily visible or

simultaneously allowing other agencies to assist beneficiaries using the same card. Prior to e-cards in Turkey, hot meals provided in camps cost US\$150 -US\$170/person/month. Currently, WFP's E-Food Card Programme transfers US\$45/person/month, illustrating the cost effectiveness of electronic vouchers.

E-vouchers in WFP's other refugee response operations will give beneficiaries greater flexibility in purchasing food products and negate the need for them to attend distributions as the card will be automatically recharged monthly through partner banks. Beneficiaries will also be able to spend the balance of their e-voucher in multiple visits, unlike paper vouchers which must be spent at one time. WFP is working to identify and sign an agreement with a bank in Egypt while a limited launch and pilot of the e-voucher are planned for September and October in Lebanon and Jordan respectively.



THE BENEFITS OF VOUCHERS

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 to their lives while allowing them to maintain their dignity.

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

differentiated as a result of WFP assistance.

Food vouchers also help to simulate local economies including the promotion of local production and markets.

ELECTRONIC VOUCHERS

WFP is working to transition all paper vouchers in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Iraq to electronic vouchers, similar to those used in Turkey. The e-voucher (referred to as the e-card in Lebanon) will function like a pre-paid debit card that beneficiaries can use to purchase food from shops, while

E-vouchers provide beneficiaries greater flexibility in purchasing food products.



WFP/Sepideh Soltaninia

MONITORING

As part of concerted effort to streamline monitoring and evaluation across WFP's regional refugee response, country offices have agreed on a minimum set of standards, tools and indicators. In addition, WFP is currently setting up a regional database and data analysis services, which will ensure the establishment of an increasingly harmonized regional monitoring and evaluation system.



All countries in the region will now collect data through these recently standardized tools, including post-distribution household level questionnaires, as well as distribution monitoring and shop monitoring questionnaires and checklists. In Jordan and Lebanon, shop monitoring activities are currently complemented with price monitoring activities, in order to ensure that shops are not charging beneficiaries higher prices.

CHALLENGES

Security

Security remains a considerable challenge for WFP's regional response. WFP has so far managed to scale-up its assistance in all five countries, but has, on

occasion, been forced to delay or postpone distributions as a result of insecurity. WFP Lebanon has particularly been affected by security concerns, with suspensions and even cancellations of distributions occurring at times. In Egypt, WFP postponed August 2013 voucher distributions in order to ensure the safety of beneficiaries and WFP staff following political insecurity across the country.



Funding

Funding constraints for the provision of food assistance continue to present significant challenges across the region. As a result, WFP has capped its assistance to 14 out of 20 camps in Turkey, despite being requested by the Government to assist refugees in all camps. In Egypt, WFP is responding to 250-325 phone calls each week, over 90 percent of which are related to Syrians requesting to be included in the food voucher distribution list. UNHCR have reported a number of Syrians relocating in an attempt to be eligible for a WFP food voucher.

Despite utilising internal funding mechanisms in order to avoid

pipeline breaks, a lack of sustainable funding creates uncertainty for WFP's operations, making planning with government and NGO partners difficult. Moreover, a lack of consistent funding leaves host countries and beneficiaries in an uncertain position as continued assistance cannot be guaranteed. Host countries and beneficiaries will ultimately bear the extra burden should WFP be unable to provide assistance.

Furthermore, in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Iraq, the transition to the e-vouchers will necessitate the availability of WFP resources to the partner bank prior to the beginning of each monthly distribution cycle — placing further pressure on the need for sustainable funding.

