

SURVIVING RAMADAN AWAY FROM HOME: AN OVERVIEW OF FOOD ASSISTANCE



A Syrian refugee family cooking a meal in their makeshift shelter in Chebaa. UNHCR/Andrew McConnell



26 June 2015

LEBANON UPDATE

Agencies and the Government of Lebanon had requested US\$ 2.1 billion in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) launched on 15 December 2014. As of 22 May 2015, agencies reported to have received US\$ 371 million (17% of the requirements).

HIGHLIGHTS

- The ongoing 2015 vulnerability assessment will most likely confirm a continuing decline in food security among refugees in Lebanon;
- Due to massive funding constraints across the region, WFP is forced to reduce the standard e-card assistance package of US\$27 per person per month to US\$13.5 from July, a further decrease from US\$19 during the first half of 2015;
- One in five families with school-aged children reported withdrawing children from school to help cope with the reductions since January – forcing them to work or beg for additional income;
- Food cuts are expected to lead to an increased number of school dropouts; more begging and child employment; and increased debts and borrowing.

Amal, 26



“I stopped eating so my children can have food. Their health is more important than mine.”

Amal, originally from Rural Aleppo, now lives in the Bekaa Valley where the highest concentration of Syrian refugees in Lebanon reside. She is losing weight rapidly as she has cut back on her own meals to ensure that her children have enough food.

The World Food Programme (WFP) spoke with Amal in mid-June.

An Overview of Food Assistance

795,976 refugees are assisted by the WFP in June through the e-card programme in Lebanon.

The Food Security Sector or agencies involved in the provision of food, working in close partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), are engaged in contingency planning efforts to assess gaps and to identify possible availability of stocks, which may serve as complementary to the planned food assistance.

A number of local and faith-based organizations in Lebanon distribute hot meals and food parcels throughout the year,

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especially during Ramadan. The Food Security Sector, led by WFP in close coordination with MOSA is working to coordinate Ramadan food distributions to avoid duplication, fill gaps and target as many vulnerable individuals as possible.

However, that the living conditions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has deteriorated over the past years – despite ongoing assistance – has been well documented. The jointly conducted Vulnerability Assessments of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) in Lebanon in 2013 and 2014 detail those findings. Notably, the 2014 report confirms that three quarters of surveyed households experience some degree of food insecurity, with 13 percent being categorized as moderately or severely food insecure. The ongoing 2015 VASyR will most likely confirm a continuing decline in food security among refugee populations.

At the same time that food needs are increasing, the level of assistance being provided by WFP is decreasing. Due to massive funding constraints across the region, WFP is forced to reduce the standard e-card assistance package of US\$27 per person per month to US\$13.5 from July, a further decrease from US\$19 during the first half of 2015. Unfortunately, the reduction is coming in the middle of the holy month of Ramadan, during the hottest time of the year. With US\$13.5, WFP is no longer able to guarantee that it is providing a suitable level of assistance to maintain acceptable food security levels.

The impact of food cuts on refugee families is dramatic. Food cuts have forced them to exhaust remaining savings, borrow food, rely on help from families and friends and reduce the quantity of food and number of meals each day.

Particularly worrying is the effect on children. For example, one in five families with school-aged children reported withdrawing children from school to help cope with the reductions since January – forcing them to work or beg for additional income. With sustained reductions in assistance, those coping strategies can only be expected to continue.

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The decision to reduce the e-card value was made to ensure that as many of the most vulnerable households continue to receive some assistance. The continuation of this initiative remains fully dependent on a sustainable level of funding being made available. WFP is seeking all available options to mobilize the resources needed as well as continuously refining its contingency plans in line with other humanitarian partners and agencies.

Impact of reduced assistance



2014:

- The regional food basket cost, equivalent to 2,100kcal
- Identified as the minimum requirements for an average family to lead a healthy life



January 2015: Coping strategies reported:

- Reduced meal sizes and frequencies
- Reliance on debts and borrowing
- School dropouts and child employment



July 2015: Irreversible coping strategies are expected:

- More school dropouts and child employment
- Begging and criminality
- Further increased debts and borrowing

WFP can no longer guarantee acceptable levels of food security

Agencies working on food assistance

The World Food Programme (WFP), Action Contre la Faim (ACF), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Intersos, the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), Islamic Relief (IR), Lebanese Red Cross (LRC), Mercy Corps (MC), Premiere Urgence – Aide Medical Internationale (PU-AMI), Save the Children (SCI), UNRWA, World Vision (WV).

Donors

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