Overview of Food Security Situation in Lebanon

Introduction

Lebanon has been very heavily affected by the Syria crisis since 2011. Apart from Turkey, it received the highest number of refugees in the sub-region and has the highest number of refugees per capita. Agriculture is important to the entire population of Lebanon, farmers and consumers. And despite only contributing about 5.5%¹ to the GDP, about 60% of the population relies directly or indirectly on agricultural activities.

Several assessments have been conducted in Lebanon since the start of the Syria crisis, which have assisted in better understanding of the situation and living conditions of the different population cohorts residing in Lebanon. The main data source on displaced Syrians is the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon the (VASyR)², which was conducted in 2013 and 2014. In June 2015, data collection for VASyR 2015 was completed and the results will be published in July. As for Palestinian nationals, UNRWA is the main source of information, through the registration data and Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) needs assessments conducted on a yearly basis, three until now including two were rapid assessments and from the AUB/UNRWA 2010 survey on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (PRL). As for Lebanese returnees, IOM conducted comprehensive livelihoods assessments/registration in 2013 and 2014, and are currently undertaking the third assessment (data collection was completed during May 2015). In order to compare between refugees and host community, the most updated comprehensive data is by CAS 2009 and the living condition surveys in 2004 and 2007. Another source of information on food security and livelihoods for host communities is the Food security and livelihood assessment (FSLA) report, conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in partnership with REACH in 2014/5.

Food Security Overview

National Context: Who are the food insecure, and where are they?

Based on the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015-2016 it is estimated that 3.3 million people are in need, in which 1,350,000 are in need for food. The majority (83%) of the people in need of food are Syrian refugees, the rest are Lebanese households and Palestinian refugees (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 3RP summary of people in need, and in need of food in Lebanon.

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¹ http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS
² http://foodsecuritycluster.net/sites/default/files/VASyR%202014%20FINAL.pdf
The food insecurity situation of displaced Syrian has deteriorated between 2013 and 2014, from 66% of households food insecure to 75% in 2014. 62% were identified as being mildly food insecure, 12% as moderately food insecure and 0.4% as severe.3 Reasons given to explain the decline include erosion of livelihoods assets and decrease in financial support from WFP through e-cards. As for PRS, 8% of households were only identified as food secure, and the remaining suffered from different levels of food insecurity (80% mild, 12% moderate). The situation of food security of PRL is quite comparable to the situation of poor Lebanese. Almost half of the refugee population lives at or below the Lebanese national poverty line of US$4 per day, with a third living at or under US$2.3 per day and unable to meet basic needs. This includes 29% of Syrian nationals registered as refugees by UNHCR, 180,000 PRL and almost all Palestine refugees from Syria. Based on VASyR 2014, half of the displaced Syrians are below the Lebanese national extreme poverty line ($3.84 per person per day), 75% of PRL are poor ($6 per day). At least 336,000 or 8% of the Lebanese population lives in extreme poverty (under US$ 2.4 per day), of which 64,000 households are enrolled in the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP).4

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3 http://foodsecuritycluster.net/sites/default/files/VASyR%202014%20FINAL.pdf

Figure 2 Informal Tented Settlements in Lebanon.
Vulnerability Analysis

The VASyR report shows that the food security situation has significantly deteriorated in the year 2014 compared with the previous one. Half of the assessed Syrian households live now below the national poverty line and for most of them food is their biggest expenditure.

As shown in Error! Reference source not found., generally Syrian refugees are less food secure than Lebanese host communities. However, the surveys indicate that in some areas (Akkar and South) Syrian refugees tend to have higher food consumption scores than Lebanese households. This may be possible as these areas represent indeed the poorest areas in Lebanon. It is important to note that these figures were derived from different household surveys, conducted with a different sampling frame. One should be particularly careful with interpreting the FSLA survey results as the sampling frame was relatively small. When considering the break down in cohorts, statistically, results are only indicative. Nevertheless, there are not only vulnerable Syrian refugees, but also poor Lebanese households who should not be excluded from assistance.

Food Security Indicators

Food Availability

Harvesting of the 2015 winter grains will end in early July. Timely and satisfactory rains provided sufficient moisture for crops. Vegetation conditions as captured by the satellite-based Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) suggest a good harvest.

In 2014, total cereal production is estimated at about 177,000 MT, similar to the previous year and the five-year average. Concerns about sustainability and efficiency of water use in agriculture are prevalent and arise frequently. Lebanese exporters of horticultural products, fruits in particular, are experiencing difficulties due to the continuing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic that disrupted land routes with occasional border closings.

Domestic cereal production covers on average about 17% of the consumption needs and the country depends heavily on imports. In the 2014/15 marketing year (July/June), the cereal import requirement, mainly wheat for human consumption and maize for livestock and poultry, is forecast at 995,000 MT, slightly above the previous year. In March 2015, general inflation was 1%, while the food and non-alcoholic beverages inflation was negative 1% (beginning from January 2014, the base year for CPI was changed to December 2013). The Consumer Protection Department at the

Ministry of Economy and Trade sets the price of local Lebanese flat bread. Other bakery products (baguettes, sandwich bread, etc.) are not subsidized.\(^6\)

The country depends heavily on imports of cereals. In the 2014/15 marketing year (July/June), the cereal import requirement, mainly wheat for human consumption and maize for livestock and poultry, is forecast at 995,000 tonnes, slightly above the previous year.\(^7\)

**Food Access**

Physical access to food sources is generally not problematic, since markets are well stocked and functioning. However, for many Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese households, lack of resources can be a reason for limited access to food.

**Economic Situation**

The official unemployment rate in Lebanon is around 10%. The labor market is increasingly suffering to absorb the additional labor force. In 2014, 37.3% of PRS were employed in mainly elementary occupations on a temporary or seasonal basis. The Syrian refugees in Lebanon have the right to work during their first six months, after which they require a work permit, which is not easy to obtain. Syrian migrant workers are now required to obtain from their potential employers certified legal and financial guarantees, which many employers are reluctant to provide especially small-scale employers such as farmers and SMEs. As a result, the normal cross-border flow of Syrian migrant and seasonal labour has been severely disrupted which, combined with reduced inter-regional movement of Syrian refugees, is reportedly causing serious labour shortages in some farming areas at the peak of the agricultural season (April to September). Lebanese Labor laws and continuous changes in labor policies is increasing the burden on displaced individuals to meet their daily needs.\(^8\)

The consumer price increases are modest. Changes in May saw an increase of 0.4%, the highest figure in more than two years. But outside of energy, price pressures remained modest and food prices were unchanged matching April’s flat reading.\(^9\) In general, markets are functioning and generally prices are monitored on a regular basis. WFP is monitoring food prices and the last available data is for the third quarter in 2014.

**Security**

In term of security, the situation in the country is causing a burden on organization to access several areas to provide assistance, mainly in Bekaa and Akkar.

**Assistance**

Food assistance to displaced Syrians is mainly provided by WFP and its partners through e-cards. International and national NGOs also play a major role in providing food vouchers, parcels and kits to different population groups. Around 27,209 poor Lebanese are receiving cash for food on a monthly basis since Dec 2014.

The number of assisted individuals as well as the amount of assistance has been decreasing since the end of 2014, due to funding shortfalls. As such, the value of the e-cards was decreased by 70% in January 2015 and a targeting exercise was invitation in order to prioritize the most vulnerable and most in need. Another decrease in the value of e-cards is expected in the upcoming months (July and August) to 50% from the initial value of 2015 ($27 to $13.5).

As a result of a targeting assessment – identifying the most vulnerable population group - around 15,000 individuals were removed from WFP assistance and will no longer received assistance starting May. 7,000 HH will receive $14 voucher during May and will be excluded in June; 28,000 HH will receive $19 voucher during May and will be excluded in June and about 825,000 individuals will receive $19 voucher starting May. In light of the reductions in assistance, and the fact that households spend the main share of expenditure (including e-cards) is on food, the risk of individuals not being able to meet their basic dietary needs arises.

By the end of June, WFP will remove 50,291 individuals due to the household targeting exercise. Overall, 153,682 individuals will be removed due to both the targeting and validation exercise.

Most of the Palestinian refugees from Syria rely on the assistance from humanitarian organizations to meet their basic needs. The three main sources of assistance were UNRWA, popular committees and NGOs. UNRWA was reported to provide 78% of cash and more than a third of food aid received by PRS households. Popular committees mostly assisted with food vouchers 47%, while local NGOs assisted with food in-kind 37%. Three quarters of the PRS households receive food vouchers, 40% received food in-kind and 46% received cash assistance. In Tyre, both inside

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\(^7\) ibid.


\(^9\) [http://www.ldnews.com/business/ci_28336645/consumer-prices-up-0-4-percent-may](http://www.ldnews.com/business/ci_28336645/consumer-prices-up-0-4-percent-may)
and outside the camp, households received most of the assistance through different modalities (cash, vouchers, in kind, subsidy). This is because several NGOs were providing different kind of aid to PRS and Syrian refugees as well. 10

The primary modality of assistance in Lebanon are e-cards and vouchers, since the local markets are still functioning well and are able to provide sufficient food for the host communities and the refugees. The provision of voucher has become an important economic factor, since the injected $800 million USD boosted the Lebanese GDP by 1.3 %

Tension among displaced populations and the host community is causing a challenge to the GoL as well as all stakeholders involved in the response. As such the LCRP, aims at targeting both vulnerable Lebanese as well as displaced individuals, aiming at both humanitarian and stabilization.

Based on assessment conducted by OCHA, UNICEF and REACH (May 2015), host communities reported most important priority need to be employment (19%), followed by health and electricity. As for displaced Syrians reporting as top priority need to be winterization (this number could have been effected by the fact that the assessment was conducted during the winter). Need for food was prioritized by only 2% of Lebanese and 10% of displaced Syrians.

In terms of coping strategies associated with lack of food due to lack of money to buy food, responses were varied among cohorts. 44 % of vulnerable Lebanese household do not rely on any coping strategies, while 42% have low reliance, 8% medium and 5% heavily rely on coping strategies. The situation for Syrian refugees is worst in 2014 compared to an increase of 48 % in 2013. This was more common Bekaa Valley and less common in Beirut-Mount Lebanon. The most common coping strategies (CS) were relying on less preferred or expensive food, reducing meal portion sizes and reducing the number of meals per day. Nearly 85 % reported having experienced lack of food or lack of money to buy it during the 30 days prior to the survey conducted by UNRWA. The main strategies were to relying on less preferred or inexpensive foods and buying food on credit or borrowed money. Out of the total population, households that engaged in crisis coping strategies increased in 2014 compared to 2013.

Utilization

Main nutrition activities in Lebanon are coordinated by UNICEF and the Ministry of Public Health, with focus on prevention and treatment of acute malnutrition, health education, and routine vaccination. Screening of children under five for malnutrition and IYCF for children under two at both the community level and primary health care level were undertaken up until April, 2015 when the MoPH decided to suspend all community screenings and focus only on screenings at the primary health care level. As for treatment of acute malnutrition, UNICEF and its partners are training and treating at PHCs and SHCs levels (both moderate and severe malnutrition). The efforts and funds have decreased for prevention and treatment of malnutrition since the nutrition assessment that was conducted during 2013, published in 2014, among displaced Syrians, where GAM rates were only 2.2%. In 2014, the GAM rate among PRS was of 3.9%, which was also below the emergency threshold set by WHO.

According to the FSLA, 88.9% of the Lebanese host communities has an acceptable Food Consumption Score (FCS), while 4.2 % reported to have poor FCS. VASyR 2014 shows that 3% of households had poor FCS, 10% had border line and 87% acceptable FCS -which represents a deterioration compared to the 93% of households with acceptable FCS in 2013. Akkar was the region with the highest percentage of severely and moderately food insecure households. Beirut-Mount Lebanon had the highest percentage of food secure households. It seems that the population cohort that has the best FCS are the PRS (99% acceptable). Reasons may be found in the assistance provided to this cohort. It was noted that almost all households consumed a staple cereal, vegetables on a daily basis and most of the households 86 % consumed animal-source protein on a daily basis11. No data is available on Lebanese returnees and PRL.

Dietary diversity for Syrian refugees has decreased in 2014 compared to 2013. On average, HH consumed 9 out of 12 food groups during a week and 7 out of 12 food groups per day. While for host communities the average HDDS was 8.72. A widest difference in score was between Akkar (7.80) and Beirut – Mount Lebanon (9.35). The least consumed food group was fish which was consumed an average of 0.94 days per week. For households who had a poor food consumption score (4% of the sample), all proteins were consumed less than one day per week with a combined average of 1.25 days. For PRS, dietary diversity was found to be the lowest in households living in Beirut outside the camp with less than a half of the population (46.5%) consuming more than 7 food groups (out of the maximum of 12) on a daily basis, while the highest dietary diversity was achieved by households living in Tyr (inside and outside the camp) with almost all of the population (98% and 96% respectively) consuming more than 7 food groups (out of a maximum of 12) daily.

Due to poverty and substandard sanitation and shelter conditions, informal settlements show high rates of infections and preventable diseases, with reports of skin diseases, diarrhea, fever, and respiratory ailments. Also, chronic diseases and serious illnesses are common and often untreated due to limited access to healthcare.12

In July, water scarcity and issues related to water quality were most severe in Akkar Governorate and in the Bekaa, and tend to affect cadasters, which are considered most vulnerable in terms of concentration of refugees and poor Lebanese.13

According to a recent assessment in Akkar, access to water ranked as one of communities’ top concerns, with supplies impacted by environmental and meteorological factors, pollution due to inadequate wastewater management systems, and outdated infrastructure. Sewage and coordinated wastewater management systems also ranked among communities’ top concerns, as infrastructure and services fail to cope with the rising demand. Also, localities hosting refugees reported that Syrian households lack access to containers and expressed the need for expanding garbage collection routes.14

The 2014 VASyR showed however that the proportion of refugee households with no access to drinking water increased by 5% to 33% in 2014.

**Information Gaps**

No assessments were conducted in 2014 or 2015 to have an updated overview of the nutritional status of at least the children who are at highest risk. In addition, with the continuous cuts of WFP funding and decrease in food assistance, the situation is expected to worsen compared to 2013 GAM rates. There is a high need to conduct another nutrition assessment in Lebanon targeting both displaced populations as well as the host community. The only other data source for this information is through the sentinel sites that are currently being established in PHCs, which will only capture limited number of children accessing sites for health services.

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12 http://www.reach-initiative.org/reports
13 http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/LBN_11401_WASH_A4P_140711.pdf
14http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents.php?page=1&view=grid&Language%5B%5D=1&Country%5B%5D=122&Type%5B%5D=4