



## Food security programme in Lebanon helps Syrian families to improve nutrition during COVID-19

### *FSC partner Action Against Hunger provides fresh food vouchers for pregnant and lactating women*

As the protracted crisis in Syria enters its tenth year, millions of displaced Syrians are still living in very difficult conditions in neighbouring countries. According to the latest United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) figures, **Lebanon is currently hosting more than 1 million registered Syrian refugees**, with the Bekaa and Baalbek-El Hermel governorates hosting some 340,500.

Diets among displaced Syrian communities have deteriorated sharply, particularly for children: between 2019 and 2020 the percentage those aged between 6 months and 23 months with a minimum acceptable frequency of meals plummeted from 80% to just over 50%.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Syria in late February 2020 and cases increasing throughout March, Action Against Hunger (AAH) adapted their interventions to support the most vulnerable segments of the population during the emerging crisis. Given the declared state of emergency and to minimize health risks, AAH suspended all activities except distributions of fresh food vouchers, which could be done remotely. These vouchers were aimed at **increasing access to nutritious food for pregnant and lactating women (PLW), female-headed-households and vulnerable families** who often resort to damaging coping strategies, such as skipping meals or spending less on healthcare to pay for food.

The fresh food voucher distributions are part of a project financed by the France's Development Cooperation, which uses the e-voucher system "*Kits for Autonomous Cash transfers in Humanitarian Emergencies*" (KACHE). KACHE is of particular help in remote areas where **humanitarian access is a challenge** and there are no ATMs or cash points available. The system was developed by AAH together with the World Food Programme (WFP) and [RedRose](#) back in 2014 – when vouchers were barely used – so beneficiaries could buy fresh

vegetables, fruit and dairy products. To establish the KACHE platform, electronic cards were distributed to beneficiaries and one terminal and Bluetooth printer allocated to each of the nine selected vendors.

Political instability, economic volatility with fluctuations in the Lebanese Pound/United States Dollar (LBP/USD) exchange rate along with a shortage of USD all directly affected distributions and drove up prices for basic commodities in the country. As a result, several top-ups of fresh food vouchers were planned to protect beneficiaries' purchasing power, and each received a grant of USD 122 instead of USD 61 – double the original amount. All beneficiaries also received a list of the contracted shops as well as precautionary measures for preventing COVID-19 contamination, and vendors were trained on preventing the spread of the virus.



**To prevent the spread of the virus and guarantee participants' safety, all shop workers were trained on COVID-19 preventive measures.**

Monthly Food Security Sector (FSS) working groups helped to **avoid duplications and maximise coordination**, while country-wide reporting and referral tools were updated at the end of each month and communication ensured with UN partners to build synergies and reach households that others were unable to assist. The fresh food vouchers served as a gateway to provide the most vulnerable Syrian refugees and Lebanese with access to a varied diet and be better equipped to take care of their families. Local market vendors and other small businesses also benefited from boosted incomes.

*"Fresh food vouchers were very helpful and supportive, I was able to stay with my children instead of leaving them alone at home while I went to work on the farm" –*  
**Amani Ibrahim, 31, Syrian beneficiary of the programme**

The project allowed families who had lost assets and livelihoods to maintain their dignity by assuming ownership, while also easing stress on markets and NGOs' logistics. Small businesses and the economy were meanwhile given an opportunity to recover. To enhance

food security and nutrition outcomes, projects such as this should ideally be implemented with other types of programmes and awareness-raising initiatives, encouraging people to make healthier choices.

A key lesson was the **importance of targeting based purely on vulnerability**, without having a fixed target ratio between nationalities: vulnerability depends on many factors, and fixed nationality ratios could exclude potentially vulnerable people. This would also render the assistance more effective and ensure the do-no-harm approach, all while limiting tensions that could arise between different nationalities from funding decisions. While emergency assistance is still very much needed to address rising food insecurity, **delivering more sustainable aid is a humanitarian responsibility**. It is essential to collectively rethink approaches to emergency response that restore resilience, promote people's ability to resume income-generating activities and strengthen the social fabric of a country strained by a multidimensional crisis.

Find out more about AAH in Lebanon [here](#).

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