

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR) analyses a representative sample of Syrian refugee families in Lebanon to provide a multi-sectoral update of the situation of this population. Conducted annually, 2019 marks the seventh year of this assessment. With more than one million Syrian refugees, Lebanon remains to have the largest concentration of refugees per capita, globally.

The contents of this report, jointly issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), demonstrate that while some improvements in specific indicators are noted, Syrian refugees in Lebanon continue to show heightened vulnerabilities. While rates of birth registration have seen an increase since previous years, other legal documentation issues (e.g. legal residency) remains to be an on-going challenge. About half of households are living in extreme poverty, despite large scale assistance programs to families. Additionally, while rent prices were not noted to increase dramatically, many families continue to live in substandard and over-crowded conditions across the country.

### Methodology

Between 8 April and 3 May 2019, survey teams visited 4,727 randomly selected Syrian refugee households, covering all districts across Lebanon.

The household questionnaire was designed based on the questionnaire of the previous year to ensure comparability and carried out through face-to-face interviews at refugee homes. The analysis plan was developed following the sectors' guidance and global indicators.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Civil and legal documentation remain a challenge

Syrian refugees continue to face serious difficulties in updating their documents for temporary stay in Lebanon, which creates anxiety and stress among the refugee population. Lack of regularized stay has far reaching consequences on all aspects of their life in Lebanon, including challenges in securing housing, accessing livelihoods and facing risk of arrest and detention. The rate of legal residency among the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon has continued to decline in 2019. Only 22% of individuals (above 15 years old) reported having legal residency, compared to 27% in 2018. Rates among youth and women remain lower than middle-aged, men counterparts. Needing to obtain a Lebanese sponsor, even for those that are exempt, was the highest reported barrier to regularizing their stay.

Positive outcomes were noted for birth registration with rates of births registered with the Foreigners' Registry reaching 30% from 22% in 2018. Almost all births since 2011

had, at the minimum, a birth certificate from a hospital or midwife. In September 2017, the need for parents to have legal residency in order to complete birth registration was waived, and only one spouse is now required to have legal stay to register the marriage. Additionally, in March 2018, late birth registration procedures for Syrian children older than one year were simplified and made more accessible. These recent policy changes, in addition to increased awareness on the importance of birth registration, are the key contributing factors to this increase. Still, many births remained unregistered with the proper authorities and if left unregistered, can have serious negative effects such as limited access to key services.

### Increases in restrictive measures

While few refugees rated their relations with the host community as negative (5%), a significant portion were neutral (41%). When examining reported issues that were perceived to drive tensions among refugees and the host community, competition for jobs and resources came up most frequently. Competition for jobs was cited by just over half of families, which is a

substantial increase from 38% in 2018. Curfews were the most commonly cited security concern among refugees and 14% of families stated that there was a curfew imposed for refugees in the area where they live. 2019 witnessed an increase in the enforcement of restrictions on refugees' ability to work, as well as security authorities raids on businesses run by- or employing Syrians. These measures were also accompanied by protests by Lebanese nationals against Syrian labour in Lebanon. Amidst heightening anxieties surrounding economic austerity, overstretched resources and high unemployment, Syrian refugees are increasingly being associated, in the public perception, with economic issues in Lebanon.

**Access to health care for most, but not all**

Overall access to primary and hospital care slightly improved and remains on an acceptable level. For both primary and hospital care, cost was the main barrier to accessing the needed care, rather than physical limitations. The costs incurred included treatment fees or doctor fees as well as transportation costs. In fact, the proportion of households citing cost as a barrier to health care increased substantially since 2018, suggesting that economic vulnerability is a notable common denominator for these households. Other findings indicate that area of residence and household composition also play a part, such as gender of the head of household.

**Refugees continue to live in conditions below humanitarian standards**

Shelter conditions have not improved from 2018 and over half (57%) of Syrian refugee families are living in overcrowded shelters, shelters below humanitarian standards and/or shelters in danger of collapse. Close to 40% of Syrian refugee households were living in shelters that were below humanitarian standards or in dangerous conditions. Over one-third of households continue to live in overcrowded conditions of less than 4.5m<sup>2</sup>/person. The distribution of Syrian refugee households across the main shelter types remained mostly stable with the majority (69%) living in residential structures, 20% in non-permanent shelters and 11% in non-residential structures.

**Households spent more on food in 2019**

Food security for Syrian refugees witnessed slight changes since the previous year, with a large proportion of households being marginally food secure in 2019 (63%), compared to 57% in 2018. Women-headed households are more food insecure than men-headed households (35% vs 28% respectively). This is a similar trend to 2018, where 40% of women-headed households were food insecure, as compared to 32% of men-headed households. Shelter type is correlated with the overall food security status. Households living in non-residential shelters (36%) are more food insecure than those living in non-permanent (26%) or residential shelters (29%). Food insecurity is highest in the North (38%) and Mount Lebanon (33%). While food security has increased in two of its three pillars: food consumption and livelihood based coping strategies, the share of expenditure on food has increased in 2019, which indicates increased economic vulnerability.

The share of households with adequate diet continues to increase throughout the years (from 62% in 2017, 67% in 2018 to 75% in 2019). This is reflected in an increased dietary diversity with almost 75% of households consuming nine or more food groups per week in 2019, as opposed to 70% in 2018. However, a quarter of Syrian households still have poor or borderline food consumption. Men-headed households are consuming a more diverse diet per day than women-headed ones, where 35% of men-headed families consume 6.5 or more food groups per day (such as dairy products, meat, fish, eggs, and vegetables), compared to only 24% of those headed by women.

**Syrian refugees are becoming more economically vulnerable**

The proportion of Syrian refugees spending less than US\$ 2.90 a day (< SMEB) has increased from 51% in 2018 to 55% in 2019. 73% are spending less than US\$ 3.80 a day in 2019, compared to 68% in 2018. The VASyR data also shows that the average monthly per capita expenditure decreased from US\$ 111 in 2018 to US\$ 105 in 2019. The average level of debt per household has been increasing by nearly US\$ 100 over the last few years (US\$ 919 in 2017, US\$ 1,015 in 2018, and reaching US\$ 1,115 in 2019) showing that Syrian refugee households continue to lack enough resources to cover their essential



needs. 9 out of 10 households are in debt, an increase of 5% compared to last year.

Main reasons for borrowing remain the same over the last several years, where food (75%), rent (51%), and health care payment (34%) are at the forefront. More people are borrowing to buy medicine (33% in 2019 vs 23% in 2018) and repay debts (6% in 2019 vs 3% in 2018). More men-headed households are borrowing to buy food (76% vs 71% for women) and pay rent (52% vs 47% for women) while more women-headed households are borrowing in order to pay for health (39% vs 33% for men) and buy medicine (40% vs 31% for men). Friends in Lebanon are still the main source of borrowing in 2019 (84%), followed by borrowing from supermarkets (47%).

**Only one-third of refugees have a regular job**

The vulnerability assessment collected livelihood and income information at both individual and household levels. In 2019, the labour force participation rate is 38%; 66% among men and 11% among women. The highest percentage of labour force participation is in Beirut (42%), El Nabatieh, South Lebanon and Mount Lebanon (41% each). The unemployment rate among the labour force is 31% in 2019, with a higher percentage among women (37%) compared to men (30%). The highest unemployment rate is found in Bekaa (62%), followed by Baalbek-El Hermel (49%). 59% of households had members working in the past 7 days, with the lowest level of employment in Baalbek-El Hermel (30%) and Bekaa (36%). Only 47% of women-headed households had members working, compared to 61% of men-headed ones. The average monthly per capita income is US\$ 66, with the lowest income in Baalbek-El Hermel (US\$ 28) and Bekaa (US\$ 30). The highest income is found in Beirut (US\$ 127). Women-headed households have a much lower income (US\$ 47) than men-headed ones (US\$ 69). Main sectors of work remain construction (21%), agriculture (17%), and other services (13%). Agriculture work is mostly found in Akkar and the South (35% each). One-third of refugees have a regular job and 13% have more than one part time job. The two main sources of income for Syrian refugees are WFP assistance (24%), and informal debt from friends and shops (22%), indicating the challenges Syrian refugees continue to face in covering expenses through employment.

**More households are resorting to crisis livelihood-related coping strategies**

In 2019, Syrian refugees continue to adopt a wide range of strategies to cope with a lack of food and/or the means to buy it. Overall, more households are resorting to crisis livelihood-related coping strategies, especially through reducing expenditure on health, education and selling productive assets. Strategies to cope with the lack of food increasingly adopted in 2019 compared to 2018 include relying on less preferred/less expensive food, reducing the number of meals eaten per day, and restricting consumption by adults so children can eat. Geographically, households living in the North, El Nabatieh, and Mount Lebanon are adopting more food-related coping strategies in 2019, compared to 2018. Households in Beirut and Bekaa are adopting much less food-coping strategies in 2019, compared to 2018.

**Child labour & child marriage remain in line with previous year**

The percentage of children between 5 and 17 years old who are engaged in child labour remained very similar to last year's rate, at 2.6%. Boys are still at higher risk of child labour than girls, 4.4% and 0.6%, respectively. Of children who are engaged in labour, 27% are working in agriculture. It must be noted that child labour may frequently be underreported and peaks during agriculture season, which did not overlap with this year's data collection. Twenty-seven percent of girls aged 15 to 19 were married at the time of the survey, very similar rate to 2018 results at 29%. The highest rate of child marriage was in the North governorate, 34%. Around 1 out of 2 children between 1 and 14 experienced some form of physical aggression and 6 out 10 experienced some form of psychological aggression.

**Child nutrition improves slightly**

There was an increase of 13 percentage points in children under 6 months of age who received only breastmilk the day prior to the survey, from 42% in 2018 to 56% in 2019. As for children between 12 and 15 months, there was a slight increase of 4%, from 50% to 54%. The Minimum Diet Diversity for children between 6 and 23 months of age remained the same as last year, at 17%. The Minimum Acceptable Frequency for children between 6 and 23 months of age increased from 64% in 2018 to 80% in 2019. The

percentage of children under 2 years of age who were sick in the two weeks prior to the survey kept increasing from 34% in 2017 to 41% in 2018 and reached 48% in 2019. The three highest reported sicknesses remained the same as last year, fever (83%), cough (73%), and diarrhea (46%). Twenty-four percent of children under 2 years of age who suffered from severe diarrhea required hospitalization or a doctor's consultation.

**Households continue to rely on bottled drinking water**

In terms of access to drinking water, 88% of household members have access to improved drinking water source, compared to 91% last year. Bottled mineral water (42%) remains the highest source that household rely on for drinking water. When asked if water is readily available on premise, 61% household members had the water source available on premise. The majority (94%) of household members have access to improved sanitation facilities, 7 percentage points increase from 2018. The rate goes up to 87% and 89% when the shelter type is non-permanent or non-residential, respectively. The use of basic sanitation service, i.e. an improved sanitation facility that is not shared, was found to be at 74%. This decreases to 61% for non-permanent shelters.

**Gaps in school enrolment remain**

Participation in organized learning, which is the percentage of children between 3 and 5 years of age who were attending an early education programme at the time of the survey, slightly decreased from 16% in 2018 to 13% in 2019. As for children between 6 and 14 years of age, enrolment remains stable at 69%. However, this rate drops to 44% when children have a disability. The percentage of children between 15 and 17 year of age in school remained at 22%. Similar to last year, the gender parity indices indicate that the proportion of girls enrolled in schools remained almost equal to that of boys. There was a small increase of 5 percentage points in the proportion of youth (15 to 24 years of age) who are not employed, not in education, and not attending any training, from 61% in 2018 to 66% in 2019.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Challenges with obtaining legal residency should be addressed through an expansion of the fee waiver in line with recommendations in the Brussels I and II Conference partnership papers. Expanding the fee waiver for legal residency to all categories of refugees would increase refugees' access to documentation, freedom of movement and overall protection.
- In light of the growing community tensions fueled by public and media discourse reporting the presence of refugees, as well as restrictive measures applied to refugees, it is critically important that the London and Brussels' commitments "to preserve dignified stay of refugees, while enforcing the application of national laws in a non-discriminatory manner" be applied broadly. Efforts should also be made to address socio-economic pressures and tensions, especially at the local level. These include livelihood and social stability initiatives that benefit both the Lebanese communities and the refugees, as well as advocacy around dignified work.
- Existing support mechanisms and health programmes should be kept available for refugees in need of health care in order to prevent deterioration in access levels. Further interventions targeting the households that presently do not have access to health care should be implemented, specifically mitigating the financial barriers of transport and treatment costs. In addition, further analysis is needed to explain the underlying causes of the lesser access to hospital care among women-headed households reached in the survey.
- Over 30% of Syrian refugees live in non-permanent and non-residential shelters, and are vulnerable to emergency events. Preparedness and response to emergencies, mainly addressing refugees living in non-permanent shelters, should be ensured to enhance lifesaving interventions.
- To decrease the current mobility rate of 20%, and to prevent eviction and eviction threats, an integrated and multi-sectoral response, with focus on shelter/WASH/protection/social stability assistance is required to meet the increasing needs of the refugee population.
- In food security, meeting the funding requirements is crucial in order to maintain

food security gains and ensure wider coverage for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. All partners should also continue to adopt the unified and improved targeting and vulnerability approach. This approach is essential in order to enable actors to better link assistance with their interventions, as well as to deepen linkages between the different sectors and external partners such as the government, academia, research institutes and most importantly Syrian refugees.

- The food security sector strategy must continue to coordinate actions that address stabilisation and economic vulnerability, with a special focus on women and youth, and ensure our actions are sustainable and integrated in the overall programmes of the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Social Affairs.

- Socio-economic vulnerability and debt rates have forced refugees to compromise shelter adequacy in order to sustain themselves and their families. Access of vulnerable refugees to affordable occupancy at minimum standards, mainly in residential shelters, should continue to be ensured through sustainable upgrades (rehabilitation) coupled with improved security of tenure.

- Poverty alleviation needs to remain at the centre of the refugee programme. Safety nets programmes and livelihoods opportunities are key to enabling families to meet their basic needs and increase the overall resilience of the population, especially in an environment which is becoming more economically challenging.

- New employment and training opportunities for young people should be developed with a gender lens, given that youth women were found to face significantly greater challenges in finding jobs and/or training opportunities vis-à-vis their men counterparts.

- Child labour and child marriage continue to require a tailored multi-sectoral, integrated response with a gender dimension. Long-term interventions on prevention and risk mitigation are still needed and should prioritise tackling social norms contributing to child marriage and child labour, especially on the side of caregivers. Similarly, violent discipline directed at children and adolescent girls and boys should be tackled through stronger innovative communication initiatives in order to encourage positive behaviour among caregivers and communities. Such

campaigns should be run in collaboration with stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, civil society, and private sector (media).

- Enhanced emphasis on improving access to and availability of water supply and sanitation facilities is required to ensure access to safely managed services based on agreed standards, irrespective of shelter type.

- The education response should focus on the retention of students in schools and completion, through improving the quality of education, promoting a violence-free school environment, and providing transportation when needed. Pre-primary education presents another opportunity for improving children's long-term well-being. Lastly, education interventions should be systematically linked to child protection systems and livelihood opportunities for youth.

- A comprehensive approach to inclusive education needs to address all aspects, from outreach, to teacher training, and provision of support and special needs supplies. More evidence should be generated on the multiple deprivations of persons with disabilities and respond to their needs through mainstreaming and targeted programmes in protection, education, child protection and WASH.