



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Virtual Consultation Meeting on *“Understanding Livelihood Solutions Under Protracted Forced Displacement: The Case of Homs’ Refugees Population in Lebanon”*
(Microsoft Teams, 2 November 2020, 1:00-3:30 p.m. Beirut Time)

Information Note

A- Background

Lebanon hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees per capita in the world. In Sep 2020, the total number of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon accounted to 879,529¹. The ongoing conflict in part of the Syrian Arabic Republic, restricted resettlement operations, and the deteriorating socio-economic and political conditions in Lebanon have limited durable solutions for refugees. The protracted nature of the displacement coupled with a significant funding gap in humanitarian and development aid from one side and the increased socio-economic needs of refugees and host communities from the other side limited the ability of the state to manage the crisis and turn it into an opportunity.

Agriculture livelihoods, designated as a formal livelihood source facilitating refugees’ inclusion in the job market in Lebanon, are normatively considered temporary economic integration opportunities that improve the food security of refugees and activate rural economies. This is identical for Lebanon where around 60% of refugees are living in rural and marginalized areas, having agriculture the main source of income. Refugees in addition to their host communities are targeted by various livelihoods programs that mainly improve human and social assets and address market access challenges to set the ground for sustainable interventions. The magnitude of success depends on a suitable enabling environment in addition to market system dynamics that create win-win scenarios for both populations. Refugees are eventually expected to utilize the skills and knowledge they gain to develop their livelihoods and communities when they decide to voluntarily return to Syria.

In an evaluation for livelihoods programming in 2018, findings revealed that livelihood initiatives targeting Syrian refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey are still limited and fragmented. The main constraints encountered while mapping livelihood interventions within the Syrian crisis response include information gaps on economic opportunities, poor complementarity between labor market demand and supply, absence of long-term livelihood interventions (dominance of emergency short-term initiatives), lack of interventions addressing the barriers to women’s employment and the limited funding to livelihood policies and work². The evaluation recommended more integrated scaled-up and coordinated livelihood response between UN agencies, the government, NGOs and the

¹ UNHCR 2020. Operational Portal Refugee Situations- September 2020

² UNHCR-UNDP Regional Joint Secretariat 2018. Improving Livelihoods and Economic Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities

private sector. These interventions should be tailored to contribute to the local economy of host communities while simultaneously providing job opportunities for refugees.

In Lebanon, 80-90% of Syrian refugees are experiencing some degree of food insecurity. Ten years into the crisis, Syrian refugees have struggled against multi-dimensional challenges to access basic needs and secure a source of income. The 2019 vulnerability assessment showed that Syrian refugees' labor force participation accounted to 38% with 66% among men and 11% among women. Refugees are spending around 50% of their income on food, indicating their weak resilience to shocks³. Both the economic crisis and the movement restrictions taken to curb the spread of Covid-19 have further exacerbated the situation, resulting in unprecedented high levels of unemployment. According to a recent assessment, 50% of Lebanese and 75% Syrians are worried about not having enough food to eat during the month of May 2020⁴. ESCWA warned in Sep 2020 that around 50% of the population in Lebanon might have difficult access to basic food needs by end of 2020⁵.

Homs is the largest governorate in Syria and had the third largest size of population prior to the conflict (1.8 million in 2011). The rural population accounted for 49% of the total governorate population in 2011. The governorate shares borders with Lebanon and Iraq and facilitates linkages between different Syrian governorates. It was highly impacted by the conflict in term of physical assets. It is estimated that around 50% of the total governorate population has been displaced. The Syrian Government gained full control over the governorate in 2014-2015. In June 2020, the official number of registered Syrian refugees from Homs in Lebanon was 215,000, accounting to around 24% of total registered Syrian refugees. They are largely distributed in agriculture zones including Akkar, Baalbeck-Hermel and Zahle⁶. Returnee rate among Syrian refugees is still low where around 95 thousand registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon voluntarily returned to Syria since 2012. Homs governorate is among the top governorates with intended return of refugees. In 2019, the United Nations estimated around 674 thousand people in need in Homs governorate including 198 thousand in acute need⁷.

To develop durable solution strategies targeting regional migration crises within the multi-dimensional approach of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), it is important to understand in a protracted situation how specific livelihoods programming (such as agriculture livelihoods in this case) are answering local specific economic needs at sector level to support host communities while equipping refugees with better skills and knowledge. The hypothesis considers that refugees are expected to utilize these skills to improve their temporary economic inclusion in the host country from one side and to re-build economic sectors and diversify them in their country of origin when they decide to voluntarily return from the other side.

B- Objectives

In this context, ESCWA is organizing a consultation meeting to share the findings of the case study on **“Understanding Livelihood Solutions Under Protracted Forced Displacement: The Case of Homs’ Refugees Population in Lebanon”**. The aim of the consultation meeting is to highlight and discuss the main findings of the study based on the conducted secondary and primary reviews that took place during April – June 2020.

³ VASyR 2019. Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

⁴ WFP 2020. Assessing the Impact of the Economic and COVID-19 Crises in Lebanon - June 2020

⁵ ESCWA 2020. Is food security in Lebanon under threat?

⁶ UNHCR 2020. Data Sharing Agreement UNHCR-ESCWA in June 2020

⁷ UNOCHA 2019. Humanitarian Needs Overview – Syrian Arab Republic

The meeting will answer the following questions:

- What is the nature of agriculture livelihood interventions, their objectives, their relevance to refugees' profile/age, their role in facilitating skilled employment, reducing food insecurity, and improving income? How are current livelihoods programming positioned to promote sustainable livelihoods for both refugees and host communities?
- What are the impacts of agriculture livelihood interventions on the promotion/development of the five livelihood assets analyzed through the sustainable livelihoods' framework and value chains/market system approach?
- What are the observations regarding the integration of livelihoods interventions in local economic development plan and their complementarity with the priorities for context-based agriculture development?
- How is the agriculture skilled labor supply by Homs refugees developing local value chains and contributing to local economic development?
- What are the livelihoods barriers for Homs' refugees voluntarily return analyzed using the five livelihood assets?
- What are the livelihoods initiatives that should be prioritized based on a set of criteria that ensure win-win situation for both refugees and host communities?

C- Participants

The meeting will bring together agriculture livelihood experts from Lebanese Government, UN organizations, local NGOs, INGOs, and other organizations.

D- Organization of the meeting

The consultation meeting will be held virtually on Microsoft Teams on the 2nd of November 2020 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Kindly confirm your attendance by registering on the link shared in the invitation email at the latest by October 28, 2020. You can join the meeting (Ctrl + click) through the following link: <https://bit.ly/31ytfAB>. Participants are kindly requested to sign in 15 minutes prior to the meeting.

E- Correspondence

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