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WFP/Mazen Hodeib

Assessing the Impact of the Economic and COVID-19 Crises in Lebanon

June 2020

Highlights

- In Lebanon, WFP launched a **random and anonymized web survey** targeting the Lebanese population as well as Syrian and Palestinian refugees. This survey contributes to a first complete picture of the impacts of the economic crisis and COVID-19 on the livelihoods and food security of people in Lebanon.
- Due to a combination of containment measures for COVID-19 and a worsening economic crisis, two out of every three Lebanese households suffered from a **reduced income** compared to the previous year, while about 10 percent across all groups reported that their households are **resorting to alternative income sources** to make ends meet.
- **The COVID-19 outbreak** and related containment measures have pushed nearly one out of every three Lebanese into unemployment so far, while one in five respondents saw their salary being reduced. Lebanese respondents living in Akkar were among the highest to report either losing their jobs or having a reduced income due to COVID-19. Moreover, Lebanese women as well as young adults between 25-34 years of age have been particularly affected by reduced salaries. Drastic change in employment status was significantly felt more by Syrian women than men, as 61 percent reported losing their jobs due to COVID-19 compared to 46 percent of Syrian men. The latter proportions of women and men experienced salary reduction or have already been impacted by public unrest.
- **Economic sectors** that have been the most impacted are construction as well as services and sales (incl. accommodation and tourism, restaurants and food services). Across all three population groups assessed, the main reason for disruption of work activities was that employers had to close businesses or were forced to reduce staff. Syrians were over proportionally affected by these layoffs.
- To bridge income gaps, two-thirds of each population group has resorted to one or more **livelihood-based coping strategies** in the past month, above all spending less on food was reported strategy most frequently across all three groups. Other top strategies applied included spending savings, asking for friends and family for help and borrowing money on credit to meet essential needs. A considerable percentage of respondents also reported the incapacity to cope. In fact, one in four Syrian refugees have already exhausted their coping capacity, followed by one in five Palestinians and 12 percent of Lebanese.
- Hyper **price inflation** impacted households' ability to access food. For Lebanese respondents, 41 percent reported not having stockpiled food due to their inability to afford the costs and 15 percent reported not doing so as the prices are changing on a weekly basis. Findings were even more concerning for refugees, with 44 percent of Palestinian respondents and a staggering 64 percent of Syrians reporting the inability to have emergency stocks, mainly due to unaffordability.
- With food prices soaring in Lebanon, **food is a major source of concern** for a large proportion of respondents across all three groups. Fifty percent of Lebanese, 63 percent of Palestinians and 75 percent of Syrians felt worried they would not have enough food to eat over the past month. Those who have lost their jobs – either since or prior to the outbreak – have shown to be more distressed than others. Lebanese residents in Akkar have reported to be more worried than those living in other governorates.
- **Food consumption** prior to Ramadan, indicated a situation of concern, especially for Syrian refugees with 44 percent reported eating only one meal over the previous day. One in five Lebanese and Palestinians respondents reported the same.
- To meet their food needs, Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians are applying one or more **food-based coping strategies**. Nearly 30 percent of Lebanese living in Akkar are applying more severe coping strategies compared to those of other governorates. Moreover, of particular concern are the Syrian refugees, with 11 percent reporting going a whole day and night without eating and 21 percent skipping meals.
- Based on an analysis of all indicators, the following **groups among the Lebanese populations are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity** and require special attention. Notably, households that depend on daily casual labour, on support from their friends and family or are living off debt tend to be applying more severe food-based coping strategies than others. In addition, larger families as well as those with one or more dependents and an unemployed head of household are also doing the same to a greater extent than other groups. These coping mechanisms could lead to malnutrition in the longer-term.
- **Main concerns** raised by all population groups revolved around the sharp deterioration of the economic situation and its associated impacts. Following the recent crises, including rising unemployment rates, the need for money to cover essential needs (incl. food, rent and medicine) have been strongly echoed by the population in Lebanon. **Tensions and violence** have also been reported to be on the rise, especially by the Lebanese population compared to other groups. More Lebanese women (56%) have perceived tensions than men (52%). In addition, Lebanese women are perceiving a greater increase in domestic violence compared to men, which raises important protection concerns.
- As the situation continues to be extremely dynamic in the country, **on-going monitoring activities** using phone surveys and other assessments are critical to help support efforts at strategic planning and targeting for adequate responses. With more information at hand on the impact of the economic and COVID-19 crises, the Government of Lebanon and humanitarian partners will be better equipped to inform their response to the unfolding crises.

Background and Objectives

Since October 2019, Lebanon has faced dramatic economic and socio-political challenges which led the country to default on its foreign debt for the very first time. The Government of Lebanon had to choose between debt repayment of \$1.2bn Eurobond and providing essential goods and services to its population. While already suffering from the economic impact of the longstanding Syria conflict, Lebanon is also hosting the highest number of refugees per capita in the world, with over one fourth of the population (1-for-3 refugee to Lebanese population). Both refugees and local populations continue to feel the negative impacts of the protracted civil war in Syria, combined with recent steep economic deterioration.

The outbreak of COVID-19 is further contributing to the economic recession, compounding existing weaknesses and increasing vulnerabilities of all residents in Lebanon¹. According to the Government of Lebanon, the country experienced a 10 percent contraction of GDP in the last quarter of 2019 and will face 14 percent and 4 percent negative growth in 2020 and 2021, respectively. The disease outbreak placed additional pressure on an already collapsing economic system and has overburdened national social safety nets and the health system. Existing poor social safety nets, limited coverage in water and electricity services, weak solid waste management/disposal and overcrowded living conditions in many parts of the country can augment the risk of the spread of the virus as observed in the past weeks. Combined with an economic collapse, this could push Lebanon into a food crisis as stated by the Prime Minister in May 2020.

The food security situation which has already been declining is now being further exacerbated due to movement restrictions, loss of income, and food and non-food price inflation. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the World Bank had projected a significant increase in poverty levels among the Lebanese – from 30 percent up to 52 percent by end of 2020. As indicated by WFP, poverty levels among Syrian refugees are also estimated to have risen from 55 percent previously living below the extreme poverty line to 83 percent. Similarly, Palestinian refugees' poverty figures are also expected to have increased. The combined impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and the economic freefall on people's livelihoods is catastrophic, particularly for the most vulnerable among the Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians, such as youth, daily workers, women-headed households, the elderly and people with specific needs.

As the situation inside Lebanon continues to deteriorate, it is critical to assess and monitor how the livelihoods of the Lebanese population as well as Syrian and Palestinian refugees living in the country are affected over time. The web survey was implemented as a joint effort between WFP's Research, Assessment and Monitoring (RAM) Division and WFP's Lebanon Country Office. The main objective was to collect credible and timely information to enhance the understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 and the economic crises on the lives and livelihoods of the Lebanese and refugee populations, including their ability to meet their food and other essential needs. Findings are meant to inform strategic planning and operational responses, including prioritization decisions and adjustments, filling an important knowledge gap for Government, national partners and the international community. This report presents the key findings of the study.



WFP/Edward Johnson

¹ Source: <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#>

Methodology and coverage

The study is mainly based on data collected through web surveys. Data has been triangulated with other available secondary information. Web surveys present a viable tool in the context of Lebanon as 2020, the internet coverage amounts to 78 percent of the population between 0-99 years.² Moreover, the majority of the Lebanese population is literate (95%).³ Nevertheless, it has to be considered that any technology used poses varying level of biases. In the case of web surveys only populations with access to the internet will be covered.

Figure 2: Distribution of completed web surveys at governorate level for Lebanese population

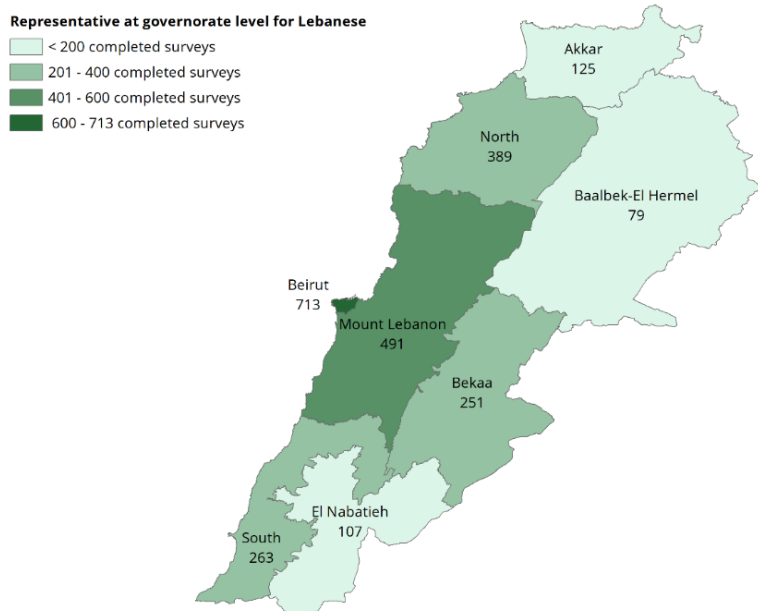
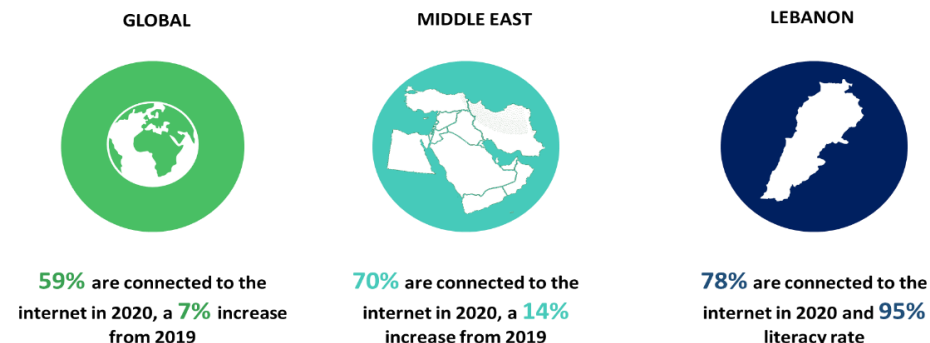


Figure 1: Internet users in total population (0-99)



In practical terms, web surveys appear when internet users click on a broken link or make a mistake when typing in a URL link, ensuring a randomized sample.⁴ Using this technology, Lebanese were interviewed across the country, covering all 8 governorates. Samples were determined and aggregated to ensure representative results at governorate level. The self-administered web surveys were able to capture a total of **2,418 Lebanese**. In addition, **887 Syrian refugees** and **165 Palestinian refugees** were also interviewed at national level bringing the total sample size of this survey to **3,470 completed responses**. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative questions, mainly covering the impacts of COVID-19 and the economic crisis on people's livelihoods and how they are coping, their food security situation, access to health care, perceived tensions and violence as well as main concerns and migration intentions specifically for Syrians. Responses were collected within 4 weeks, from 20 April to 18 May 2020 using the online technology. The minimum sample requirement was 1,600 completed surveys for the Lebanese population, 400 completed surveys for Syrians and 200 completed surveys for Palestinians. The sample requirements were reached or exceeded for most groups except for Palestinian refugees, which proved to be more difficult to reach due to a combination of lower presence and possibly, lower connectivity.

This technology considers people who are literate internet users, with connectivity to the internet, hence, the sample is not necessarily representative of all populations but provided representative results at administrative level for the Lebanese and national level for Syrians and Palestinians. To mitigate distortions resulting from representation imbalances, weighting systems were developed and applied during the analysis stage based on the sex and age of these three groups independently.

² Data reportal – Global Digital Insights: <https://datareportal.com/>

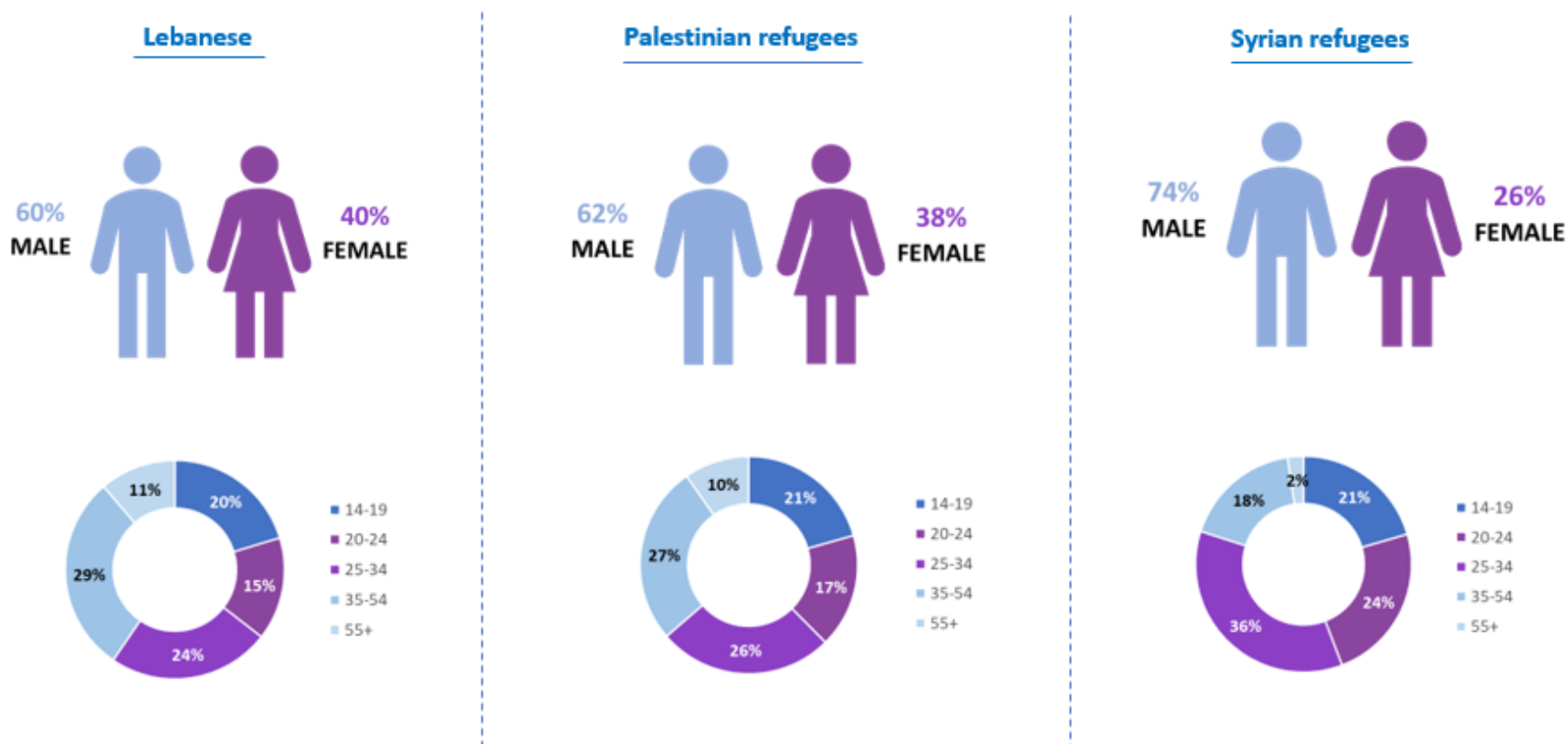
³ Source: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LBN>

⁴ The technology has successfully applied by WFP in 10 countries (see for example the [joint IOM/WFP study in Libya](https://www.rwipi.com)). For more information on the technology: www.rwipi.com

Profile of survey respondents

Surveys inside Lebanon targeted individuals above 14 years of age. Of the Lebanese respondents, 40 percent were women and 60 percent were below 35 years of age. In the actual Lebanese population distribution, about half are women and 42 percent are below the age of 35. Similar findings were found among Palestinian refugees, with 62 percent of women respondents and 64 percent below the age of 35, whereas the actual distribution in the population is comprised of half women and about half below 35 years of age. Among Syrians, women made up 26 percent of the sample and 81 percent were below the age of 35. And within the actual population of Syrians, the youth accounts of 63 percent and women account for 51 percent according to UNHCR data. Younger populations, and sometime the male population, tend to be more internet savvy, which explains why younger groups are overrepresented in the sample. Nevertheless, the survey reached and captured the voices of all sex and age groups. Sample weights were introduced to compensate for any bias introduced to reflect the actual population distribution.

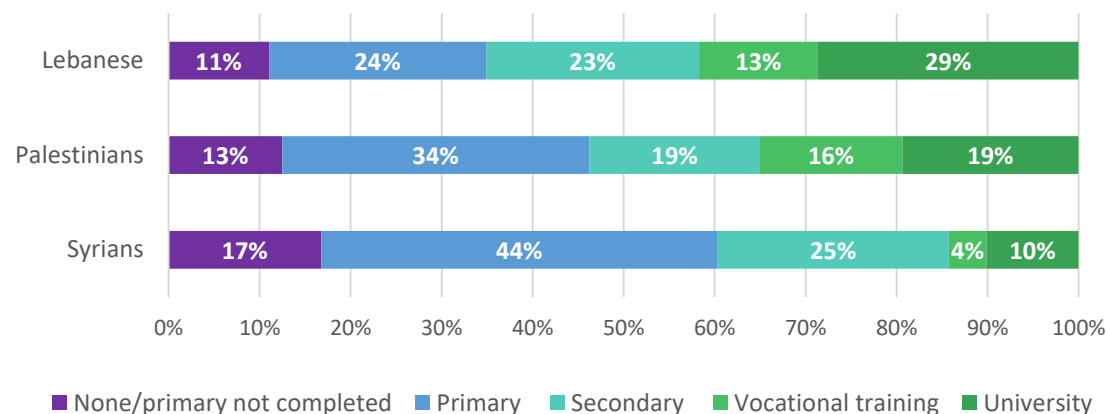
Figure 3: Sex and age distribution of survey respondents (unweighted)



Most Lebanese respondents have achieved secondary level education or have university degrees, 13 percent have completed vocational training, and the remainder have completed primary or were not able to complete their primary education. According to ILO, in 2018-2019, 21 percent of the Lebanese population had a university degree or above while 15 percent had completed secondary school and 25 percent had elementary level education.⁵ This illustrates that although web surveys are generally expected to overrepresent educated people, the sample collected is not so far off from the reality in the country.

The distribution was found to be slightly different for Syrian refugees, with a majority having primary level or incomplete schooling. Only 10 percent reported having a university degree. Similarly, fewer Palestinians reported having higher level education.

Chart 1: Education attainment (unweighted)

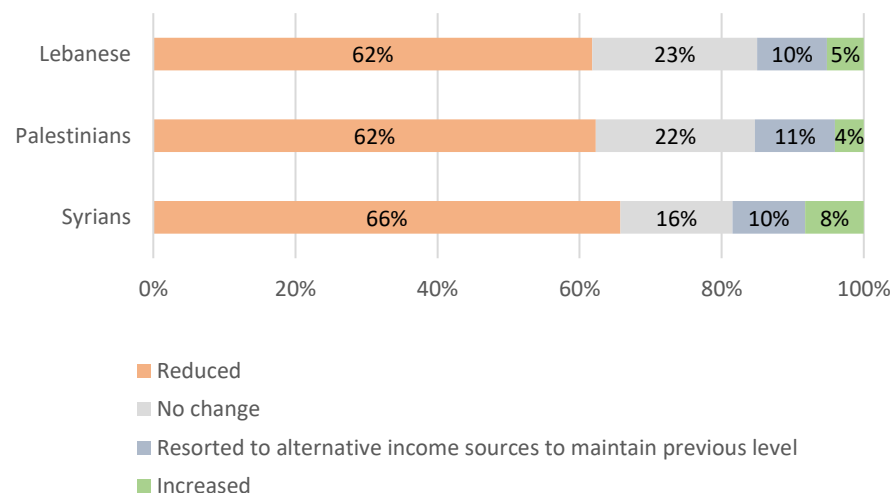


Impact on livelihoods

HH household income

With the latest changes in the economic situation due to both COVID-19 restriction measures and the economic and socio-political crisis, income-generating activities were largely affected in Lebanon. In order to capture the impact on livelihoods, respondents were asked if their household income had undergone any changes compared to one year earlier, and about the main reasons for this change. A majority of Lebanese households suffered from income reduction compared to previous year and a similar proportion of Palestinian households witnessed reductions in income as well. Syrians seem to have suffered the most from income reduction with two-thirds of respondents claiming to have been affected. Across all groups, around 10 percent are seeking alternative income sources to maintain previous income levels.

Chart 2: Changes to HH income over the past year

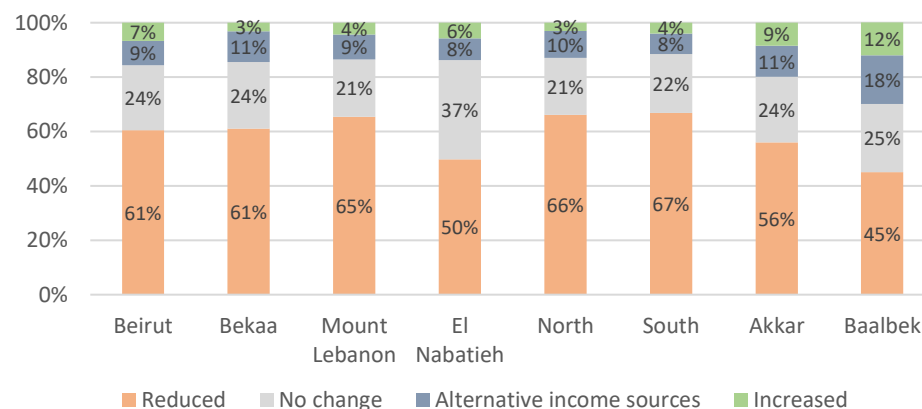


Lebanese households living in South, North and Mount Lebanon have been hit harder compared to other governorates, with around two-thirds reporting reduced income (see chart

⁵ Source : https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_732567.pdf

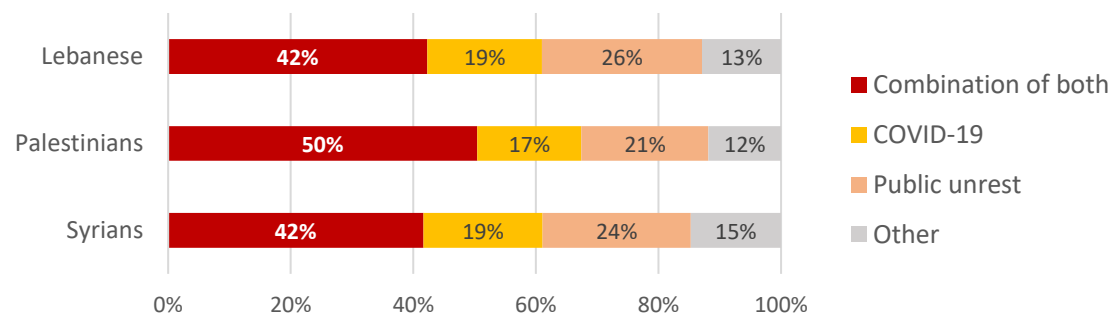
3). Around one-third of Lebanese depend on either salaried work or daily casual labour as main income sources. Casual employees have been affected greatly by COVID-19 and related containment measures, due to the overall nature of this employment type, which usually does not entail a formal contract combined with limited access to employment assistance programmes. High proportions of families residing in the North and South governorates depend on daily casual work, 18 and 15 percent respectively. Comparatively, analysis results showed that 11 percent of Lebanese families in Mount Lebanon rely on daily casual labour as income source. A majority of the Lebanese living in this governorate commute for 1-3 hours to work in Beirut and recurrent roadblocks, restrictive curfew hours and limited movement by private and public transport may have jeopardized their income.

Chart 3: Changes to Lebanese HH income over the past year - by governorate



Across all groups, the main reason stated for changes in household level income was a combination of both public unrest deriving from the economic crisis and the COVID-19 containment measures implemented by the Lebanese government.

Chart 4: Main reason for changes in HH income over the past year



Employment status and how it has been affected by COVID-19

In order to capture the COVID-19 impact on employment status in Lebanon, respondents were asked whether their individual ability to carry out their work activities has been jeopardized as a result of containment measures. Nearly 30 percent of Lebanese respondents reported losing their jobs since the outbreak of COVID-19 and related containment measures. Out of those who lost their jobs, 42 percent were found to be between 20 and 24 years of age.

Out of the working Lebanese, 23 percent reported recent salary reductions. Young workers who fall within the 25 to 34 age range accounted for 28 percent of those who saw salary reductions since the COVID-19 outbreak. When applying a gender lens, it became apparent that a slightly higher proportion of Lebanese women reported recent income reductions compared to men (24% vs 21% respectively). Lebanese respondents living in Akkar were among the highest to report either losing their jobs or having a reduced income due to COVID-19.

Over half of interviewed Syrian refugees reported losing their jobs since mid-March of the current year. Comparisons of employment status by gender of Syrian respondents showed that 61 percent of women have lost their jobs due to COVID-19, meanwhile 46 percent of men experienced this change.

When looking into the impact of COVID-19 on economic sectors, mainly for Lebanese (as shown in *chart 6*), results revealed that the restaurants and general service sector have been hardly hit. These are followed by construction as well as the arts, entertainment, accommodation and tourism sectors.

Chart 5: Respondent employment status – change since COVID-19

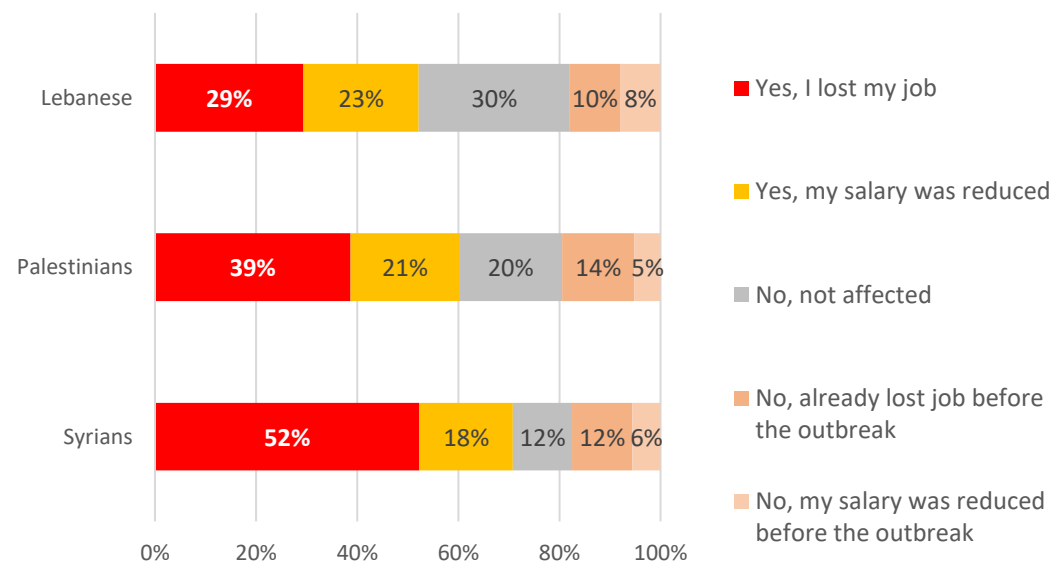


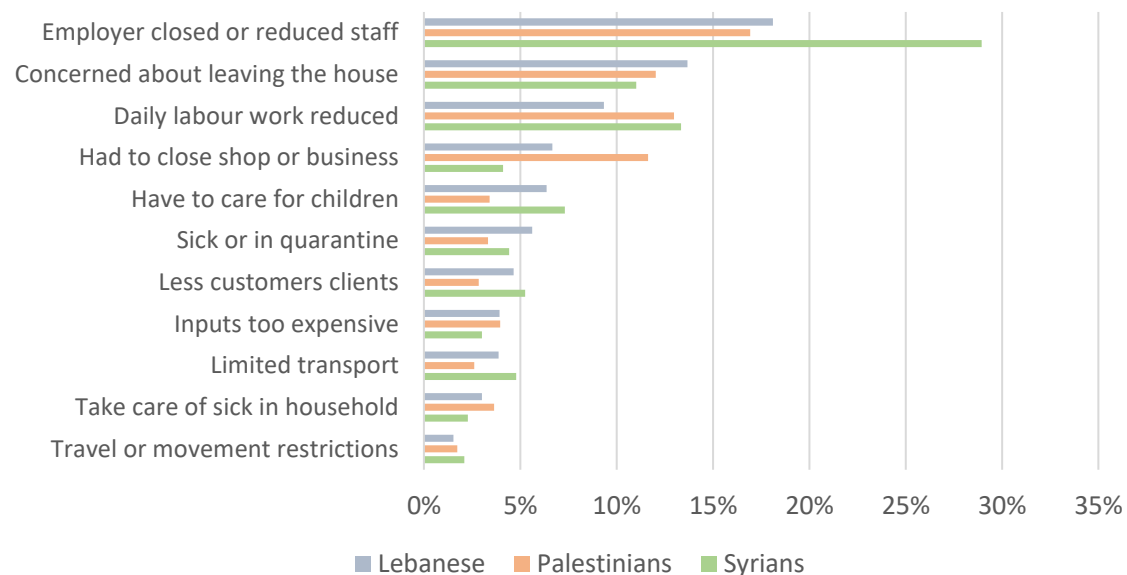
Chart 6: Employment status of Lebanese respondents by economic sector – change since COVID-19



Main reasons for disruptions of work activities since COVID-19

When asked about the main reasons for disruptions of their work activities since COVID-19, the main reason for Lebanese was business closure or reduction in staff (see *chart 7*). Syrians were also very much affected by businesses closing, not surprisingly as their main sectors of work are construction (15%) followed by restaurants and food services (10%). Palestinians on the other hand, highlighted having to close their shop or business to a greater extent than other groups.

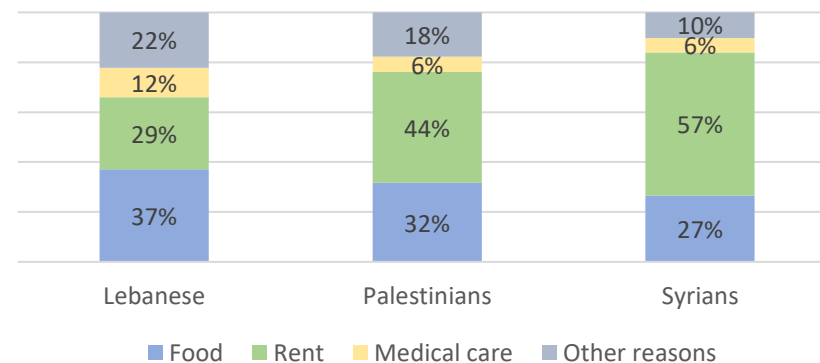
Chart 7: Main reasons for disruption of work activities since COVID-19



Debt

When asked about taking debt in the past 30 days to cover basic needs, about 42 percent of Lebanese respondents reported having to do so, against 55 percent of Palestinians and 61 percent of Syrians. For all three groups, debt was incurred mainly to cover the cost of food and rent payments (see *chart 8*). While the Lebanese took less debt to pay rent than Syrian and Palestinian respondents, they are the only group for which food purchase was the main reason to contract debt. This goes to show that high levels of loss or reduced income has significantly impacted the ability of these populations to meet their immediate food and shelter needs, hence the need to resort to borrowing money or purchasing on credit.

Chart 8: Out of those with debt, main reasons are:



Livelihood coping

Considerable percentages of respondents reported on the inability of their households to rely on livelihood-based coping strategies as they have already been exhausted in the past. Proportions of population groups who did not find the need to cope are minor, where the Lebanese group had the highest percentage (see *Figure 4*). However, those who resorted to coping strategies to meet their most essential needs including food, health, rent and other account for nearly two-thirds of each of the population groups. These results are worrying as households who have recently coped might quickly lose their capacity to cope when faced with additional shocks and/or a prolonged crisis.

Figure 4: Use of livelihood-based coping strategies over the past month

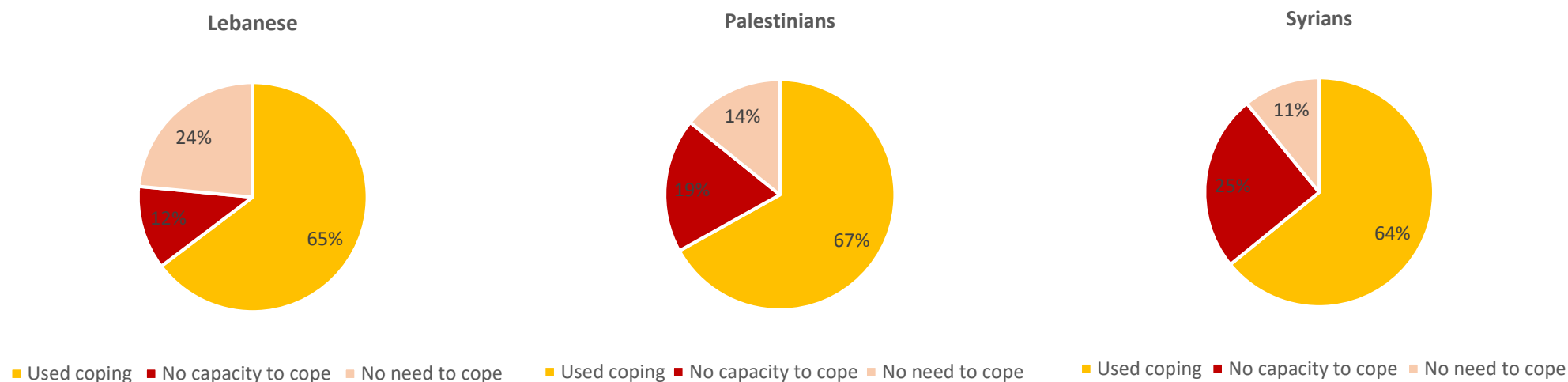
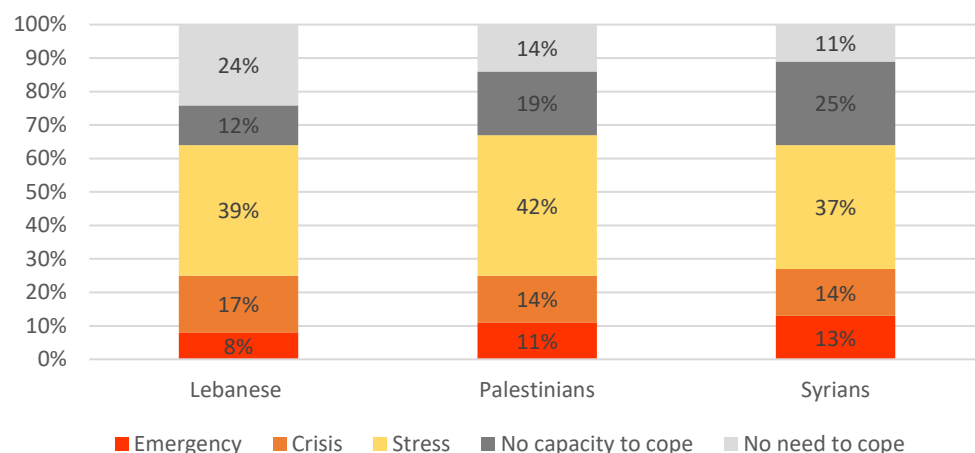


Chart 9: Applied coping strategies by severity



About one in five Lebanese households resorted to severe crisis or emergency livelihood coping strategies, including spending less on health and education, selling productive assets, and begging. Similarly, 20 percent of Syrian households applied crisis and emergency strategies. Sending children to work and begging were highest among Syrians compared to other groups. However, 25 percent of Syrian refugees reported not having the capacity to cope anymore, as shown in *Figure 4*. It is also alarming to have a noticeable percentage of Syrians reporting borrowing money and selling domestic assets (12%) which leaves them with very minimum resources to fall back onto in the future, and therefore would be extremely vulnerable to any additional shocks. Most Lebanese respondents have reported spending less on food, which was even found to be higher among women (28%) than men (23%).

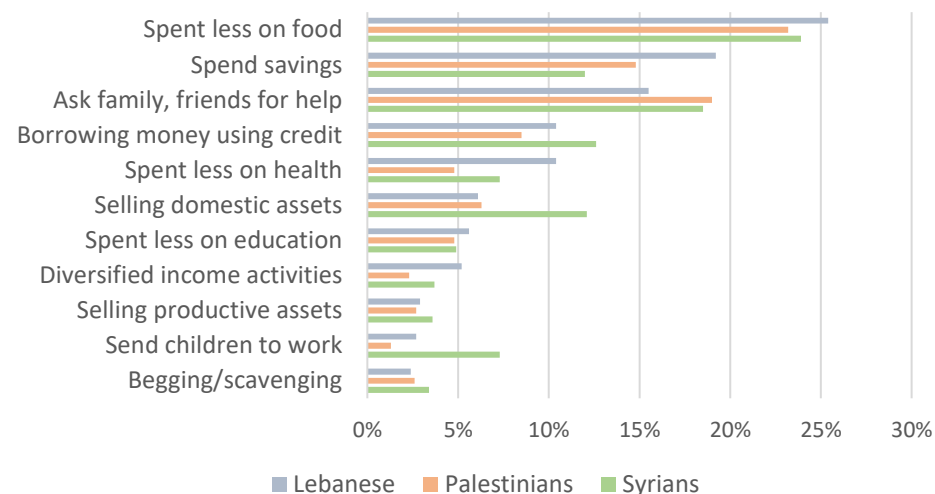
In addition to spending less on food, spending savings and resorting to friends and relatives for help were main strategies used by all groups. Surprisingly, begging/scavenging was reported at relatively high rates when taking into consideration the cultural sensitivities in reporting such activity.

A relatively high proportion of Syrian refugee households (7%) reported sending their children to work compared to other population groups (see *chart 10*). This is likely due to a combination of employment restrictions and overall increase in economic vulnerability observed since 2019^{6 7}.

Looking at the spent savings strategy, high results for Lebanese families are very apparent compared to other groups, as some Lebanese are still able to rely on their savings to meet their essential needs.

Both Palestinian and Syrian refugees tend to rely more on support from family and friends compared to Lebanese households.

Chart 10: Main livelihood coping strategies applied



⁶ VASyR 2019

⁷ The VASyR 2019 also states that “It must be noted that child labour may frequently be underreported [...]”. The web-based survey shows higher proportions of child labour. That could also be explained by the survey nature that allowed respondents to anonymously shared their views and the economic deterioration as stated above.

Markets, shopping behaviour and food stocks

Following the onset of public unrest in Lebanon, an inflation of 56 percent was registered between the months of September 2019 and April 2020. Looking into both the impact of earlier economic and financial disruptions in addition to COVID-19 containment measures, preliminary results revealed that the cost of the food basket increased by nearly 50 percent between mid-March and last week of May.⁸ The price of the food basket comprised of eight items of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB)⁹ has been steadily increasing over time. Comparisons of the current price of the food component of SMEB with that of September 2019, found a cumulative inflation of 109 percent.

In order to capture the change in shopping behaviour, web respondents were asked whether they had been able to stockpile food due to the national emergency and containment measures (see *chart 11*). Many reported not having stockpiled food as they could not afford to do so. It was apparent that the witnessed price inflation impacted households' ability to access food. Only 30 percent of Lebanese respondents reported having stockpiled food, the highest proportion among all population groups.

The proportion of Syrian respondents who were unable to stockpile food due to unaffordability was found to be the highest among the different population groups. Others reported not doing so as the prices are constantly changing or found stockpiling of food unnecessary. This is due to the rapid depreciation of the Lebanese Pound on the black market observed since mid-October 2019. Although the Lebanese pound is pegged to the US dollar, it has lost more than 62 percent¹⁰ of its value on the black market, leading to steep increases in prices. With Lebanon relying heavily on food imports to cover its domestic needs, this has caused food prices to be heavily tied to changes in the exchange rate market. Only 13 percent of Syrian respondents confirmed having stockpiled food as a result of the pandemic, the lowest between the three population groups. For Palestinian respondents, only 23 percent managed to have emergency food stocks.

All respondents were then asked about the estimated time duration of the food stocks (see *chart 12*), with a majority indicating that they have less than one week worth of food stocks. Among all groups, Syrian refugees reported the least time that the food stocks would last them for.

Chart 11: Stockpiling food due to COVID-19

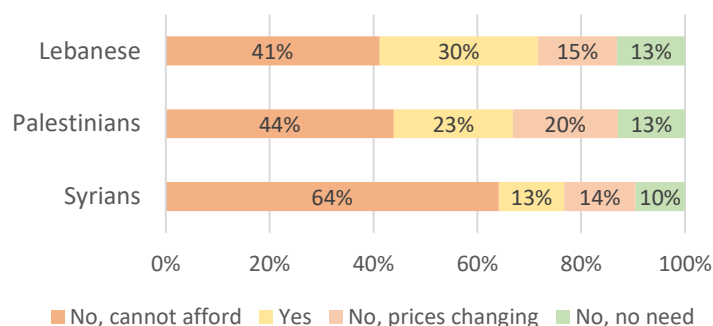
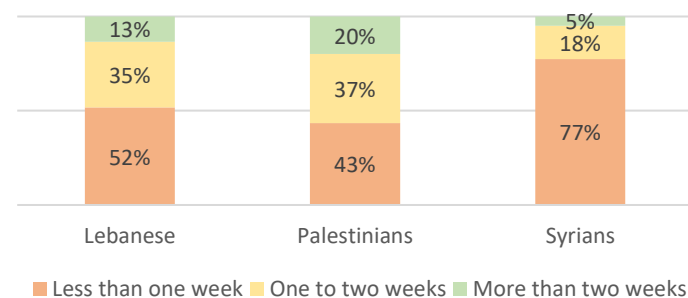


Chart 12: Duration of food stocks reported by population groups



⁸ Lebanon VAM Update on Food Price Trends: <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000116234/download/>

⁹ The SMEB food basket is based on a monthly ration per person of 6 kg of rice, 3.9 kg of bulgur, 1.5 kg of pasta, 1.5 kg of white beans, 1.5 kg of sugar, 0.9 litres of sunflower oil, 0.3 kg of salt and 1.2 kg of canned meat. See also Annex 3 of the VASyR 2018 at: <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2018/12/VASyR-2018.pdf>

¹⁰ Source: <http://LebaneseLira.org>

Food security situation

With food prices soaring in Lebanon, large proportions of respondents reported feeling worried about not having enough food to eat in the last 30 days. One in every two Lebanese felt this distress, while two in every three Palestinians and three in every four Syrians were also worried about not having enough food to eat. Comparisons with the pilot web survey conducted with Lebanese and Syrian populations in 2018 show a noticeable increase in fear of not having enough food to eat, a 19-percentage point increase for Lebanese (from 31%) and a 15-percentage point increase for Syrian refugees (from 60%).

Apparent proportions of Lebanese respondents from all eight governorates reported feeling worried about not having enough to eat (see *chart 14*). Particularly those living in the governorates of Baalbek¹¹, Akkar and North which have been the country's most deprived regions for years, with severe poverty levels (WB, 2020). Previously identified vulnerable populations were mainly those who reside along the border with Syria. This is mainly due to the proximity to the war-torn country, which witnessed large influxes of Syrian refugees in recent years. The Syrian crisis has also directly impacted economic activity in Akkar and North governorates, as these areas strongly relied on trade with Syria in the past.¹²

Chart 13: Have you felt worried about not having enough food to eat in the last month?

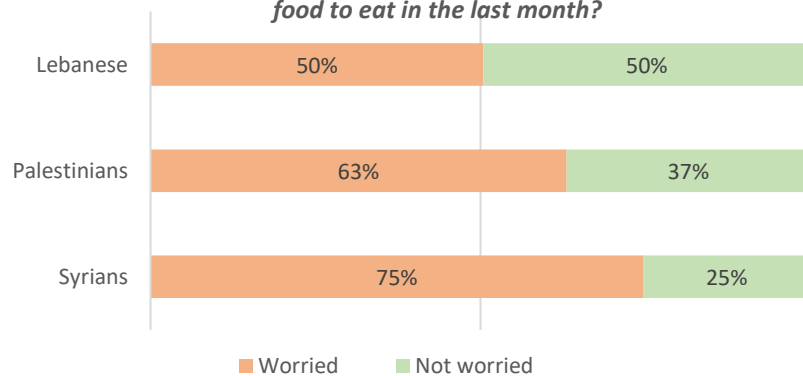
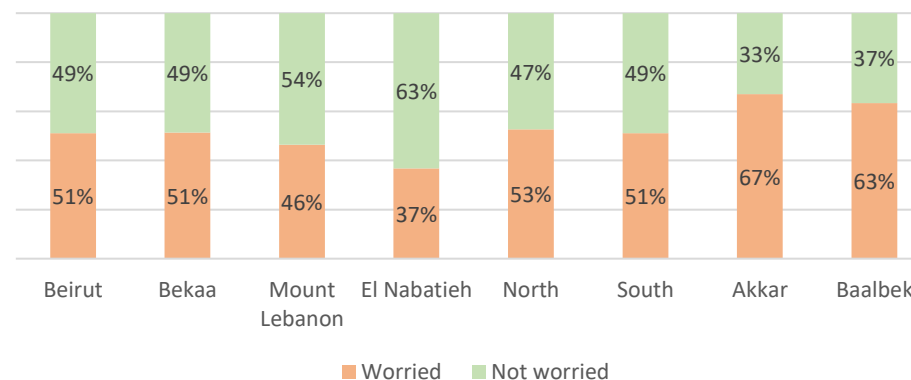


Chart 14: Have you felt worried about not having enough food to eat in the last month?

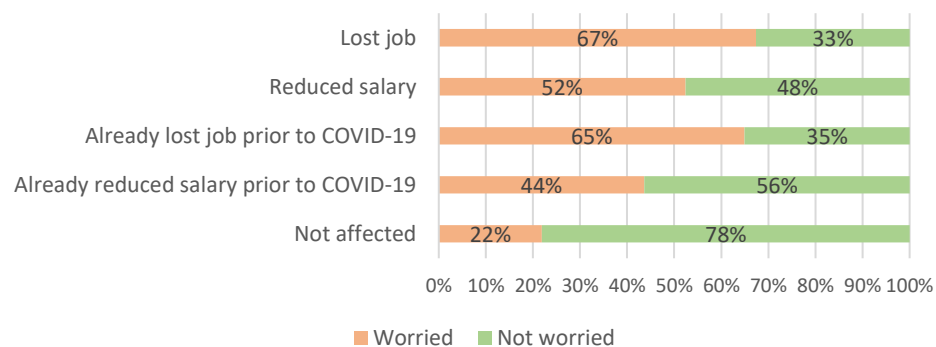


¹¹ Results for El Nabatieh and Baalbek are indicative of the Lebanese population at governorate level.

¹² OCHA region profile - <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-north-akkar-governorates-profile-october-2018>.

Comparisons of disaggregated results by employment status of the Lebanese population are shown in *chart 15*. Those who lost their jobs, either pre or post-COVID outbreak, are the most worried about not having enough food to eat (67% and 65% respectively). While those who experienced a reduction in their salaries followed. This gives an idea about their purchasing power. Prior to COVID-19 outbreak, the unemployment rate in Lebanon was not clear, with numbers differing according to various sources. However, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported an increase in the 2019 unemployment rate compared to the previous year (6.23% vs 6.14%). The unemployment rate figures are expected to have risen dramatically in 2020.

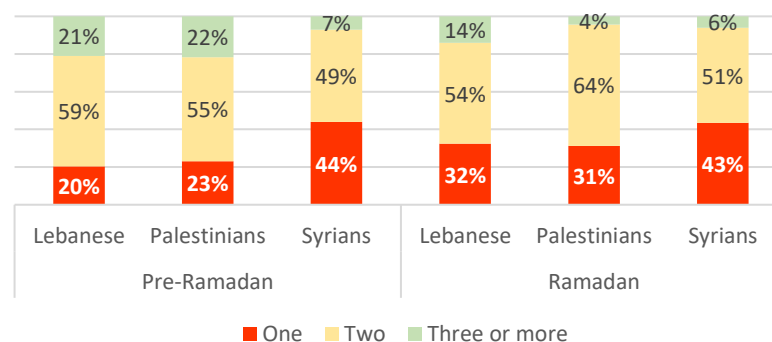
Chart 15: Lost job and reduced salary due to COVID-19 – change in individual employment status



Food consumption

Prior to and during the month of Ramadan (23 April to 23 May 2020), respondents from different population groups in Lebanon were asked about the number of meals consumed in the previous day. Pre-Ramadan responses revealed that a higher proportion of Syrian refugees consumed only one meal compared to other groups. These worrying results for Syrians remained consistent during Ramadan, which indicates that they were already at the edge prior to the fasting month and could not compromise food consumption further.

Chart 16: Number of meals eaten in the previous day



Food-based coping

All population groups were asked to describe their food situation in the last 30 days by selecting the main food-based coping that describes best their situation. A higher proportion of Syrian families resorting to food-based coping compared to the Lebanese and Palestinian populations (see *chart 17*). Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of Lebanese respondents reported having relied on the most severe food-based coping (19 percent skipped meals or did not eat for a whole day and night).

Disaggregated results for food-based coping have demonstrated that Lebanese families in Akkar (27%) and Beirut (22%) are resorting to severe coping mechanisms the most, compared to other governorates. Analysis results for Baalbek and El Nabatieh are indicative, hence could only serve as a sign of the actual situation in these governorates.

Chart 17: Food-based coping by population groups

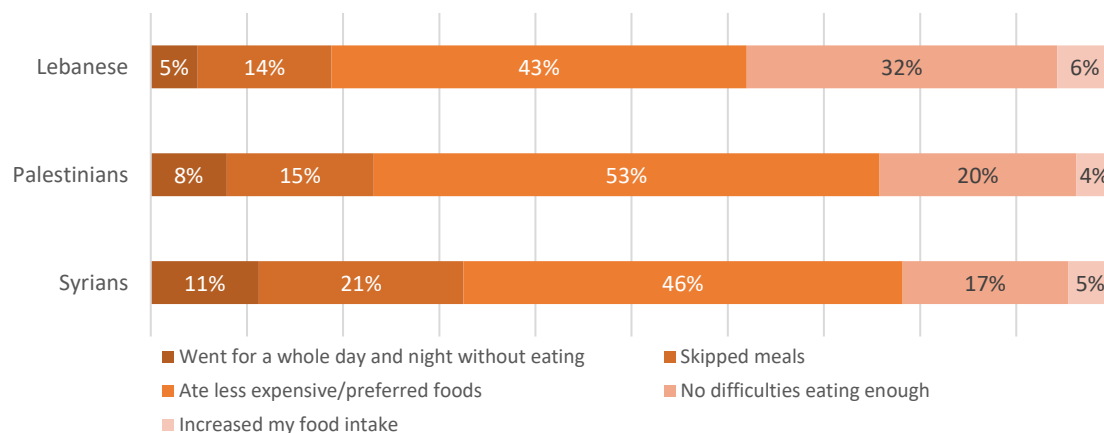
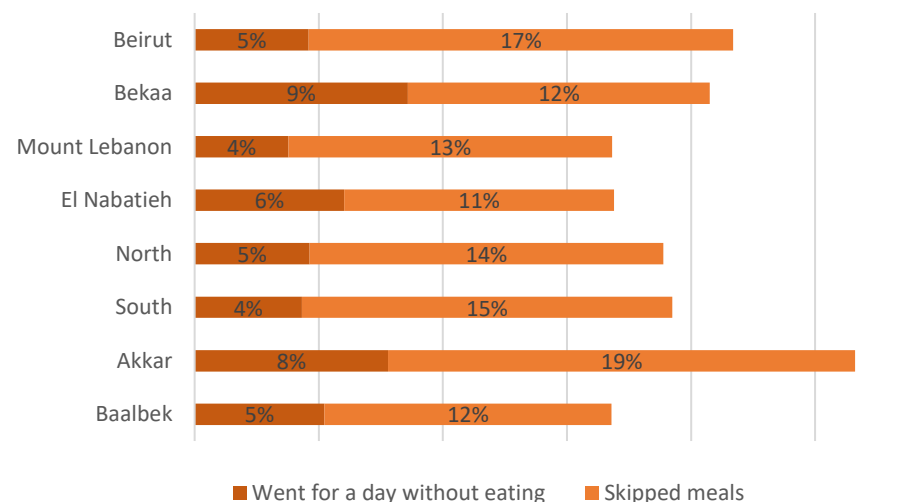


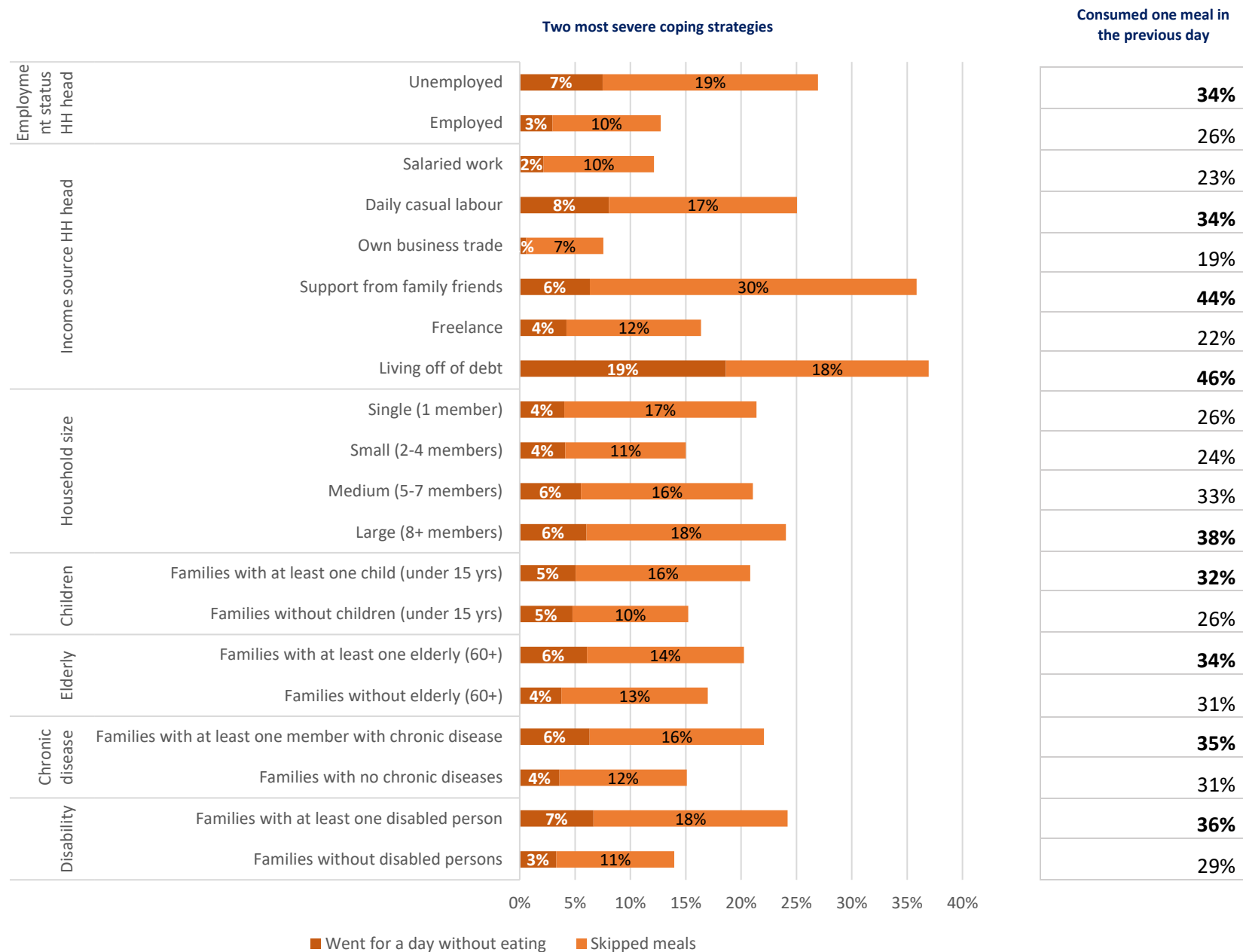
Chart 18: most severe food-based coping of Lebanese families by governorate



Who are the most food insecure?

The food security status varied according to key characteristics of respondents. *Figure 5* provides a summary of these variations. The study found that **larger Lebanese families** with 8 or more members are more worried about becoming food insecure than smaller ones. They also make higher use of severe food coping strategies and compromising their food consumption, most likely to prioritize smaller children. Additionally, the employment status of Lebanese head of households is an important variable, showing those with **unemployed heads of households** being more worried and applying extreme food coping strategies compared to others who continue to be employed. Furthermore, comparisons between **families with at least one dependant** to those without revealed apparent variances. **Families with at least one child** and those with **at least one elderly person** at their charge have reported to be compromising their food consumption and apply severe coping strategies more often. Same was found for **families with at least one member with chronic disease or disability in their household**. These are the main groups which deserve particular attention due to their higher vulnerability to food insecurity.

Figure 5: Food-based coping and food consumption by Lebanese households

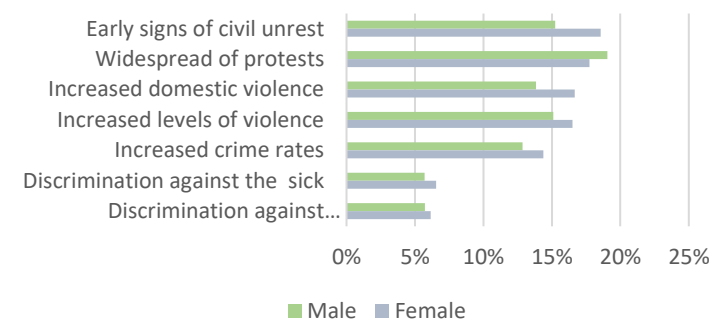


Tensions and violence

The unfolding economic crisis in Lebanon has led to various protests and public uprising with accounts of violence in the country since mid-October 2019. Lebanon has in the past witnessed several rounds of tensions and violence, including a civil war that lasted from 1975 until 1990. For the first time in 2019, however, major protests erupted countrywide to express dissatisfaction with the economic situation and the incapacity of the ruling political class to address the population's concerns. As a proxy to better understand potential deterioration of public safety in the country, respondents were asked to report on their perceptions of the levels of tension and violence within and between communities recently. Among main population groups, a greater proportion of Lebanese (56%) reported a perceived increase in tensions/violence compared to Syrians (50%) and Palestinians (46%). No major differences were noticed among the eight governorates.

More Lebanese women (56%) have perceived tensions than men (52%). *Chart 19* illustrates differences by gender and interestingly shows that women perceive greater increase in domestic violence than men, which raises important protection implications and should be taken into account in programming planning.

Chart 19: Perceived tensions and violence (Lebanese)



Impact on healthcare

Public and private health care in Lebanon vary significantly as public health practitioners have always been underpaid compared to those providing private health care. Private hospitals account for 82 percent of Lebanon's health care capacity¹³, which is unaffordable and inaccessible to many. Since mid-2019, medical equipment importers, for both public and private hospitals in Lebanon, began facing difficulties in bringing medical supplies into the country due to the shortage of US dollars, which was exacerbated further in November due to the unofficial devaluation of the Lebanese pound. This has become more alarming with the emergence of the global pandemic. Around 95 percent of Palestinian refugees do not have health insurance in Lebanon which means they are heavily reliant on the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) and other sources to cover hospital fees. As a result, most are completely dependent on Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) hospitals for medical care.

Web survey respondents from all groups were asked to provide feedback on functionality/accessibility to health care facilities as well as medicine affordability. Out of Lebanese respondents who are aware of or had to seek medical care, nearly half reported health services functioning as usual, however 34 percent reported facing barriers to accessing health care due to recent non-functional facilities or other inaccessibility reasons. High proportions of the other population groups reported deterioration or not having access to the much-needed facilities.

Out of respondents who had to buy medicine in the last month, 56 percent of Lebanese respondents reported facing challenges in accessing medicine, while 71 percent of Palestinians and 73 percent of Syrians reported encountering challenges. With vast majorities not being able to afford medicine.

¹³ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/10/lebanon-hospital-crisis-endangering-health>

Chart 20: Perceived chance in health care provision

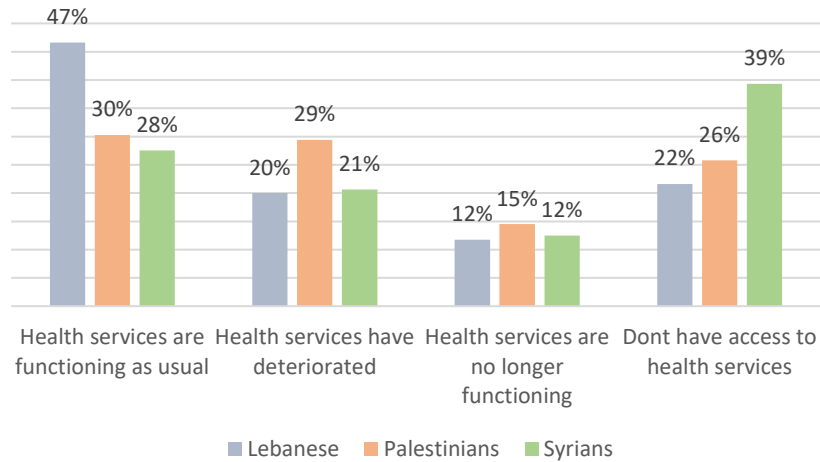
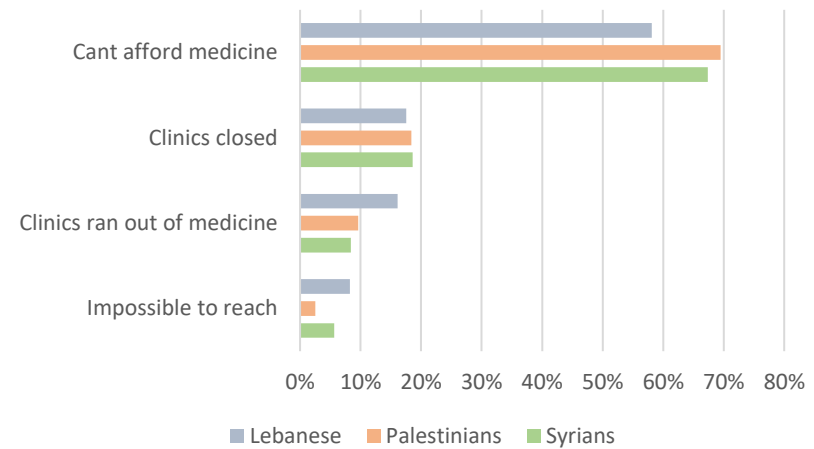


Chart 21: Challenges in accessing medicine

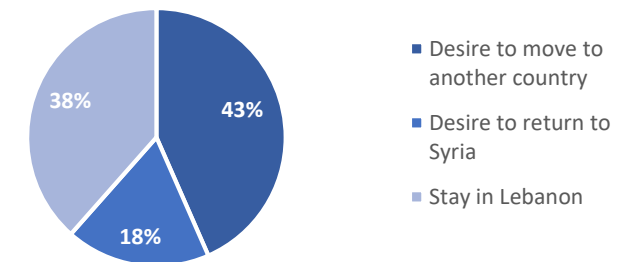


Refugees' intentions to move

When Syrian refugees were asked, through the self-administered survey, about their plans to move or remain in-country, 62 percent of web respondents reported wanting to either move to another country or return home to Syria, 43 percent and 18 percent respectively, when the situation permits. When comparing these results to those analysed in 2018, an apparent increase is observed for those who want to move to another country (from 29% to 43% change). Hence, less want to remain in Lebanon or return home to Syria.

Main reasons for wanting to leave were mainly related to lack of work opportunities (37%) and lack of means to purchase food (18%), highlighting the important role food security plays as a driver of migration.

Chart 22: Do you desire to stay in Lebanon, return home or move to another country in the next months?



Main concerns

Through an open-ended question, respondents were asked to express what they are currently the most worried about. The economic situation in the country, the lack of work, unemployment and money as well as poverty were themes most frequently mentioned. A **Lebanese woman** expressed clearly that *“the whole economic situation is worrying, and even more than COVID-19. Everything is super expensive. Our savings have lost their value due to the rise of the rate of the USD with respect to the LBP.”* Price increases and loss of purchasing power due to inflation in Lebanon is strongly felt by the population.

Food and basic needs including rent and medicine were also recurrently mentioned as a main concern for Lebanese residents. Another **Lebanese woman** quoted *“Not being able to purchase food considering that there won't be any jobs due to our country's economy and the coronavirus. I'm also afraid that my mom won't be able to get medicines she needs.”* Another **Lebanese man** wrote *“We got evicted from our house because we are unable to pay the rent, and we are also struggling to buy insulin for our diabetic father.”*

Anxiety when thinking about the future and the ability to provide for their family was also strongly reported by both Lebanese and refugees. This **Syrian man** said clearly *“What worries me most is securing a better life and future for my family and to live as many people live without psychological pressure or harassment. At first, it was normal, but after the quarantine, things got worse. There are no job opportunities and prices for rent are increasing. We hope that our landlord doesn't evict us.”*

Conclusions

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and related containment measures, there were already serious concerns over access to food in Lebanon due to the steady inflation in food prices that commenced in the latter months of 2019 triggered by the economic crisis. Furthermore, the economic recession caused large-scale job losses and salary reductions. These impacts were further aggravated by the recent restrictions put in place to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Experiences from around the globe show that measures may continue for months with their social and economic impact continuing to affect the lives of many, including the population of Lebanon.

Widespread disruptions to the livelihoods of populations in Lebanon are already translating into loss of income for many, particularly Lebanese households who depend on already unstable income sources such as casual labour, petty trade, or small businesses. Although people working in restaurants, services, construction and entertainment sectors have been greatly impacted, those working in other sectors (e.g. education and research; health; government) have also been affected with either reduced income or job loss.

Figure 6: What are you currently most worried about?



The web survey found that many groups are becoming increasingly vulnerable to food insecurity. In fact, those who have lost their jobs – either since or prior to the outbreak – have shown to be more distressed than others about not having enough food. Indicative analysis results showed that Lebanese families residing in bordering governorates with Syria, including Akkar, Baalbek and El Nabatiyeh tend to be more worried about food compared to others. This is due to the pre-existing poverty and vulnerability levels. Food security indicators collected in this survey point to specific groups of vulnerable households who require special attention. These include larger families (8 members or more) as well as **those with one or more dependents**, either school aged children (5-14 years), an elderly member (60+ years), a person with chronic disease or a permanent disability. In addition, families in which the **head of household is currently unemployed** have also shown to be compromising their food consumption and applying severe coping strategies more than those with a working chief of family.

Across all assessed groups, Syrian refugees tend to be more concerned about not having enough food to eat and applying food-based and livelihood-based coping strategies to meet their essential needs. Palestinian refugees and Lebanese populations follow. This can be explained by their establishment in the country, as most Syrian refugees arrived in country over the last nine years, while Palestinian refugees have been residing in Lebanon for decades. Syrian refugees continue to look for better opportunities and live abroad. An increase of the proportion of respondents who plan to seek refuge in a third country was observed, with less wanting to move back to war torn Syria.

Recommendations

With some people reducing their consumption or skipping meals, food needs should be addressed immediately, and assistance expanded to those in need currently not receiving any form of assistance. At the same time, financial assistance and other resource transfers to vulnerable populations should be expanded along the lines of plans and actions already underway to mitigate impact on households' livelihoods. Notably:

- It is essential to mitigate the disruptions to livelihoods and cushion the financial blow, by supporting the government in strengthening national social safety net systems.
- The international community should support Lebanon to stimulate local food production to meet future demand and ensure trade and supply chains remain open and functional.
- Important differences were noted at the regional level between responses from women and men from Lebanon, with more women experiencing an impact on their income. Underlying gender issues throughout Lebanon need to be considered and further analysed.
- Nutrition surveys should be envisaged and planned in the medium-term to detect any malnutrition amongst all population cohorts.

As the situation in Lebanon continues to be extremely volatile and the number of vulnerable people is expected to significantly grow by the end of 2020, it is recommended to continue monitoring the situation of all cohorts and affected communities over time. Concerns are likely to change as new economic and political dynamics emerge and uncertainties around COVID-19 persist. Ongoing phone-based monitoring activities and recently completed assessments conducted by partners including CAS, DRC, ILO or UNHCR are necessary and will allow for ground-truthing of the web-survey results, while fine-tuning more detailed characteristics of groups to be targeted for assistance. In turn, this information will continue to support efforts of the Government of Lebanon, as well as of WFP and partners, in strategic planning and targeting to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected.

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