



Photo: WFP/Edmond Khoury



World Food Programme

SAVING
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LIVES

School Meals Programme

WFP's school meals programme acts as a safety net for vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee children and their families

Only 30 percent of Lebanese school-aged children attend public schools, and more than half of the refugee children are unable to pursue their primary education due to economic hardships. **WFP's intervention through the school feeding programme aims to address the critical issue of limited primary education for Lebanese and Syrian children while preventing short-term hunger and improving children's food consumption.**

For this, WFP partnered with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) in 2016 to develop a school snacks programme with three components: the provision of nutritious daily school snacks, nutrition education, and health and nutrition summer camps.

However, due to prolonged school closures starting 2020 and throughout the whole 2020-2021 academic year, the school meals programme quickly adapted to meet the growing food needs of the most vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian families.

TAKE-HOME RATIONS: ADAPTING TO COVID-19

Instead of school snacks, WFP provided in-kind food parcels to the families of children attending public schools to help mitigate the impact of Covid-19 and the economic crisis and to maintain families' links with schools and encourage them to keep their children enrolled.

Through the distribution of take-home rations, WFP ensures that students as well as their families continue to receive WFP assistance in light of the depreciation of the local currency and increase in food prices. By mid-2021, WFP was able to expand assistance to reach 134,000 beneficiaries through food parcels which covered 40 percent of the monthly needs of a family of five. Parcels are distributed on a monthly basis and consist of 30 kg of dry food (rice, pasta, burghul, lentils, beans, oil, sugar, and salt).

Given that the assistance modality was adjusted following school closures, monitoring of the main outcome under this activity (retention and drop-out rates) was not possible. Instead, rigorous process monitoring for distributions was conducted through on-site visits and post-distribution phone calls to ensure that households received assistance in a safe and dignified manner and to evaluate their satisfaction and feedback.

As Lebanon continues to face multiple crises with heavy repercussions on education and security, the distribution of take-home rations will continue till the end of the school year 2020-2021 and while many schools remain closed, operate for condensed hours with no breaks, or use a blended learning approach.. WFP will continue to work with MEHE on adapting programmes and expanding support to vulnerable students and their families.



Hanan and her daughters are picking thyme leaves to sell them to local tradesmen. Photo: WFP/Hassan Nouredine

THE SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMME IN THE UPCOMING 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR

In coordination with MEHE and cooperating partners, WFP is planning to provide school snacks to 71,000 Lebanese and Syrian refugee students in 115 primary schools across Lebanon.

Participating schools are located in vulnerable communities across the country and typically offer the double-shift system. The morning shift primarily enrolls Lebanese students while the afternoon shift is designed to accommodate Syrian students. By targeting both vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian children, the programme promotes a healthy school environment for all communities.

Fresh, nutritious, and locally-produced snacks every day

The composition of the snack package aims to address dietary diversity and the double burden of malnutrition among targeted students. In addition, parents are relieved from budgeting for their children's lunches, freeing up much-needed financial resources to help meet other needs.



School Kitchens



In 6 pilot school kitchens, volunteer mothers prepare cold sandwiches made with local products for the students, who also receive a piece of fruit or vegetable.

To ensure the effectiveness of the programme, the snack distributions are monitored by WFP's partners in collaboration with school health educators, while a third-party company regularly monitors partners' warehouses and end-products to ensure food safety and quality.

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Hanan opens the large cotton bag and the scent of thyme fills the air. This is a scent that would take most Lebanese back to their childhood; homemade breakfast, family and simply...home! In this house, however, the smell of thyme carries a different meaning. Hanan collects and picks the culinary herb herself and sells it to a local tradesman for a modest amount per kg — barely enough to cover her family's needs.

The mother of six lives with her family in the farthest district in the North of Lebanon, Akkar. Like many in that area, Hanan and her family were struggling to make ends meet as rural and marginalized Akkar offered few opportunities. Lockdown measures following the spread of the coronavirus and the ongoing economic crisis only made things worse for the family.

"My husband had a hip injury a couple of months ago and our living conditions have deteriorated quickly since then," says Hanan. "My son is in the army, but his paycheck is barely sufficient to support him alone."

Hanan's children attend a public school in the northern district of Akkar where the WFP's school snack programme had been running prior to the closure of schools due to the coronavirus. After that, Hanan's family received WFP food packages to cover their needs.

"We are grateful for the food parcel that is being distributed in our children's school. Without this support, we would not be able to have proper food for a whole month," Hanan explains as she takes out bags of pasta, rice and sugar from her kitchen cabinet. These are some of the essential food items contained in the WFP food box along with salt, oil, and lentils.

MORE THAN JUST A SCHOOL SNACK

Whether assistance is delivered through the provision of school snacks or the distribution of take-home rations, WFP's school meals programme acts as a safety net for vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee children. As students are provided with their nutritional needs on a regular basis, families will have the incentive to enrol and keep their children in school, while hindering their chances of engaging in child labour, early marriage, and other activities that would affect their mental and physical development. School snacks can also contribute to improved food consumption through daily dietary diversity and to overall educational outcomes by increasing students' ability to concentrate at school.

At the start of 2020, there was almost an equal number of boys and girls participating in WFP's school feeding programme with similar retention and drop-out rates between the two, while overall retention rates for the morning shift was nearly 100% and 94% for the afternoon shift.

Through school snacks, WFP aims to support children to have better health and nutrition, allowing them to perform better and broaden their educational and future opportunities.

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