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Report on the field visit of the WFP Executive Board

Acknowledgements

The Executive Board Member States whose representatives participated in the field visit to Turkey and Lebanon would like to express their appreciation and gratitude to the WFP Secretariat and the WFP country teams in the two countries for their efficient planning and coordination in providing an opportunity to gain a holistic, first-hand overview of the situation in each country.

Members would also like to thank the governments of Turkey and Lebanon for hosting the visit, local partners and institutions working with WFP in each country and the WFP staff in the two countries for their hard work and dedication.

Introduction

1. From 21 to 27 October 2018 a team of 12 representatives of Executive Board Member States visited two countries that are supporting refugees who have fled from the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic: Turkey and Lebanon. The aims of the visit were to see WFP's work in supporting refugees affected by the crisis, and the communities that kindly host them; observe the policies, procedures and structures put in place for supporting refugee operations; learn about the implementation of WFP policies, strategies and programmes in the field and the modalities of programme delivery, including support for national safety net programming and innovative programming for cash-based transfer activities and livelihood projects; assess the steps taken in preparation of a national zero hunger strategic review and an interim country strategic plan in Turkey and progress towards the goals of the Lebanon country strategic plan for 2018–2020 (approved by the Board at its 2017 annual session); acquire insights into the challenges faced by the beneficiaries of refugee operations, host communities and the individuals and organizations responsible for

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carrying out activities; and observe WFP as a member of United Nations country teams and a partner of other stakeholders.

2. The visit provided an excellent and unique opportunity to assess and learn more about WFP's activities and results at the regional and country levels in both countries. The thematic focus of the visit was support for Syrian refugees, but participants also had the opportunity to be briefed on the support for host communities as well.
3. This report outlines the Board team's findings, highlighting opportunities and challenges related to supporting refugees and host communities

Background

4. The field visit began in Ankara, where Board representatives met Syrian refugees, representatives of the Turkish Red Crescent, government officials, the United Nations country team and representatives of cooperating partners, including the social assistance and solidarity foundation and the financial services provider Halkbank, a commercial bank that delivers cash to beneficiaries through its ATM network as part of the e-voucher programme. The team also met the European Union representatives supporting the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) programme for refugees. During this first part of the visit, the participants had a chance to meet stakeholders and WFP partners involved in implementation of the ESSN programme, including representatives of the Turkish Government, local civil society and the private sector. This was an opportunity to get different perspectives on the effectiveness and scope of the programme and understand how it works in practice.
5. In Lebanon, the visit began in Beirut where Board members met representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), both partners of WFP. They witnessed biometric registration of refugees conducted with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and digital skills training delivered by the American University of Beirut. Board representatives spoke with refugees in the informal tented settlements and with cooperating partners operating the Dalili e-card application at local supermarkets. They also witnessed the distribution of school snacks by International Orthodox Christian Charities and visited a cedar tree reserve in the Beka'a valley that supports livelihood activities.

Syrian refugees

6. The participating Board representatives appreciated the efforts of the Turkish and Lebanese authorities in providing a practical response for Syrian refugees, noting that the position of the two governments was that the final objective should be the safe return of refugees to their homes. Participants also noted that most refugees would be ready to return once conditions were favourable in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Recommendation

7. WFP should continue providing humanitarian and development assistance to Syrian refugees and facilitating all other efforts to foster favourable conditions for their return, including activities aimed at creating infrastructure, jobs and safe access to food, water, health, education and social activities in the Syrian Arab Republic.
8. All the Syrian refugees with whom the participants spoke in Turkey and Lebanon unanimously excluded a return to the Syrian Arab Republic while their personal safety and physical integrity remained at risk. They all mentioned a fear of acts of revenge on the part of Syrian Government authorities, compulsory service in the Syrian army, abductions of male family members, torture and extrajudicial killings. Women and girls in particular were

absolutely clear that under current conditions, they did not see a return to the Syrian Arab Republic as a realistic option.

Recommendation

9. WFP and the international donor community should be prepared to continue providing humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees in host countries until conditions are conducive to a safe return to the Syrian Arab Republic, particularly with regards to the personal safety of refugees.

Inter-agency cooperation

10. The team noted with satisfaction the visible and substantive collaboration among the WFP country offices, the governments of Turkey and Lebanon, the United Nations country teams, including UNICEF and UNHCR, Red Crescent societies and other cooperating partners. They also observed that the WFP country team in the Syrian Arab Republic is working closely with the country's Government.

Recommendation

11. There is a need to seek greater coherence and partnerships with other international organizations and donors operating in the region in order to continue providing targeted assistance to refugees in need and to implement more projects in accordance with the respective mandates of the organizations and their comparative advantages. It is also important that WFP and other United Nations agencies increase their activities in the Syrian Arab Republic in cooperation with relevant local authorities.

Recommendation

12. While noting with satisfaction the excellent collaboration among the WFP country offices, the host governments in Turkey and Lebanon and the United Nations country teams, the Board representatives saw the need for a more continuous physical presence of international agencies in every formal and informal tented settlement of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Such a presence could take the form of a joint focal point providing individual protection in the event of a medical or other emergency. The international agencies on the ground should coordinate among themselves, perhaps taking turns to provide representatives for sessions of, for example, two or three hours twice a week in an office in every camp, where camp residents could go if they have individual problems.
13. In addition, the existing coordination mechanisms of inter-agency cooperation should include a joint assessment of "who does what best" and "how to maximize possible synergies" for every phase of a project, wherever the various agencies collaborate.

WFP projects in Turkey and Lebanon

Recommendation

14. **Turkey:** The participants view the expansion of the ESSN database to cover more resilience-oriented areas of work as an area where WFP's unique experience with ESSN, strong collaboration with Turkish partners and proven monitoring capacities and human resources can be of great value.
15. **Lebanon:** The digital skills learning project is open to young Lebanese and Syrian people. Given the high unemployment rate among young Lebanese people and the enormous risk of a lost generation among young Syrian refugees, the project is of potentially strategic importance as it seeks to enhance participants' computer and English skills, giving them access to immediate online income opportunities with international information technology (IT) companies without burdening the local Lebanese labour market. In order to reach its full potential, the project should be rolled out nationwide. In addition, there is need for a

more flexible approach from the host Government regarding the provision of work permits for young Syrian refugees seeking online work with international IT companies outside Lebanon and regarding permission for Syrians to open bank accounts in Lebanon.

Partnerships

16. **The crucial role of partnerships in WFP's work should be better described and emphasized in Executive Board documents and discussions.** In Lebanon Board representatives had the opportunity to see inter-agency work on the ground in a refugee validation centre and to value the contribution to programme implementation made by local NGOs that are very close to local communities.
17. **Partnerships with local NGOs and civil society are an asset for WFP but can also pose risks.** Strong due diligence processes must be in place in order to prevent and manage these risks. WFP could consider establishing a policy for engagement with local NGOs and civil society as part of implementation of its enterprise risk management policy.
18. In Turkey Board representatives took part in various discussions about the European Union's provision of funding for Syrian refugees in Turkey through the European Union Facility for Refugees in Turkey, with particular focus on the European Union's request to WFP that it lower its indirect support cost rate. The Board representatives explained that the rate had been agreed by the WFP Executive Board and that the Board was not willing to revisit the issue because a reduced indirect support cost rate had already been approved in 2017. Discussions are still ongoing and the whole Executive Board should be informed about them.
19. Turkey is home to the highest number of Syrian refugees and the response provided there is different from that in most other countries. The Board representatives met Syrian refugee families in rented apartments, and while their living conditions appeared better than those seen in camps, the families spoke of their struggles in finding employment. The situation of children seemed better, with educational opportunities for Syrian pupils in the Turkish school system.
20. According to UNHCR figures, refugees constitute 30 percent of the population in Lebanon. The Board representatives visited families living in informal settlements in the Beka'a valley and noticed that the services (including referrals to other entities not part of a formal camp system) provided were far from sufficient, including the health and psycho-social support needed by people who are severely traumatized. WFP's cash programme is very innovative and aims to support the food security and nutrition needs of refugees, but greater outreach is needed in order to provide safe access: the Board representatives spoke with women who were scared to leave the settlement or even their own shelters and were therefore unable to reach the closest WFP grocery store.

Programming

Programming for promoting livelihoods and social cohesion

21. The promotion of livelihoods and social cohesion is of fundamental importance in building the resilience of Syrian refugees and facilitating their return to the Syrian Arab Republic. The Board representatives observed how WFP cooperated with communities in helping beneficiaries become more self-reliant by improving their skills and competencies, which in turn increased their job opportunities either in host countries or after their return home. These efforts also have the potential to enhance social cohesion between Syrian and host communities.

22. In Turkey, the Board representatives visited a community centre run by the Turkish Red Crescent, a cooperating partner of the WFP country office and national agencies. The centre provides support to beneficiaries of all ages living in urban areas through capacity building activities and services such as language skills and vocational training. The Board representatives observed that the Turkish Red Crescent had created a safe and friendly space for Syrian families and children to learn basic skills for a healthy life. Women beneficiaries reported that the programme gave them the opportunity to work and that they found the authorities and their new neighbours to be very helpful and welcoming, treating them like guests.
23. In Lebanon, the Board representatives visited the digital skills livelihood programme, run with cooperating partner the American University of Beirut. The programme offers mixed gender classes for Syrians and Lebanese people aged between 18 and 30 years and covers basic to advanced digital skills. A certification awarded at the end of the training adds value to the employment profile of the students and presents the possibility of pursuing a higher academic degree. The Board representatives also had the opportunity to meet students who had been granted scholarships to study at universities in the host country and abroad.
24. WFP livelihood programmes were, however, not yet accessible to all beneficiaries. The Board representatives learned that two key factors – individual perceptions and legal residency – influenced the resilience of livelihoods and social cohesion, which consequently affected the success of the programme. While visiting beneficiary households in Turkey and in the informal tented settlements in Lebanon, the team witnessed the demeaning living conditions and poor health conditions of many refugees. In Ankara, the head of a family with five children reported that he did not feel safe in allowing his children to play outside because of incidences of kidnapping in the area. He did not socialize much and he prevented his wives and children from joining assistance programmes or community events. As he had deserted from the army, he had no interest in returning to the Syrian Arab Republic but hoped to move to a country in Europe. In Lebanon, two families reported that after leaving the Syrian Arab Republic they had suffered traumatic health problems (diabetes, a nerve disorder and kidney stones) that required hospital care. The families had no residency documents because the process of obtaining them was very expensive and the documents had to be renewed annually. Without legal residency, it is very difficult to obtain a work permit and access to hospitals and assistance services outside the camp is limited. Consequently, these families were highly dependent on the cash assistance provided by WFP and other agencies. Some beneficiaries expressed concern that they would not survive if the cash assistance from WFP and support from other United Nations agencies were suspended, because they had no other means of supporting their families.

Recommendation

25. It is clear that the collaboration between WFP and the host governments and the joint coordination on ground among the country offices of WFP and other agencies must continue and be more frequent in order to meet the basic and urgent needs of the most vulnerable people and to leave no one behind.

Future programming

Partnership with the Rome-based agencies and others: Transitioning towards development and fostering cooperation

26. It was clear from the field visit that while the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic remains uncertain, refugees will inevitably prolong their stay in host countries. However, the continuity of financial support from WFP and other United Nations agencies is not guaranteed. Short-term humanitarian assistance may not be sufficient and further collaboration on mid- and long-term development plans is needed. Collaboration among the Rome-based agencies and with other United Nations agencies could complement the extension of WFP's humanitarian programme and the transition of its work towards development.
27. One Board representative suggested that the presence of a resilience office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the large network of United Nations agencies in Lebanon indicated an opportunity for strengthening collaboration in accordance with the expertise of each agency in order to reduce the dependency and build the self-reliance of beneficiaries. Despite the challenges related to land access and landownership for refugees in host countries, two examples confirmed the possibility of overcoming these hurdles: the vegetables grown in tiny areas of beneficiaries' dwellings and the success of an UNHCR gardening initiative called "Seeds of Hope", run in a refugee camp in Iraq.

Recommendation

28. Growing plants had two important roles, as a food source and as a source of psychological well-being. This could become one of the efforts for complementing a future development plan in the host countries.