**GNC Stories from the Field: Lebanon case study **

**Establishing a dedicated nutrition sector in Lebanon: Response to triple threat from Beirut blast, COVID-19 and deepening economic crisis**

The explosion at the Port of Beirut in Lebanon on 4 August 2020 caused widespread damage across the city, with initial reports of more than 170 people killed, 6,500 people injured, and more than 150 people missing. Early estimates were that the explosion had left more than 300,000 people with no shelter in the Greater Beirut Area.

Lebanon has been dealing with a huge refugee crisis for decades, with current Government estimates of 1.5 million Syrian refugees in the country. To respond to this, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) was established under the leadership of UNHCR and UNDP, with sectors informally activated to ensure a coordinated humanitarian response. However, prior to 2020, maternal and child nutrition had not been identified as a critical priority in Lebanon, therefore the nutrition response was mainstreamed in the health and food security sectors under the LCRP. The loss of livelihoods compounded by the current COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the financial and economic crisis in the country, has created an urgent need for continued assistance in terms of food, nutrition and health.

**Rise in poverty levels**

Lebanon is facing the most devastating socio-economic crisis in its recent history. The economic and financial crisis, accelerating since the end of 2019, has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut Port explosions. The economy continues to suffer from a critical foreign currency shortage. As a result, the Lebanese pound has severely depreciated, losing more than 80 percent of its value by January 2021. Inflation has been in the triple digits, reaching 133 percent (year-over year) in November 2020, with food prices increasing by a staggering 423%. Between August 2019 and August 2020, the price of food and non-alcoholic beverages increased by 367 per cent; the cost of the survival minimum expenditure basket (SMEB) increased by 183 per cent between October 2019 and December 2020.[[1]](https://euc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en%2DUS&rs=en%2DZA&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Funicef.sharepoint.com%2Fteams%2FEMOPS-GCCU%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2Fe9f0143807d644129617c77eaa2229c3&wdlor=c4846BB9B-00D8-474F-B397-12012C78C640&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=AA59C99F-B0E0-2000-D920-B848AA1BB930&wdorigin=Outlook-Body&wdhostclicktime=1621407683540&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v1&newsession=1&corrid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&usid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&sftc=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush&rct=Medium&ctp=LeastProtected#_ftn1) In parallel, the poverty rate rose from 28 per cent in 2019 to 55 per cent in 2020 and an estimated 1.1 million Lebanese are now extremely poor.[[2]](https://euc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en%2DUS&rs=en%2DZA&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Funicef.sharepoint.com%2Fteams%2FEMOPS-GCCU%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2Fe9f0143807d644129617c77eaa2229c3&wdlor=c4846BB9B-00D8-474F-B397-12012C78C640&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=AA59C99F-B0E0-2000-D920-B848AA1BB930&wdorigin=Outlook-Body&wdhostclicktime=1621407683540&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v1&newsession=1&corrid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&usid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&sftc=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush&rct=Medium&ctp=LeastProtected#_ftn2) Virtually all the Syrian refugees are living in poverty. This has led to limited access to purchase and consume safe, age-appropriate and nutritionally balanced diets, particularly among the ultra-poor and marginalized households with families continuously adopting negative food-based coping mechanisms which further compromises the dietary intake.[[3]](https://euc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en%2DUS&rs=en%2DZA&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Funicef.sharepoint.com%2Fteams%2FEMOPS-GCCU%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2Fe9f0143807d644129617c77eaa2229c3&wdlor=c4846BB9B-00D8-474F-B397-12012C78C640&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=AA59C99F-B0E0-2000-D920-B848AA1BB930&wdorigin=Outlook-Body&wdhostclicktime=1621407683540&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v1&newsession=1&corrid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&usid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&sftc=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush&rct=Medium&ctp=LeastProtected#_ftn3)

**Request for GNC support**

August’s explosion looked set to compound existing threats to the nutritional status of vulnerable populations in the country caused by the dramatic increase in food prices and the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in 2020. The Lebanon UNICEF country office played a vital role in advocating for a stand-alone nutrition sector coordination mechanism, and for the recruitment of staff to support this. The response request to the GNC was for remote deployment of a Nutrition Sector Coordinator (Faith Nzioka) to secure a platform from which to coordinate, harmonize and implement nutrition activities. Initial deployment was approved for eight weeks; however, an extension was granted for four weeks, and the deployment for the Nutrition Sector Coordinator ended on 23 November 2020.

One of the main challenges in Lebanon is significant data assessment gaps, with no up-to-date data available on acute and chronic malnutrition (the latest MICS survey is from 2009). A second GNC deployment request was for a Nutrition Information Management Officer (Shabib Alqobati) to provide information management (IM) support for key humanitarian IM products, including a nutrition situation analysis and calculation of nutrition targets.

**Key achievements**

The creation of the Nutrition Taskforce (NTF) provided a forum for partners to highlight and discuss operational challenges and provide learning among the coordination partnership. Two other groups were also crucial in supporting operations: the Assessment and Information Management working group, chaired by Save the Children; and the Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) Committee, chaired by the Ministry of Public Health (Mother, Child and School Unit). The GNC coordination deployment supported a number of IYCF initiatives, including a capacity building plan, BMS violation tool and hotline database, mapping lactation specialists and an advocacy note on Baby Mother separation in context of COVID 19. IM support focused on collecting information for key humanitarian IM products, to inform the nutrition situation analysis and calculation of nutrition sector targets such as People in Need (PiN).

**Transition to stand-alone nutrition sector**

Through advocacy efforts to make the case for nutrition and the achievements of the NTF, facilitated by the GNC-CT, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) agreed to establish nutrition as a stand-alone sector on 20 November 2020 under the Emergency Operation Cell (EoC) led by UN OCHA. This move recognises the crucial role of nutrition in a multi-sectoral response to address pre-existing and emerging needs.

In April 2021, UNICEF recruited a dedicated Nutrition Sector Coordinator (Abigael Nyukuri) who assumes the full responsibilities of a Nutrition Cluster Coordinator (NCC), based on the six Core Cluster functions as well as accountability to affected populations. This role is complemented by a Co-Chair from Action Against Hunger (ACF) Spain, a position that is transitioning to fully (100 per cent) support to the sector and reporting to the NCC.

**Developing a Nutrition in Emergencies (NiE) response plan**

The Nutrition Sector, through a consultative process and with support from the GNC, has developed the first draft of a 6-month NiE response plan to address critical gaps in the nutrition response and to complement existing plans. As nutrition is an emerging area of public health in Lebanon, the plan has a strong capacity building component for both MoPH and sector partners to ensure delivery of quality services at scale.

Following the Beirut blast and the destruction of the port and grain silos, the country witnessed a surge of in-kind donations, with some focusing on breast-milk substitutes, therapeutic foods and commercial complementary foods. Not all donations were provided with relevant coordination mechanisms or following correct needs assessments and international standards, which has compromised breastfeeding and complementary feeding, thereby increasing health risks to vulnerable children. Despite the presence of a national Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) policy and legislation on the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, field reports are still showing the occurrence of actions that undermine IYCF. To address this, the nutrition sector is working closely with MoPH and the IYCF Technical Committee to include a legal framework against violators of the code.

**Next steps**

The sector is also in the process of undertaking a SMART Survey, to address current data gaps and provide evidence to inform the current scale and scope of needs. The results of the SMART Survey will further feed into the emergency nutrition response plan.

As all the determinants of malnutrition are on the rise in Lebanon, the sector is also in the process of developing a contingency plan based on agreed scenarios, in close collaboration with other sectors and under the overall leadership of the HCT.

**References**

[[1]](https://euc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en%2DUS&rs=en%2DZA&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Funicef.sharepoint.com%2Fteams%2FEMOPS-GCCU%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2Fe9f0143807d644129617c77eaa2229c3&wdlor=c4846BB9B-00D8-474F-B397-12012C78C640&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=AA59C99F-B0E0-2000-D920-B848AA1BB930&wdorigin=Outlook-Body&wdhostclicktime=1621407683540&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v1&newsession=1&corrid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&usid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&sftc=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush&rct=Medium&ctp=LeastProtected#_ftnref1) WFP (December 2020) VAM Update on Food Price and Market Trends

[[2]](https://euc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en%2DUS&rs=en%2DZA&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Funicef.sharepoint.com%2Fteams%2FEMOPS-GCCU%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2Fe9f0143807d644129617c77eaa2229c3&wdlor=c4846BB9B-00D8-474F-B397-12012C78C640&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=AA59C99F-B0E0-2000-D920-B848AA1BB930&wdorigin=Outlook-Body&wdhostclicktime=1621407683540&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v1&newsession=1&corrid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&usid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&sftc=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush&rct=Medium&ctp=LeastProtected#_ftnref2) ESCWA (2020) Poverty in Lebanon: Solidarity is vital to address the impact of multiple overlapping shocks. August 2020

[[3]](https://euc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en%2DUS&rs=en%2DZA&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Funicef.sharepoint.com%2Fteams%2FEMOPS-GCCU%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2Fe9f0143807d644129617c77eaa2229c3&wdlor=c4846BB9B-00D8-474F-B397-12012C78C640&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=AA59C99F-B0E0-2000-D920-B848AA1BB930&wdorigin=Outlook-Body&wdhostclicktime=1621407683540&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v1&newsession=1&corrid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&usid=35b9a0c2-36f4-42f7-bbc2-02cc483312c9&sftc=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush&rct=Medium&ctp=LeastProtected#_ftnref3) IOCC (2020) IYCF Rapid Assessment. July, August and September 2020