

## Final Report – USHAGRAM - October to November 2021

« Renforcement des conditions socio-économiques des femmes Syriennes et Libanaises vulnérables de la Bekaa à travers des formations professionnelles et une aide à l'insertion économique »



### 1. Key project features

**Title:** « Renforcement des conditions socio-économiques des femmes Syriennes et Libanaises vulnérables de la Bekaa à travers des formations professionnelles et une aide à l'insertion économique »

**Timeline:** The project was implemented between October 2021 and November 2021

**Funding organization:** Association Ushagram Suisse

### 2. Problem Statement, Needs analysis, Description of target populations

For the past couple of years, Lebanon has been facing one of the most severe economic and financial crises globally since the mid-nineteenth century. Since 2011, the country has been home to more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees and their displacement has aggravated the repeated shocks on Lebanon's health, governance, and financial systems. End of 2019, Lebanon has rushed into an economic crisis after a fast cut in the capital inflows which triggered failures in the banking sectors, debts, and the exchange rate. The Lebanese pound has rapidly depreciated which resulted in major price increases pushing more than half of the country's population below the poverty line<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, to poverty, unemployment is on the rise. As the Lebanese lira continues to lose its value, the country has experienced a drastic collapse in basic needs and services and with depleted foreign exchange reserves, subsidies were removed on food, medication, and fuel. This has led to a terrible fuel shortage leaving the country in complete darkness and long queues at the petrol stations.

Since March 2020, the country has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 health crisis, which exacerbated the fragility of already-vulnerable people, and further slowed the economy. The chain of circumstances that hit Lebanon reached its peak on Tuesday, 4th of August 2020 when a fire in one of the Beirut port warehouses caused two explosions, the second massive. The Blast hit Beirut killing more than 200 people, leaving more than 6,000 injured, and displacing more than 300,000 people.

The Lebanese population is living in this vicious cycle struggling every day to accommodate their basic needs like nutritional food, shelter, schooling fees, basic health needs, etc. arcenciel has a clear aim to

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<sup>1</sup> *The World Bank in Lebanon- Overview, October 2021*



# RELEX Report

Ref #

RLX-SOP011-A001

Revision  
Date

19/11/2021

improve the living conditions of these vulnerable people; refugee populations and their host communities alike, based on the continuation of the activities arcenciel implement since its establishment.

This specific operation was designed following our Social Program strategy and is implemented since 2016 with the contribution of many donors. Our goal is to provide vulnerable Syrian and Lebanese women in the Bekaa area with vocational training and economic integration assistance to strengthen their resilience and give them opportunities to build a better life for themselves and their families.

This final report is meant to provide Ushagram with an updated narrative description of the work that was undertaken on behalf of the extended grant awarded to arcenciel that was implemented from October 2021 to November 2021

### 3. Project Context

This current “Ushagram project for Training of Women” took place in the Agnes Varis Training Center for Women that was established within arcenciel’s Khan El Maqsoud Restaurant in 2016. arcenciel and Ushagram’s partnership is meeting again to produce the vision of this project a third time; a manifestation of the success of the first and second year, and proof of the need for such projects to be implemented at these times.

These women, the beneficiaries of the project, are in real need of acquiring the skills that will help them enhance their opportunities in finding a job or in launching their small businesses. It’s those vulnerable Lebanese and refugees who face the worst repercussions of such economic crises, and livelihood projects, like this one, relieve these communities of the carried burden in the quest of looking after their families.

### 4. Project Description

#### *Outreach and assessment*

arcenciel’s Social Program adopts the “Community Based Rehabilitation” (CBR) concept where our social workers reach out to vulnerable and marginalized families through the field and door-to-door visits. They identify their needs and assess how arcenciel can serve them. Once this information is databased, beneficiaries are identified and selected for the appropriate projects that would fulfill their needs.

For this project, the quality training provided at the Khan restaurant and the shared feedback from former beneficiaries with their community has helped in selecting women when they approach arcenciel intending to integrate into a similar training. Our social workers in Taanayel identified the women from refugee and host communities who fit the criteria for this project. Before the project’s inception, they assessed the beneficiaries’ interest in the project, motivation, and commitment to follow the project’s guidelines and framework.

In this round of the project, the beneficiaries consisted of a group of 10 women: seven Lebanese and three Syrians. Their ages ranged from 38 to 54, all of them were married women. The beneficiaries came from regions around the Taanayel area. All of the women concluded and graduated from their training session in November 2021

#### *Training Sessions’ Content*

The culinary training of women takes place in the Agnes Varis Training Center in arcenciel’s Taanayel center. It targets 10 women from regions within Central Bekaa. The women are seeking opportunities to better their socio-economic conditions within their households. The training is a 100 hour-course that lasts for one full month. Participants received daily training from 9 AM till 3 PM, five days a week.

Around 20% of the training is theoretical; where the participants attend sessions in the adjacent Khan El Maqsoud restaurant on food safety and hygienic standards in the culinary industry.

Theoretical part of the training



The majority of the training, the other 80%, is practical; where participants go to the kitchen/the training center and learn – hands-on – how to prepare *mouneh* (Lebanese conserved food), how to cook meat and poultry-based dishes, how to process food and dry fruits among other culinary skills.



## 5. Challenges – problems encountered

Lebanon is facing a major economic issue: the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound and in parallel, new banking restrictions, including a strong limitation of the amounts available for withdrawal. These new banking rules have resulted in economic difficulties for the payment of foreign and local suppliers, in a context where Lebanon is an importer of most of its goods from abroad. Thus, to overcome these banking obstacles and the devaluation of the Lebanese pound, local suppliers have increased the prices of their products and services, applying the exchange rate of the parallel market.

The country is also suffering from a fuel crisis, where the price of gas and other fuels rose by around 18%<sup>2</sup>. At the end of October, the subsidies were lifted causing a spike increase in fuel prices, a tank of petrol now costs more than the country's monthly minimum wage. This has limited transportation availability where transportation costs increased by 31%<sup>3</sup>.

arcenciel's Job Placement Office has been noticing a significant and worrying decrease in the job offers available for these women as the pandemic and economic crisis have brought restaurants and touristic industries on their knees. arcenciel's team noted that it wouldn't be possible to find suitable employment for these women. arcenciel's team, nonetheless, is putting all its efforts to help the women equip themselves to start their activities from home and potentially sell their products in the Beit El Mouzareh weekly market.



Beit El Mouzareh, Farmer's Market in Taanayel-Beqaa

## 6. Good practices and key lessons learned

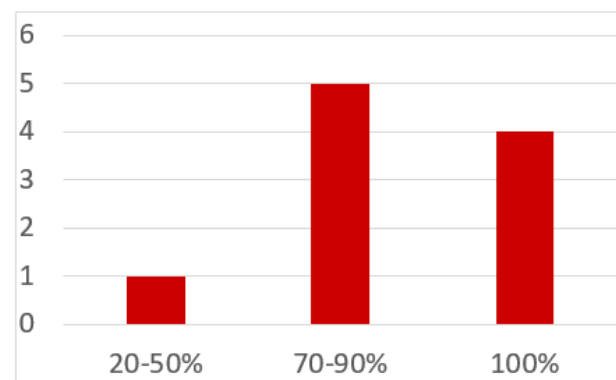
Since the beginning of this project in 2016, arcenciel team is constantly looking to improve its process by capitalizing on our acquired experiences and feedbacks. We checked the quality of our training sessions through pre and post-surveys filled by the beneficiaries which gave us precise feedbacks on our activities.

### Knowledge:

Initially, almost all participants indicated that they have basic to little knowledge about the subject. The women later expressed that the training provided them with new information skills such as time management, and it improved their hands-on experiences. Some women also mentioned that the training created them an opportunity to work with women of other nationalities.

### Job Opportunities:

Besides one, all of the participating women were unemployed, full-time stay-at-home parents. After the course, all the beneficiaries mentioned that they feel more prepared now to work despite a few who have mentioned the need for more training. Based on the skills they had received at the end of the course; all women are willing to



<sup>2</sup> Economist Intelligence- Lebanon, November 9, 2021

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

put their training into practice and they are more confident in getting work opportunities in the coming 6 months.

*Percentage of getting work opportunities in the coming 6 months according to the participants*

### Women empowerment

In the pre-survey, most participants expressed that they do not feel supported by their family or anyone around, and only two women felt that they had their spouse's support. After the course, the women expressed a higher self-confidence and have found a new role besides taking care of their family. The women also conveyed in the post-survey that they now feel more supported by their surroundings especially by their cohort.

The project showed that with the right knowledge and training, women can acquire new skills that can empower them and promote self-reliance. The project also offered a safe space for the women to share, speak, and be heard which created a supportive community of women empowering other women. This in return has improved participants' mental well-being and personal development.

### 7. Project Sustainability

At the end of the course, all the women received a certificate of completion which can increase their credibility and trustworthiness when starting their own businesses. The women also received a 1,00,000 LBP to help them start their own women empowerment projects.

It is worth mentioning that based on previous years' experience, the majority of the women who graduated from the Agnes Varis Training Center established their small businesses at home. Since most women have duties and responsibilities towards their household members, working from home seems to be the best option to produce, sell and contribute to their family's income without commuting. Women living either in informal settlements or in tight Lebanese communities in the region rely heavily on word of mouth to spread news regarding their homemade products especially after consumers know that these women have received their training from arcenciel, a well-known organization in the region.

Furthermore, arcenciel helps those women promote and sell their products, mainly the *mouneh* ones, in its seasonal farmers' market "Beit El Mouzareh". It is a weekly market in the Domaine de Taanayel that arcenciel manages where farmers and women sell their produce and products. The goal of this market is to sell the products directly from the producer to the consumer without the middlemen, hence, producers can sell at affordable prices with maximum profit. arcenciel constantly helps those women to maximize their visibility and opportunities to sell their products. The women are encouraged to take part in other markets located in different areas, not only in the Bekaa but also in Beirut and Mount Lebanon regions.

For women who would prefer working in the hospitality industry, they are databased in arcenciel's Job Placement Office, part of arcenciel's Employment Program. The bureau's officers constantly fetch for appropriate vacancies in the region and work in linking employers to these women.



*Women selling their products at the Beit El Mouzareh- farmer's market*



## 8. Impact story

*Aida Al Ali was born in the town of Qab Elias, Bekaa in 1987. Aida was raised with her six sisters and only one brother. When she was just 2 years old, her father passed away leaving a tremendous void for the family. Her mother was a housekeeper and was able to secure some education for Aida and her siblings.*

*When Aida turned 15 years, she got married. In her first four years of marriage, she gave birth to a girl and a boy. After twenty days from the birth of her third child, the neighborhood woke up to Aida's mournful cry. The baby had a congenital malformation, and his lung was incomplete causing his sudden death. That tragedy, unfortunately, happened again not only once but two times.*

*Aida's mother-in-law pressured for a divorce, beat her, kicked her out of the house, and was prohibited from seeing her children. Aida was accused of losing the family three sons, a big deal in the eastern culture. Despite that, her husband wasn't influenced by his mother's opinion and didn't agree to abandon Aida.*

*Aida then gave birth to a beautiful baby girl who brought so much joy to the family and filled the house with laughter. One day, Aida and her eldest daughter were preparing food, and in a blink of an eye, the three-year-old girl came into the kitchen, grabbed the handle of the frying pan, and the boiling oil accidentally poured on the little one and was instantly dead. The police investigated the case and the accusation pointed to the mother. For five years, Aida's sorrow grew deeper, she couldn't reach any psychological support, and her mental health kept on getting worse; she has lost a father who she didn't know and has lost four children.*

*A few months ago, Aida's neighbor told her about the courses offered by arcenciel. Aida was interested and she signed up for the sessions. After few days, Aida joined other women in a well-equipped kitchen to learn everything about cooking and food safety.*

*Aida says: "This training boosted my self-confidence, made me forget my sadness for a bit. I get to be out of my home kitchen, and this brought me some joy. I will not forget my children and my father, but this session created some light in my darkness. Today, I believe I am stronger, and I can deal better with the outside world. This certificate will help me find a job and become more independent. The money that I have received, I will top it with a small loan to open a shop beside our house, and that way, I can support my husband in contributing to the home expenses, especially during hard times as those."*



## 9. Next steps

arcenciel's team is continuously working on finding further funds to sustain initiatives that create learning opportunities for many marginalized communities and individuals. Through Ushagram's help, we were able to sustain another successful project, and we look forward to more future fruitful collaborations with Ushagram.

arcenciel's team refers beneficiaries to NEF Near East Foundation, an NGO funding micro-projects. NEF's funding of micro-projects works on empowering small initiatives to help sustain the beneficiaries in new business opportunities.

arcenciel is proud of this successful project and strives to allocate funds from its partners and donors to keep serving these vulnerable women in contributing to the betterment of their households' socio-economic status and wellbeing, especially during these rough times.