

Ushagram Suisse

Narrative Report

September 2022- December 2022

"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"

30th of December, 2022



arcenciel.org
participer au développement

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1. Key Project Features

Project 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
Implementing Entity	arcenciel
Start Date	09/2022
End Date	12/2022
Target Beneficiary	40 Beneficiaries 160 indirect Beneficiaries

2. Context Overview

For General and Social

Once an upper middle-income country, Lebanon's economic and financial crisis ranks in the top 10, more likely top 3, most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century¹. The devaluation of the Lebanese Pound has become more acute losing over 90% of its value. A country that is highly dependent on imports has been led to inflation, causing a severe deterioration in purchasing power and leaving more than half of its population below the poverty line. Unemployment is at 29.6% and Youth Unemployment at 47.8% in Lebanon by January 2022. With the continuous lira depreciation, the country has experienced a drastic collapse and has become unable to provide basic needs and services to its residents as it has lost its foreign exchange reserves, and removed subsidies 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 in their peak of August 2021. A recent study showed that Lebanese households are facing continuous challenges in accessing basic needs, where more than 60% of households are resorting to crisis coping strategies such as reducing expenditure on health, education and selling productive assets².

For more than 10 years now, Lebanon remains as the host of the highest number of refugees per capita and per square kilometer in the world, showing stupendous commitment to the refugees within the borders. Since March 2020, the country has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 health crisis, which exacerbated the fragility of already-vulnerable people, refugee populations and their host communities alike, 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 a massive explosion killing more than 200 people, leaving more than 6,000 injured, and displacing more than 300,000 people.

The Ukrainian – Russian conflict hasn't made things any easier for Lebanon. With a hike in prices such as those of oil and gas, the war has a negative impact on the world in general, and the Middle East in particular, specifically fragile countries like Lebanon. Lebanon is not a productive economy, most of the consumer goods are imported. More than 80 percent of wheat was being imported from Ukraine, more than 14 percent imported from Russia and remains a failing state of a broken country, broken government infrastructure, and broken institutions. Destitute and disabled, the government is unable to take strategic action or find substitute markets leading to an increase in basic needs and assistance.

The World Bank has estimated that poverty and extreme poverty rates in Lebanese households during 2020 have reached levels as high as 45 percent and 22 percent, respectively. Precrisis vulnerability assessments by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that around 37 percent of Syrian refugee households are food insecure. In other words, almost one

¹ The World Bank in Lebanon- Overview October 2021

² WFP and World Bank (2021). Lebanon m-VAM Vulnerability and Food Security Assessment, March April 2021

quarter of Lebanese households (those experiencing extreme poverty) and four out of ten Syrian households are likely to skip a meal daily.

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 improve the living conditions of these vulnerable people; refugee populations and their host communities alike, based on the sustainable activities arcenciel is committed to implement.

3. Outreaching Beneficiaries

arcenciel adopts a specific outreach strategy which involves the Community Based Inclusive Development (CBID) approach. CBID is an approach that brings change in the lives of people with disabilities at a community level, working with and through local groups and institutions.

Geographical outreach: arcenciel' CBID officers are deployed to a specific geographical catchment area to establish a well-balanced referral system to identify the beneficiaries' needs and work on meeting them.

Case management approach: CBID officers conduct CBID vulnerability assessment with the beneficiaries by a door to door approach or by the beneficiary visiting arcenciel's centers. The vulnerability assessment is an interview that studies the person's case by including the evaluation of the financial status, familial situations, employment status, disabilities, education, needs assessment not just for the beneficiary but their family as well. In order to follow up with beneficiaries, our social workers conduct home and field visits to ensure that the project/ treatment is taking place up to the standard method and is ongoing. Once such information is databased, beneficiaries are identified and selected for the appropriate projects that would fulfill their needs. And so was the case for this joint project with Ushagram.

For this project, our social workers in Taanayel identified the women; refugees and local who fit the criteria needed for this project. And prior to the project inception, they assess the beneficiaries' interest for the project; motivation and commitment to follow the project's guidelines and framework.

4. Review of Achievements

A. Beneficiaries' Profile

After the women were assessed by arcenciel's social team to have a vulnerability assessment and were asked about their interest of being provided with capacity building in terms of food safety and hygiene.

40 women participated in the third consecutive year of the execution of the Ushagram project. 40 women were divided over 3 groups. 13 to 14 women in each group.

Below is the desegregation by age and nationality of the participating women:

Age per group		
18 to 25	26 to 35	36 and older
3	3	8
2	4	7
	4	9

Nationality per group		
Lebanese	Syrian	Palestinian
6	8	
7	4	2
8	5	

Each group represented women gathering and working together from all over the Bekaa and the surroundings of the Taanayel center. The differences in age and marital status created a synergy among the group and a shared space for these women to share their experience and motivate others in their work.

B. Activities

The culinary training of women that takes place in the Agnes Varis Training Center in arcenciel's Taanayel center was drafted out and prepared for these 40 women coming from regions within Central Bekaa. These women vulnerable thought out the project to seek opportunities to better their socio-economic conditions within their households and acquire necessary skills and tools to be capable of being matched with matching job opportunities. The training course was for one full month, with daily trainings from 9AM to 3PM, five days a week.



The first group of trainees during their theoretical training

Almost 20% of the training is theoretical; where the women attend sessions in the adjacent Khan El Maqsoud restaurant on food safety and hygienic standards in the culinary industry. The majority of the training, the other 80% of it, is practical; where the women go to the kitchen/the training center and learn – hands-on – how to make mouneh (Lebanese conserved food), how to make meat and poultry-based dishes, how to process food and dry fruits, among other culinary skills.



The hands-on practices during the training

These daily interactions with an organized schedule teach these women how to work in a dynamic group, how to be punctual and how to commit to a training/tasks given to you. Skills that are much needed when someone is matched with a job opportunity.

40 women completed their one-month training and received certificates of food safety and hygiene training.



Some of the women from the training receiving their certificates

5. Description of Challenges Faced

Transportation Cost

Heating fuel, diesel, and gasoline have seen a 3,000% increase in cost over the last 12 months as the subsidies on fuel were lifted by the Central Bank and the currency continues to devalue. The situation has been further augmented by the Russian invasion of Ukraine where international prices of fuel have already spiked. In return transportation prices have increased by 510% which limited beneficiaries from reaching the centers. Taking a public taxi (service), for example, used to cost 2000 LBP and now costs around 30,000 LBP while people's salaries haven't increased much. Also, remote regions around Halba and Taanayel, for instance, public transportation is scarce and service users have to rely on carpooling in case private transportation is not available. As a way to mitigate this, the team has facilitated their carpooling by connecting people from the same region and encouraging them to share the transportation. The support given at the end of the project, is also feeding into covering some of those expenses.

6. Impact

Duha, a 49-year-old woman born in Hama, Syria from a simple warm home, decided to tell us her story.

She received her education in one of the city's schools, but her father pulled her out after the sixth grade for her to work with her mother in the sowing factory. Duha soon after, got engaged to a Lebanese young man from a Syrian mother and after her marriage, she lived with him for a while in Syria then moved to Lebanon for better work opportunities. After many years of marriage and giving birth to three boys and a girl with special needs. After a few years, her husband suddenly passed away and Duha had to find a way to support her family.

At 14 years old, her eldest son started working in a mechanical shop to support his mother and siblings, but soon after, he was hit by a car, left on the side of the road while his mother ran to his rescue trying to hold her son in her arms one last time. Her other son tried to support and even went to Saudi Arabia to send to his family but soon after, his papers fell through and he was only able to support himself.

Duha did everything possible to take care of her children and little girl who needed her full attention and support. She cleaned homes, did some tailoring with the little skills she had, took care of other people's homes to provide whatever medically needed for her daughter. Duha struggled financially, especially after the pandemic and lockdown that the country imposed, when she couldn't work anymore and had to rely on the kindness of others to simply eat.

Duha was approached by arcenciel, and the team assessed her family situation and her willingness to join the Ushagram project. Duha was very eager and excited to learn something new but she expressed to the arcenciel team that she could not leave her daughter at home alone, so the arcenciel team proposed that she brings her disabled daughter, Rawa, with her to the training and allow her to also participate and benefit from such an experience. As part of arcenciel's mission, we work

on integrating people with disability into society. All our facilities are equipped for PWD and the Khan al Maksoud is no exception. Our teams are highly trained to work with people with disabilities and the inclusion of their needs into the program.

Rawa is very bright and energetic, she loves being in the kitchen and working in a team setting. Duha, her mother, supported her in every activity and that was the biggest motivator for her in the Ushagram project. Rawa showcased much improvements in her social skills due to the group dynamic and project. As for her mom Duha, she received her certificate and is hoping to find a job to sustain her family. Duha felt much confidence after the training as it taught her to believe in her skills.

Zabia is a 54-year-old mother from Syria, who has been living in Lebanon for 10 years now. *Zabia* dedicates her life to supporting her three kids and fighting to give them the education they need. After going through a lot of life strains, her separation from her husband was a very most challenging journey that affected her self-confidence and her interaction with her community and society. *Zabia* always loved cooking and her passion for food preparation has been growing since she first decided to cater a few meals to her neighbors.

Zabia's ultimate goal is to run her own business of catering food but she was never able to pursue this dream as she has minimal experience and her separation and financial situation just made it even harder to work on her goal. She was approached by arcenciel for the Ushagram project and couldn't be happier to be part of the program.

When *Zabia* started the training, she took the decision that she isn't here to make friends or interact with anyone. Her main concern was to learn and get the money that could support her family. However, things changed after a week where *Zabia* described the work environment as very pleasant and the women and team's kindness started growing on her. It has pushed her to have friends that even now on weekends she gets to spend some time with them and have lunch at each other's houses. *Zabia* has been enjoying her time at the workplace where she highlights the importance of writing down her observations of the chef's secret touches to each meal. She is very excited to learn new Lebanese dishes which will allow her to expand her expertise when opening her own catering and to accustom to her client's requests, especially since there are differences in the way dishes are named in both cultures.

Preparing food and leaning beneficiaries has been one of *Zabia's* favorite activities. As being one of the oldest among her coworkers, *Zabia's* self-confidence was boosted as she showed distinction in her cooking experience, an opportunity for her to learn leadership skills especially when her colleagues notice her conflict resolution abilities. *Zabia's* family has been through a lot for the past years, her time away from home has created an opportunity for her to reconnect with her kids. After her working hours, *Zabia* enjoys the quality time she gets with her kids and she spends it telling them about the day she had and how she learned to prepare food!

7. Project Sustainability

The women receive a certificate after completing the course; which would help them with pursuing a job, using the certificate use to increase their credibility and trustworthiness when starting their own businesses.

In previous years, a significant percentage, if not the majority of the women who graduate from the Agnes Varis Training Center resort to establishing their own businesses at home. This option would suit their households and their personal commitments with their husbands and/or children; where they don't need to leave their houses, while they still have the opportunity to produce, sell and make a living; or at least contribute to supporting their families.

The areas these women live in allow them to spread the word on the products they make and sell; whether it's in the camps and informal settlements the refugees live in, or in the tight communities the Lebanese live in, in such regions. They rely heavily on the word of mouth; especially after the news is spread that they received the trainings in arcenciel; an organization that is well known in the region.

Furthermore, arcenciel helps them promote and sell the products (mainly the mouneh ones) in its farmers' market "Beit El Mouzaree"; a weekly market in the Domaine de Taanayel that arcenciel manages, where farmers and women sell their produce and products; respectively. The concept of this market is to sell the products directly, from the producer to the customers; without middlemen, and hence have them sold at affordable prices, and with maximum profit to the producers, farmers and women.

The women are also encouraged to take part in other markets hosted in different areas in the Bekaa or even in Beirut and Mount Lebanon; based on their mobility flexibility, and so arcenciel keeps helping them to maximize their visibility and opportunities to sell their products.

As for the women who would rather prepare working in the hospitality industry, they are databased in arcenciel's Job Placement Office; part of arcenciel's Employment Program; through which the bureau's officers work on finding them appropriate vacancies in the region, and help link the employers with these women.

8. Conclusion

During the last few months, the project relied heavily on implementing the set activities and working on finishing the trainings. The Ushagram project is an inspiring project that allows women to not only gain skills but self-confidence and opportunities of friendships. 40 women have participated in the third consecutive year. 40 women have created new memories, installed work ethics and are now set to regain their dreams.