



Strengthening Primary Health Care Services for Syrian Refugees, Lebanese Returnees, and Vulnerable Host Communities

By the end of August, the countries neighbouring Syria were hosting over 3 million refugees – part of what the United Nations has called “the biggest humanitarian emergency of our era.” The impact upon Lebanon has been immense. Over 1.1 million refugees now reside in the country, a figure equivalent to 25 percent of Lebanon’s population prior to the crisis. Proportionally, this is equivalent to the entire population of Canada being displaced to the United States.

Lebanon’s already fragile health system has been severely strained, while the risk of communicable disease epidemics has risen. As families’ savings dwindle, competition for jobs increases and prices rise, the poorest refugees and Lebanese are struggling to meet the costs of healthcare, in what is a largely privatized system. According to a recent survey, nearly one third of Syrian refugee households requiring health assistance have been unable to obtain it. Assessments conducted by IOM in 2013 indicated that gaps in access primary health care and specialized care were particularly acute in South Lebanon, which was less well covered by organizations providing healthcare services.

In December 2013, IOM Lebanon launched a project to improve access to and quality of primary healthcare for Syrian refugees, Lebanese returnees from Syria, and vulnerable host communities. IOM is now supporting six pre-existing primary healthcare centers (PHCs) with subsidized consultations, free acute and chronic medications, and reimbursements for medical and administrative staff working additional hours. Four of the PHCs are in South Lebanon (in Tyre, Nabatieh, Marwanieh and Klayaa) and are run by the Al-Kayan Foundation, a local health service provider, while two are in the Bekaa (in Ghazze and Taalabaya). To date, the centres have offered consultations to 18,000 Syrian refugees



An IOM-supported mobile medical unit dispenses medications during a visit to Bazourieh, South Lebanon

and 1,400 Lebanese host community members and returnees. Antenatal care visits have been conducted for 2,300 women and over 1,000 children have received vaccinations. An IOM community health team conducts outreach in the areas around the PHCs, so far informing over 2,800 households of the services available.

In June 2014, IOM expanded the project, establishing a mobile medical unit in collaboration with the Al-Kayan Foundation to reach remote communities in South Lebanon in need of medical support. The unit is composed of a doctor, a nurse, and assisting staff, and provides free consultations and medications. It spends one day a week in each of the districts of Hasbaya, Tyre and Bint Jbeil. So far, the mobile unit has enabled 1,400 Syrian refugees and 700 host community members and Lebanese returnees to access health

services.

“This collaboration is very important to us; with IOM’s support the Al-Kayan Foundation is able to serve people better and reach communities far away from existing health facilities,” said Ms. Rima Abou Darwish, General Manager of the Al-Kayan Foundation.

Alongside these services, IOM health staff perform regular health education sessions on public health topics of major importance to refugees and local communities, from common diseases to child nutrition, personal hygiene and family planning. So far over 2,300 individuals have taken part.



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