

The Lebanese Socioeconomic Crisis (2019-2023): The Impact on Food Security of Palestinian
Refugees and Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

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Content

Summary	2
Introduction	3
Research and methodology approach	7
Theoretical Framework	8
Lebanon – Palestinian and Syrian refugees	9
Limitations	10
Food insecurity	11
Definitions	11
COVID-19 and food insecurity	12
Lebanon: Historical Experience as a Food Insecure Country	14
Syrian and Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon	18
Food Security: Impact of the Protest, Pandemic and Blast.....	22
October 2019 Protest.....	23
COVID-19 Pandemic.....	24
Port of Beirut Explosion.....	25
Combine Events and Effects on Food Security.....	26
Impact on Palestinian Refugee Food Security	30
Impact on Syrian Refugee Food Security	34
Conclusion	37
Palestinian Versus Syrian Refugees’ Food Insecurity	39
Looking into the future	42
References	44

Summary

Over the last several decades, Lebanon has been plagued by internal instability, poor administration and been tangled in affairs of powerful neighbours. All these elements increased food insecurity over the decades in Lebanon's as it has received approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees and continues to host 489,292 Palestinian refugees. However, since the end of 2019, Lebanon has been facing its worst socioeconomic crisis in decades, exacerbated by a national protest, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Beirut port explosion. This new wave of events pushed food insecurity higher and higher among Lebanese and refugee communities.

This major research paper is interested in studying food insecurity in Lebanon from the end of 2019 up to 2023. Specifically, the research is interested in answering how the intensification of multicategory crisis in Lebanon since 2019 affected Palestinian and Syrian refugees' food security. The study concluded that the data available does not provide a comprehensive answer to the question as the statistics and percentage presented do not study or explain the different elements that imply being food secure. However, it cannot be denied that Syrian refugees have been impacted harder than Palestinians due to the latest bureaucratic and structural disadvantages.

Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees states that in 2022, Lebanon remained the hosting country with the highest number of refugees per capita, which is unsurprising (United Nations High, 2022a). By 2017 and 2018, Lebanon was already considered the country with the largest concentration of refugees received relative to the national population (Ghattas, Sassine et al., 2015; Hoteit, Mohsen et al., 2022). It would be imagined that a reason for a country to host a high number of refugees is that their capability to support them and transition them into a more stable life would be positive. Nevertheless, Lebanon has proved that expectation to be wrong. Over the last several decades, Lebanon has been plagued by internal instability and tangled in affairs of powerful neighbours (International Crisis Group, 2023b). This also applies to most countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which continue to host more than 40% of the displaced population worldwide even though it is only the home to 5% of the world's population (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021). In addition, the Middle East and North Africa region has long been one of the most unstable regions on the planet, plagued by political crises, socioeconomic disputes, and warfare, among other tensions. Not all countries of the MENA region have been unstable at the same time, which has caused a constant displacement of refugees from one country to another, like a vicious cycle of people trying to survive.

The giant wave of refugees in the MENA region has recently come from Syria as individuals flee the internal warfare. Those individuals fleeing have been Syrian and other refugee communities that had previously escaped their former countries. In the case of Lebanon, a 2022 report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registered as

refugees and population of concern 839,788 Syrians, 8,931 Iraqis, 2,307 Sudanese and 2,476 from other countries (United Nations High, 2022a). These numbers do not include those refugees and asylum seekers that have not registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which can translate into a higher number of refugees from different nationalities. Furthermore, other international humanitarian organizations provide aid in Lebanon, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

As was mentioned, Lebanon has been suffering from instability for a long time. However, in the last couple of years, the international community and Lebanon have been attacked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had multiple effects on politics, the economy, health, and the movement of people, among other problems. The pandemic emerged at the end of 2019, but Lebanon was experiencing an additional national crisis before the worldwide pandemic. A national protest started in Lebanon on October 17th, 2019, because of a new tax measure announcement in reaction to the economic crisis, which crippled the political scene (Amnesty International, 2020). As if it was not enough, an economic crisis, a political crisis, and a pandemic, on August 4th of 2020, the Port of Beirut in the capital city of Lebanon exploded. The port of Beirut was the main port in Lebanon, where the country received its biggest importations, including food.

The pandemic had already complicated the importation of food into Lebanon as each country started restricting border crossing and even closed their borders. This and the port explosion exacerbated the food insecurity in Lebanon, which was already at risky levels. Food insecurity in Lebanon had already been increasing prior to the pandemic and explosion due to the

persistent multicategory crisis and poor administration that Lebanon had been living in for decades. Additionally, the high influx of refugees kept increasing food insecurity in Lebanon. Food insecurity does not discriminate between people's nationalities; nevertheless, it affects each community differently based on their pre-existence vulnerabilities. A report reviewing the food security in Lebanon at the end of 2022 identified about 2 million people in Lebanon experiencing acute food insecurity (World Food Programme, 2022).

As food insecurity continues to be exacerbated in Lebanon since the end of 2019, this major research paper is interested in studying food insecurity in Lebanon from the end of 2019 up to 2023. Specifically, the essay wants to understand how the Lebanese multicategory crisis exacerbated by the 2019 national protest, COVID-19 and the port explosion impacted food security in Lebanon. The interest of this essay is still broad as it covers all social classes, genders, nationalities, and urban and rural groups. Because of it, the research will focus specifically on understanding how the exacerbation of the multicategory crisis in Lebanon affected Palestinian and Syrian refugees' food security. Refugees have been chosen as one of the most vulnerable populations due to financial constraints, unclear governmental status, restrictions to access essential opportunities and a path leading to poverty (Verme, Gigliarano et al., 2016). Two refugee groups have been selected as each group (Palestinian and Syrian) has elements that make them different. Comparing two refugee nationalities can provide a bigger picture of the impacts on refugees' food security, which could not be provided by only one.

Initially, the research question was inspired by the hypothesis that Syrian refugees' food security was more negatively affected by the multicategory crisis in Lebanon than Palestinian refugees due to Syrians' incapacity to register and receive support from the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees, the nonexistence of official refugee camps, and the lack of a multigenerational network of support. Meanwhile, Palestinian refugees' food security has been decreasing faster than Lebanese but slower than Syrian refugees, thanks to their legal status as refugees, access to aid and support of an exclusive agency (UNRWA), and their family-multigenerational network. However, during the research process, it became clear that this hypothesis was wrong. The data available do not provide a complete picture of the different elements that must be studied when analyzing food security, such as sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meet the dietary needs of even more vulnerable population as the elderly and infants. The available data focus on the cost of food staples, the cost of the food basket, and the poverty level, among other similar statistics. That type of data provides a picture of the impacts of the multicategory Lebanese crisis on the food security of Palestinian and Syrian refugees, but it is not enough. Some academics agree that there are limited studies that examine the determinants of food insecurity in the most vulnerable individuals inside refugees' populations (Sahyoun, Sassine et al., 2020)

In order to prove the former argument, the essay will start by introducing the methodology and the theoretical framework and explaining why Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have been chosen for the study, as well as the study's limitations. Next, a definition of food insecurity will be provided, followed by an explanation of the COVID-19 pandemic's consequences on food insecurity. Third, the essay will provide the historical context of Lebanon as a food-insecure country before 2019 began Lebanon's biggest crisis. Next, an explanation of why there are Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon will be provided as a quick presentation of what is their current status. Following, the research will analyze how the situation in Lebanon has evolved with the 2019 national protest, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the

explosion of the Beirut port. This section has two subsections: the first focuses on the economic and political consequences, and the second on the impacts on refugees. Six, this paper will provide more detailed and specific information on the impacts the crisis, COVID-19, and the port blast had overall on food security, with a subsection on the impacts on food security of Syrian refugees and others on Palestinian refugees. Finally, the study's conclusion will look into the future of the food security situation of Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

Research and Methodology Approach

The major research paper uses a qualitative research method, starting with a literature review of primary sources from nongovernmental organizations such as the United Nations and the United Nations Refugee Agency that work directly with refugees. In addition, a literature review of academic articles from secondary sources such as reports and articles published in academic magazines such as the *Journal of Global Health Reports* and *Development in Practice* is used. Specifically, the selected reports and articles are those written by academics focusing on food insecurity in Lebanon in the last ten years, the evolution of food insecurity in Lebanon and how Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have been affected by food insecurity since 2019.

The major research paper follows specifically a desk research method since it explores data and information from existing documents and uses secondary data -previous qualitative and quantitative research- to gather particular knowledge. In the case of this essay, knowledge about food insecurity in the last ten years in Lebanon and its impacts on Syrian and Palestinian

refugees in the country. Furthermore, the documents and data relevant analyses the impacts of the multcategory crisis Lebanon have been experiencing, plus the specific role the October 2019 protest, the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Port blast have had on food insecurity.

Theoretical Framework:

The study follows a theory of synthesis to summarize and integrate the multiple perspectives about the challenges Palestinian and Syrian refugees have experienced in being food secure in Lebanon in the last ten years, particularly since the exacerbation of the multcategory crisis with a national protest, a pandemic and an explosion. This step is relevant as some of the literature has taken a more extensive perspective by focusing on specific camps, gender, Palestinian and Syrian in multiple MENA countries as a diaspora, among other focuses. Others have performed comparative studies between specific camps or the same refugee population in two or more countries to analyze how each country or camp changes the opportunities to be food secure as a refugee. Furthermore, as the study of the interconnection between these elements is so recent, the theory of synthesis allows to review different academics that have covered one or more of the elements this study is concentrating on. It would be possible to compare female refugees versus male refugees as other studies have done; nevertheless, it is not interesting for this research to understand how sex as a variable impact food security. The primary variable in the study is how the nationality of refugees (Syrian or Palestinian) in Lebanon plays a role in how food insecurity affects them under a multcategory crisis.

A critical theory that is used in the development of the research is the theory of migrant settlement. The migrant settlement theory suggests that when refugees and asylum seekers arrive in a country, their settlement in the country will depend on four factors. First, are the country's

policies and rights conferred to the refugee? Second, the existence and type of social networks in the country; third, economic participation; and fourth, migration circumstances, attitudes and aspirations (Bloch, 1970). This theory will help us understand how Syrian and Palestinian refugees have settled and interacted with the local community and Lebanon's policies.

Lebanon – Syrian and Palestinian Refugees:

It is necessary to explain that out of all the existing countries that received refugees, Lebanon has been selected as the focus for the research question for the following reasons: First, Lebanon host the largest number of refugees per capita in the world according to the UNHCR report on January 2022 (United Nations High, 2022a); as well as "hosting the largest number of refugees [...] and per square kilometer in the world" (United Nations High, 2018b, p.67); third, the government of Lebanon has taken legal measures to limit the registration of one specific nationality of refugee which brings a unique element to the study to compare. Finally, since 2019 Lebanon has been facing its worst socioeconomic crisis in decades, exacerbated by a national protest, the pandemic and an explosion.

Lebanon hosts different nationalities of refugees, and out of the different nationalities, the essay has chosen Palestinian and Syrian refugees for the study for the following reasons. First, Palestinian refugees are the oldest refugee community in Lebanon, but it is not among the biggest group of refugees in Lebanon (there are only 489.292 Palestinian refugees). Meanwhile, Syrian refugees are the most significant percentage of refugees in Lebanon, with over 1.5 million. Second, Palestinian and Syrian refugees have access to different types and levels of registration as refugees. On the one hand, Palestinian refugees were registered under the United

Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) rather than with UNHCR.

On the other hand, Syrian refugees could register under the UNHCR until 2015. Since that year, Syrian refugees are not allowed to register with the UNHCR due to a decision of the Lebanese government to stop Syrian refugees' registration. It is necessary to clarify that no new Palestinian refugees are registering in Lebanon, even if the number of registered has increased. As the oldest refugee group, Palestinians can transfer their registration location, and only new Palestinian registration emerges when there are births. In the case of Syrian, new registration is impossible due to the new Lebanese legislation, even if it is necessary for recent birth. Third and last, Palestinian receive direct support through their exclusive agency UNRWA. Meanwhile, Syrian refugees prior to 2015 can receive support from the UNHCR, and those post-2015 cannot get services from the UNHCR.

Limitations:

As a research paper with a limited word count of twelve thousand, it is essential to recognize the limitations of the project. As the research question is concerned with the time frame from 2019 until today, there can be recent development the essay might not be aware of or the newest publications that were not used to answer the essay question. Furthermore, the experiences of refugees can vary between camps, regions and family composition, and the essay will not be able to differentiate between these elements as the research is more a comparative analysis of how food insecurity has increased and affected Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

Other limitations have been mentioned in the secondary literature, which also applies to this research. A limited number of online nutrition assessment tools measure the overall nutritional situation regarding food security during crises (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021, p.3). Also, different secondary articles selected have been pioneering in performing ground interviews and data collection regarding food insecurity in Lebanon; however, the variables used between studies have been different, and these studies have not partnered to completed or exchanged in formatting. To the knowledge of Kharroubi, Naja et al. (2021), their study is the first to study the food insecurity trends in Lebanon and estimate the impact of the multiple elements that have detonated Lebanon's crisis through projections and scenario modelling techniques.

Food Insecurity

Definition:

As the research question is focused on food insecurity, it is necessary to understand what the major research paper understands and means by food insecurity. Food security implies the existence and availability of physical and economic access to enough quantities of safe and nutritious food without restrictions (United Nations High, 2021, p1). This research will work with the definition of food security of the 1996 World Food Summit, which defined *food security* as “when all people at all times have sustainable physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, for a healthy and productive life” [4] (Ghattas et al., 2015; Sahyoun et al., 2020, p.2).

As a result, food insecurity is the absence of one or more of those conditions. Food insecurity is characterized by reduced food intake, reduced food expenditure and changes - usually negative- in the quality of food consumed (Ghattas et al., 2015, p.8). In addition, Sahyoun, Sassine et al. (2020) state that food insecurity is a crucial cause of poor diet quality, contributing to the onset and deterioration of chronic health conditions. Other academics like Hoteit, Al-Atat et al. (2021) also confirm the negative and severe repercussions of food insecurity on individuals' health (p.19). As a result, when studying the absence of food security in individuals and communities, Ghattas et al. (2015) perceive physical and mental health as significant indicators of food security levels.

COVID-19 and Food Insecurity:

Food insecurity is not a new element that individuals worldwide started facing due to the pandemic. The process of globalization extended to the food supply chain. The globalization of the food supply chain has created co-dependency with other countries in agriculture, farming, and food sells. The interconnection and dependency of the food system have been growing over decades. Consequently, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the dynamic of food security as each country started taking their own measures to control the spread of the virus. The first couple of months into the pandemic impacted food security because people started losing income and purchasing power, particularly among those experiencing poverty (Zuntz, Klema et al., 2022, p.258). In addition, implementing lockdowns and border closures disrupted supply chains, markets, and trade. It puts "the global food system under immense strain and is affecting food supply and demand, as well as people's access to sufficient and nutritious sources of food" (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021, p.1). The reason that national COVID-19

measures had such a significant impact on food supply chains is that supply chains have become increasingly globalized, as has been mentioned creating a wave of negative impacts on food availability and the cost to purchase it (Zuntz, Klema et al., 2022, p.249).

These disruptions in the food supply and demand induced chronic hunger. The number of people considered under chronic hunger went from 83 million in 2019 to 132 million in 2020 (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021, p.1). Moreover, the increase in food insecurity was strongly observed in the Middle East region since the levels of hunger had increased four times compared to other countries outside the region during the pandemic. The disruption in the global and national food supply and the market uncertainties also caused an extreme rise in food prices; however, the increase was not globally widespread except in low-income countries with food deficits, such as Lebanon and Syria (Zuntz, Klema et al., 2022, p.259). Some common elements that those highly food-insecure countries share have been low levels of education, low household income and unemployment (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021). As a result, in 2020, six out of twelve eastern Mediterranean countries, including Lebanon, were receiving humanitarian assistance through cash-based transfers and short-term assistance to buy food (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021, p1). Zuntz, Klema et al. (2022) agreed that the pandemic had disproportionately affected refugees' (in the Middle East) food security due to their pre-existence and long-standing food insecurity in the region.

Lebanon: Historical Experience as a Food-Insecure Country

Located in the Middle East and North Africa region, Lebanon is a small, middle-income country with a population of six million people (Nabulsi, Ismail et al., 2020). Even though it is a small country, Lebanon has been characterized by a long history of political, social, and economic instabilities (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021, p2). Furthermore, it hosts the largest concentration of refugees per capita and "the fourth largest refugee population in the world" (Nabulsi, Ismail et al., 2020, p1). The arrival of the outside population in the shape of refugees and asylum seekers into Lebanon, which is getting hotter and dryer, increases the negative consequences of drier conditions on the agricultural economy and the well-being of its citizens (Verner, Ashwill et al., 2018). A country with sociopolitical and economic instabilities, a detrimental agricultural situation and an even larger population has created the perfect conditions to make food insecurity a standard reality for the country. In fact, academics such as Hoteit, Mohsen et al. (2022) affirmed that "Lebanon has therefore developed into a typical nation where food insecurity (FI) exists and persists" (p.2). In order to understand how all previous elements have been interacting prior to 2019 and their impact on food insecurity, this section of the essay first is going to introduce the historical political arena and its relation with the high inflation levels of the country. Following, the evolution of the agricultural sector is presented. This is important as it explains why Lebanon became so food-dependent from other international markets. Third, the essay explains the Lebanese import dependency. Finally, the role of displaced individuals and refugees in re-enforcing the country's food insecurity is presented.

The political arena in Lebanon has been unstable since the end of the civil war 1990 (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021). After the war, governments were not stable enough, and the policy

design was fragmented. Moreover, years of sectarian feudalism and persistent governmental corruption have kept Lebanon in economic instability. The government has tried to adapt by borrowing, mainly from local banks. However, economic growth has not been able to keep pace with the rising debts and interest on borrowing (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021). In addition, the constant geopolitical challenges of Lebanon's neighbouring countries have been reinforcing national challenges. The Lebanese economy strongly relied on tourism, foreign investments, and remittances, "which injected money into the country, potentially shielding its population from high levels of food insecurity" (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021, p.10). The rising debts had pushed inflation to 7.6% in mid-2018, but inflation dipped to 3.5% year on year in May 2019 (before the big crisis) (*Economist Intelligence Unit*, 2019). The decrease in inflation by the beginning of 2019 was possible due to the ease of global oil prices, falling food prices and the return of some Syrian refugees in Lebanon back to Syria. Unfortunately, this would not last must as the national protest began, the pandemic exploded, and oil prices increased (*Economist Intelligence Unit*, 2019).

The persistent government instability and corruption had large direct and indirect effects on the evolution of the agricultural sector. The government policy decision did not always favour a more robust agricultural sector. For example, massive urbanization took over land that could have been destined for agricultural production since the end of the civil war. Furthermore, since the 20th century, the Lebanese government has found itself lacking initiatives to support agriculture and boost national dependency on its own agriculture. There Lebanese government's public investment in agriculture has been low. According to Kharroubi, Naja et al. (2021), "the general [public] budget allocation [in the agricultural production] is only around 0.5% of the entire state budget" (p.10). Even with policies with negative impacts on agriculture and the

government's low interest in investing in this sector, the agricultural and agro-industrial sectors are essential for the economy and livelihood of individuals in Lebanon, especially in rural areas (Verner, Ashwill et al., 2018). In 2011 the Lebanese agricultural sector tried to quickly adapt to the growing population (citizens and refugees) and react to the food security shocks by investing in local initiatives and opportunities with agricultural workers (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021, p.2). Unfortunately, climate change has reduced the chances for Lebanon to improve its agricultural sector. The country has been witnessing more frequent water shortages, an increase in the series of droughts and other extreme and unfamiliar weather conditions affecting Lebanese agricultural productivity and the food security of the country (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021, p10). The climate change impact on agriculture increasingly translates into "a contingent liability for the Lebanese economy" (Verner, Ashwill et al., 2018, p.I), impacting the GDP and balance of payments.

Over decades, the poor administration and low public investment in developing and strengthening agriculture have made Lebanon highly dependent on imported food supplies. In fact, academics such as Hoteit, Al-Atat et al. (2021) affirm that Lebanon has been characterized by relying on international intervention to support its agriculture and provide basic food staples. Lebanon is highly food import-dependent; 85% of the country's food basket is imported from other countries in order to meet consumer demands (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021, p.10). An example that Hoteit, Al-Atat et al. (2021) provides is that 99% of all cereals are imported, which are an essential staple for cooking in Lebanon. The extreme dependence on imports has created a heavy deficit between the food trade balance and agriculture. Consequently, the gap between the total demand for food and agricultural production keeps increasing yearly (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021). In 2022 the Middle East region was ranked as the world's largest cereal importer (Zuntz, Klema et al., 2022).

Incapable of investing and creating policies in favour of strengthening the agricultural sector in Lebanon; plus, the high food import dependency has been creating poor conditions for food security. Moreover, the precarious condition to cover the food demand in Lebanon has been exacerbated by the high influx of displaced people. Even though Lebanon is not part of the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is one of the countries with a higher number of refugees (Zuntz, Klema et al., 2022). Asylum seekers and refugees have also been seriously impacting Lebanon's political and socioeconomic situation, contributing to increased general instability, an instability that has been facing since its civil war. Refugees are not only competing for food with Lebanese citizens, but they are also competing for jobs, public services, housing, and primary natural resources such as land, water, and forest, which are essential to be food secure (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021). This added competition increases tensions with host communities and reduces the opportunities for refugees to acquire income, shelter, and food. Those tensions have had consequences on the food security status and livelihood of Lebanese and refugee communities (Ibrahim, Honein-AbouHaidar & Jomaa, 2019).

It is evident that Lebanon's experience with food insecurity is not new and is a result of the pandemic, the 2019 national protest and the port explosion event combination. Lebanon's status quo is a food-insecure country. This status has been built over decades of political instability, economic stagnation, high inflation levels, poor agriculture development and increasing food importation dependency. It is correct to say that food insecurity has affected Lebanese and refugee communities; however, refugees have been affected in different ways due to their pre-existent status as a highly vulnerable population.

Syrian and Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

Due to Lebanon's geographical location within unstable neighbouring countries constantly in armed conflict, Lebanon has become a destination for refugees who flee wars and persecution in their home countries (Nabulsi, Ismail et al., 2020, p.1). That is why since the 1990s, Lebanon has been known as a host country for refugees. In fact, more than one-quarter of the population in Lebanon is displaced individuals fleeing from countries in the region, including Syria, Iraq, and Palestine. Lebanon has temporarily or permanently received individuals escaping wars such as the Palestinian war (1947), Iraq war (2003) and Syrian war (2011) (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021, p17). However, the Lebanese government has adopted different measures that have complicated the arrival and livelihood of refugees. As the study focuses on Syrian and Palestinian refugees for the comparative analysis, this section of the essay explains how Syrian and Palestinian arrived in Lebanon and how they interact with the refugee policies of Lebanon.

First, it is essential to clarify that Lebanon is no party to The Refugee Convention of 1952 neither has any type of national legislation regarding refugees (Janmyr, 2016). The national government had been pushing the responsibility of dealing with the refugee population to the municipalities regarding providing shelter and food, among other things. Furthermore, access to the country by Syrian and Palestinian was not as regulated until 2015. In the case of Palestinians, Lebanon created a department that dates to 1959. The Department of Palestinian Refugees Affairs (DPRA) oversees registering, creating civil documents, and recording the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, but they are denied Lebanese citizenship to them (UNHCR, 2016). It has been mentioned that UNRWA takes responsibility for registering Palestinians; however, prior to 2004, there were over 30,000 Palestinian registered under DPAR and not

UNRWA, which was reviewed and fixed after 2004 (UNHCR, 2016). For Syrian refugees, Lebanon kept its border porous until January 2015. By the end of 2014, the Lebanese government officially closed its borders with Syria. It approved a policy of Syrian refugee displacement that discouraged Syrians from staying in the country by increasing restrictions (Kikano, Fauveaud, Lizarralde, 2021). Starting in 2015, the government of Lebanon requested the suspension of the registration of Syrian refugees by UNHCR (United Nations Highs, 2023b). Not being able to register Syrian refugees implies they cannot benefit from support and identification and are restricted from accessing economic opportunities, threatening their food and shelter security (Hachem, Ali et al., 2022). The 2015 policy removed "seeking asylum" as a valid reason for Syrians to enter Lebanon and required them to have a valid identity document and an approved reason for entry (United Nations High, 2023a). Consequently, Syrians have been forced to obtain legal status through sponsorship as economic migrants or with a previous UNHCR registration certificate (Zuntz, Klema et al., 2022).

Another element of the refugee policy is the establishment of camps. The Lebanese policy about camps has changed over the decades due to the changing geopolitical dynamics and internal instability. Before the end of 2005, Lebanon did not have a policy against establishing refugee camps. As a result, UNRWA was able to establish 12 refugees' camps for Palestinians; however, since the 90s, the government has prohibited the entry of building materials into camps to repair or build new ones (Amnesty International, 2006). By 2005, Lebanon prohibited the construction of new camps as a reaction to stop the permanent settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon and control possible militias and rebels hiding in these settlements. Verme, Gigliarano et al. (2016) confirm that the measure adopted by Lebanon against the establishment of camps resulted in the inexistence of official refugee camps post-2005, which makes refugees disperse

into local communities all over the country and stay in informal settlements—the 70 years of presence and experience with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon left a strong lesson to the government and how to react to the Syrian exodus beginning in 2011 (Kikano, Fauveaud & Lizarralde, 2021). As a result, the government prohibited the construction of camps for Syrian refugees and forced them to look for informal settlements around the country.

According to the UNHCR, for January 2022, the Lebanese government has received an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees; the number of Syrian refugees has increased since 2011 because of the Syrian civil war. Nabulsi, Ismail et al. (2020), Ibrahim, Honein-AbouHaidar and Jomaa (2019) affirm that today, the Syrian conflict remains one of the most significant humanitarian disasters and challenges facing the world, which has left massive destruction, loss of lives and displacement of over five million people, looking for refuge in neighbouring countries (e.g. Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan). Specifically for Lebanon, this war has resulted in more than one million Syrians being displaced to their country (Ghattas et al., 2015). The number of Syrians can be more extensive since the UNHCR registration of Syrian as refugees in Lebanon was suspended by order of the Lebanese government in 2015 (United Nations High, 2022a). Even those Syrian who could register with the UNHCR prior to 2015 do not receive legal rights for assistance and are prohibited from working (Abumeri, 2020). The 2015 restrictive policies left Syrian refugees without recognition as lawful refugee status, leaving Syrian even more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Abumeri, 2020). When Syrian refugees arrived in Lebanon, they settled down in the margins of the urban and peri-urban areas; mainly, they settled in three governorates; 36% of Syrians went to Bekkaa, 25% went to the north, and 25% went to Mount Lebanon (Verme, Gigliarano et al., 2016, p.42).

Palestinian refugees arrived in Lebanon after the 1948 Palestinian exodus (an event when over 700,000 Palestinian arbs were expelled by Zionist militias) (Ghattas et al., 2015). Another substantial influx of Palestinian refugees followed the first exodus in 1967 after the regional war (Sahyoun, Sassine et al., 2020). They are a unique refugee group as they have lived in camps for at least 50 years, and family members have been living in the country for over 70 years (Sahyoun, Sassine et al., 2020). As a result, they have a protracted (long-term) refugee status (Ghattas et al., 2015). Ghattas et al. (2015) affirm that “Palestinian refugees are the oldest [in Lebanon], followed by Iraqi and then Syrian” (p.8). In fact, Palestinian are not only the oldest refugee group in Lebanon but in the world; they are considered the longest and most extensive group of refugees worldwide (Sahyoun, Sassine et al., 2020). In addition, under the UNRWA’s mandate, Lebanon received more than 200,000 Palestinian (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021, p.17). Palestinian refugees not only flee to Lebanon, but they also find refuge in Syria. Unfortunately, with the increase of hostilities in the Syrian war, over 53,000 Palestinian living in Syria migrated to Lebanon in search of safety (Ghattas et al., 2015). After this wave of Palestinians in Syria, approximately 51% of Palestinians are hosted in refugee campgrounds in Lebanon (Ghattas et al., 2015). Most Palestinian refugees receive assistance through UNRWA, including cash assistance, education, protection, and health care (UNRWA, 2023). Even though Palestinian are the oldest refugee population in Lebanon, they do not represent the largest percentage of refugees in Lebanon. The UNHCR Annual Results Report of Lebanon 2022 shares that the number of asylum-seekers and refugees from other countries than Syria in Lebanon was around 12,200 individuals by the end of 2022. Out of those 12 thousand individuals, 489.292 are Palestinian refugees, a small percentage compared to Syrian refugees.

Food Security by the End of 2019: Protest, Pandemic and Blast

A national protest took over the streets in Lebanon in October 2019; the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020 shocked the country's stability, followed by the Port of Beirut blast in 2020. All these events together, plus the multicategory crisis that has been cooking for decades, had devastating effects on the Lebanese and refugee communities in the country (Malaeb and Wai-Poi, 2021).

Before analyzing the impacts of food insecurity on Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the general consequences of food insecurity in Lebanon are discussed. Limited studies focus on the trends of food insecurity in Lebanon after the pandemic and Beirut Blast, and all argue that countries such as Lebanon with political instability had the highest prevalence of severe food insecurity compared to more politically stable countries (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021). The destruction of the main port for food import from Lebanon, plus the inflation, currency devaluation, lower purchasing power and the other elements described in the previous section, led to an increase in the cost of food and dietary choices, which increased food insecurity in the whole country (Lebanon: USAID provides, 2022). In order to understand more clearly the consequences those three main events had on food security in Lebanon, this section presents first the protest and its effects, followed by the pandemic and its effects and the port explosion and its effects. Finally, a more comprehensive analysis of the effects of the combination of events on food security in Lebanon is introduced.

October 2019 Protests:

Before COVID-19 spread worldwide and became a threat, Lebanon was already facing drastic and severe economic, financial, health and socio-political challenges (Hwalla, Jomaa et al., 2021). By 2019, Lebanon was "the world's third most indebted country [,] with unemployment rates reaching 30%" (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021, p.2). This high fragility was setting up the perfect scenario for a national protest. Individuals were tired of living in Lebanon with increased unemployment, income losses, soaring levels of inflation, fast currency devaluation, and banking crisis due to the drop in capital inflows and poor governance (Malaeb and Wai-Poi, 2021; Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021). All these elements pushed more than half of the country's population below the poverty line.

On October 17, 2019, the Lebanese government announced tax measures to address the economic crisis; however, people took over the streets against the measurement and demanded accountability, the end of corruption and the resignation of all political representatives (Amnesty International, 2020). In reaction to the protest, the Lebanese government in charge was forced to resign. Consequently, a new government was formed in January 2020. Unfortunately, the new government did not make any improvements. Instead, it defaulted on Lebanon's debt obligations by March 2020, and it had been running a deficit since it took over the government (Malaeb and Wai-Poi, 2021). The government stability was not even achieved by 2023 as the parliamentarians continued to fail to elect a new president and left the government under a caretaker (International Crisis Group, 2023a). The weakened or nonexistent government has left Lebanon incapable of addressing the economic crisis.

COVID-19 Pandemic:

Soon enough, after the national protest in Lebanon, the unprecedented event of the coronavirus pandemic hit on a global scale in December 2019. The pandemic has had severe repercussions beyond the toll on human lives and disruptions on the health care system. Each country started implementing protective public health measures as reactive measures, which caused massive economic and social shock. The global economy fell into a massive recession due to border closures and regional and national lockdowns taken by each country, among other strategies. Consequently, the globalize and codependent supply chains, markets and trade got disrupted and almost stopped. The global food system and access to stable and sufficient food sources were among those supply chains affected. It also disrupted employment opportunities and created a cascade of unemployment.

In February 2020, COVID-19's first case arrived in Lebanon. The pandemic hit the country with one of the highest rates of COVID-19 worldwide, deteriorating at a faster pace than the already vulnerable Lebanese health system (Hwalla, Jomaa et al., 2021). It not only hit the health care system but also exacerbated the pre-existence significant economic crisis by increasing "income losses, inflation, and devaluation of the Lebanese currency that pushed more than half of the country below the poverty line" (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021, p.2). Lebanon's economy mainly depends on tourism, foreign investment, and remittances; with the pandemic measures put in place for months stopping tourism and impacting remittances, Lebanon's economy got highly hit. Furthermore, the lockdowns negatively impacted the exports and import as 80% of Lebanese cereal consumption is met through importations (Kharroubi, Naja et al.,

2021). A contracted GDP growth and limited activity in the trade supply forced Lebanon to take two actions which negatively affected the economic crisis even further.

One of the measures was unilateral due to the lockdown measurement that forced an annual decrease of 41.6% in imports, from which a 14.6% decrease was in food imports and beverages (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021). This exacerbated the levels of food insecurity. 2020 Lebanon was trading 10.1 billion USD in 2020, dropping to 9.6 billion in 2021. The other measure was increasing the borrowing to purchase food and medical supplies, which pushed to alarming levels the public debt. This decision put the country in its biggest crisis since its independence because the public debt exceeded 150% of GDP (Makdissi and Seif Edine, 2020). Other academics, such as Malaeb and Wai-Poi (2021), argue that the debt-to-GDP ratio for 2020 went up from 171% in 2019 to 187%.

Port of Beirut Explosion:

On August 4th, 2020, Beirut was shocked by an explosion in the Port of Beirut. The explosion left over 200 people dead and 6,500 injured, causing massive destruction in city infrastructure and displacing over 300,000 individuals (Malaeb and Wai-Poi, 2021; Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021). In addition, the blast further limited the import and export of food products - already limited by lockdowns and COVID. The port explosion also destroyed the plant and animal quarantine offices, eradicated the grain silos, and decimated the equipment and laboratories used to measure the quality of imported wheat. It also devastated the small-scale fishing industry and jobs due to the fish's death close to the explosion's epicentre (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021; Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021).

The explosion of the port also meant the destruction of the main route to import and storage of food in the country, the supply chain, and the availability of grain for the whole country; consequently, food security declined even faster. The explosion impacted not only Beirut but also the country as a whole since Lebanon's economy has been concentrated in the capital (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021; Malaeb and Wai-Poi, 2021). All this had profoundly negative effects on the food security of Lebanon. The import of food and resources for agriculture was already limited due to the lockdowns and trade disruption by COVID-19. The port explosion further restricted food availability in the country as the main port of entry for imports and food storage became suddenly unavailable. The blast exacerbated even further food insecurity; by the end of 2020, food prices inflated by 402%, and a total of 2.28 million people fell into poverty (Malaeb and Wai-Poi, 2021).

Combine Events and Effects on Food Security:

Following the national protest, the pandemic, the port explosion, and the pre-existence of financial and political crises pushed the currency to collapse progressively. The Lebanese currency slid down from 1,500 in October 2019 to the black-market value of 27,000 by December 2021; the Lebanese pound lost over 90% of its value on the currency exchange market by June 2021 (United Nations High, 2021; Haidari, Fahes et al., 2022). In addition, the labour force was being paid with the same devaluated and weak currency, reducing the ability to afford food, and living costs. The impact of the debt increase pushed the price of the food basket to inflate to 183% as the purchasing power of the Lebanese currency and the import of food declined (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021).

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2021), the cost of food from October 2019 to June 2021 increased by 404%; by November 2022, the price of the food survival minimum expenditure basket reached 1.1 million Lebanese pounds per person monthly (World Food Programme, 2022; 2023a; 2023b). This translated that people in Lebanon will need "21 times the amount they would have needed before the crisis to purchase essential food items" (World Food Programme, 2023b, p.3). It is clear that food prices have skyrocketed in Lebanon since the national protest of 2019. Hoteit, Al-Atat et al. (2021) shared that in their surveys, most Lebanese households reported a decline in income, expansion in debt, salary cuts and high unemployment rates, all of which negatively impacted food security in Lebanon. All these were a result of the combination of decline in the GDP due to the lack of tourism, remittances, and foreign investment; increase in the public debt that consequently devaluated the currency even further; and the shortage of agricultural products and food importation due to lockdowns and the explosion of the main port of entry and food storage (Haidari, Fahes et al., 2022; Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021). At this point, the macro-financial failure and the exchange rate collapse led to the loss of people's deposits and a triple-digit inflation rate (Hoteit, Al-Atat et al., 2021). Considering the food cost increased in 2020, the Lebanese government-subsidized flour, wheat, bread, and electricity as a temporary measure to support the citizens; nevertheless, the measure did not stay in place for long (Makdissi and Seif Edine, 2020). Furthermore, the investigation of Hoteit, Al-Atat et al. (2021) states that food insecurity has been an immediate problem for households in Beirut. From November 2020 to March 2021, nine out of every sixteen households ate less than two meals per day; also, over 70% had to skip their meals (Hoteit al-Atat et al., 2021).

By 2021, the World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor agrees that Lebanon was facing one of the top three most severe economic global crises since the mid-19th century. Additional studies performed in 2021 argued that the combination of all the events Lebanon was facing was going to push food insecurity to alarming rates (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021). In 2021 inflation reached highs of 145% in a couple of months, compared to the average of 84% in 2020 and pushed 2.7 million people in Lebanon into poverty by 2021 (Malaeb and Wai-Poi, 2021). The currency devaluation and levels of unemployment so high force some Lebanese citizens to sell expensive goods for food offers and large quantities of products as a desperate measure (Haidari, Fahes et al., 2022). Looking specifically at governorates, food insecurity highest increases were seen in Akkar (from 33% in 2020 to 49% in 2021), El Nabatieh (from 40% in 2020 to 50% in 2021), and Mount Lebanon (from 40% in 2020 to 49% in 2021); however, independent from their region households without permanent shelter was more food insecure than the rest (United Nations High, 2021). In the same year, the National Poverty Targeting Program shared that in its recent study, more than 237,000 people from Lebanon's poorest and more vulnerable households depend on its food assistance (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021). The people of Lebanon became even more food assistance dependent between 2021 and 2022 due to the lifting of subsidies for food, fuel, and medicine, which all alone caused prices to go up around 200% to 300% (World Food Programme, 2023b).

The following year, the World Bank affirmed that Lebanon was “fronting one of the world's worst economic and financial crises” (Haidari, Fahes et al., 2022, p.2). Since the situation in Lebanon pushed the poverty levels further and the food insecurity widespread among host communities, refugees and citizens, the World Food Programme increased the value of cash transfers in April 2022. The UNHCR started providing refugees with 800,000 Lebanese pounds

per person for food needs and 1.6 million per household for other essential needs, but only starting February 2023 (World Food Programme, 2023b). Moreover, it supported over 2.1 million in 2022 with food and essentials between Lebanese and refugee communities (World Food Programme, 2023a). Unfortunately, the increase was not enough “to offset sharp price increases and currency depreciation to meet minimum living standards. As a result of the widening gap between the value of assistance and cost of living, food security indicators declined in 2022 across the board” (World Food Programme, 2022, p.1). In September 2022, the first Integrated Food Security Phase Classification for Lebanon was released, and 1.29 million Lebanese plus 700,000 Syrian refugees (approximately 33% of the population) were facing acute food insecurity –this is without including other refugees’ communities (World Food Programme, 2022).

Food insecurity was further exacerbated by the war in Ukraine because 80% of the wheat in Lebanon is imported from Russia and Ukraine (Hoteit, Mohsen et al., 2022; UNRWA, 2022a). However, the essay will not study the impacts of the war in Ukraine. The fast deterioration of Lebanon's economic, political, and social conditions has been "affecting all pillars of food security including availability, access, and utilization" (Hwalla, Jomaa et al., 2021, p.2). Not only the increase in food prices impacted access to food, but the fuel crisis contributed to insecure food as power conditions were unreliable, which limited the security of households to keep frozen or chilled food to prevent spoilage (Haidari, Fahes et al., 2022).

By 2023, Lebanon was entering the fourth year of extreme economic, political, and social crisis with one of the most enormous numbers of refugees per capita. Moreover, global food and fuel prices reached a record high, which added more tension to food insecurity levels (World

Food Programme, 2023a). As it was not enough that global food cost was the highest, the Lebanese pound (LBP) has lost over 94% of its value, making it even more expensive for people in Lebanon to afford the little food that was possible to enter the country (World Food Programme, 2023b). The currency depreciation meant an even more drastic drop in purchasing power for individuals and the Lebanese government. Consequently, the economy of Lebanon continues to plume; it has forced the government to “amend official prices repeatedly within days (or even hours) for essentials including bread, medicine and fuel” (International Crisis Group, 2023a). Even with the adoption of this type of measurement, poverty levels and food insecurity keep increasing as there is a record-high price of the food survival minimum expenditure basket (World Food Programme, 2023b). Different sources agree that the food security situation in Lebanon is worrying, and a consequence of a three-year deep economic crisis exacerbated by three unique events that need more international support and assistance to meet essential needs and food security in Lebanon (Lebanon: Economic crisis, 2023; World Food Programme, 2022).

Impact on Palestinian Refugees' Food Security

The essay has presented the effects of the 2019 protest, the pandemic and the 2020 port explosion under a pre-existent multcategory crisis on Lebanon's food security. All the previous adverse effects and increases in food insecurity also apply to vulnerable communities such as refugees. However, this section of the essay is interested in going into more detail about how those three main events affected Palestinian refugees in Lebanon's food security. It is necessary to highlight that the available specific information regarding the food security of Palestinians in

Lebanon from the end of 2019 up to 2023 is limited compared to the information found on Syrian refugees.

As has been introduced before, Palestinian refugees are a unique population compared to other refugee populations in Lebanon due to their protracted situation, multigenerational families and policies regarding work and internal mobility, and the possibility of living in refugee camps, among other elements (Sahyoun, Sassine et al., 2020). Nevertheless, they are a marginalized community, as are other refugee communities in Lebanon. Palestinian have been assisted over the decades by exclusive organizations such as DPRA and UNRWA, on top of other organizations such as the WFP. However, Palestinians depend on UNRWA services and aid due to restrictions on education, health, social services and employment (UNHCR, 2016). Like other refugees in Lebanon, Palestinians have restrictive policies on employment; however, changes in the law after 2010 gave Palestinian access to more formal employment opportunities that used to be restricted to Lebanese citizens (UNHCR, 2016). Unfortunately, Palestinian still get denied the right to work in many professional categories, which adds more stress and pushes Palestinians into further poverty (UNRWA, 2022a). In contrast with other refugee communities, Palestinians live in formal settlements (12 official camps built by UNRWA), but these settlements cannot be adequately maintained or adapted.

Before the three cataclysmic events starting in 2019, 58% of the Palestinian population was already considered poor, and 72% experienced food insecurity as their food expenditure was low (Ghattas et al., 2015). Furthermore, half or more Palestinian considered food insecure were receiving assistance from UNRWA in the shape of cash assistance to purchase basic food. However, it was not enough to respond to their levels of food insecurity (Ghattas et al., 2015).

The greatest portion of humanitarian assistance received by Palestinians comes from UNRWA, but since 2019, the WFP also assists Palestinian refugees (World Food Programme, 2023b). The protest, pandemic and explosion augmented the hardships of Palestinians by increasing the risk of electric blackouts, health problems and food insecurity (UNRWA, 2022a). The few jobs employing Palestinians got eliminated or cancelled due to the circumstances; consequently, incomes got reduced (UNRWA, 2020; 2021). Another element that impacted the income was the currency devaluation that decreased the purchasing power of Palestinians to afford basic food staples that kept getting expensive and rare to find. According to a study by UNRWA, 62% of Palestinian interviewees affirm that their household income was reduced during COVID-19 (UNRWA, 2022).

The decrease in income and the lower purchasing power also affected the capacity of Palestinians to afford cooking gas, which was also increasing in cost and directly impacted food security. A cooking tank gas price increased by 1,454% between 2020 and 2021, adding pressure to food security (UNRWA, 2022a). As an intent to support Palestinians, UNRWA was also providing financial aid to Palestinian to cover the cost of cooking gas tanks; however, the financial aid was not enough. During her interview, a Palestinian refugee stated, "I cannot afford to buy gas for heating (UNRWA, 2022a). The already precarious conditions for food security of Palestinians in Lebanon got even more challenging as Palestinians from Syria began arriving in Syria due to the Syrian war (Ghattas et al., 2015; UNRWA, 2022a). Access to essential commodities (such as food) was further limited to the new Palestinian refugees from Syria since 65% of Palestinians in Lebanon were living below the absolute poverty line by 2020 already (UNRWA, 2020).

Palestinians were becoming poorer faster than in previous years while inflation was skyrocketing. A survey conducted by UNRWA (2022b; 2022c) in 2022 also found that 87.3% of the Palestinian refugees from Syria were living below the absolute poverty line and 11.3% were in a state of abject poverty which was a significant increase from 73% recorded in July 2021. The cost of the World Food Program's food basket, another international assistance tool for Palestinians, kept rising; from 2019 to 2021, the basket's price increased five times its original cost (UNRWA, 2022a). According to a survey by UNRWA (2022b) 2021, 58% of Palestinian households had to reduce their meal sizes. During interviews by UNRWA, some Palestinian refugees said that eating meat, chicken, or even eating three meals per day was a dream now (UNRWA, 2022a). By the beginning of 2022, the Lebanon Field Office food price monitoring survey found that the cost of a standard food basket had increased by 32% (UNRWA, 2022c). The financial means for Palestinians to access food, even essential items, were becoming out of reach. Therefore, agencies such as UNRWA provided cash assistance to approximately 90,000 Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 2022a). However, as a Palestinian stated in the interview, "The cash assistance I receive from UNRWA is barely enough to buy food and cover very basic needs" (UNRWA, 2022a, p.7). Unfortunately, this increases the pressure and reliance on humanitarian aid agencies to feed Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Palestinian refugees kept pushing and surviving by using harmful coping mechanisms such as missing meals and child labour. Another coping strategy that Palestinian refugees had access to compared to other refugees is that they had a multigenerational network that allowed them to rely on neighbors and family members. For example, a Palestinian interviewee shared that they often would have to take the children to their neighbors' houses to eat (UNRWA, 2022a). They pressured humanitarian aid agencies to increase their support and assistance, and the

Palestinian situation in Lebanon kept deteriorating. In fact, UNRWA is considered the lifeline of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Nevertheless, UNRWA is also facing a financial crisis due to a budgeting shortfall, putting the assistance role and protection it provides at risk in an extremely delicate situation (UNRWA, 2022a).

Impact on Syrian Refugees' Food Security

This portion of the essay is interested in understanding how the multcategory crisis, the protest, the pandemic, and the port explosion specifically affected the food security of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. As mentioned before, since the civil war in Syria, Lebanon has accepted more than one million refugees from Syria, increasing the concentration of refugees per person (Chemali, Borba et al., 2018). The Syrian situation is split between those Syrians registered with the UNHCR with access to its assistance and those Syrians who are not and have been forced to obtain sponsorship and paid for a work permit (Zuntz, Klema et al., 2022). The analysis of the impacts begins with presenting the Syrian reality prior to the three events, followed by studying the effects of the government measurements. Next, the impacts are going to be analyzed per year. Finally, a quick conclusion of how the situation will be left by the beginning of 2023 is shared.

The 2011 Syrian civil war increased the refugee numbers in Lebanon, which would reach out as a primary point of assistance to the UNHCR, and only since 2012 Syrians were able to search for help with the WFP too. Both humanitarian organizations started by providing food parcels and vouchers. However, with the fast increase in Syrian refugees, they moved to provide cash-based assistance through electronic cards (World Food Programme, 2023b). Unfortunately,

those Syrians arriving after the 2015 legislation to restrict UNHCR registration pushed these Syrians into further poverty and dependency on the country's economy for jobs and food. This is because Syrians post-2015 have been left to be treated as economic migrants rather than vulnerable people that require protection, assistance and humanitarian aid as refugees (Zuntz, Klema et al., 2022). In addition, the Lebanese measure to prohibit the establishment of official camps has increased the gap of insecurity to access essential services and store food safely (Krishnan, Riva, Sharma & Vishwanath, 2020). In 2017, 91% of the Syrian refugees lived in extreme poverty and food insecurity, and about 75% of Syrians were living below the poverty line of \$3 per day (Ibrahim, Honein-AbouHaidar and Jomaa, 2019; Dehnavi and SüB, 2019; WFP, 2023b; Hachem, Ali et al., 2022).

Syrian refugees are experiencing their own crisis inside the Lebanese crisis. In the opinion of the UNHCR (2021), the multiple instability elements Lebanon was experiencing prior to the end of 2019 "has continued to impact the food consumption levels of Syrian refugees" (p.3). The joint programs of the UNHCR and WFP state that by 2021, 358,000 Syrian refugees were receiving cash assistance to relieve pressure in food insecurity (Kharrouba et al., 2021). Even with the financial aid provided by both humanitarian organizations, 51% of Syrian households "had medium to very high food expenditure share (more than 50% of their expenditure were on food), up from 45% in 2020" (United Nations High, 2021, p.1). This resulted from the multcategory crisis's combination of economic and financial events. Since the Syrian post-2015 were not allowed to receive UNHCR food and financial aid, the loss of job opportunities, the financial collapse and the 90% depreciation of the Lebanese pound increased the Syrian risk of food insecurity. It increased Syrian prior-2015 dependency on humanitarian aid for survival (Hachem, Ali et al., 2022). This re-confirmed how household food security levels

were deteriorating over time, leaving Syrian refugees increasingly vulnerable. Even if food importations have been impacted by the pandemic and port explosion, and the food cost increased, the agricultural situation was deteriorating too. The agriculture sector has been highly impacted in Lebanon -as mentioned in previous sections- that 90% of refugees were forced to obtain their food from shops rather than growing it; consequently, food insecurity increased faster among Syrians (Zuntz, Klema et al., 2022). Due to the high food insecurity in 2021, Syrian refugees, registered and non-registered, started applying emergency and crisis coping strategies such as begging, selling land or property in Syria, and accepting high-risk/illegal/socially degrading jobs; adults would also intentionally reduce their food intake to ensure kids and infant had enough food (United Nations High, 2021; Hachem, Ali et al., 2022).

The multicategory crisis kept reducing the primary living conditions and food security situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. According to the UNHCR (2021), food insecurity for Syrian refugee households increased by 1.7 times from 2019 to 2020, the highest in comparison with previous years. From 2021 to 2022, food insecurity increased from 49% to 67% in 2022 (United Nations High, 2021; World Food Programme, 2023b). The 2022 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees highlighted that 90% of Syrian refugee families desperately needed humanitarian assistance to survive and cover their basic needs as they were living below the survival minimum expenditure basket (World Food Programme, 2023a; United Nations High, 2021). Meanwhile, As global Food (2022) shares that 1.5 million Syrian refugees have been unable to afford and access health, food, electricity, and any other basic needs since the start of the crisis. The WFP statistics for the same year highlight that two million Lebanese and Syrians were receiving cash-based transfers or in-kind food (statistics were in combination with Lebanese residents and Syrian refugees) (World Food Programme, 2022).

The reality Syrian refugees face in Lebanon regarding living conditions and food security only keeps worsening. Lebanon: Economic crisis (2023) affirms that 700,000 Syrian are confirmed to be facing food insecurity. Meanwhile, Jeremias, Abou-Rizk et al. (2023) expressed that "two-thirds of Syrian refugee households were found to live below the poverty line and one-third of households in Lebanon were moderate to severely food insecure" (p.2). The effects of the multicategory crisis prior to the national protest, the pandemic and the Port of Beirut explosion were already high and intense on the Syrian population due to the multiple restrictions the government had established against Syrian refugees and their vulnerable status as refugees. The years 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 only made the high dependency of Syrian refugees on international humanitarian organizations more evident and how they become the more significant victims of a multicategory crisis.

Conclusion

Over three years of a deep political and socioeconomic crisis in Lebanon has had severe and worrying consequences on the food security of the country's population. A government was overthrown, debt and inflation increased with a currency falling, the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and an explosion of the most essential import entry of the country led to an increased cost of food and gas and lower purchasing power, among other things. All this has become the perfect cocktail to put the food security of Lebanese, refugees, and asylum seekers in extreme danger. It was essential to study the impacts it had on overall food security in Lebanon because to understand how much the multicategory crisis exacerbated the already vulnerable food

security status of Syrian and Palestinian, it was necessary to have the same country as a reference.

As has been shown all over the research, food security is studied through statistics and percentages; however, those numbers have not been the exact same between the multiple sources. The different statistics presented can be explained by the different size samples and the status of the individuals. Unfortunately, multiple households of refugees and asylum seekers avoid or cannot register legally in Lebanon. Therefore, the conclusion of the food security impacts could be worse than the sources have presented.

Since the start of the crisis in October 2019, the World Food Programme (2023b) found out that the prices of food have increased nineteen times. As an answer, the Lebanese government started subsidizing flour, wheat, bread, and electricity; however, the measure was only temporary. When the government subsidy was eliminated, it pushed households to eat less than two meals per day and 70% to skip meals by March 2021 (Makdissi and Seif Edine, 2020; Hoteit, al-Atat et al., 2021); individuals did not have the financial means to buy the food that used to be provided by the government. In the same year, already poor and vulnerable households –around 237,000 people– were highly dependent on food assistance, fuel, and medicine (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021). In addition, the cost of food had skyrocketed by 404% by June 2021 and 2,000% by December 2022 (United Nations High, 2021; World Food Programme, 2022).

It was interesting to identify that most sources tools to understand food insecurity by researching the increased cost of the food basket, the number of meals a household or individual consumes per day, the poverty line, and sometimes the cost of cooking gas or dependency on

emergency aid. Some statistics and percentages do refer immediately to the percentage of food insecurity. These statistics do provide some idea of how much food insecurity has worsened for people in Lebanon because of the national protest, the pandemic, and the explosion of the port of Beirut. Nevertheless, the sources do not provide insight into how individuals, even more, vulnerable among the poor and vulnerable such as kids, the elderly, and people with disabilities, have been impacted. Even though the major research paper did not deepen the details of those extra vulnerable populations, it is necessary to highlight the limitations this study and most sources had as their statistics do not include them. For example, the elderly, pregnant women, and infants need a more specific type of food to cover their basic food needs, which are not the same as the rest of the population; this cannot be seen in mere percentages and statistics. All this helps the study to conclude that the food insecurity in Lebanon due to the multicategory crisis might be worse than the reports have shown.

Palestinian Versus Syrian Refugees' Food Insecurity:

Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Lebanon have not escaped the negative impacts of the multicategory crisis Lebanon has been facing since the end of 2019. In fact, as already vulnerable populations in Lebanon, the increase in food insecurity has been expected if the average Lebanese population has been impacted as well. However, the way how they have been affected differs in some elements. To start, Palestinian refugees have been one of the oldest populations of refugees in Lebanon compared to Syrian refugees. Nevertheless, the number of Syrians is higher than Palestinian. The number of Syrian refugees has been faster increasing since 2015 with the Syrian war, but with the displacement from Syria, Palestinian refugees in

Syria were forced to flee as well. The Syrian war did increase the number of Palestinians in Lebanon; however, it does not compare to the over 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

As was mentioned previously, Lebanon had been for decades under much instability. This socioeconomic and political stress added to the vulnerable status of refugees had already pushed Palestinian and Syrian refugees into further poverty. Prior to 2019, 58% of Palestinians in Lebanon were considered poor, and 72% were food insecure (based on their low food expenditure) (Ghattas et al., 2015). Meanwhile, 91% of Syrian refugees had high poverty levels and were food insecure (Dehnavi and SüB, 2019). The policies and administrative structure on which Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Lebanon relied were different and had created a gap between Palestinian and Syrian chances of further food insecurity. This analysis is not provided directly by the sources but was presented in previous sections. On one hand, Palestinians counted on their own agency responsible for providing them with humanitarian aid –UNRWA—in addition to UNHCR and WFP. Moreover, UNRWA has built legal and formal refugee camps for Palestinians. On the other hand, Syrians have been prohibited from registering as refugees with the UNHCR since 2015 due to a decision made by the Lebanese government, leaving Syrians that arrived after 2015 unable to access any humanitarian aid assistance and being treated as economic migrants (Zuntz, Klema et al., 2022). In addition, Syrians did not count in formal refugee camps.

It is relevant to mention the existence or not of formal refugee camps as camps increase access to essential services and store food safety. Not having access to store food safety increase food insecurity, especially for Syrian refugees. Also, the incapability for a big number of Syrians to access UNHCR humanitarian aid made them more dependent on the volatile Lebanese food

markets. Palestinian refugees could have also been relying on food markets, but they had the UNRWA food aid. In 2021 it was reported that 58% of Palestinians had to reduce their meal sizes, and 90% of Syrians were living below the survival minimum expenditure basket (United Nations High, 2021; UNRWA, 2022b). By 2022, the cost of a standard food basket had increased 32% (UNRWA, 2022c). At the same time, 87.3% of Palestinians were living below the absolute poverty line, and over 90% of Syrian were living in extreme poverty. The poverty levels were extremely high for both Syrian and Palestinian refugee groups, which forced them to take riskier measures such as begging, selling their few items and illegal jobs. Refugees were more aware of the different needs among their already vulnerable population of the even more vulnerable such as kids and the elderly. For example, parents started skipping meals to give more nutrients or even basic food to their kids, something that is not mentioned in the statistics. The World Food Programme (2023b) states that for 2022, food insecurity for Syrian refugees was at 67%, but no more details are provided.

During the whole analysis performed on this research paper, the migrant settlement theory was applied to understand how the multicategory crisis affected the food security of Palestinian and Syrian refugees. Evidently, the four factors of the theory were difficult for both refugee groups:

1. The Lebanese policies and rights towards Palestinian and Syrian were making their arrival and stay more difficult as Lebanon did not sign the refugee convention and has established policies against the settlement of Palestinians and Syrians.
2. The inexistence of a social network other than the humanitarian aid organizations the refugees could rely on. Palestinian did count on a multigeneration family system; however, it did not impact much their food security.

3. Both refugee groups' economic participation was minimal because of the job application limitation and became almost null with the pandemic.
4. The last element of the migration circumstances was only analyzed for Syrian whose entry as refugees got eliminated.

It is evident that primary sources are making efforts to track the severity of the impacts the multicategory crisis has had on Syrian and Palestinian refugees' food security. Organizations are trying to cope with the detrimental situation of the country to provide basic needs. Nevertheless, the data available does not provide enough information that covers all the elements that are included in the definition of food security used in the study. The analysis developed in this major research paper tried to cover those numerical gaps; however, in order to have a complete answer to the research question, further surveys and data collection are necessary.

Looking into the Future:

The essay does not have as a purpose to find or create recommendations of strategies to reduce the impacts and levels of food insecurity that affect Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. However, during the research and analysis of secondary sources, some recommendations were identified that are worth highlighting when looking into the future. The multiple authors that discuss possible solutions to food insecurity in Lebanon, either from a national approach or a refugee oriented, agree that it must be the government that needs to take action by prioritizing policy design and implementation (Ghattas et al., 2015). In the opinion of Hoteit, Mohsen et al. (2022), "Governments have a responsibility to establish functioning institutions and infrastructure that enable the poor to achieve nutrition security" (p.12) because

food security needs to be in harmony with nutritious food. Furthermore, policies to be effective must count on substantial investments.

Until a stable government or political structure is put in place, food subsidies should be maintained as food insecurity is not only threatening the life of Palestinian and Syrian refugees but the life of the Lebanese population who have not been a marginalized population inside Lebanon (Makdissi and Saif Edine, 2020). Before 2021, the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture made a recommendation to increase local agriculture production (Kharroubi, Naja et al., 2021). This was suggested in April 2020; unfortunately, a clear coordination strategy has not been implemented. In answer to the incomplete recommendation, Kharroubi, Naja et al. (2021) suggested a focus on short to medium-term projects that center on "cash crops," which are high-value food such as fresh fruits and vegetables; this will help to reduce the disruptions in the food supply chain and promote local food production. Another suggestion made by Ibrahim, Honein-AbouHaidar and Jomaa (2019) focuses on building community kitchens were allows households to support multiple households, reduce social isolation, promote nutrition education, and improve cooking and food management skills in low-income families. This strategy of community kitchen can alleviate food insecurity and "enhance dietary diversity while fostering social cohesion among refugees and host communities within a protracted crisis setting" (Ibrahim, Honein-AbouHaidar and Jomaa, 2019, p.10).

Something multiple authors do emphasize and have seen over the analysis done in this research is that to tackle food insecurity; projects need to cover other areas, such as housing and infrastructure. As was mentioned at the beginning of the essay, food security is not only possible through the availability of food but also through the safe storage of food, accessibility to services

to prepare them and a nutritious and balanced diet, among other elements. Therefore, Ghattas et al. (2015) statement continues to be true for housing and infrastructure must be increased, as well as reforming policies to increase the rights of the vulnerable.

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