



Rona Haddad, UN Volunteer with WFP Lebanon, during a field visit to a school benefiting from WFP's school-feeding programme.

© WFP, 2019

The stories that matter most: Lebanon's crisis turns caregivers into real-life heroes

The devastating blasts that hit the Port of Beirut on 4 August 2020 will push food prices beyond the reach of many, particularly as Lebanon imports nearly 85 per cent of its food. The UN and aid partners have launched a US \$565 million appeal to address the overwhelming needs in Lebanon. The World Food Programme (WFP) is already engaged in the emergency response, with support from UN Volunteer humanitarians.

Since October 2019, Lebanon has been witnessing a grim economic crisis that was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The national currency has lost 80 per cent of its value, driving the price of a monthly food basket – that is a selection of staple food items a family needs – to [more than the double](#) over the past six months. With [one million people](#) living below the poverty line, many families were already struggling to make ends meet. Then the Beirut explosion happened. UN Volunteer humanitarians are at the forefront of the response with UN entities.

Dana Houalla, a UN Volunteer Communications Assistant with WFP in Lebanon, is among them. Reflecting on the role she and her fellow UN Volunteers are playing, Dana explains that she wants her contributions to go beyond the numbers to make sure the stories of the affected families are told.

"I wanted my stories to move people. I wanted to inspire people to end hunger. Yet, the resilience of caregivers has been further tested by the explosion at the Port of [Beirut](#)," says Dana.

"We were all shocked by how fast this happened. As volunteers, our homes are amongst the buildings that were damaged," she explains. However, people's needs call for immediate and continuous action. While Dana develops communications, her colleagues scramble to the field to help with the recovery efforts, clean up initiatives and outreach.

“ The humanitarian workers, survivors, volunteers and people all over the country are at the blast site together. Everyone is in grief. It is a lot to take in, but none of us is alone. This is the story that matters most. --Dana Houalla, UN Volunteer Communications Assistant with WFP, Lebanon

Dana's supervisor, Malak Jaafar, Head of Communications at WFP Lebanon, shares why volunteerism is key in these challenging times.

Maya Sabbagh, who serves with WFP's Partnerships Division, is contributing to recovery activities as a UN Volunteer Business Support Assistant. As her agency seeks new partners that could deliver results on short notice with access to the most underserved areas, Maya is supporting this process, compiling profiles of partners, contributing to calls for proposals and knowledge-sharing activities.

"While working to support the needs of our beneficiaries, we are managing a crisis of our own. Our offices have been heavily damaged and new modalities were established to enable both home and field-based work," notes Maya. "We are adapting constantly, modifying how and where we work, while simultaneously managing a pipeline of established, new and

potential partnership agreements," she explains.

“ The fast pace of our work and our outreach helps establish the WFP network that is keeping many people in Beirut alive. -- Maya Sabbagh, UN Volunteer Business Support Assistant with WFP, Lebanon

While not directly engaged in the current emergency response, UN Volunteer Sarah Kabbara is delivering much-needed support to WFP's mandate through her work with the school-feeding programme, which addresses short-term hunger among children and provides an incentive for them to enroll and remain in school.

“ During my talks with parents, one father mentioned to me that he is unable to feed all of his children. It is heartbreaking to see the many children and families that are hungry. The food boxes are a lifeline to families with no other means of support. --Sarah Kabbara, UN Volunteer with WFP

Field visits are equally important for Rona Haddad, who serves as a UN Volunteer Field Monitoring Assistant with WFP. Rona shares one encounter that sums up the situation of many in Lebanon. "With tears in her eyes, a Lebanese grandmother told me she had never had to seek assistance before, but had nowhere else to turn to for food. It was heart wrenching," says Rona.

"Like many Lebanese, she did not have savings or benefits and could not keep pace with the increased costs of food. She was just one of many elderly women and family members of children in the school-feeding programme. Without assistance, those may not survive," adds Rona.

Dana is passionate about telling the stories her colleagues bring back from the field. "The stories from our field visits are touching, because the people speaking to us are caregivers. They are the ones who often look after everyone else, but are now food insecure. They are also among the most vulnerable, as a result of the Port explosion," she explains.

"We are committed to telling their stories. These are the stories that matter most," Dana concludes.



• WFP • World Humanitarian Day • Lebanon • Beirut-2020

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 2: Zero hunger](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)