

In a survey of 4,702 US adults employed at least part time, 42 percent of working women said they have faced one of eight types of discrimination on the job because of their gender.

## Syrian refugees in Lebanon falling deeper in poverty

Syrian refugees in Lebanon are more vulnerable than ever, with more than half now living in extreme poverty, and over three quarters living below the poverty line, according to the findings of a major UN study.

Released Friday, "The Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon" (VASyR), is a yearly study carried out by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), en.amahar.com wrote.

The 2017 survey revealed that 58 percent of households are living in extreme poverty (less than \$2.87/person/day), unable to meet survival needs — an increase of five percent to the extreme poverty levels since last year. Refugees now have less money for essentials — with average per capita spending now standing at just \$98 per month — \$44 of which is spent on food.

The proportion of households living below the poverty line (less than \$3.84/person/day) has also continued to increase, reaching 76 percent of refugee households in 2017.

"Syrian refugees in Lebanon are barely keeping afloat," said Mireille Girard, UNHCR Representative in Lebanon. "Most families are extremely vulnerable and dependent on aid from the international community."

She added, "Without continued support, their situation would be even more harrowing, especially in winter when their struggle is exacerbated by the harsh conditions."

Borrowing money to buy food, cover health expenses and pay rent is extremely common, with 87 percent of refugees saying they are in debt. On average, 77 percent of Syrian refugee households experienced a lack of food or money to buy food during the 30 days prior to the survey.

Although high, these figures reveal an improvement over 2016, when 91 percent reported borrowing money and 88 percent reported a lack of food or money to buy food.

Only 19 percent of families reported that all members had legal residency, down from 21 percent in 2016.

More alarmingly, the share of households with no members having legal residency increased considerably, reaching 55 percent in 2017. Overall, 74 percent of surveyed Syrian refugees aged 15 and above do not have legal residency.

The survey also revealed that only 17 percent of refugee parents managed to complete all the steps of the birth registration process for their children.

The report indicates, however, that higher percentages of families have completed the first two steps of the process — with nearly all families (96 percent) obtaining a notification of birth from the hospital or midwife, and three quarters obtaining a certificate from the Mukhtar



daily@mail.co.uk

(town leader), which attests to the birth of the child, but does not constitute birth registration.

Just over one-third of the children had their birth registered with the local civil registry office of the Nofous, the third step of the birth registration process.

Food insecurity remained critically high, with 91 percent of households affected to some degree. While this is an improvement on 2016, the majority of households reported that they had cut spending on food (79 percent) or bought food on credit (77 percent).

"While still high, the food insecurity situation has stabilized, reflecting the positive impact that cash-based food assistance has on the most vulnerable refugee households," explained WFP Country Director Dominik Heinrich.

"That said, sustained donor support for 2018 is the only way to ensure that there is no further deterioration nor recourse to harmful coping strategies by vulnerable refugees in Lebanon."

Significant improvements have been made in school enrolment for children aged 6-14 — with a national average of 70 percent now enrolled — up from 52 percent last year. Enrolment rates in the Bekaa Valley nearly doubled in just one year. However, while enrolment rates are up, completion of education remains an enormous challenge — with just 12 percent of adolescents aged 17-19 having completed their education up to grade 9.

"Needless to say, we are pleased with our achievements and the increasing enrolment. But, what we find deeply worrying is the rising poverty, since it directly impacts children's possibility of exercising their basic right to education," said Tanya Chapuisat, UNICEF's representative in Lebanon.

A range of humanitarian assistance continues to be provided with 71 percent of respondents saying they received some form of assistance in the previous three months.

Monthly cash-based food assistance by WFP makes up the largest proportion of support, reaching almost 700,000 refugees.

During the colder months, UNHCR's seasonal unrestricted winter cash program includes close to 800,000 persons. Furthermore, unrestricted cash safety net support by UNHCR reaches 198,000 of the most severely vulnerable persons (33,000 households) on a monthly basis.

Child-focused humanitarian cash from UNICEF expanded from a pilot covering 50,000 refugee children in the 2016/2017 school year, to 75,000 in the 2017/2018 school year.

The 2017 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR) is the fifth survey of its kind, with researchers having visited some 5,000 refugee families randomly selected from 26 districts across Lebanon.

## Non-smokers more attractive than smokers

Non-smokers are proved to be more attractive than smokers as proofs of negative impact of smoking on facial appearances, said researchers at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom.

Over 500 participants were presented with the faces of 23 sets of identical twins, plus a male and female prototype, thedailystar.net wrote.



The research explored two further aspects of smoking and facial appearance: "(1) Does facial appearance alone provide an indication of smoking status and (2) how does smoking affect the attractiveness of faces?"

The finding under the title of 'Smoking status and attractiveness among exemplar and prototypical identical twins discordant for smoking' was published on Royal Society Open Science journal on December 13, 2017.

Identical twins, both male and female, as the subjects of the study provided the researchers with the degree of control they needed to achieve accurate results.

"Because identical twins share nearly all their genetic material, and some aspects of their environment (e.g. parenting, cultural background, education), differences between them can be attributed to non-shared environmental effects, including differences in lifestyle behaviors such as smoking," the study said.

The male and female participants were able to correctly identify which of the male and female prototype faces was the smoker 70 percent of the time.

Both men and women also predominantly chose the non-smoker prototype faces as the more attractive of the two.

The researchers believe that their findings could be instrumental in promoting changes in smoking behavior, especially among young people.

"Young people are particularly sensitive to the potential negative effects smoking has on their attractiveness as they age," the study said.

The findings, particularly those for the prototypes that represent the characteristic facial features of smokers and non-smokers, have the potential to be of utility in developing and improving smoking behavior change interventions," it added.

## Energy poverty a reality for at least a fifth of New Zealanders

Reduced summer power bills used to be a welcome reprieve for struggling families in New Zealand. The sun's out, the heaters are off, and everyone's outside saving on power use.

But, that's not the case anymore. High power bills are becoming a year-round phenomenon, and it's crippling some families, according to stuff.co.nz.



stuff.co.nz

A recent Otago University study said one fifth of all New Zealand families have experienced energy poverty, which is when 10 percent or more of their household income is spent on energy.

Wellington mum Kelly McLeod had a \$501 family power bill in July this year.

"We paid the bill, even though it was huge," McLeod said.

Energy and Resources Minister Megan Woods said the new payments announced in the mini-budget will go some way towards alleviating energy poverty.

"We paid the bill, even though it was huge," McLeod said.

Even then, it meant sacrificing family outings and changing meal plans to cheaper alternatives.

But, McLeod reckons they got off lightly. She does community work through her church, and it was scarily common how many people struggled with power bills.

"I know families that can't pay the bill and their power gets shut off, so they move to a new power company, can't pay that and then they've got the debt collectors after them."

Minister of Energy and Resources Megan Woods said the government was concerned about energy poverty and was taking steps to address it. New payments under the mini-Budget released on Thursday was one measure.

Older New Zealanders and those on fixed incomes tend to be hardest hit. That's not right and we can do better," Woods said.

"That's why our Winter Energy Payment will help older and fixed-income New Zealanders afford the heating they need to keep themselves warm and healthy. Around a million Kiwis will receive up to \$700 a year to help them heat their homes this coming winter."

Most families struggled in winter with heating, but the problem was year-round, McLeod said.

She estimated about 90 percent of the people she worked with in the community struggled to pay their power bill. Over the last 18 months, she'd seen the situation worsen as more and more people came looking for help.

"For a lot of families I work with, it is a ripple effect that goes from health to education. It shouldn't be a choice a family has to make.

"If they try to pay their power bills, then that's their transport bus money gone."

## Automatic saving in UK to start at 18 under new plans

Every worker aged 18 or over will begin saving into a workplace pension unless they opt out, under UK government plans to extend its automatic enrolment scheme.

At present, the scheme means employers must enroll staff aged 22 and over and earning above £10,000 into a pension, BBC reported.

Ministers hope to reduce the minimum age to 18 in the mid 2020s and say it will affect about 900,000 young people.

The system has been credited with ensuring more prepare for older age but it brings extra costs for employers.

It has been introduced gradually since October 2012.

"For an entire generation of people, workplace pension saving is the new normal. My mission now is to make sure the next generation of younger workers have the same opportunities," said Work and Pensions Secretary David Gauke.

A slice of a worker's pay packet is automatically diverted to a pension saving pot, which is invested until retirement. Their employer also makes a contribution, as does the government.

Individuals have the option to opt out if they wish to, although that will mean losing the employers' contribution.

At present UK workers aged 22 and above are automatically enrolled, assuming they earn more than £10,000 a year and are not already signed up to a workplace pension.

Anyone on a short-term contract, working where an agency pays their wages, or who is on maternity, adoption or carer's leave should still be eligible.

The total minimum contribution is

currently set at two percent of earnings (0.8 percent from the worker, one percent from an employer, and 0.2 percent



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as tax relief from the government).

From April 2018, it will increase to five percent of earnings (2.4 percent from the worker, two percent from the employer, and 0.6 percent as tax relief). From April 2019 onwards, it will rise to eight percent of earnings (four percent from the individual, three percent from the employer, and one percent as tax relief).

In light of a review of the automatic enrolment system, the Department for Work and Pensions plans to extend the system to workers aged 18 and over who are earning £10,000 a year or more. Those earning less can ask their employer to enroll them.

Iona Bain, founder of the Young Money blog, said that the move was still

inadequate in solving a long-term pension crisis for the young.

"A lot of young people still do not

help those with multiple jobs.

Annual reviews of the trigger point for automatic enrolment (at present, when a worker earns £10,000 or more). Contribution levels will also be reviewed.

• Exploring the use of technology to encourage the UK's 4.8 million self-employed people to save for retirement.

• The proposals will cost employers an extra £1.4 billion a year, and the government an extra £600 million in tax relief a year.

"Requiring employers to contribute from the first pound of earnings, will mean that, by 2019, hundreds of thousands of small employers will have to pay up to £180 more per employee each year," said Mike Cherry, national chairman at the Federation of Small Businesses.

"For employers in certain sectors, such as care and hospitality, where margins are tight this will really add up."

More than nine million people in the UK have been automatically enrolled into a pension so far, adding to the 10.8 million already contributing to a workplace pension.

However, the proportion of earnings being set aside is much lower now than before 2012.

The average proportion of earnings put into an investment-based defined contribution pension has fallen from about nine percent of earnings before auto-enrolment to four percent now.

The DWP's review, led by industry representatives, estimated that 12 million people are not saving enough for their retirement, representing 38% of the working age population.