



COVID-19: VOICES FROM LEBANON



In face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Scort has reached out to Young Coaches all over the world to give them a platform to share their experiences and challenges.

Lebanon, 25. June 2020

Lebanon has a long-standing history of welcoming displaced people from neighbouring countries. Over the past few years, many fleeing the conflict in Syria have also arrived, making it the country with the most per-capita refugees. More recently, Lebanon has also experienced an economic crisis and is challenged with a lockdown due to COVID-19. Three Young Coaches tell us about their lives and how they are adapting to the situation.

In response to the lockdown in Lebanon, Qutaiba, a Young Coach based in Beirut, and some of his friends decided to collect donations to buy food packages for low-income families. However, this did not last long; an unstable currency meant that soon they could not afford to distribute food packages.



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When the pandemic hit Lebanon in March 2020, rising inflation had already caused food prices to soar by almost 50% compared to the previous year. Unfortunately, food prices have continued to increase since April and for many the situation is steadily deteriorating. “ I don’t know what they live off”, Qutaiba tells us, when

talking about the families. “They live day by day. One day, they have food, the next, they don’t.”

In a very short timeframe, Lebanon has experienced a revolution, an economic crisis causing an inflation, and now a lockdown due to the spread of COVID-19. While the numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases have been relatively low, the lockdown caused an increase in the unemployment rate. The lack of employment opportunity and the resulting competition has led to increased tensions between the Lebanese and the refugee community, which makes up a quarter of the country’s population.

To help reduce the potential for social tensions, the Football Club Social Alliance delivered a Young Education

back in 2017, educating 31 young adults from Lebanon as well as from the refugee population. Through their activities, they help promote social cohesion between the host and refugee community, thus contributing to a more peaceful coexistence.



Qutaiba is a volunteer for an organisation and coaches children from low-income areas as well as kids living in refugee camps. According to him, the situation for refugees was already challenging before the start of the pandemic. Now it is even worse: Due to the economic crisis, Qutaiba does not see how the Lebanese government can support refugees, when it struggles to provide for its own citizens. Some Syrian refugees have even started to return to safe areas in Syria, because they hope for a better life there.

Raz, the Head Coach of the Juventus Academy in Lebanon, mainly coaches children from middle- and high-income families and considers himself as one of the lucky ones as he still receives part of his salary. But “the community is angry. Because the food prices are going up and people cannot buy essential things like bread and milk.” If Lebanese who had jobs are facing problems, “refugees are going to have ten times the issues we have.”, he says.

Jawad cannot say the same thing about his situation: the lockdown has cost him his income. “Adding the epidemic to the already difficult situation with the economy, it may have permanently destroyed the small clubs.”, Jawad worries. He is a football coach for the



© Jawad: People queuing to exchange money

Coerver Academy in Beirut and has also founded his own football academy, the “Haramoun Sports Academy”, with the aim to engage kids in his hometown in football activities. Especially in the suburbs and the poor villages, small football clubs are endangered. However, the circumstances have not discouraged him to continue engaging with the children. To make sure the kids in his hometown Rashayya have access to a training at least twice a week, he offers free online sessions via video calls.



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The children are highly motivated, “but the problem was that a lot of parents were unfamiliar with this form of communication.” On top of that comes the financial aspect: not all families can afford a good internet connection and thus access to these sessions is limited.

Despite the difficulties, Jawad tries to look at the circumstances positively and decided to use this time to develop new skills and participate in online workshops. Now is the time to “read more about coaching topics we didn’t have time for before”.



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Raz has also quickly adapted to the new situation and switched to online sessions. Instead of a live stream, he records videos for exercises the children can do at home. He adjusted his sessions in a way only a small space and limited material is required. “Instead of a training partner they can use a wall.”

Qutaiba, who often works in refugee camps, has no access to the children as the camps are closed for external people. For him, it is not the football he misses most, but the connection



© Qutaiba: Handing out food packages

with the children. For him coaching “goes much deeper than football. It is about feelings.”

We thank all our Young Coaches for their ongoing commitment and work during this time! #TogetherWeInspire

For more information on the project in Lebanon: [click here](#).