



Refugee children holding a new ATM card @ UNHCR / A.McConnell

### December developments

- Following the launch of UNHCR’s ATM cash assistance programme in November, by the end of December, some 46,518 refugee households, 232,590 individuals, had received ATM cards with cash to purchase heating fuel and a stove as part of the winterization programme.
- In December, 22,876 additional vulnerable refugee households, (over 114,000 individuals), who were otherwise not included for winterization assistance, were provided with ATM cards charged with cash for hygiene and baby kits and one-time winterization assistance for USD \$107.
- Coordination among interagency stakeholders continued to work towards the on-going harmonization of cash assistance via ATM card in the context of the Cash Working Group chaired by UNHCR. Organizations are working to ensure that cash assistance to refugees is provided in a comprehensive manner and coordinated among organizations.

### Achievements: January – December

Activity	 Reached January – December	 2013 Target
Cash for winterization (via ATM card)	232,590	252,000
Cash for shelter	22,935	37,500
Emergency cash for protection	9,760	100,000

### Needs

Refugee households throughout Lebanon are struggling to meet their basic needs due to lack of access to labour opportunities and dwindling family resources and savings. As many households rely on market provided goods and services, such as rented apartments, financial support is critical for the survival of vulnerable families. As an alternative to in-kind assistance and distribution of core relief items, refugees frequently express a preference for financial assistance, which enables them to prioritise their own needs and saves time travelling to distribution sites.

# Challenges

## High cost of living:

The cost of living in Lebanon, especially in terms of housing is very high. This has forced many households to adopt negative coping strategies or to move into substandard accommodation in order to make savings. UNHCR, together with its partners, is unable to fully cover the needs of even the most vulnerable households, but monthly cash assistance via ATM transfer can provide a contribution to meet a household's minimum expenditures.

## Reduced livelihood opportunities:

Labour opportunities for Syrian refugees and Lebanese alike have declined as a result of the increase in the supply of worker to the market. The inability of households to contribute to their monthly cash requirements has increased the gap between expenditure and income, rendering an increasing number of households dependent on external assistance.

## Security concerns:

In some parts of the country, cash by ATM card is still not a viable option due to security concerns. Refugees are faced with restrictions to their movement and have poor access to markets and ATMs. In these areas, alternative assistance modalities, such as vouchers or in-kind distributions will continue, despite this placing an increasing burden on existing resources.

# Strategy

UNHCR is moving towards increased use of ATM cards for the distribution of cash assistance, starting with the winterization programme. ATM cards have a number of benefits:

- Given the fact that refugees live in close to 1,600 locations across Lebanon, ATM cards provide a practical means for swiftly delivering cash assistance to refugees in the country.
- In addition, ATM cards empower refugees by providing a dignified means of receiving cash assistance, saving time spent at or travelling to distribution sites.
- The cards also enable UNHCR and partners to make the best use of funds available. They eliminate costs related to procurement, storage, and distribution of in-kind assistance.
- Finally, monitoring of electronically recorded transactions allows partners to better assess and understand refugee needs. Some 650,000 refugee families will have received ATM cards by the end of March.

Based on the experience gained from the winterization and other cash programmes, UNHCR is planning a shift in 2014 from sector-specific or 'conditional' cash assistance to a more comprehensive cross-sectoral 'unconditional' approach of monthly cash grants. Households receiving the monthly cash allowance will be able to use the funds to bridge the gap between their expenditures and income and set their own priorities. The approach seeks to target a portion of the total refugee population who would be qualified for financial assistance based on their vulnerability, while the refugee population at large will continue to benefit from protection services, food, health and education according to existing criteria in addition to other *ad hoc* emergency interventions. In this way, cash assistance via ATM will supplement, rather than replace other forms of assistance that cannot or should not be monetized.

# UNHCR implementing partners

Danish Refugee Council (DRC); World Vision (WV); Save the Children; Makhzoumi Foundation; Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED); Caritas, Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP); Social, Humanitarian, Economical Intervention for Local Development (SHEILD); Solidar Suisse.