

Vulnerability Assessment Framework: Technical explanation

December 2014

BACKGROUND

More than 3.2 million Syrians have fled their homeland to seek safe haven in neighbouring countries since the outbreak of civil war in 2011. As of 28 October, 618,508 of that total were living in Jordan, according to UNHCR records. As the Syrian refugee crisis continues, humanitarian assistance organizations and their donors increasingly want to use resources – regardless of funding levels – as effectively and equitably as possible to ensure that the most vulnerable refugees receive the greatest help. Improving targeting on the basis of vulnerability is a core commitment listed in the Jordan Chapter of the Regional Response Plan for 2014, the main strategy and appeal framework for the refugee response.

At the beginning of the VAF project in January 2014 there was limited comprehensive information on vulnerability within the Syrian refugee population. *Vulnerable* and *vulnerability* are common terms in the humanitarian relief world, but they often are used imprecisely as substitutes for people living in poverty; in particular in urban settings. For the purpose of providing humanitarian assistance, vulnerability should be defined by the factors that make individuals vulnerable so that assistance packages can be designed to meet beneficiaries' needs.

The use of different data among organizations risks the likelihood of duplicate services or of beneficiaries not receiving the most relevant services; and having information that cannot be compared or combined to form a comprehensive picture.

The VAF seeks to address those challenges, and improve on data-driven assistance by focusing not only on hazards and risks within beneficiary households, but also on strengths and capacities. At this stage of the humanitarian response, a fuller and more nuanced picture of vulnerability is needed – and possible – to inform humanitarian interventions.

OBJECTIVE OF THE VAF PROJECT

To put in place a system that supports the humanitarian assistance community by:

- ✓ Establishing a profile of vulnerability among Syrian refugee households and enabling monitoring changes in vulnerability over time;
- ✓ Addressing beneficiaries vulnerabilities based on using common vulnerability criteria;
- ✓ Strengthening coordination and decision-making of the delivery of humanitarian assistance

SCOPE

The VAF's emphasis is on refugee households in non-camp settings because assistance in camps tends to be provided to all refugees and because those who choose to live in camps instead of host



communities are usually less self-sufficient and more vulnerable. This scope, however, could widen after the VAF begins to roll-out and consultations are held with the inter-agency steering committee.

VAF MAIN OUTPUTS

- ✓ **STANDARDIZED DATA-COLLECTION TOOLS USING INDICATORS.** This allows vulnerability data to be collected, stored in a common platform, analysed, shared, and used for planning and decision-making.
- ✓ **COMPREHENSIVE DATABASE.** Data derived from the VAF indicators is collected at the registration stage by UNHCR and during home visits by UN agencies and NGOs. The information is uploaded into a central database.
- ✓ **MINIMUM SET OF COMMON VULNERABILITY INDICATORS.** That can be applied by sectors and partners when making assistance decisions.
- ✓ **AGREED-UPON VULNERABILITY DEFINITIONS BY SECTOR.** Rules created by each sector delineate levels of vulnerabilities within sectors, placing the households in one of four vulnerability categories – low, mild, moderate and severe. This should allow more specific delivery of assistance and also flag households that require more follow-up.
- ✓ **STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES.** SOPs will cover how, when and where the indicators will be applied (with safeguards taken to protect refugees).
- ✓ **TRAINING MANUAL FOR ENUMERATORS.** A guide to understanding and giving the questionnaire.
- ✓ **TRAINING MANUAL FOR NGOs/UN AGENCIES.** Guidelines on accessing the database, and training and support for participating organizations.
- ✓ **COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY.** A plan for informing refugees, government officials and other stakeholders about the VAF.
- ✓ **APPEALS SYSTEM.** The appeals system offers beneficiaries who feel their assistance was unfairly changed to demonstrate why their vulnerability has been inaccurately assessed by the VAF.

MAIN OUTCOMES

- ✓ Humanitarian assistance organizations in Jordan find that the VAF is beneficial to how they provide services to Syrian refugees and decide to participate;
- ✓ A training system, including manuals, is in place and effectively teaches staff from participating organizations how to use and utilise all relevant aspects of the VAF;
- ✓ Duplication of services is reduced;
- ✓ Participating agencies utilize the VAF to create queries that specifically address their programme and beneficiary needs, for example, households in Irbid that lack reliable access to safe water;
- ✓ Partners who have identified beneficiaries for individual household assistance are able to check the ‘vulnerability profile’ of that household against the database by uploading a list of unique identifiers (for example, the UNHCR or MOI registration number);

- ✓ Trends in vulnerability by different criteria, for example geographical area of needs, are spotted through issuance of periodic reports and inform strategies of assistance organizations;
- ✓ Broader strategic processes, such as the RRRP, are informed by VAF analyses and reports;
- ✓ VAF's comprehensive picture of vulnerability is used for advocacy purposes as well as for planning and prioritizing of aid interventions;
- ✓ Refugees utilize an appeals process that is accessible and understandable;
- ✓ The appeals process successfully reinstates the assistance of refugees' who are in serious need of it.

The VAF team is eager to listen to suggestions and answer questions. Contact Kate Washington at washingk@unhcr.org or Harry Brown at harry@brown-source.com

