



Basic Assistance Working Group Meeting: June 2021- Minutes of Meeting			
Date	24/6/2021	Time	10:00am
Facilitators	Ruba Cheaib	Duration	2 hours
Minutes Prepared by	Ruba Cheaib		
Agenda	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sector updates <i>May Assistance and coverage</i> <i>Socio-Economic Indicators</i> <i>Transfer Value for MPCA</i> 2. WFP situational analysis 3. LOUISE Operational Updates 4. Presentation from UNICEF on new program “Haddi” 5. Presentation from CAMEALEON on ATM experience research: confidence and usage of ATMs 6. PSEA Focal Point TOR and Call for Expression of Interest 		
Agencies represented	<p>Action Against Hunger (ACF); Ayuda, Intercambio y Desarrollo (AIDA); ANERA; Arcencial; Basmeh & Zeitooneh; Beirut Relief Coalition (BRC); Cash Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Organizational Network (CAMEALEON); Care International in Lebanon; Caritas Austria; Caritas Lebanon; CESVI; Couloirs Humanitaires; ECHO; FCDO; HelpAge International; Hilfswerk International (HWI); Inter-Agency; International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); Intersos; Islamic Relief Lebanon; Inter-Agency; LOUISE; Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA); Norwegian Refugee Council; Nusaned; Oxfam GB; Relief International (RI); Save the Children; SHEILD; Secours Islamique France (SIF); Soutien Belge Overseas (SB Overseas); SPHERE Building Tomorrow (SBT); Tafaol Association; Trócaire; UNDP; UNHCR; UNFPA; UNICEF; WFP; World Bank</p>		

1. Sector Updates (presented by Ruba Cheaib)

a. Assistance- May 2021- (coming from Activity Info Reporting)

- In May 2021, 138,000 households received multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA). Additionally, around 5,500 households received cash grants through UNICEF Integrated Child Wellbeing Program (ICWP). Of those that received MPCA, around 3,000 also receive cash grants through the ICWP.



- Around 8,000 Palestine Refugees from Syria (PRS) received MPCA, although not yet reported on Activity Info.
- Coverage of MPCA to displaced Syrians has been increasing over the past couple of months and another small increase is expected in June due to some planned expansions. MPCA to Lebanese has also increased since May 2021, due to the expansion of existing partner caseloads.
- The total amount of USD value disbursed in June for MPCA is US\$4,500,000. This USD value is calculated using respective partner exchange rates as assistance is disbursed in LBP.
- Using the estimate of 267,000 Syrian families in extreme poverty (from VASyR 2020), in May, 77% were targeted with either food assistance and/or MPCA. Of those, 56% are receiving MPCA, with less than a quarter not targeted for food assistance in addition to MPCA. Around 56,000 families (253,000 individuals) are targeted for food assistance (through WFP food e-card) but are not receiving MPCA. A total of 118,455 families (44% of those living in extreme poverty) are not targeted for MPCA and a total of 61,614 families in extreme poverty are not receiving MPCA or food assistance.

b. Socio-Economic Indicators

- *Exchange rate:* The unofficial exchange rate is often closely linked to price fluctuations in the market, directly impacting the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) value, and this potential coverage and transfer values. The Lebanese pound hit new lows in June, after averaging around 12,000LBP/USD in previous months. Rate steadily increasing from 13,000 LBP/USD to high 15,000s during June. While some partners have been able to secure higher exchange rates with FSP (~12,000) mainly linked to banks' access to the *Sayrafa* platform; others are still unable to secure exchange rates higher than 3,900LBP/USD or 6,240 LBP/USD.
- *Consumer Price Index (CPI):* CPI for May 2021 has been released by the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS). A continued upward trajectory is still noted in the annual change of the CPI over time. The monthly change April to May 2021 was recorded at +6%. The annual change comparing May 2020 with May 2021 stood at +158% and the annual change comparing April 2020 with April 2021 stood at +119%.
- *Survival minimum expenditure basket (SMEB) monitoring:* Most data coming in to monitor the SMEB comes from WFP price monitoring while other components are adjusted using data from the monthly CPI. The SMEB is separated into three components: the food basket, the non-food basket and other non-food services. The value of the SMEB basket in May 2021 stood at around 2,200,000LBP, a 6% increase since April 2021. The food basket increased by 10% while the non-food basket increased by 6%. Other non-food services are increasing very slightly each month but not to a large extent.
- *MPCA Transfer Value:* The transfer value for MPCA is intended to cover the full non-food SMEB, accounting for income. Income estimation for Syrians used to calculate the transfer value comes from VASyR 2020 and will be updated once

VASyR 2021 results are available. Estimated average household income among Syrians as of VASyR 2020 was at 262,000LBP per month. Assuming that level of income, the gap between the MPCA transfer value (400,000LBP monthly) and the estimated needs is around 360,000LBP per month. Noting that currently, there are also gaps in coverage of the food basket with food assistance under the Food Security Sector.

- With some partners having secured higher exchange rates with their banks, there is the appetite to increase transfer values and potentially cover the full basket. For other partners, this may not be feasible, as not all partners have been able to secure better exchange rates, but some degree of an increase may be possible.
- Discussions around increasing the transfer value are on-going with MoSA and the Government of Lebanon where concerns have been raised about the potential impact increasing the value will have on tensions between Lebanese and Syrians. UNHCR and WFP have formally requested an increase in the transfer value, to MoSA and other government counterparts.

2. WFP RAM Situational Analysis (Presented by Simon Renk, WFP)

- *Imports:* Data from the Port of Beirut shows a 17% decrease in unloaded food weight when comparing January May 2020 versus 2021 and 32% decrease in comparing May 2020 to May 2021. Cereal imports recorded a 9% change when comparing January to February 2020 versus 2021. Food imports (excluding cereals) remained stable (1% change) and total food imports recorded a 3% change. Total imports recorded a -8% change during this period.
- *Stock coverage of WFP contracted shops:* Some improvements were noted following the market disruption in Mid-March when the exchange rate deteriorated, with 85% of shops reporting having more than 2 weeks of stocks within the week of June 14th.
- *Product availability in WFP contracted shops:* Challenges in securing subsidized products continued with 36% of shops reporting scarcity of these products during the week of June 18th and 24% reporting that suppliers are accepting new orders for subsidized products. None of the shops reported that they received the full order of subsidized products.
- *SMEB price evolution:* A 10% increase between April and May in the food SMEB is noted reaching 234,000LBP/person. The basket has increased by more than four times since October 2019. For the non-food SMEB, a 6% monthly increase in noted between April and May, reaching around 344,000LBP per family per month. A 298% increase is noted since October 2019.
- *Fuel inflation and news:* Fuel shortages continue across the country media reports lack of funds, smuggling and hoarding. Gasoline price increased by 86 percent, diesel by 106 percent, and cooking gas by 53 percent since the beginning of December 2020.
- *Subsidies update:* Electricity, medicine and fuel shortage point to a “de-facto” rationing of subsidies. The price of a large pack of bread has increased by 117%



since June 2020, with prices varying depending on point of sale (bakeries versus supermarkets).

3. LOUISE Operational Updates (Presented by Dima Krayem, LOUISE Project Manager)

- LOUISE preferential exchange rate stands at 12,000-12,200LBP/USD.
- As a normal practice to reduce loads at ATM, cards are uploading over several days with loadings staggered over 10 days for MCAP and MPC. Loadings for WF Food e-card were staggered over four days. No uploads are occurring over the weekend.
- ATM monitoring and crowd control continues by UNHCR/WFP/UNICEF field teams and partners with no major issues reported. The installation of additional ATMs in El Minnieh, North and Marjeyoun, South and being finalized.
- Almost all (99.9%) of redemption occurred in BLF banks, although there remains five banks that are accepting the LOUISE card. Redemption rates remain high (98.4%) in May.
- Programmatic updates: UNHCR is planning horizontal expansions as of May 2021, increasing reach of the multi-purpose cash program (MCAP) by 35,500 non-assisted Syrian households. They will start to receive assistance as of June.
- UNICEF's Integrated Child Wellbeing Program saw an increase in transfer value to 500,000 LBP/child, capped at 2 children in June 2021.
- A number of Partners (namely with cash for work programs) have shown interest and will be joining LOUISE.
- No changes when it comes to transfer values. Food assistance remains at 100,000LBP/month/person and MPCA 400,000LBP/month/family. WFP and UNHCR in discussions with MoSA to increase food component to 200,000 LBP/individual, and MCAP/MPC assistance to 700,000 LBP/HH as of July 2021 (if request is approved).

4. Launch of "Haddi": UNICEF's new Integrated Child Grant (Introduced by Sarah Hague and Presented by Abed Alrahman Faour, UNICEF)

- *Introduction:* Over one year ago, UNICEF and ILO were asked to work with the Government of Lebanon on a National Social Protection Strategy. That work is still on-going, but faced delays due to COVID and the blast. Within the 3RF (framework set up after the blast but also going beyond), a social protection sector plan had been set up. Within the sector plan, and within the UN position paper on social protection, specific mention is made with regards to social assistance and the urgent need to expand social assistance in Lebanon. This includes expanding the poverty targeting programs, which is already underway (MPCA to refugees, NPTP for Lebanese) but also the introduction of social grants which address specific lifecycle vulnerabilities. Social grants sit alongside poverty targeted programs but do not exist in Lebanon. Thus, if you are not falling in the bottom of the population poverty, you are often left out of the social assistance available. In relation to this, UNICEF has been discussing with the Government and other actors, to launch a national disability allowance towards the end of the year. However, there was still the needs to provide some kind of child grant outside the national program, due to the growing need.



- The current economic crisis has had multiple impacts including increasing unemployment, reducing wage, reduction of access to basic needs and increasing multi-dimensional poverty. These are impacting the most vulnerable groups including children and persons with disabilities, particularly with the absence of a sustained national social assistance program.
- The *Haddi* program builds off the emergency cash assistance and regular social assistance provided by UNICEF in 2020 which focused on child wellbeing. The initiative is designed to respond to the current economic situation through the provision of integrated social assistance to the most vulnerable children in Lebanon over six months. This will be implemented through UNICEF's existing programs. The program ensures linkages with other services provided by UNICEF partners.
- The targeted population is individuals covered by UNICEF services through partners. The program aims to reach around 70,000 individuals by the end of June (30% Lebanese, 20% Palestinian and 50% Syrian). The monthly cash grant will cover a period of 6 months and up to 12 months. The support will be a provision of social assistance, focusing on child wellbeing, in addition to the services already received from partners and referral to additional complimentary services if needed.
- The Transfer Value was defined based on previous UNICEF cash transfer adequacy and feasibility studies while considering the importance of balancing the value with national incomes and mitigation potential social tensions. Three different sets of transfer values are defined for the benefiting households. Families with one child enrolled in the *Haddi* program will receive 40USD over 6 months at least, for families with two children/individuals enrolled, the transfer value will be 60USD and those with three or more enrolled individuals, the value will be 80USD. Following the Risk analysis and mitigation planning under LOUISE conducted in Feb/Mar, the *Haddi* program was approved to be a pilot program for disbursement in USD with the condition of an extensive risk mitigation plan which includes ensuring no crowds at ATMs, inclusion of Lebanese, strong GRM, communication and accountability plan, regular monitoring within 24 hours of the transfer and documentation of learn of using USD for the program.
- The program will not seek to identify new children (i.e. no referrals, outreach or registration). In this way, services are linked for an integrated (cash plus) approach, expectations are not raised in the national population, and subjective targeting is avoided (partners will provide what is available through their programs).
- The cash is given with no conditions and restricted and not connected to any services so that families do not perceive that they are being paid to do anything. The grant can also serve as a top up to a minority of Syrian households that receive MPCA.
- Cash assistance will be provided through OMT branches across the country, based on previous positive experience disbursing USD following the blast.



- UNICEF has a call center that will be answering all calls related to the *Haddi* programs with a developed Q&A document. External communication plans are also in place after the launch. Follow up and monitoring disbursement process for disbursement in USD to take place through the call center and partners.
- Registration began in June and will be finalized by the end of month; the first payment is scheduled for the 28th of June with SMS being staggered over one week. A full impact evaluation is planned and designed with the baseline taking place now.

5. Presentation from CAMEALEON on ATM experience research: confidence and usage of ATMs (presented by Chiara Genovese, CAMEALEON)

- This research was funded by the FCDO, the German Federal Foreign Office, The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the EU Regional Trust Fund. It was delivered in collaboration with WFP and ECHO.
- The research aimed to build a deeper understanding of the level of confidence of WFP MPC beneficiaries to use the ATM to withdraw their assistance, the coping strategies they use in cases of low confidence and the factors that hinder or enhance their ability to use the ATM confidently.
- This study was conducted as part of CAMEALEON's mandate to conduct research and analysis in support of the WFP MPC programme.
- The research questions were:
 - o How confident do Syrian refugees feel in withdrawing MPC assistance from ATMs?
 - o What coping strategies do beneficiaries use to withdraw their assistance at the ATM and why?
 - o What factors enable or hinder households with low ATM proficiency or confidence from successfully withdrawing assistance from ATMs?
- This research was conducted by the CAMEALEON secretariat team between June-December 2020.
- The research used a mixed method approach. A quantitative component was used in the form of a phone survey where 398 WFP MPC beneficiaries were interviewed in June 2020. The sample was representative of the WFP MPC caseload in May 2020. A 95% significance level and 5% margin of error were used. The qualitative elements of the research included 11 key informant interviews with staff members from WFP, LOUISE, BLF and Cooperating partners. In depth interviews were also used, in particular, 14 interviews were conducted with WFP MPC beneficiaries in the Bekaa. It is important to note until October 2019 WFP MPC beneficiaries were able to use any ATM/Bank in Lebanon. However, since then and due to restrictions on the banking sector, the number of ATMs that accept WFP MPC ATM cards reduced significantly. In April 2021 only five banks accepted WFP MPC ATM cards. Thus, the confidence level of WFP beneficiaries could be affected by their previous experiences with a wider range of bank ATMs compared to what is now accessible.
- WFP MPC beneficiaries can withdraw their assistance from the ATM using the red card. In March 2020, red card users used a total of 187 ATMs in Lebanon

120 of these were on-site BLF ATMs, 45 were off-site BLF ATMs and 22 belonged to other banks. On-site ATMs are attached to a bank branch and in these cases, if the card is withheld the bank staff can retrieve it. Off-site ATMs are usually placed on a shopping street or gas station and in these cases if the card is withheld, it is shredded. Red card users can use fast cash options to withdraw assistance- this is a list of predefined amounts on the ATM screen. They could alternatively use the manual option which includes typing in the preferred amount.

- *Findings from research question 1: How confident do Syrian refugees feel in withdrawing MPC assistance from ATMs?*
 - The research found that 98% of survey respondents had never used an ATM in Syria before displacement and 99.7% never used the Point of Sale (POS) in Syria before displacement. This is because the majority of interviewed beneficiaries lived off subsistence farming in Syria, or the remuneration received for work was mainly in the form of cash-in-hand payments. In 2012 (the last year for which there is data available), there were 8.22 ATMs per 100,000 inhabitants in Syria, compared to 39.25 ATMs in Lebanon in 2019. This gives an indication that the cash response through ATMs was an appropriate modality in Lebanon.
 - As part of the research the confidence level of different ATM operations was assessed. Typing the pin number was the operation that MPC recipient respondents found easiest, whereas using the manual entry was the operation that they found most difficult. 56% of respondents were not confident at all with the manual entry and this includes respondents that were not even aware of what the manual entry is. Most respondents with low confidence levels reported the reason being the fear of the card being withheld. The manual entry option helps in withdrawing the full amount in one transaction- reducing the overall time spent at the ATM. The CAMEALEON AAP study (2018) showed that in some case, beneficiaries had to wait between two and three hours at the ATM to be able to withdraw their assistance. The situation has largely improved since then specifically thanks to the staggering of payments as well as the introduction of the manual option at all BLF ATMs starting in April 2020.
 - The research explored the correlation between demographic variables and confidence in using the manual entry option. It was found that gender is significantly correlated with the use of the manual entry option, where male users were more likely to be confident than female users. Literacy levels and education levels are also positively associated, where those that are literate and those with higher levels of education are more confident with the manual entry option. The age of the user was not significantly associated with it as well as the presence of a disabled member in the family.



- *Findings from research question 2: What coping strategies do beneficiaries use to withdraw their assistance at the ATM and why?*
 - One form of coping strategy that Syrian refugees used to withdraw assistance is the use of third parties. 15% of the survey respondents gave their cards to someone else to go to the ATM (these individuals usually include extended family members, friends, neighbors, or taxi drivers). Of the remaining respondents, 30% went to the ATM and gave their card to someone else to operate it for them (these are usually UN or partner staff members, friends, neighbors, or taxi drivers). Overall, 45% of the survey respondents relied on some form of third parties to help. Household size was significantly correlated with using a third party, specifically, smaller families were more likely to use a third party. Female headed households are more likely to ask a third party for help. While considerations around saving time, money, and care duties play a role when deciding about going to the ATM, overall little confidence with the ATM is the most common reason for seeking help.
 - In the survey, the average size of a female headed household was 5.6 and the average size of male headed household was 6.9. And female headed households are more likely to ask a third party to go to the ATM for them 27% compared to 11% at male headed households for female headed households it is larger the head of households that is going to the ATM or the son or daughter whereas for male headed households it's also usually the head of household but also the spouse it's going to the ATM. The household composition was calculated using the dear 2020 data we see that on average female headed households of made of 1 head which is female with an average of 0.1 spouses there are zero point things youth 1.8 children 0.05 elderly persons and 0.6 other adults this explains why the profile of the family member that goes to the ATM is either the head of household or the son or daughter which in this case would be another adult overall in female headed households there are 1.7 adult individuals for male headed households we have one head which is male in the majority of the cases there