



Basic Assistance Working Group Meeting: March 2021- Minutes of Meeting			
Date	24/3/2022	Time	11:00am
Facilitators	Ruba Cheaib	Duration	2 hours
Minutes Prepared by	Ruba Cheaib		
Agenda	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sector updates BA Core Group January Assistance + 2021 Summary Socio-economic indicators SMEB and Transfer Values 2. WFP Situational Analysis 3. Presentation from SCI on child wellbeing grant 4. Presentation from UNICEF on roadmap to expand social assistance 5. Overview of winter cash assistance 2021/2022 		
Agencies represented	<p>ACTED; Ajjalouna Organization; Ajjalouna; Al Majmoua; Al Ghina Association; Arcenciel; Ayuda, Intercambio y Desarrollo (AIDA); Catholic Relief Services (CRS); Cash and Learning Partnership Network; Cash Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Organizational Network (CAMEALEON); CARE; Caritas Lebanon; Caritas Switzerland; CCP Japan; CISP; DanChurchAid; DG ECHO; ECHO; Embassy of Canada; FCDO Lebanon; HAND; ICRC; ISWA; LCRP Coordination Unit; Lebanese Red Cross; Lebreliet; Medair; Medecins sans frontieres; Mission East; Ministry of Environment; Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA); Norwegian Refugee Council; Nusaned; Oxfam GB; Premiere Urgence Internationale; Relief International; Saint Joseph University; Save the Children (SCI); SDC; Secours Islamique France (SIF); Soutien Belge Overseas (SBO); Solidarites International; Tafaol Association; UNFPA; UNHCR; UNRWA; UNICEF; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; War Child Holland; WFP; World Vision Lebanon (WVL)</p>		

1. Sector Updates (presented by Ruba Cheaib)

a. Basic Assistance (BA) Core Group

- In January 2022, the Sector launched a call for expressions of interest (EoI) to NGOs for the Core Group. The BA Core group (co-led by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and UNHCR) is made up of UN agencies who are standing members (UNHCR, UNICEF, UNRWA and WFP) as well as international and national NGOs (elected on a yearly basis).
- Two new NGOs submitted an EoI to be considered- Nusaned and Al Ghina Association. The current NGO core group members also expressed interest to remain in the Core Group (LRC, Caritas Lebanon, Oxfam, SCI, RI and ACF).
- To encourage equal representation of both local and international agencies in the Core Group, the two new agencies (after reviewing the EoI) were automatically included, without a formal voting process.



- As a result, the BA core group, in addition to representatives from MoSA and UN agencies includes four international agencies and four local agencies. This membership is effective and active throughout 2022.

b. Assistance- February 2022- (coming from Activity Info Reporting)

- In February 2022, over 200, 000 households received multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA), 165,000 were Syrian households, 36,000 Lebanese (majority of which are assisted through the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP)).
- A little under 75,000 households received child specific social assistance mainly through UNICEF's Haddi program and Save the Children (SCI).
- Total USD disbursed in regular assistance (MPCA and child specific grants) in February was almost \$8.4M. The majority of MPCA is being disbursed in LBP while the majority of child specific grants are being disbursed in USD.
- Throughout February and March, seasonal cash assistance continues to be disbursed. In February, a total of around 134,000 households received seasonal grants (120,00 Syrian and 14,000 Lebanese households). Most of the seasonal cash assistance to Syrians was disbursed in LBP and for Lebanese, the majority in USD. Total USD disbursed in seasonal assistance in February was almost \$7.3M.
- Details on monthly reporting from Activity info can be found on the BA online dashboard here: <https://ialebanon.unhcr.org/BADashboard>
- Expected coverage of MPCA to Displaced Syrians: Figures presented here represent the targets for respective agencies and thus may differ from the monthly figures reported on Activity Info which reflect the number of families that received a cash payment that month. Of those living in extreme poverty (264,000), 256,000 (97%) are assisted with either food assistance (cash for food or food e-card) or MPCA or both. Around 177,000 households are targeted for MPCA- 67% of the Sector target. This includes families recently include in WFP and UNHCR programs through the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM). Around 87,000 families living under the SMEB and not receiving MPCA (33% grant).
- Coverage of assistance to Lebanese: The target for Lebanese in 2022 for the sector is a little under 122,000 families. Around 78,000 households received cash assistance under the Sector in the first quarter of 2022. Around half of those, received winter cash assistance only and thus do not receive regular.

c. Socio-economic Indicators:

- Consumer Price Index (CPI): The February CPI saw an 3 % decrease since January 2021, mainly due to the decrease in the LBP o USD exchange rate that month (trading at around 20,000LBP in February compared to over 30,000 LBP/USD in January). However, this decrease in not expected to be maintained throughout March. The February CPI recorded an annual increase of 215%, compared to February 2021.
- Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB): The SMEB, from January to February, recorded a 11% decrease and stands at around 5,158,000 LBP per month (estimated for a family of five). The food basket recorded a 14% decrease and the non-food components decreased by 6%. Since February 2021, the SMEB has increased by 205%.
- Transfer Value for MPCA: Based on the prices in February, the recommended transfer value for multi-purpose cash to cover non-food needs is around 1,800,000 LBP per family per month (equates to \$80 based on most recent informal exchange rates). The currently approved transfer value (being disbursed by UNHCR and WFP) stands at 800,000 LBP, covering only 44% of the recommended value. The Majority of NGOs providing MPCA are doing so in USD and the values is between 50 to 100 USD, depending on the agencies. Barriers in harmonizing transfer values, including regularly updating values was discussed at the last Core Group meeting. This included concerns around social stability and social

cohesion, funding constraints, limitations linked to the availability of bank notes, and other programmatic challenges. These challenges will be documented, and discussions will continue to see how to take this forward.

2. WFP Situational Analysis (presented by Abdallah Souhani, WFP)

- Latest updates from Port of Beirut website: The declining trend in the weight of unloaded food continues with a 16% decrease when comparing the first two months of 2022 with 2021, a 33% decrease compared to 2020 and a 36% decrease compared to 2019. A 50% decrease is noted for live animals, 47% decrease in fats and oils and 13% decrease in cereals.
- Food availability in WFP contracted shops: Food stock availability remained stable by the end of February 2021 with 81% of shops reporting having more than two weeks of stock coverage and 3% of shops reported disruptions in orders. With regards to electricity shortages, 51% of shops reported full outages from both Électricité Du Liban (EDL) and private generators (similar to January). However, 93% of shops had contingency measures and continued to be able to operate. Scarcity in certain products was reported by 15% of shops. Ninety-eight per cent of shops reported expecting to receive new orders within the week and 96% reported that suppliers were delivering full qualities of orders.
- Market insights: Ukraine crisis: Both Ukraine and Russia up to 30% of the global wheat export. Partial export bans are being seen by various countries, having an effect on global prices. With regards to wheat, Lebanon needs are estimated to be 50,000 Metric Tons with reports showing that the current stock is estimated to cover six weeks. The wheat is only full subsidy remaining at the original rate. Prices of wheat in Lebanon have already increased by 17% monthly. Based on food importers syndicate, the current vegetable oil stock will last until May.
- Demand: Exchange rates: Circular 161, introduced in mid-December, has been further extended by the Central Bank until the end of March and has initially brought the rate down to 20,500 LBP/USD. For some time, the Sayrafa rate and market rate were almost equal. However, during the second week of March, concerns around the ability of the Central Bank to continue implemented Circular 161 surfaced and the informal market rate began to increase.
- Food SMEB: By February, a decrease (14%) in the food SMEB is noted registering at 567,000LBP per person; a 965% increase since October 2019.
- Non-Food SMEB: Similarly, a 11% decrease is noted in the non-food SMEB in February, compared to January, registering at 1,085,000LBP per family.
- Weekly costs-preliminary data. Since the start of the Ukraine crisis, prices of the food and non-food SMEB have been increasing. Before the crisis (by the week of February 14th) the cost of the food basket registered at 560,000LBP and by the second week of March has gone up to 634,000LBP. The non-food SMEB recorded an 8% increase during this time frame.
- Prices of Combustible fuel: Since the start of March prices for gasoline have increased by 20%, diesel by 45% and cooking gas by 9%.

3. Presentation from Save the Children on child wellbeing grant (presented by Amelia Charles, SCI)

- Background: This program is intended to support children as they face unique vulnerabilities in the current context as families face many challenges. Protecting children from the impact of poverty is one of the strongest investments from both a social and economic perspective.
- Approach: The intervention includes up to 12 months of cash assistance (min. of nine months) delivered by a money transfer agent (OMT) with a cash plus approach understanding that cash, in addition, to other services is very important to impact child wellbeing. These other services include household level financial counselling, support for households saving and nutrition messaging. This is all done to ensure that the child's interest is prioritized through household expenditure while following up closely on the needs of child (including education, protection, health, shelter, etc.) through both internal and external referrals. The counselling follows a toolkit called "money matters" developed by SCI globally that aids case workers help families understand and

communicate around the different needs of members in the households (children but also women and girls and those with disabilities). The counselling also helps understand how decisions are made and to encourage joint decision making when relevant. The counselling is delivered in line with the cash transfers with one session at the beginning of the program and following each transfer.

- Outreach and targeting: Being a child wellbeing program, the targeting focuses on families with children defined as families with women pregnant in their third trimester through under the age of 18. Any families meeting these criteria is eligible to be assessed. Assistance is provided equally to Lebanese and refugees (mainly Syrian with a few Palestinian families). The eligibility process looks at different components of risks facing children (conditions of shelter, access to education, protection risks, and other household economic indicators). Referrals are received from the families themselves, local implementing partners or other partners.
- Reach to date: Disbursements started in November 2021, reaching 7,000 children.
- Cash transfer value: The cash transfer value has been calculated based on the SMEB monitoring. Given that current MPCA and food values do not meet the needs defined, the child wellbeing grant is still only filling a gap. This is calculated by taking the non-food SMEB (minus estimated income) and add the food basket (up to three children). Budget constraints only allow SCI to cover 70% of the value. The value currently is capped at 160USD per household for three children, 120USD for two children and 60USD for one child. A change of 5% in the prices would trigger a revision on the value and will be evaluated quarterly. Assistance is currently disbursed in LBP, but will transition to USD, following a pilot.
- Risk Mitigation: One main concern was around challenges in budgeting when it comes to regularly updating transfer values. Thus, the quarterly review of the value is coupled with strong communication with donor and member offices to ensure understanding of adaptability lines to maintain meaningful assistance. Due to the higher transfer value, the reach is limited compared to the previous MPCA program. Strict waitlist caps and strong referral mechanisms are in place to ensure families can access different times of assistance.
- Access and tensions: Preliminary data from post distribution monitoring (PDM) shows that about half of respondents did not have to pay transportation costs to access OMT and the majority did not face any challenges. The majority (90%) were able to withdraw the full amount on one trip. Around 70% of families made the decisions on spending jointly (two caregivers) and very few reporting disagreements. No respondents said there were tensions in the community.
- Tensions: From baseline data, monthly debt (new debt) is much higher than income from work or assistance and remittances were very minimal. Indebtedness was reported to be very high, with food being the primary reason for taking out new debts.
- Impact: Primarily, families are spending the entitlement on general household expenditures (food, health and rent). So far, data shows a reduction in negative coping strategies. In the baseline, around 50% of respondents reported asking money from strangers and Syrians were more likely to accept high risk jobs as compared to Lebanese.
- Dollarizing: A pilot is underway to dollarize assistance to Lebanese and nine focus group discussions have been held with Syrians. Overall, each of the groups are familiar with using USD transfers and seeking exchange rates. People seem to generally trust OMT over banks and ATM cards. No tensions reported due to their knowledge of USD transfer and tensions were not expected due to USD. Receiving USD was seen to be beneficial, particularly when it comes in savings. However, if the value provided in LBP were to be the same, there was no preference to receive USD. Currently, ability to save was minimal.



4. Presentation from UNICEF on roadmap to expand social assistance (Presented by Sarah Hague, UNICEF)

- Internationally, the first Sustainable Development Goal highlights the need to move towards social protection floors and the importance of scaling up social protection for both poor and households that may be vulnerable for different reasons. In many countries a system approach has been developed where a set of different programs with different objectives exists. Certain individuals that face specific lifecycle vulnerabilities incur additional costs and barriers to facing their needs, making social grants very important.
- In Lebanon, the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) has been reviewed twice by the inter-ministerial committee on Social Policy and due to become adopted. The UN Position Paper on Social Protection was published around one year ago, and the Sector Social Protection Plan has been developed as part of the 3RF.
- Within these different policy documents there are a range of different priorities and two key priorities linked to social assistance. This includes scaling up social assistance to cover more people and increase the scale of poverty targeting program along with the introduction of social grants, which previously did not exist. Other priorities are linked to building the system including building a unified registry, strengthening coordination, linking programs through referrals and capacity building. The resource and political landscape make this challenging, however it is an opportunity to scale up assistance during this crisis. This needs to be done in a way to respond to the crisis while also building a system for the future.
- The NPTP targets the most extreme poor specifically as a safety net. However, the social protection floor where households with specific vulnerabilities are entitled to additional support. This includes support for elderly, people with disabilities and households raising children, in a complimentary way, since the costs these families are higher than those families without these vulnerabilities. This is also applicable to the Syrian population and programs are starting to move towards this complementarity. For example, two thirds of Syrian children receiving support through UNICEF's Haddi program are also living in extreme poverty and receive multi-purpose cash assistance while a little less than ten per cent of Lebanese enrolled in Haddi also receive social assistance through the NPTP.
- The NSPS is shifting towards an action plan that is fully costed through contributions not only from donors, but also from the government; coordination and monitoring mechanisms need to be in place. In the meanwhile, key priorities are being implemented including pension reform and social grants. Throughout this, the system needs to be built to be inter-operable and linked through a unified registry.
- The newly formed Cash Working Group will provide an overview of all cash programs (humanitarian and development) to clarify different objectives, how they complement each other and how they fit together, for both the Lebanese and Syrian population.
- Through all of this, the role of Civil Society is critical.
- The Haddi program now reaches around 130,000 children who are also receiving other priority services and receive USD through Money Transfer Agencies. The mid-line evaluation has just been completed.
- The National Disability Allowance, led by MoSA, includes all nationalities, and includes a strong role from the civil society, will be launched before mid-year. Youth with disabilities will be priorities and expanding as resources allow.



5. Overview of winter cash assistance 2021/2022 (Presented by Milos Terzan, UNHCR)

- Winter Cash assistance is intended to provide a shock response due to the additional needs that households incur and is complementary to other cash programs.
- Winter cash to refugees: the amount was based on the value of 55USD translated to LBP at the rate at that time (and must be fixed for the duration of the program due to availability and funds and accountability to all beneficiaries). The payment was done through LOUISE cards. 281,000 families were targeted, and around 271,000 were reached. The program ran from late October to end of March and eligibility is based on the regular targeting model as well as the GRM beneficiaries. The table below summarizes the different packages:

Priority groups	Entitlement
1.MCAP/MPC + Food assisted families	2,790,000 (930,000 LBP per month x 3 months)
2.Food only or MCAP only assisted families	3,720,000 LBP (930,000 LBP per month x 4 months)
3.Non assisted families	4,650,000 (930,000 LBP per month x 5 months)

- Winter Cash to Lebanese: The number of Lebanese targeted was increased substantially since previous years- targeting 46,000 households. Cash was delivered through OMT at an amount of \$165 (in line with the winter basket for three month) per family in USD. the program is on-going. Eligibility was based both on partner assessments as well as NPTP registered families.