



Basic Assistance Working Group Meeting: February 2021- Minutes of Meeting			
<b>Date</b>	24/2/2022	<b>Time</b>	10:00am
<b>Facilitators</b>	Ruba Cheaib	<b>Duration</b>	2 hours
<b>Minutes Prepared by</b>	Ruba Cheaib		
<b>Agenda</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Sector updates</b> January Assistance + 2021 Summary Socio-economic indicators SMEB and Transfer Values</li> <li>2. <b>Update from WFP on NPTP</b></li> <li>3. <b>WFP Situational Analysis</b></li> <li>4. <b>LOUISE Updates</b></li> <li>5. <b>Updates from WFP and UNHCR on the GRM</b></li> <li>6. <b>2022 Sector Annual Workplan</b></li> </ol>		
<b>Agencies represented</b>	<p>Action Against Hunger; ACTED; Adam Smith International; Ajjalouna Organization; Al Majmoua; Al Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association of Beirut; Al Ghina Association; Arcenciel; Ayuda, Intercambio y Desarrollo (AIDA); Cash Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Organizational Network (CAMEALEON); CARE; Caritas Lebanon; Caritas Switzerland; CCP Japan; CISP; Concern Worldwide; DanChurchAid; DG ECHO; Embassy of Canada; FCDO Lebanon; Humanity and Inclusion; ICRC; Insan Association; Islamic Relief Lebanon; LCRP Coordination Unit; Lebreliief; MAGNA; Medair; Mission East; Ministry of Environment; Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA); MPDL; Norwegian Refugee Council; Nusaned; Oxfam GB; PARCIC; Relief International; Saint Joseph University; Salam LADC; Save the Children (SCI); SDC; Secours Islamique France (SIF); Soutien Belge Overseas (SBO); Tafaol Association; UNDP; UNFPA; UNHCR; UNRWA; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; WATAD Association; WFP; World Rehabilitation Fund; World Vision Lebanon (WVL)</p>		

## 1. Sector Updates (presented by Ruba Cheaib)

### a. Assistance- January 2022- (coming from Activity Info Reporting)

- Due to the launch of the new reporting database in 2022, some gaps in reporting remain. Thus, figures are subject to change.
- In January 2022, around 209, 600 households received multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA), 165,000 were Syrian households, 35,700 Lebanese (majority of which are assisted through the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP) by WFP; this is a slight drop but most likely due to gas in reporting) and around 8,00 were Palestinian refugees from Syria.
- 65,000 households received child specific social assistance mainly through UNICEF's Haddi program and Save the Children (SCI). An overview of SCI's program in the March meeting.



- Total USD disbursed in regular assistance (MPCA and child specific grants) in December was almost \$9M. Assistance disbursed in LBP is converted to USD based on respective exchange rates.
- Details on monthly reporting from Activity info can be found on the BA online dashboard here: <https://ialebanon.unhcr.org/BADashboard>

**b. 2021 Sector Achievements**

- The BA End of Year dashboard will be published next week, and link will be shared with the minutes.
- 79% of the target for MPCA was reached across populations. For displaced Syrians, 90% of the target for MCPA was reached by the end of the year (around 240,000 households). For Lebanese, the target was overachieved. As of September, WFP began providing a top up for basic needs through the NPTP, couples with NGO interventions, the number of households reached was around 45,000) exceeding the target by 5%. The target for Lebanese was based on the number of households that were eligible under the NPTP, and not a needs-based target similar to that for displaced Syrians. Around 8,900 Palestinian refugee families from Syria were reached with MPCA in 2021.
- As of December, 95% of the target for seasonal cash was achieved for displaced Syrians (258,000 households). For Lebanese, 47% of the target was reached (25,000 families) with an expectation to reach 45,000 Lebanese families with seasonal cash assistance by the end of the season.
- 62,000 households were reached with child specific social assistance, namely through UNICEF's programs.
- Total USD disbursed in cash assistance in 2021 equates to around \$162M (\$121M in regular assistance and \$41M in seasonal assistance).
- Around \$200M was received in funding for BA in 2021, in addition to \$7M carried over from 2020. This is about of the partner appeal. This large discrepancy, despite the coverage reach, is due to the calculation of the budgets in late 2020 when planning for 2021 was taking place where transfer values for MPCA was calculated based on 400,000LBP at the 3,900 LBP/USD. For 2022, this should be an issues since budgets for the sector were calculated using projections of exchange rates and transfer values over the year.
- Expected coverage of MPCA to Displaced Syrians: Figures presented here do not include newly included families by UNHCR and WFP through the Grievance Redress Mechanism in February. Of those living in extreme poverty (264,000), 251,000 (95%) are assisted with either food assistance (cash for food or food e-card) or MPCA or both. From November 2021, 172,000 households are targeted for MPCA- 65% of the Sector target with around 91,600 families living under the SMEB and not receiving MPCA.
- Coverage of assistance to Lebanese: The target for Lebanese in 2022 for the sector is a little under 122,000 families. Around 35,000 households are receiving regular assistance through the NPTP, of which, 15,000 are targeted to receive seasonal cash assistance. An additional 37,000 families are targeted to receive seasonal cash. In January, 417 households received MPCA from NGOs and 25,000 families received assistance through Haddi. The way the figures are presented assume that there is no overlap between the programs. The Sector targets for Lebanese in 2022 are based on planned interventions that were confirmed in the planning phase (including the NPTP, Haddi, NGO confirmed funding and seasonal cash assistance).

**c. Socio-economic Indicators:**

- Exchange rate: The Lebanese Pound (LBP) was trading at between 20,000 and 21,500 to



the U.S. Dollar (USD) in February with the *Sayrafa* rate trading around 20,000. All partners that are providing assistance in LBP, should be accessing the *Sayrafa* rate.

- Consumer Price Index (CPI): The January CPI saw an 8 % increase since December 2021 and an annual increase of 240%. Increases of specific categories of goods and services are available. Largest increase in sub-categories was in “Miscellaneous goods and services” at a 69% monthly increase, largely driven by the increases in prices of different types of insurance.
- Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB): The SMEB, from December to January, recorded a 10% increase and stands at around 5,800,000 LBP per month (estimated for a family of five). The food basket recorded a 13% and the non-food components increased by 6%. Since January 2021, the SMEB has increased by 262%.
- Transfer Value for MPCA: Based on the prices in January, the recommended transfer value for multi-purpose cash to cover non-food needs is around 2,00,000 LBP per family per month (equates to \$75 based on most recent informal exchange rates). The currently approved transfer value stands at 800,000 LBP, covering less than 40% of the recommended value. risks. Discussions are on-going between UNHCR, WFP and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) to increase the values for MPCA and food assistance.

## 2. Update from WFP on NPTP (presented by Antoine Morelvulliez, WFP)

- The NPTP, a government led social assistance program, is entering the second phase of the scale up (December 2021 to April/May 2022) where an additional (new applicants) 130,000 families will be verified, out of which 40,000 families will be enrolled. The target is to reach 75,000 enrolled households by April/May 2022. Households are assessed per batch to ensure faster processing of results with two batches per month and 10,000-15,000 households per batch. Out of the 130, 000 households to be verified, two lists are coming from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (PCM) while two others are lists of families who were unreachable during the first phase of the scale up.
- It is important to note that for the first time in the history of the NPTP, the caseload to be assessed to split between private firms (40%) and social workers (60%). It is a government led program with social workers conducting the interviews. Households assigned to private firms were allocated based on a low presence of social workers in those areas. Refresher trainings were provided to around 600 social workers and transportation fees for staff were covered.
- To date, four of the ten planned batches have been covered. The target to date was to 50,000 households, yet around 40,000 were submitted. Reasons include COVID and other complications that may have risen during the initial phases. Once the forms are submitted, they are cleaned by MoSA staff than sent to PCM where the scoring takes place. The list of eligible households is then sent back to MoSA and WFP. To date, three of the four batches were scored with a 22% eligibility rate. One of the four batches have been enrolled (365 households). This is due to a decision taken at the NPTP technical committee to only enroll households with the 20% lowest scores, per batch, the remaining will be included at the end of the verification exercise.
- Phase one of the scale up is complete. This included households that were already receiving food e-cards or already registered in the Hayat database were re-verified. In 2020, 15,000 households were benefiting from NPTP, out of which 5,000 were newly included in 2019 and the remaining 10,000 were re-assessed during the first phase.
- Typically, six to seven weeks is needed between verification and first payment. For the first batch, this was slightly delayed and took around ten weeks.
- Assistance through the NPTP was Dollarized in September 2021. Most redemption is now occurring at ATMs in USD, with marginal redemption in shops. The first cycle saw lower rates of beneficiaries withdrawing assistance in USD. Monitoring also shows that beneficiaries are familiar with the use of

ATMs. Very few security incidents were noted, which were dealt with by MoSA. Additionally, crowd control measures were in place during the last loading cycles to avoid long queues at ATMs as well as staggering loadings over five days. Motoring also shows positive trends in reducing negative coping strategies. There have been points noted for improvement including strengthening COVID preventative measures at ATMs, better informing beneficiaries about redemption options, increase the spread of ATMs with bank notes, solving issues with LBP balances and changing exchange rates, harmonization of transfer values with the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), and tackle the sustainability of the system (number of ATMs, different delivery mechanisms).

- Final notes: Importance of the alignment of transfer values with the ESSN. Currently, NPTP transfer value stands at \$15 per person (capped at six persons) for the food component and \$25 top-up. ESSN transfer value stands at 20USD per person. The food component is based on the food SMEB, as the patterns in prices for Lebanese and Syrians expected to be similar. The top-up transfer value however is not based on the non-food SMEB developed for Syrians and was aligned to what was anticipated under the ESSN. In regions where there are no ATMs, options of redeeming assistance in Money Transfer Offices are being assessed. The current pipeline break for the NPTP is March/April 2023. It is estimated that \$8M will be disbursed per month when the target of 75,000 households is reached.

### 3. WFP Situational Analysis (presented by Abdallah Souhani, WFP)

- Latest updates from Port of Beirut website: in 2021, a 21% decrease in the weight of unloaded food in noted, as compared to 2020, and a 27% decrease compared to 2019. In 2012, versus 2022, a 38% decrease is noted for edible vegetables and live animals, 13% decrease in fats and oils and 6% decrease in cereals. Comparing the last quarter of 2021 to 2020, a 25% decrease is noted in the weight of unloaded food.
- Food availability in WFP contracted shops: food stock availability remained similar, with similarly figures as in the second half of 2021 with 81% of shops reporting having more than two weeks of stock coverage and 10% of shops in January reporting disruptions in orders (mainly link linked to bad weather conditions). With regards to electricity shortages, 52% of shops reported outages from both Électricité Du Liban (EDL) and private generators (slightly up from December and November). However, 94% of shops had contingency measures and continued to be able to operate. Scarcity in certain products was reported by 13% of shops, an increase since previous shops. Ninety-four per cent of shops reported expecting to receive new orders within the week and 62% reported that suppliers were delivering full qualities of orders.
- Demand: Exchange rates: Circular 161, introduced in mid-December, has been further extended by the Central Bank until the end of March. A new Circular (164) was introduced allowing all money transfer companies to exchange USD/LBP.
- Food SMEB: By January the food basket reached 660,000LBP per person, a 13% increase from December. Preliminary data from the week of February 14<sup>th</sup> shows a 17% decrease to around 570,000LBP per person. Whether this decrease will continue through the month remains to be seen.
- Non-Food SMEB: By January the food basket reached 1.2LBP per family, a 11% increase from December. Preliminary data from the week of February 14<sup>th</sup> shows a 17% decrease to around 1.1LBP per family. Whether this decrease will continue through the month remains to be seen. A number of new taxes and duties are being discussed which will affect the prices of food and non-food baskets.
- Prices of Combustible fuel: The Central bank continue to provide 85% of the needed USD for the import of gasoline. Some news reports around potential shortages have surfaced but have been denied by officials. Since the start of 2021, prices for gasoline have increased by 1200%, diesel by 1,700% and cooking gas by 1,100%.

### 4. LOUISE Updates (presented by Rayan Boustani, WFP)

- In February, the LOUISE agencies are following a new approach for obtaining weekly preferential rates which includes a biweekly exchange of USD at the Sayrafa rate.
- Uploads continue to be staggered between four and 12 days, depending on the assistance group and no uploads are taking place on weekends.

- The situation at ATMs has improved, with no major issues faced in February. Additional ATMs were installed in Baalbek and a total of 35 additional ATMs have been installed across the country since 2019.
- LOUISE beneficiaries are only able to use BLF ATMs and redemption at BLF ATMS is close to 100%. For January, the redemption rate was at 98.78%.
- A new tender is taking place for the economic formula used for targeting and posted on February 14<sup>th</sup> and open for three weeks with results expected by May 2022.
- UNICEF maintain the cash for wash program under LOUISE, targeting around 200 households
- No changes to transfer values for MPCA and food assistance (800,000LBP per household and 300,000LBP per person, respectively). UNHCR and WFP are coordinating to approach MoSA to inform about the transfer values. Transfer Value for protection cash assistance has been raised to 1,300,000LBP.
- An increase in the cash for food, food e-card, and MPCA caseloads due to the Grievance Redress Mechanism inclusion.

**5. Updates from WFP and UNHCR on the GRM (presented by Susanne Carl, UNHCR, and Shirley Odero, WFP)**

- The GRM is an alternative inclusion pathway that was introduced in 1029. It allows refugees to place a claim (through an online link or in person) if they feel they were wrongly excluded from assistance. UNHCR and WFP reserve a certain number of slots to fill through this mechanism. It serves to enhance accountability towards refugees. It is a self-initiated process, not based on economic scores, but rather on profiles determined through a data driven analysis based on UNHCR data.
- The purpose of the GRM is to compliment the targeting formula and originally designed through consultations with refugees. It is reviewed every year. The main update this year was the automatic inclusion of certain profiles that are pre-determined to have a high likelihood of facing challenges in submitting a claim (ex. elderly alone on the file).
- The GRM serves two objectives: Firstly, it addresses the exclusion error if the targeting formula. This is done through the inclusion of profiles that the formula has difficulties in predicting due to statistical rarity. It also serves to improve accountability as the refugees themselves initiate the request.
- For this year, the claim period was open from the 6<sup>th</sup> of October to the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, following the announcements of the results of the new targeting cycle. Claims were submitted through the call center, an online link, field/partner hotlines, or in person (at reception centers, community centers and through field staff). The total number of unique claims received was 92,479 (out of 99,441 claims received). This is drop from last year where 180,000 claims were received (120,000 unique). The percentage of unique claims of total claims was much higher than last year, which may indicate a higher level of understanding of the process. The online link, which was introduced last year, was used by 77% of the claims (around 50% last year).
- Eligibility is based on claim submission and given that the case is not receiving any type of assistance (MPCA or food). The profiles are determined based on a combination of different socioeconomic vulnerabilities, including income generating capacities in combination with dependency ratios, and protection flag (ex. family with no capable adults between 18 and 59; families with only one capable adult and a high rate of dependency including children or elderly with a disability or medical condition). These profiles are developed together with UNHCR and WFP in consultations with protection and field colleagues and revised yearly and updated if needed. All families falling in the profiles were selected for MPCA by UNHCR and cash for food assistance from WFP and MPCA depending on a prioritization matrix.
- As a result, 10,771 Syrian families and 515 families of other nationalities were included. The GRM was only collected for Syrian families. Due to delays in the cycle for refugees of other nationalities, all excluded families were considered. The eligibility SMS was sent in December and January and the first transfer has been complete for validated cases. Most cases were selected for MPCA from UNHCR in combination with food assistance from WFP (7,392 Syrian families), 241 families will receive MPC from WFP and 3,138 Syrian families and 515 families of other nationalities will receive only MPCA from UNHCR. Included families are not included for the 12 months cycle. They are included (for UNHCR) retro-actively for December while the first payment was in January thus missing one payment.

- Communication: Key messages were developed to outline the eligibility of the GRM, the claim period, the channels that can be used and clarifications of only submitting one claim. The channels used to disseminate this information included outreach volunteers, the UNHCR website, counselling lines at reception centers, and the call center. The details were also included in the discontinuation and eligibility SMSs.
- As normal practice, those eligible were sent an SMS. UNHCR sent the SMS to the entire eligible caseload in December. For WFP, due to inability to cover entire caseload, a prioritization exercise took place and SMS were sent out in January. The SMS were tailored for card distribution and validation depending on the status of each case. Those who were not targeted, did not get direct communication and this was outlined in the disseminated information.
- Good practices and lessons learned: The GRM is considered a important tool to allow communication on eligibility beyond the targeting formula. Surveys are being conducted to understand the satisfaction with the service (data collection on-going) and areas for improvement. Based on this, efforts to consult refugees on how to best tailor these processes will continue. In future, additional channels to reach out to more people will be explored. The auto-inclusion aspect was very useful and has improved access to people who likely have obstacles to place a claim. Finally, the GRM review will be done to re-examine certain ideologies.