

SYRIAN REFUGEE RESPONSE: INTERAGENCY UPDATE ON WINTER ASSISTANCE



9 January 2015

LEBANON



#FutureOfSyria

Agencies and the Government of Lebanon had requested US\$ 2.1 billion in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) launched on 15 December 2014

HIGHLIGHTS

- UNHCR and partners worked throughout the week as storm Zina battered Lebanon;
- In advance of the storm, emergency stocks were pre-positioned, including blankets, tarpaulins, hygiene and baby kits, latrines, food parcels and fuel in various municipalities for rapid distribution in emergencies;
- Since October, the ongoing winter operation has provided more than 400,000 refugees with cash for the purchase of winter supplies;
- Another 250,000 refugees were provided with weatherproofing kits.

WINTER ASSISTANCE

UNHCR and partners worked throughout the country over the past week to prepare for a severe winter storm that began mid-week with strong winds, heavy rain and snow across much of Lebanon.

The first priority was on vulnerable refugees living at high altitudes and in insecure shelters such as tents and other makeshift structures.

In advance of the storm, each of UNHCR's five offices across Lebanon had already pre-positioned emergency stocks of blankets, tarpaulins, hygiene and baby kits, latrines, food parcels and fuel in various municipalities for rapid distribution in emergencies.

Throughout the week, partners met regularly in the field and Beirut to continue to map needs and coordinate responses. Contingency stocks of fuel, blankets, wood and shelter materials were reinforced and inter-agency teams were on standby for emergency deliveries and responses.

Flooding is already a problem in some lower elevations, and will become more serious once the snow begins melting at higher elevations. UNHCR teams and partners have worked as fast as possible over the past few days to replace damaged tents, provide repair kits, deliver emergency supplies and offer alternative temporary shelter for those forced to abandon their homes.

By Friday, there were relatively few reports of damage despite the severity of the storm. But temperatures remained low across much of the country amid forecasts of more rain, snow and wind. UNHCR and partners remained ready to respond through the weekend.

WINTER PROGRAMME

Inter-agency partners began the winter programme in early October to help refugees get through what is for some their fourth winter away from home. The most vulnerable refugees were provided with a combination of cash, weatherproofing kits, stoves, blankets and fuel vouchers. Flood prevention work was carried out wherever possible.

Since October, inter-agency partners have been able to reach 400,000 refugees with cash, 30,000 with blankets and heating stoves and another 250,000 people with weatherproofing kits of plastic sheeting, wood, and basic tools. Fuel vouchers were distributed to all those living above 500 meters.

Site improvements have been limited to “flood prone” informal settlements (IS), the majority of which are in Bekaa. Out of the 1,435 IS in the country, around 200 are prone to flooding. Most informal settlements are privately owned. Any site improvements must be approved by the owners – which is often not given.

UNHCR estimates that some 55 percent of refugees in Lebanon live in sub-standard shelters, including in more than 1,435 informal tented sites – 852 of them in Bekaa Valley alone. Others are living in every kind of shelter imaginable, including abandoned buildings, sheds and garages. With no government approval for refugee shelter construction or significant renovations to existing structures, we supply refugees with materials to reinforce their shelters as best as possible.

Lebanon: Surviving the Snow

Thousands of refugees across Lebanon have been struggling to keep warm and protect their shelters this week as severe winter storms bring plummeting temperatures, heavy snow, strong winds and lashing rain to the country.

Aisha, a mother-of-four from Syria, wraps a blanket around her shoulders as the wind beats against the walls of the tent. Outside, snow is piling up and soon the family’s food will run out. “We are really scared of the storm,” she says, shivering as she hands some fruit to her children. “My husband must go on the roof every hour to clear the snow and I’m worried he might fall.”

Twenty-year-old Hany, who lives in a tented settlement, sees that people are beginning to panic. “People are scared if it keeps snowing because the tents won’t hold up against its weight,” he says, as an elderly woman trudges past him through the blizzard.

You can watch the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QA2_7k49f8#t=10

BEKAA

More than 144,000 refugees living in informal settlements in the Bekaa Valley are among the hardest-hit by the storm. Heavy snow blanketed the area and other parts of Lebanon, cutting off roads and isolating thousands of people. In informal settlements, refugees had to constantly brush the snow off their roofs to prevent their shelters from collapsing.

Conditions have been particularly worrying in Aarsal and its outskirts, where altitudes range from 1,300 to 1,800 metres. Refugees living in fragile tented sites moved to six emergency shelters that have been set up by partners, and local authorities are clearing roads and helping distribute pre-positioned aid. Inter-agency partners have also distributed 10,000 hot meals a day since the storm started.

NORTH LEBANON

In Tripoli, interagency partners assessed around 59 informal settlements where 8,300 refugees are living in 1,550 different shelters.

Emergency efforts in parallel with on-going winter distribution included provision of floor-raising kits, plastic sheeting, weather-proofing kits, water and sanitation installations as well as fuel vouchers.

An additional 31,000 blankets are being distributed by the Red Cross to refugee and Lebanese families living in the city.

In Qubayat, many roads were completely blocked starting Thursday due to the heavy snow. Inter-agency partners distributed sealing-off kits for families to repair their shelters and blankets.

A rapid assessment conducted by UN and partners prioritized flood-prone sites in order to carry out improvements, drainage channels, leveling the land and gravelling to help reduce the flooding and mud that comes with winter rains and melting snow.

BEIRUT & MOUNT LEBANON

Roads to several villages and towns in Mount Lebanon were completely blocked. There was some damage to shelters in informal settlements and collective shelters, but in relatively small numbers.

UNHCR has sealing-off kits in stock and will release as needed to partners, along with blankets and mattresses. Interagency partners are distributing plastic sheets, medium repair kits, blankets and mattresses to families.

SOUTH LEBANON

In the south, one of the biggest problems is flooding because of high seas. Some flooding also occurred in sites where the authorities did not allow major infrastructure work.

By Friday, partners were still doing detailed assessments in some of the more remote informal settlements. In Shebaa, roads were closed; the municipality was distributing bread to all, including refugees.

The most common request from refugees was for more heating fuel. UNHCR has stocks of sealing-off kits, blankets, mattresses and stoves that are available for partners who request them.

DONORS

Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, EU, France, Germany, Holy See, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Mexico, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA.

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AGENCIES THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS REPORT

