

Survival and Minimum Expenditure Basket Review in Lebanon

Summary

Introduction

- A participatory and inter-agency revision process has been launched in 2016 to revise the content of the survival and minimum expenditure basket used by cash actors to reflect on refugees needs and determine the amount of assistance packages provided.
- The oversight of the work was spearheaded by an Advisory Committee reporting to the Targeting Sub Working Group (Co-chaired by Basic Assistance and Food Security sectors), composed of: UNICEF, WFP, LCC, MoSA, NPTP, NRC, Oxfam, DRC, UNHCR, BAWG Chair;
- Sectors provided recommendations on the content and value of the relevant components of the basket;
- With funding from European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), independent consultant, H  l  ne Juillard was recruited by LCC to lead the review process and document findings.
- The report reflects the updated needs and average expenditure values for a Syrian household to survive in Lebanon.
- The basket does not necessarily represent the value of assistance - the value of cash-based assistance should be determined by the availability of other humanitarian assistance, items households can independently cover by their own means, targeting strategy and criteria, programme objectives, and any additional cash requirements households may have¹.

Executive summary

- The 2014 SMEB and MEB baskets were revised through a consultative and Inter-Agency process: 33 Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) and with the recommendations of 9 sectors.
- **The Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB)**, covers the basic needs of a Syrian household to live with dignity and **the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB)**, covers the requirements to exist and meet lifesaving needs while displaced.
- The basket includes the monthly needs of a refugee family of 5 (2 adults and 3 children).
- **The 2016 SMEB is 550 USD/household/month (110 USD per capita) and the MEB at 863 USD/household/month (172.6 USD per capita). In 2014, SMEB was 435USD (87 USD per capita) and the MEB was 571 USD (114.2 USD). This was a respective increase of 26% and 51%.**

Objective and Rationale:

- This report shows the minimum needs for survival but without programmatic recommendations.
- It improved: outdated data, explanations for certain prices and content and community-input.
- The aim was to ensure the relevance of content, prices and to better reflect the needs of the refugee population in Lebanon.

Methodology:

- A mixed method approach collected qualitative feedback with qualitative and quantitative data from multiple primary and secondary sources.
- The first step was agreeing on the basket features followed by its content and quantities.

¹ 'Operational Guidance and Toolkit for Multi-Purpose Cash Grants', Enhanced Response Capacity Project 2014-2015, Available at: <http://www.cashlearning.org/mpg-toolkit/>

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Main features

- Estimated costs mostly originated from price monitoring, post-distribution monitoring information, household profiling questions from 2014 or the VaSyR 2015.
- Debt repayment was removed from the basket as the significant change in 2016 to avoid double-counting.
- As S/MEB are monthly baskets, seasonal needs are not accounted for and could be included in the next revision process.
- Households unable to cover the MEB are highly vulnerable and those unable to cover the SMEB are severely vulnerable. This determines eligibility for assistance.
- To show price differences for the country-wide baskets, costs are weighted in certain sections.
- Specific needs of vulnerable groups are not included but other tools determine such assistance.
- The FGDs included people with specific needs in the random sample and purposive sample (those below SMEB)

The Basket Content

Food

- Food represents a lower % share of the total basket than in 2014, due to new elements included in the MEB and an increase in shelter costs.
- The 2014 SMEB was 31.8 USD per capita for food falling to 29.6 USD in 2016, a 7.5% decrease.
- MEB prices also decreased by 9%, from 37 USD per capita in 2014 to 34.90 USD in 2016.

Water and sanitation

- The S/MEB baskets both remain unchanged from 2014 for water access.
- Sanitation costs are new to 2016 and estimated at 9 USD/household/month for both S/MEB.

Health

- In 2014, health was only in the MEB, but as the 3rd largest cost for Syrian refugees it is now in both the S/MEB. FDGs highlighted the undervaluation of health and shelter in 2014 calculations.
- The 2016 SMEB monthly expense on health is 29 USD/household compared to 0 in 2014 SMEB. The MEB is 66 USD/household/month compared to 10 USD in the 2014 basket.

Shelter

- Shelter is the biggest single, regular cost for Syrians at 50-60% of their monthly expenditure.
- The SMEB is 158 USD/ household/month as opposed to 81.20 USD in 2014 and captures the weighted average costs for a family of five to live in a *substandard* shelter and informal settlements (IS). The differences are that in 2014 the basket only considered the cost of living in IS and the cost was a flat average regardless of regional variations included in 2016
- The MEB captures the weighted average costs for a family of five to live in an *adequate*² shelter (239 USD/household/month). It also captures regional differences through weighting.

Non-Food Items

- The Energy and Water sector and Basic Assistance Working Group recommended NFI be given a dedicated section to enhance its visibility despite mainly including hygienic items.

² According to the Shelter Sector

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- The content did not change much from 2014 when the SMEB was 57 USD/household/month versus 64 USD in 2016. If mattresses and blankets are included it increases to 75 USD for 2016.

Education

- For a basket size of 3, the SMEB is 27 USD/household/month. The MEB includes on-top of this transportation and school feeding fees of a 30 USD lump sum in 2014 from self-reporting data.

Residency permits

- The Protection sector, MOSA and FDGs recommended the SMEB include the residency permit cost for 1 adult/household (200 USD) with the related fees (75 USD) to produce documentation.
- The MEB covers residency permits for 2 adults/household as well as the cost of one civil documentation and registration. In 2014, the cost of residency permits was mentioned but not integrated into the total amount.

Transportation, communication and electricity

- The Household Profiling Exercise is used to capture the expenses for S/MEB and the costs since 2014 remained stable. The SMEB includes 60 USD household/month and the MEB includes 75 USD household/month for transportation, communication and electricity costs.

Expenditure baskets update and monitoring

- Lebanese prices and Syrian consumption patterns remain stable without significant changes in 12months, thus baskets are considered valid for a year for both price and content.
- Market monitoring, updated information from Household Assessments/Household Profiling Exercise, the VaSyR, and/or other needs assessment information from different sector actors, should provide updates to the content and prices of the various components as part of the yearly review/update.
- Sectors have the possibility to trigger a revision earlier, on an *ad hoc* basis, if justified.

Conclusion

- The SMEB and MEB mirror poverty lines in Lebanon and operationally capture levels of socio-economic vulnerability.
- Agencies have flexibility for tailored assistance, despite the average family size, through the data per capita and static expenditures.
- Both SMEB and MEB are national but the shelter section reflects regional differences as cost is weighted by the number of Syrian refugees in the area.
- Relevant sectors need to engage and decide on how the updated S/MEB will be used and what implications it will have on their programming.