

# Review of the 2015 – 2016 Interagency Winter Support Plan

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## BACKGROUND: GROWING NEEDS, LESS MEANS, AND REGULAR ASSISTANCE

Five years into the Syrian crisis, the population affected in Lebanon (host and refugees alike) has experienced a gradual shrinking of resources and assets, translating into the inability of vulnerable families to secure basic needs.

Numerous households increasingly struggle to access goods and services critical to their survival and basic well-being, which increases their resort to debts, acceptance of exploitative labor conditions, withdrawing children from schools, early marriage, and an overall dependency on direct assistance.

In 2015, an estimated 70% of the Syrian refugee population lived below the poverty line (US\$3.84/day, or US\$584/month for a household of five) and 52 % were deemed severely economically vulnerable, that is, living below a Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket of US\$435/month for a household of five. Those families are in need of assistance to meet basic needs.

Extremely poor Lebanese households constitute an estimated 10 % of the country's population<sup>i</sup> as per the criteria of the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP), and the incidence of poverty has risen by 6 % since 2011<sup>ii</sup>. The number of economically vulnerable Lebanese families is increasing as the overall vulnerability of the country follows this upward trend. The return of Lebanese families previously living in Syria before the crisis has further increased this rate.

The situation of the Palestine refugee population is similar to the situation described above. Two-thirds of Palestine refugees from Lebanon (PRL) live under the poverty line<sup>1</sup>. Since 2011, more than 42,000 PRS fled Syria to Lebanon and now reside in existing overcrowded Palestinian camps and gatherings across the country. The PRS population in Lebanon is not able to meet basic needs either. Very similar to the Syrian refugees, the extremely vulnerable PRS population is heavily reliant on direct assistance.

To address growing economic vulnerabilities, and based on available resources, the Basic Assistance sector join forces with other sectors – such as the Food Security sector – to provide complementary assistance packages that help the most vulnerable secure their critical needs throughout the year.

Food assistance through E-vouchers (\$27/month/capita) is the most dominant type of assistance, where it is being provided for around 61 % of the refugee population to ensure the 2100 Kcal dietary intake per person per day. Around 5,000 extremely poor Lebanese households, and 10,000 Palestine refugees from Syria, also receive this type of assistance through NPTP and UNRWA respectively. In addition, multipurpose cash assistance (\$175/month/family), reaching 17% of registered refugee households, aims to facilitate the access of the most vulnerable families to basic goods and services (nonfood items, rent, water, clothing, services, etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> UNRWA and AUB, *Socioeconomic Report on the Living Conditions of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon* (Preliminary Findings), 2015. The poverty calculation in this report is based on the national poverty line calculated in 2004 while accounting for the inflation rate of 2015: US\$6/capita/day for the upper border (poverty line) and US\$2.50 for the lower border (extreme or absolute poverty line).

## **INTERVENTION: DIVERSE NEEDS, MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH**

Given the above described situation, the overall vulnerability of poor families' further increase when exposed to seasonal hazards and shocks. To cope with the shock, families have to increase their spending patterns to cover the additional winter needs such as heating fuel, shelter repairs, additional food, and winter clothing.

Furthermore, extremely poor families, usually residing in low quality shelters, require additional support to cope as these shelters do not meet minimum standards to resist cold temperatures and storms. Nevertheless, extremely poor families do not possess the financial means to cover the additional spending needed and therefore cannot survive on their own.

Addressing seasonal needs requires a multisectoral assistance approach. If a gap in shelter weatherproofing or food assistance exists, families are obliged to use the monetized winter assistance to address them, often at the expense of other key items needed for basic assistance. Given the large-scale needs, and based on socio-economic vulnerabilities and exposure to winter conditions, the Basic Assistance sector has identified 257,250 Syrian refugee, poor Lebanese, and vulnerable Palestine refugee households in need of assistance to cope with the survive the winter months between November 2015 and March 2016 with a total funding requirement of \$117.8M. Since households have various needs, actors are required to provide different interventions through various modalities:

1) Cash based interventions support:

An efficient and effective modality and preferred by refugees – was chosen as a main assistance modality.

210,000 vulnerable households (80 % of the total households targeted for winter) were identified to be targeted with cash alone. Those households are all the 165,000 food eligible, economically vulnerable, and exposed to cold Syrian refugees (UNHCR, WFP), 30,000 extreme poor Lebanese (as per NPTF), 12,000 Palestine refugees (PRS and PRL) and 3000 Lebanese returnees (ICRC, IOM).

In addition, a specific one off \$40/child top up package was introduced as additional support for families with children living in informal settlements to enable buying clothes, shoes.

2) In Kind distributions of core relief items:

Cash based interventions are supplemented by distribution of fuel cards, blankets and stoves, as well as shelter weatherproofing activities. In addition to the 210,000 households prioritized for cash, an additional target of 47,250 households were set to receive in kind support based on needs based referrals from the field.

3) Shelter specific interventions:

Supplementary to cash and in kind assistance, shelter interventions such as weather proofing and site improvements represent a key component of the winter support plan. While those activities are regular interventions throughout the year, shelter partners scale up implementation prior to and during winter months.

49,800 and 10,800 Syrian refugee households were prioritized to benefit from weatherproofing in sub-standards building / informal settlements, and site improvement informal settlements interventions respectively.

## **2015-2016 WINTER ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES ACHIEVMENTS**

### Overview:

The 2015/2016 interagency winter support plan concluded end of March 2016, reached 252,364 poor and exposed to cold households (79% Syrians; 16% Lebanese; 6% Palestinians).

More than 190,000 households received cash for winter grants and vouchers, in addition to 70,000 supported with core relief items such as warm blankets, stoves, and clothing kits. The assistance ensured that families remained warm during the winter months as it enabled them to purchase fuel for heating and winter clothing, improve their shelters, and meet additional food requirements as the post distribution monitoring shows.

It is worth mentioning that this winter assistance cycle had the widest reach since the beginning of the crisis in 2011. Nearly 61% of the registered Syrian refugee population, 25% of the identified most vulnerable Lebanese, and 93% of the Palestine refugees from Syria received winter assistance from November 2015 till the end of March 2016. The 2015/16 winter support plan was concluded successfully due the collective interventions of 32 actors (UN Agencies, NPTP, INGOs and NGOs) and a generous support from donors that reached \$107M.

### Cash & Vouchers Assistance

Reached households received different cash assistance packages following harmonized economic vulnerability criteria and targeting schemes.

All refugee households who were eligible for food assistance, economically vulnerable and exposed to cold were targeted. Households living below 500 meters received \$100 per month - 74,732 households out of 76,000 targeted were reached (98%), while households living above 500 meters received \$147 monthly - 74,183 households out of 75,000 targeted were reached (99%).

In addition, a one off child focused package of \$40 value was introduced this year and benefited 58,835 households with children below the age of 15. On average, each household received an amount of \$116. 27,411 Syrian refugee households (90,717 Children) living in Informal Tented Settlements, 24,601 extreme poor Lebanese families (71,796 Children), and 6,823 Palestine refugee households (19,786 Children) received this cash grants.

In areas where cash distributions were not feasible, in Aarsal for example, fuel vouchers were provided to 12,000 households to ensure heating their homes. MoSA also concurred to this by distributing another 1,000 fuel vouchers to vulnerable Lebanese families (300 in the Bekaa, and 700 in Mount Lebanon).

### Core Relief Items and Clothes Distributions

Distributions of core relief items were based on ad-hoc needs, mainly prioritizing households who didn't receive CRIs in the previous winter in addition to areas where cash distribution is not possible.

Core relief items were distributed to all targeted population cohorts. Distributions included 350,556 high thermal blankets, 3,452 diesel stoves and 35,735 in-kind clothing.

In collaboration with MEHE, 1,221,000 liters of fuel were distributed to 564 public schools hosting Syrian and Lebanese children. This ensured heating of classrooms in first and second-shift schools located above 500m in altitude.

Moreover, MoSA provided 4,693 mattresses to both Syrian and Lebanese vulnerable individuals in the Bekaa area.

### Shelter Weatherproofing

The regular shelter activities were scaled up for the winter 2015-2016. The activities covered weatherproofing and minor repairs in substandard buildings - 10,775 households out of 18,800 targeted (57%). Moreover, in Informal Settlements, weatherproofing activities benefited 32,471 households out of 31,000 targeted (104%) and site improvement activities for 4,948 households out of 10,800 targeted (45%) were made. The unmet shelter targets are due to a persistent funding gaps.

### Other Interventions: Energy & Water Activities

The Energy and water sector implement some activities aligned with the objectives of the winter intervention. Sector actors implemented flood mitigation activities such as cleaning of river and water channels, as well as the provision of protection fences and river banks through building of retaining walls to prevent flooding into houses. Water was provided to households for storage just before storms, and sewage pits were desludged to prevent overflow. The sector also distribute drainage kits in flood prone sites.

## **MONITORING**

### Cash for winter to Syrian Refugees

Following provision of winter assistance, winter partners conducted Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) activities to assess the provision and impact of winter assistance. The below described represent the results of the UNHCR PDM targeting a representative sample 2,339 individuals through a phone survey.

The objectives of these PDMs was to identify or measure the quality of the processes (card distribution, verification process via a 2 way SMS system), the beneficiaries' preference for cards, the use of the winter cash assistance, the unmet needs, and the preferred channels of communication by the beneficiaries.

The results came as follows. For the quality of the processes, respondents found the modality of cash distribution through cards to be effective and efficient. Almost 99% of persons confirmed that they had been treated with respect during the card distribution process. In general,

respondents expressed having no preference at all for whether assistance was provided through a single or multiple cards.

As for cash withdrawal, 99% reported having no problems in using ATMs. For 90% of the monitored households, it was the principle applicant (80%) or the spouse (10%) who had withdrawn the amounts. For the remaining 10%, 6% reported relying on friends or other family members to make the withdrawal, and 4% confirmed being assisted by bank staff or other random people.

On the sufficiency of funds, families stated that winter cash assistance was not ample to meet their needs. More than 81% indicated that the assistance was insufficient, and went on to specify that 250 USD (or more) per month would be a sufficient amount for the winter period.

Resorting to additional debts to meet the increasing needs in winter was reported to be the coping mechanism of choice by 87% of respondents.

Families used the winter cash assistance to spend it mainly for heating material (72%), food (52%), health and medical expenses (19%), rent (16%) and winter clothes (15%).

Primary needs such as food, rent and health expenditures, as well as winter-specific needs such as heating material and winter clothes, were identified as unmet needs by the respondents.

In addition to the PDMs, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with both beneficiaries and non-recipients of assistance throughout the country. FGDs were also conducted with individuals with specific needs to identify access limitations for particular groups to winter assistance. The sample was randomly selected from a large population, with the following criteria: individuals with physical disabilities, older people, single male/female parents, single male/female. The results of the FGDs echoed those of the PDMs. The respondents also stressed on the need to expand the assistance to target more households, even it induced the reduction of the assistance package.

#### [The UNICEF \\$40/child top up – Syrian refugees](#)

PDMs were conducted following the disbursement of cash top-ups for vulnerable Syrian children living in informal settlements. The results came as follows:

On the quality of the processes, 96% of the sampled beneficiaries responded that they were satisfied with the behavior of the assessment staff, while 33% confirmed they knew of families with children in the same settlement that were not assessed.

On the communication systems in use, 93% were satisfied with the SMS communication system, and 88% deemed the leaflets helpful to understand the programme.

Concerning the distribution, almost 94% attended the sessions successfully, leaving only a 6% no-show rate. 97% of the respondents were satisfied with the organization of the distribution sessions, although 25% reported high expenditures on transportation to access these sessions. With regards to the information sessions, 96% considered the information provided during the sessions to be sufficient for them to withdraw the grant autonomously.

On the effectiveness of the assistance, 99% of the respondents were in favor of cash assistance. 88% found the assistance was provided at the right time.

Regarding the usage of the funds, 81% of the sampled beneficiaries reported having prioritized winter-related expenditures as one of the two biggest expenditures at the time.

Some of the challenges highlighted in the PDMs related to the lack of one unified/central complaints mechanism. The beneficiaries had to call a wide range of actors to reach the concerned party.

#### Cash vs. In-kind

In hard-to-reach areas, in kind clothing kits were distributed. Based on the PDM conducted by UNICEF, respondents stated that they prefer for cash. 90% of the respondents confirmed they preferred to receive the value of the kit in cash, and 8% reported preference to fuel vouchers. But concerning the processes, 87% reported that the distribution site was adapted for the distribution, and 90% were satisfied with the organization of the distribution sessions. On the quality of the assistance, 92% were satisfied with the kit composition and quality, but 36% stated they did not receive the adequate size for their children.

#### Fuel for Schools:

The Fuel for School programme was implemented by UNICEF in coordination with MEHE. Distributions were monitored in real-time, which allowed to direct any issues to MEHE directly, which allowed a timely correction and intervention. One helpline for school principals to report any issues/concerns directly was put in place.

Interviews took place with school principals after the programme ended, and yielded the below results/indications. 72% of the principals reported the approach of the fuel distributions to heat the classrooms as excellent. Moreover, the pre-defined distribution schedule allowed the service provider to deliver on time, disregarding winter-related accessibility issues.

### **LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2016 - 2017**

On April 25th 2016, 46 representatives from humanitarian agencies attended an Interagency Winter Assistance Lessons Learned Workshop, held at UNHCR, which served as an opportunity to review the interagency coordination of program delivery and effectiveness for the 2015-16 winter support plan and to offer lessons learned and recommendations to inform the upcoming 2016-17 plan.

For the analysis, the 10 recommendations from the lessons learned workshop of winter 2014-2015 were used as a baseline. This served to identify where more enhancement is necessary in the programming, and where predefined objectives have been met.

The areas where there is a potential for considerable improvement include the need to involve beneficiaries in the project design through more consultations with different communities. Refugees should be able to voice their concerns on targeting, modalities and the types of assistance to be provided.

Similarly, there's a critical need to harmonize the feedback mechanism and ensure beneficiaries are provided with the easiest pathway to reach the assistance providers to communicate any concern/complaint and to report urgent issues. Among the suggested solutions, a designated call center, harmonized Q&A for operators, 2 way SMS system and mobile information tools.

Equally, there's a pressing need to harmonize the messaging on targeting and assistance between all actors via an Interagency Q&A, an SMS system that informs refugees of eligibility, and more outreach.

At the same time, the importance of the timely reporting on RAIS and Activity Info was stressed in order to avoid duplications.

The below recommendations were brought forward by break-out groups, once concentrating on Cash and CRIs, and the other on shelter activities, and then discussed and validated in plenary.

Recommendation / Lessons Learnt	Programme Design	Coordination	Communication	Implementation	Reporting
Ensure involvement of refugees in project design/community based approach	✓				
Outreach to sector working groups: Shelter, Protection, E&W and other coordination mechanisms (CSMCs)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cash is the best assistance modality / closer look at hard to reach areas where cash is not an option	✓	✓		✓	
Ensure timely funding to meet needs / resource mobilization / to start planning early (June/July)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Harmonized targeting criteria/ less restrictive / wider criteria adopted this year	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ensure non-duplication of assistance: optimize the use of RAIS and Activity Info – the common IA reporting tools	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Outreach to local authorities for information on distributions and assistance		✓	✓	✓	✓
Implementation and provision of assistance to start as of October and for 5 months	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Harmonized feedback mechanism: unified complaints mechanism, call center, unified Q&A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maintain cash safety net for vulnerable Lebanese	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provide written and verbal communication on winter assistance to stakeholders			✓	✓	✓

<sup>i</sup> MoSA/NPTP 2015.

<sup>ii</sup> NPTP/World Bank 2015.