

Minutes of the National Basic Assistance Working Group Meeting

Meeting Location	MOSA , 7 th floor	Meeting Date	15 Sept., 2017
Chair persons	Mario Abou Zeid (MOSA) Hadi Haddad (MOSA) Khalil Dagher (UNHCR)	Meeting Time	12:00 PM
Minutes by	Malak Rahal	Meeting Duration	2.00 Hrs.
Agencies present	MOSA, UNHCR, Relief Organization, IOM, UNICEF, Dorcas Lebanon, WFP, ACTED, ECHO, DFID, ACF, ANERA, Solidar, ICRC, LRC, UNOCHA, WVI, Relief International, UNDP, Solidar Suisse, OXFAM, LHIF, DRC, PCPM, SCI.		
Agenda of the meeting	1. Sector Updates: A. Targeting Assistance B. Midyear Achievements C. 2017/18 Winter Support D. 2018 LCRP Timeline 2. Operational Updates: Roll out of the Desk Formula V2 A. Presentation by UNHCR B. Presentation by WFP		

- Discussion
- Action point

1. Sector Updates: (presentation attached)

1. A / 1.B: For monthly (July), and mid-year (Jan – July) 2017 achievements, please refer to the attached presentation and dashboard.

1. C Winter 2017 – 2018 Response Plan:

- Planning figures for winter 2017 – 2018 were presented. As per the results of the recalibrated desk formula, around 193,000 Syrian refugee households are eligible for assistance.
- The primary modality is cash, and distribution of core relief items is considered supplementary. The total required budget for covering these households between November and March is approximately \$127 million.
- With the exception of UNICEF which confirms funding for winter kits for 30,000 HHs, none of the participating agencies have received funding for winter assistance thus far.
- The sector will continue follow-up with agencies working in winter support (incl. UNRWA) to determine available winter support for Palestine Refugees and poor Lebanese.
- **1. D:** the 2018 LCRP timeline was presented – please refer to the attached presentation with key dates.

2. Operational Updates: Roll out of the Desk Formula V2

A. Presentation by UNHCR

Introduction from the Deputy Representative (Protection) of UNHCR:

UNHCR acknowledged concerns conveyed by NGO partners regarding the lack of information on the messages to beneficiaries shared with the BAWG prior to UNHCR's and WFP's dissemination of SMS on inclusion and discontinuation from multi-purpose cash assistance and food assistance, and recognized that there had indeed been a gap, and therefore welcomed the NGOs' constructive feedback. UNHCR explained that a Q&A on UNHCR's inclusion and exclusion in the MCAP, following the recalibration of the formula, had been conducted for 'frontliners' from UNHCR and partners in the field locations, as well as for the Outreach Volunteers, and that information about the forthcoming SMSs had been shared in the WGs at field level. UNHCR assured that in the future, information concerning its

communication with the refugees would be shared with the BAWG in good time before the dissemination, to also allow for feedback and input from the partners. The feedback contained in the note from NGOs will help refine/develop the current Q&A and inform future mass communication efforts.

Key points presented by UNHCR:

- The application of the recalibrated formula on the updated dataset has allowed UNHCR to identify the currently most socio-economically vulnerable, and ensure convergence with WFP's food assistance.
- UNHCR and WFP are targeting their respective assistance based on a bottom up approach following a series of consultations within the BAWG (including the core group), interagency (national and field) as well as bilateral consultations with key partners and donors.
- The operationalization of the recalibrated formula takes regional variations into consideration and applies a geographical quota. The rationale is to mitigate risks related to a heavy concentration of refugees receiving multi-purpose cash assistance in one part of the country, as this could serve as a pull-factor and trigger a movement of refugees to this region and thereby lead to refugees abandoning existing coping measures as well as threats to social stability. UNHCR recalled that the geographical quota was previously discussed and accepted by the Basic Assistance Core Group, and that smaller cash-programmes in certain regions complement well this approach.
- Generally, in terms of the targeting and methodology used, UNHCR recalled that the fundamental problem is the lack of funding to cover all severely vulnerable refugees in dire need of multi-purpose cash assistance, and that there is no perfectly precise methodology as there is very little that separates one severely vulnerable individual from another with a slightly higher ranking. This is why it has taken UNHCR several months to refine the formula, together with AUB and WFP, and test it, to come up with the fairest model possible, even if not perfect.
- Following the recalibration of the formula and new targeting, UNHCR is assisting the 30,000 most severely vulnerable HHs with multi-purpose cash assistance, including 2,889 HHs, previously assisted by the LCC. As UNHCR has maintained the same total number of beneficiaries for the MCAP, and wanted to avoid any incorrect perception by the refugees that it was decreasing its assistance – which could add to the already increasing anxiety caused by the recent developments in Arsal – UNHCR chose to send out its discontinuation and inclusion SMS at the same time, so that the same number of refugees would receive positive news, as those receiving the sad news of discontinuation. The Q&A used by staff, partners and OVs also included a specific questions and answers relating to these elements, which UNHCR read to the group.
- UNHCR has a centralized list which has been used to avoid duplication with WFP assistance and to ensure that severely vulnerable refugees targeted will also receive food assistance, i.e. ensuring convergence.
- HHs discontinued from MCAP will receive their last cash transfer in October 2017; Included HHs will receive their first cash transfer in November 2017.
- For the time being, all refugees who have been notified through SMS for inclusion fall within MCAP A, as MCAP B and MCAP C – previously presented to the BAWG – are still being evaluated i.a. in light of the planned Appeal mechanism.
- Statistics from the **call centers** show that the majority of calls came from HHs discontinued from WFP food assistance. Reactions from refugees through/via social media is being tracked. Negative reactions have been addresses through clarification messages which were sent on the 7th of

September and Q&A shared with refugee outreach volunteers responding directly on **social media**;

- The first days after the SMS was sent, an increase in the number of beneficiaries approaching the reception centers was noted; 200 people a day approached UNHCR North **reception centers** and around 80 people a day in UNHCR Beirut's reception center. Also, after the discontinuation messages were sent, calls increased in the call centers from 480 to 3,700 the first day and 5,000 calls the following day. After questions were answered through the call centre, OVs, staff and partners, and a clarification SMS was sent, the number of calls decreased notably.

Discussion

- ECHO and DFID questioned the discrepancy in approach by WFP and UNHCR (incl. geographical allocation and how SMS were sent out related to inclusion/exclusion) as well as how MCAP B and C considered by UNHCR fit within the overall harmonized approach for MPCA agreed on by the BAWH.
- UNHCR recalled that the geographical quota had been discussed in the BAWG (following the Core Group) and the a/m rationale, and received general approval, which UNHCR was basing its operationalization on.
- ECHO and DFID expressed their concerns over the need for additional analysis and consultation on the geographical quota especially when it comes to assisting the poorest of the poor with the available resources.
- On the timing of the SMS, UNHCR explained that it has to adhere to the minimum 2-month notice period for discontinuations and that the messages therefore had to be sent during the first week of September (4th and 7th). These timelines have been previously agreed in the BAWG.
- Bilateral feedback was provided when information was requested by donors/interested agencies.
- Further discussions on the referral and appeals mechanism will take place as soon as possible, including tabling AUB research conducted on this specific issue. Impact of discontinuation: both UNHCR and WFP requested researchers to look into the impact and feedback of discontinued families. Results will be shared once finalized. UNHCR will also pick samples of discontinued families and will monitor them for a certain period of time and share recommendations. Qualitative assessment of the families who approach UNHCR and partners will also be completed.
- Additional information was requested by a partner on the geographical allocation filter, specifically comparing the ranking between those who will not be assisted in the Bekaa and those who will be assisted in other areas. UNHCR will follow up and provide this information at the next BAWG.
- A point was raised about some perceptions within the refugee community that the discontinuation of cash is an indication that they will be pushed to return to Syria. UNHCR recalled that it had therefore sent inclusion and discontinuation messages at the same time and all recognized the importance of communication at the community level.

B. Presentation by WFP

The new cash assistance streams being piloted and launched by WFP were presented – please check the attached presentation.

Discussion

- Inclusion sms will be shared with newly identified households in October.
- WFP is using the bottom up approach for cash and food assistance as per the results of the recalibrated desk formula. For cash specifically, no geographical quota is considered. All selected (12,800) HHs are in the Bekaa area.
- Concerns were raised from LHIF and ECHO regarding the harmonization of the operationalization of the desk formula on cash assistance, mainly between WFP and UNHCR. From the sector perspective, it

was highlighted that the geographical quota is critical for operational and proactive coordination purposes.

- UNHCR & WFP program colleagues to ensure the newly included cases are recorded on RAIS by next week latest
- WFP expressed the importance of a joint discussion within the context of the BAWG on referrals and appeals

Next steps:

- A dedicated meeting to be called by the BAWG to discuss the appeals and referrals, (mainly AUB proposal for an appeal scheme regarding multipurpose cash) as well as communications with
- Daily/weekly summary reports from UNHCR call centres will be shared with partners.
- Partners to send their concerns and their inputs on the reactions that were seen and heard from the refugees that were discontinued from assistance.
- Ensure consistency between the different messages (SMS and Q&A) that go out from WFP and UNHCR and other partners.
- Inter-Sector linkages: present the key discussions and identify implications in the next inter-sector meetings at central and at field level.
- Future BAWG to analyse impact of discontinuation.