



Outcome Monitoring Report

2018 Quarter 1



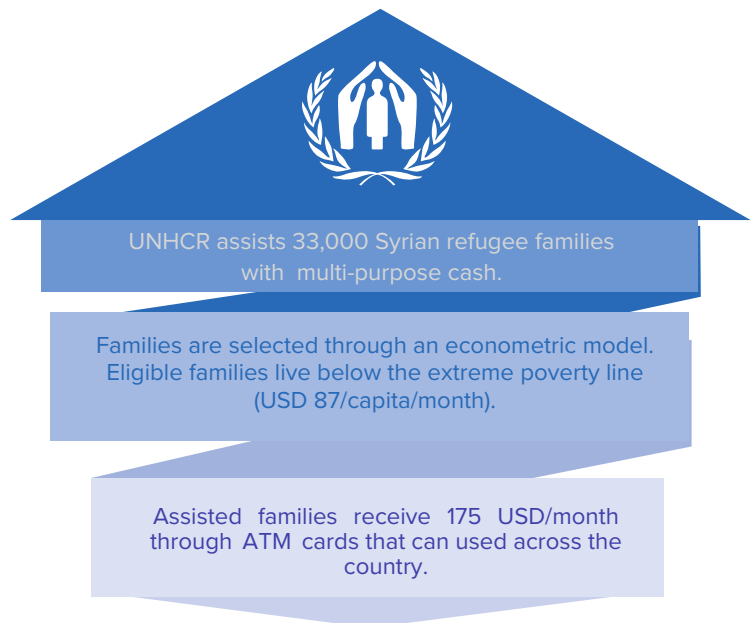
Background

UNHCR assists some 33,000 Syrian refugee families with its multi-purpose cash assistance programme (MCAP). UNHCR aims to support vulnerable families to meet their most basic survival needs and live a life of dignity. The UNHCR basic needs approach is designed to enable refugee families' increased access to assistance and services, with the goal to achieve longer term wellbeing and improved socio-economic situation.

Families' monthly expenditures are predicted by an econometric model based on data from the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR), as well as demographic data on Syrian refugees who have approached UNHCR. The econometric formula ranks the population in the following vulnerability categories: severely, highly, mildly and least vulnerable. Severely vulnerable families are those with predicted expenditures below the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) of 87USD/capita/month and are targeted for MCAP. Benefiting families receive a monthly transfer of USD 175, intended to complement other sources of income such as work and humanitarian assistance. As such, families are supported to climb above the extreme poverty line and lead a more dignified life.

The assistance is provided through an ATM card, allowing families to withdraw the cash from any ATM machine across the country.

Figure 1: Summary of UNHCR multi-purpose cash assistance programme



Objective and Methodology

Objective

This report presents the findings of UNHCR MCAP Outcome Monitoring (OM) exercise conducted on a sample of approximately 900 Syrian refugee families in Lebanon.

The purpose of the OM exercise is to track key outcomes of MCAP by comparing families enrolled in UNHCR MCAP with families not enrolled in the program (control group). The OM can provide insight into the possible contribution of cash assistance on different aspects of families' living conditions, including expenditure patterns, food consumption, coping strategies, health and shelter.

Design and sampling

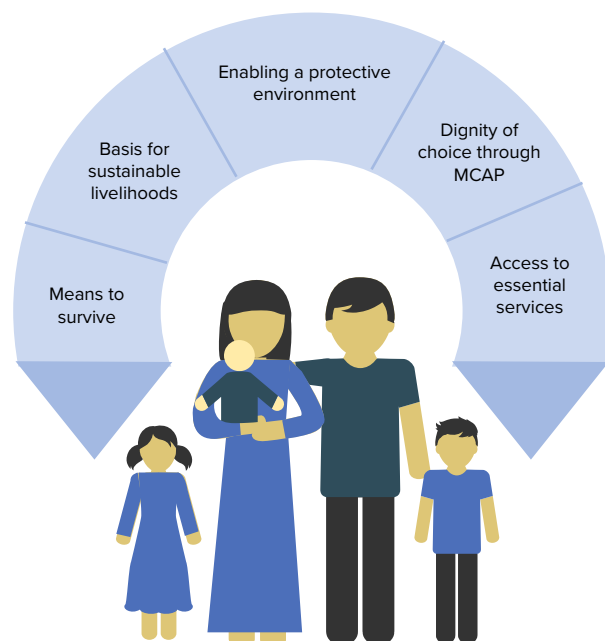
Two groups of Syrian refugee families were sampled for the OM:

Group 1: 486 families assisted by UNHCR MCAP

Group 2: 456 families not assisted by any MCAP

Both groups were selected from the pool of severely vulnerable families and both receive regular food assistance (27 USD/person/month). This was done to maximize comparability across the two sampled groups.

Figure 2: The UNHCR basic needs approach

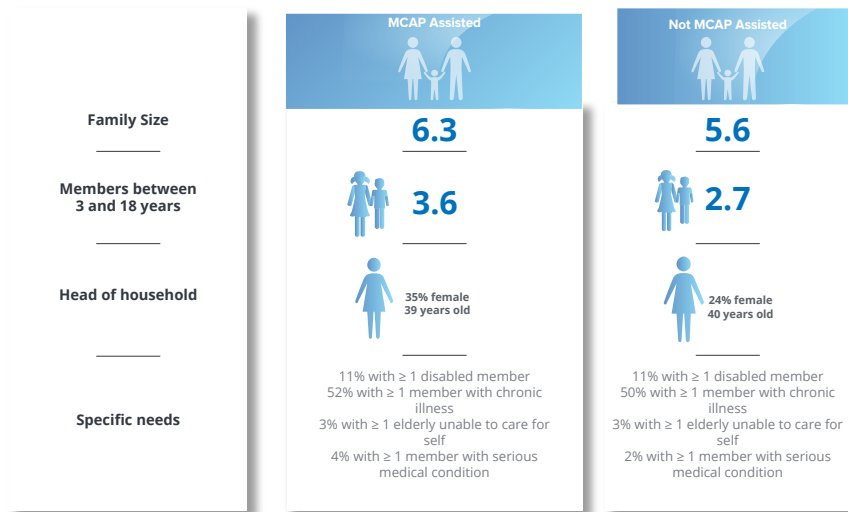


Results

Figure 3: Sample characteristics

Household characteristics

Average family size among both groups was higher than the average reported in the 2017 VASyR (4.9 members). This was expected, given that MCAP recipients are among the most vulnerable families, who are typically larger than average. However, assisted families had slightly larger family size (6.3 vs. 5.6) and more children (3.6 vs. 2.7) compared to those not assisted. A larger proportion of families receiving assistance is headed by a female compared to those not enrolled in UNHCR MCAP (35% vs. 24%).



Income

Non-assisted families seem more inclined to seek work as compared to those assisted. More assisted families have no working members (64%) compared to non-assisted families (54%), indicating the latter's heavier reliance on work. Average income earned by working members among assisted families was found to be 58 USD, and for those who are not assisted, average income was 90 USD.

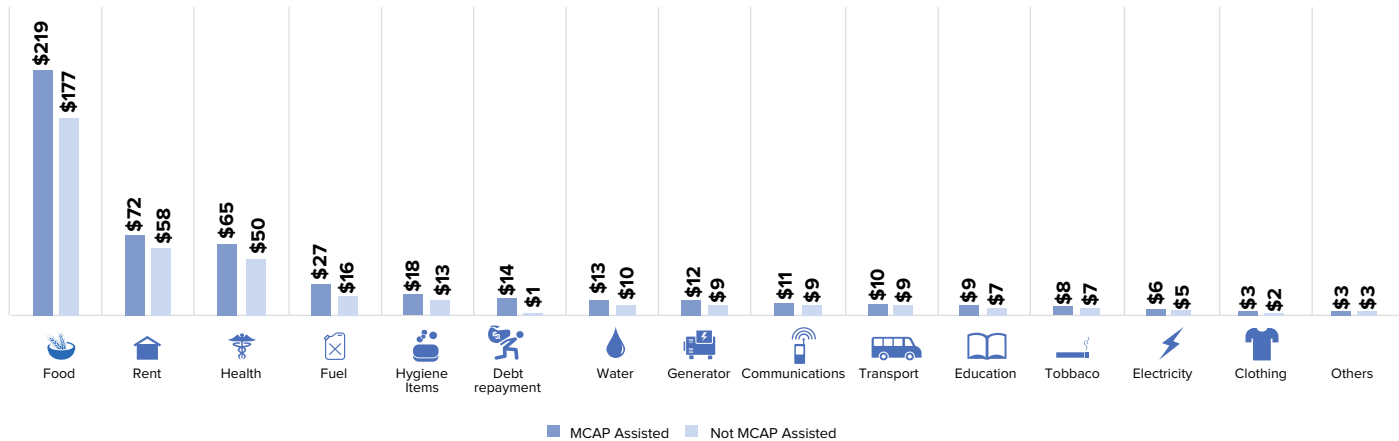
For both groups, cash assistance was reported as the primary income source for above 90% of families, including food assistance. Among those not assisted, 48% rely on debt or credit as a secondary income source, compared to only 4% among assisted families, who continue to rely on assistance as a source of income.

Debt

Both groups were equally likely to take out debt or buy goods on credit in the past month, with 88% of families reporting to have done so – similar to 87% reported in the 2017 VASyR. When looking at the total current debt incurred by families, those assisted had, on average, less incurred debt than non-assisted families (USD 634 compared to USD 851).

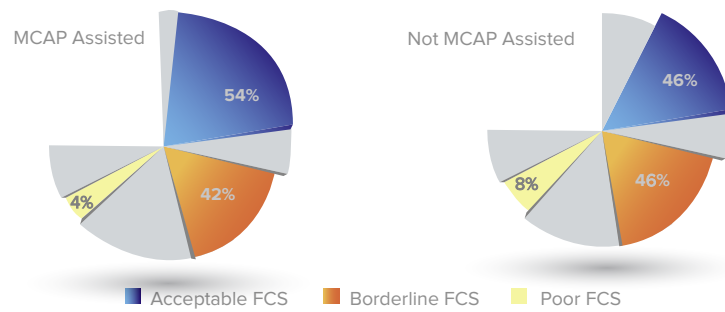
Expenditure

Despite non-assisted families reporting more working members, assisted families have a higher monthly family expenditure (by about USD 118). This indicates MCAP is an important income source for families who are unable to provide for themselves. Compared to families not receiving MCAP, assisted families recorded higher monthly expenditures on basic needs such as rent, food and health/medical costs. These expenses were also noted as top priorities when it comes to spending of cash assistance. A significant number also reported using the cash assistance to pay back debts. This may explain the findings above, indicating that assisted families have less total debt compared to non-assisted families.

Figure 4: Average monthly family expenditure on specific purchases and services (USD)


Food consumption

In line with previous monitoring exercises, MCAP seems to have a positive effect on families' food consumption, measured by the Food Consumption Score (FCS). The calculation of the FCS takes in to account how often the major food groups (staples, legumes, meats, dairy, vegetables and fruits) are consumed, based on their nutritional value. As such, families are classified to have an acceptable, borderline or poor FCS. Families enrolled in MCAP are more likely to have an acceptable FCS (54% compared to 46% among non-assisted families). Similarly, there were less families with a poor food consumption score among assisted (5%) compared to non-assisted families (8%). Although this comparison seems to indicate a positive effect of MCAP on food consumption, the number of families reporting an acceptable FCS among the assisted population is still below the national average, which, according to the 2017 VASyR is 62%.

Figure 5: Food consumption score among Syrian refugee families


Coping Strategies

Despite encouraging results on food consumption, it is noted that 87% of families still face a shortage of food or money to buy food, and 93% faced a shortage of money in the past month. That being said, families enrolled in MCAP seem less likely to engage in both food and livelihood negative coping strategies (see table 1, below).

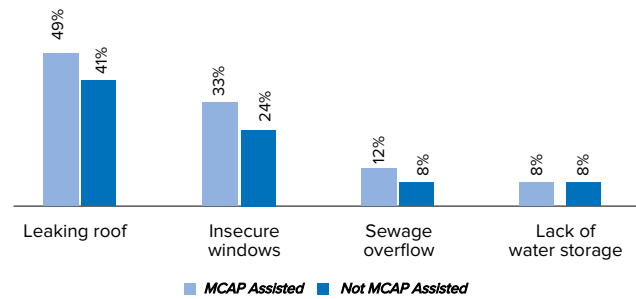
Table 1: Reported frequency (days per week) of resorting to negative food coping strategies

	MCAP assisted	Not MCAP assisted
Relied on less preferred and/or less expensive food	5.1	5.4
Borrowed food	1	1
Reduced the number of meals eaten per day	2.6	4.1
Reduced portion size	2.9	4.0
Restricted consumption of adult household members	2.0	3.9
Sent household members to eat elsewhere	0.1	0.1

Shelter, sanitation and hygiene

Average rent was USD 160, with expected differences by region. Rent prices are highest in Mount Lebanon (USD 255) and lowest in the Bekaa (USD 122). These geographical differences are in line with known trends in the country. Shelter conditions for families in both groups were indicated to be below standard.

Figure 6: Shelter conditions among Syrian refugee families



In general, severely vulnerable families had less access to improved sanitation facilities, as compared to the overall population. In this sample, about 30% of families had a flush toilet, compared to the 56% reported in the 2017 VASyR, thus further highlighting substandard living conditions among severely vulnerable families. Comparing toilet types across the two sampled groups, MCAP beneficiaries seem to have better access to improved sanitation than non-assisted families. A higher proportion of families enrolled in MCAP reported having improved pit latrines with a cement slab or a flush latrine (46% vs. 35%), while families not receiving MCAP more commonly had a traditional pit latrine without a slab (34% vs. 28%).

Wellbeing

70% of respondents reported that cash assistance enabled them to meet their family's basic needs. When assessing general wellbeing, assisted respondents seemed more likely to report positive feelings about their current situation, even if uncertainty and stress for the future persisted. A much larger proportion of assisted respondents indicated feeling happy because they are able to meet the family's basic needs (60%), compared to 32% within the non-assisted population. Still, a large number of respondents, regardless of their assistance status, are facing financial stress. According to the 2017 VASyR, around three quarters of the Syrian refugee population are living below the poverty line.

Table 2: Feeling of overall wellbeing among Syrian refugee families

	MCAP Assisted	Not MCAP Assisted
I felt happy because I was able to meet my family's basic needs	60%	32%
I was worried about the future of my household	93%	92%
I felt more secure	85%	64%
My family is better integrated into the local community	75%	61%
Financial issues caused stress for me and my family	74%	73%

Cash withdrawal and safety

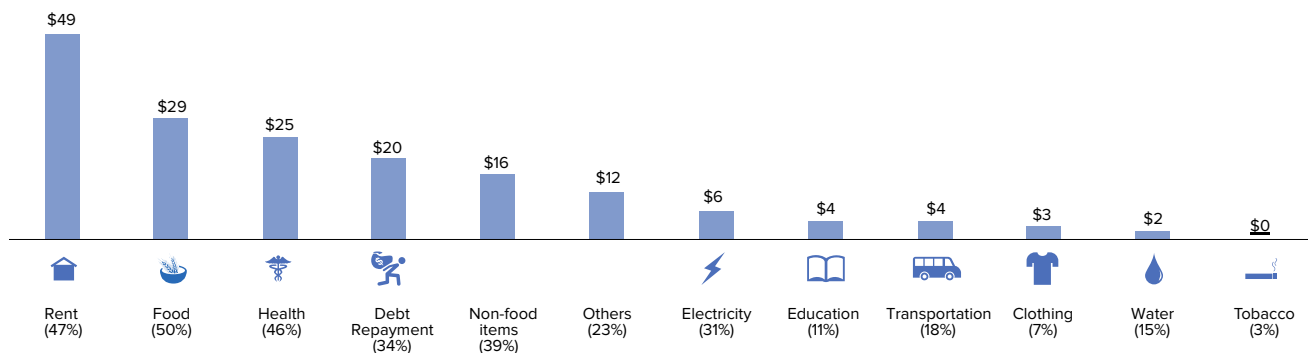
When using the ATM to withdraw the cash assistance, over 85% of respondents stated that they did not face any challenge. For those who did, the main issue reported was long queuing times at the bank. This was reported in the Bekaa region, where most of the cash beneficiaries reside. Thus, the limited number of ATMs in rural Bekaa may be causing overcrowding. UNHCR is addressing this issue by loading a subset of cash beneficiaries in the Bekaa at different times throughout the month.

Cash spending and decision making

In most families (70%) the male head of household was indicated as the primary cardholder. For the remaining 30%, the wife of the head of household would usually keep possession of the card. A similar trend was noted in relation to decision making surrounding the spending of cash assistance. Only two families reported that there was some disagreement among family members on how to spend MCAP, while for other families, decision making did not cause any issue.

As expected, the person usually in possession of the card is the family member who would most likely travel to the ATM to withdraw the cash. Most families (96%) reported that they withdraw the full amount of assistance during a single trip to the ATM. Most commonly (83%), familiarity with using an ATM was the factor that would determine who in the family would withdraw the cash. To a lesser extent, gender (9%), availability (8%) and freedom of movement (11%) were cited as key considerations. Just under 30% of respondents reported that they usually walk to an ATM. Other modes of transportation include driving, public transport or having a friend or relative drive. Time to get to an ATM was significantly higher for those who did not walk compared to those who did – 27 minutes versus 18 minutes. For those not walking, the cost of transportation to the ATM was on average USD 3. Despite the seemingly long time needed to reach an ATM, 98% of the families stated that they did not have any issues reaching an ATM to withdraw the cash assistance. For the few families who did (seven in the Bekaa and one in the North), distance was cited as the main challenge.

Figure 7: Average family expenditure on different items and proportion of families reporting expenditure (as a % MCAP)



Conclusions

- UNHCR MCAP continues to be used by families to cover their most basic needs, namely rent, food and health. On average the largest portion of MCAP is spent on rent, followed by food and health/medical costs. In general, it is more likely for families not receiving MCAP to work. Thus, they rely on alternative sources of income, while overall expenditure of non-recipient families still remains lower than those receiving MCAP.
- MCAP may be reducing the burden of debt among recipient families. While both assisted and non-assisted families reported taking out debt in the past month, assisted families had less total incurred debt and seemed to be paying off debts at a higher rate than those not receiving MCAP.
- Shelter conditions for Syrian refugee families continue to be less than ideal. While hygiene conditions may be better among MCAP recipients, overall shelter conditions are not. Triangulation of findings from this exercise with other programs is being conducted in parallel (ex. cash for shelter or core relief item distribution), to provide insight on the possible advantage of complimentary programming.
- Families who receive MCAP reported more positive perceptions towards their current situation. However, longer term stress appears to remain, despite the assistance. Due to funding constraints, only a fraction of all eligible families nation-wide are being assisted with MCAP. Consequently, refugees remain in a state of frustration and apprehension.
- It is worth further investigating the issue of overcrowding at ATMs in the Bekaa region. While a small number of families reported this challenge, it is one that has come up over several rounds of monitoring and warrants some assessment and discussion on possible solutions or mitigation measures.