



Minutes of Meeting Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG)

Meeting Location	Remotely Via Zoom	Meeting Date	3 November 2023
Chairperson(s)	Dr. Ola Boutros – Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) General Supervisor (Ministry of Social Affairs - MOSA) Camilla Jelbart Mosse, Senior Inter-Agency Coordinator (UNHCR – Inter-Agency) Elina Silen, Chief Technical Advisor – Crisis Response (UNDP)	Meeting Time	10:00 a.m. 12:00 p.m.
Minutes Prepared by	Jana Nasr, Senior Inter-Agency Coordination Assistant (UNHCR)	Meeting Duration	2.00 hrs.
Participants	Annex 1		
Agenda	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Opening RemarksEmergency Response to Escalation in the SouthProtection and Tensions Trends Overview (Q3)Winter PreparednessAOB		

1. Opening Remarks

Dr. Ola Boutros, LCRP General Supervisor (MoSA)

In her opening remarks Dr. Boutros highlighted the following points:

- Last year's winter preparedness and response plan was particularly successful and provided rapid support to the affected population during floods and snow storms.
- Technical teams at the subnational level are currently reviewing the winter plans for the upcoming winter season.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with international organizations to build effective partnerships for the response. This cooperation was open to everyone without exception.
- Lebanon has been facing an accumulation of crises since 2019, and there are increasing challenges to meet the growing needs of the population. Limited funds for this year pose a concern as they could affect the ability and capacity to respond to the needs.
- The situation is further exacerbated with the challenge of escalation in the southern border of Lebanon, with a potential threat of war. This calls for the Government of Lebanon (GoL) to ensure contingency planning. Meanwhile, OCHA is coordinating efforts within the humanitarian framework.
- Ministries need to cooperate across sectors with relevant international partners and organizations according to their mandate in order to implement the plan. This cooperation should prioritize the identification and inclusion of beneficiaries, leaving no one behind.
- In times of conflict, it is imperative to respect the principles of international and humanitarian law. This commitment is particularly crucial during times of war, where the lives and well-being of all civilians, including children, and humanitarian workers must be protected.



2. Emergency Response to Escalation in the South

Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Unit, OCHA, UNHCR South Office, and Inter-Agency Coordination Unit provided the following updates on the emergency response to escalation in the southern Lebanon:

Cynthia Bakkalian, Project Analyst (UNDP)

- Over the past 2 to 3 weeks, several meetings were held at different levels, including among ministers and with UN agencies. The Prime Minister (PM) and UN agencies agreed to work together to develop a national preparedness and response plan.
- The Minister of Environment, Dr. Nasser Yassin was appointed by the PM as the 'coordinator' for this coordination with UN agencies.
- The Secretary General of the Highest Supreme Council of Defense, who heads the National Disaster Risk and Management Committee, was also involved in updating response plans.
- The work was divided into 10 main sectors aligned with UN emergency plans.
- Daily meetings were held with these sectors, with representation from UN and line ministries.
- The main objective of the meetings was to identify available resources, challenges, and immediate actions required for the plan.
- Responses were already taking place at the local level, particularly for over 2,000 displaced people in collective shelters.
- Each sector identified immediate actions, and updates on available resources were expected by the end of the week. This information was needed to estimate the financial requirements for funding the plan.
- The GoL would be able to launch a flash appeal in coordination with UN agencies when activating the plan.

Helena Mazzaro, Deputy Head of Office (OCHA)

- OCHA's efforts in preparing for a worst-case scenario complement the Government's actions in preparing for a potential large-scale conflict.
- The contingency plan will turn into a funding mechanism only if a large-scale emergency occurs, leading to a flash appeal.
- Sectors are estimating resource needs, including financial resources, for the worst-case scenario, even though the current situation involves fewer displaced people.
- Additional funding is needed for the worst-case scenario and an emergency allocation to support partners in preparedness and response is proposed to support the current situation and continue operations.

Aya Harb, Governance & Projects Management Officer (National Mental Health Programme, Ministry of Public Health)

- The Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP) is being developed by the National Mental Health Programme at the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) in close collaboration with WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and other government entities, UN agencies, scientific bodies, and local and international NGOs.
- The full list of partners supporting implementation will be shared once finalized.
- The intersectoral MHPSS EPP is a holistic and multidisciplinary approach aimed at safeguarding the mental health of all citizens in Lebanon.
- The plan outlines key areas for immediate intervention and resource allocation, setting the stage for a proactive and comprehensive response to any future emergencies.



- It aligns with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines, emphasizes effective coordination, and advocates for a more robust and sustainable mental health care system post-emergencies, adhering to the principles of "Building Back Better".
- The four main domains of action are: coordination, response to affected populations, continuity of services, and dissemination of information. Further details about each domain are elaborated on slides 12 to 16 of the presentation [here](#).
- A list of national public awareness material is available on slide 17 of the presentation [here](#).

Francis Teoh, Head of Field Office (UNHCR South Office)

- The Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) tool has been tested in the South by colleagues from the South Field Office and the Inter-Agency Coordination Unit. The tool has proven to be successful.
- The tool will be launched today (3 November 2023) in collective shelters.
- The South office held meetings with the Governor of Nabatieh, DRM unit, and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) unit to discuss response preparedness and plans.
- The team is making an effort to have further coordination in place as a preparedness measure, especially with the different partners that are already involved in the response at field level.

Checrallah Aboujaoude, Government Liaison Officer (UNHCR South Field Office, Lebanon)

- As a preventive measure, DRM/DRR emergency cells have been activated in Nabatieh and DRR has been activated in Tyre Union of Municipalities (UoMs) and in Baalbek.
- Inter-Agency focal points are communicating with Governors/DRM and UoMs/DRR for direct coordination on referrals of needs across sectors and partners.
- Inter Sectoral coordination support this mechanism through the South Inter-Sector and Inter-Agency (co-chaired by UNDP, UNHCR and MoSA)
- All UoMs and districts have been requested to be prepared for any escalation.
- A coordination mechanism has been established with DRR Unit and UoMs through a WhatsApp group where all information and updates are shared.
- Three meetings were held with the Governor of Nabatieh to establish coordination mechanisms and an agreement reached. A WhatsApp group was also set up for coordination with sectors in Nabatieh Governorate.
- As of 3 November 2023, there are 4 shelters in the South Governorate with 717 individuals and 370 households (figures are subject to change based on the situation).
- The operational response is currently focused on collective shelters currently, with some partners expanding to Household (HH) level in liaison with local authorities.
- All sectors are involved in the preparedness response. Basic Assistance, WASH, Food Security Agriculture, and Health but the following sectors are leading on the immediate response, focusing on core relief items, hygiene kits, hot meals, mobile medical units.

Jinan Chinder, South Area Manager (UNDP)

- The direct coordination currently taking place with MoSA, DRR, and UoMs is crucial for the response.
- The involvement of Kaem Makam and other key figures in preparedness and planning has been extended to the district level where the DRR has also been activated.
- Coordination with the DRM focal point and the DRR in the South Governorate, specifically in the Zahrani area, is significant while they are working on their preparedness plan.
- The UNDP and UNHCR South Field Offices are actively following up with them, providing advice, and ensuring direct and immediate contact with relevant sectors when necessary.



Raffi Kouzoudjian, Associate Information Management Officer (UNHCR – Inter-Agency)

- There are four tools agreed upon in the recent Core Information Management Working Group Meeting (IMWG) and endorsed by the Inter-Sector Core Group.
- It is important to maintain and update the tools for effective utilization and mobilization of resources.
- The tools are listed below. For further information, please refer to slides 19 and 20 of the presentation [here](#).
 1. Service Mapping/Activity Info
 2. Contingency Warehouses and Emergency Stocks/ActivityInfo.
 3. Emergency Response Reporting
 4. Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA)

Zahi Chahine, Head of DRM Unit (UNDP)

- Clarification that the 1 million internally displaced people (IDPs) figure mentioned on slide 5 of the presentation [here](#) refers to all population groups in Lebanon as identified by the GoL in coordination with UN agencies, it does not refer to the Lebanese population exclusively.

3. Protection and Tensions Trends Overview (Q3)

Regarding the Tensions Monitoring System (TMS), Hassan and Elina explained that:

Hassan Baalbaki, Analysis Associate (UNDP)

- The TMS has been monitoring the situation and tensions taking place in Lebanon specifically with regards to the escalations in the South. The Dashboard can be found [here](#).
- As per the analysis data in the last wave of the ARK UNDP Survey (July 2023), prior to the escalation, the inter and inter-communal relations have been tense.
- Refugee-host community relations have been negative, especially in Zahle and Bcharre districts.
- In July 2023, Intercommunal tensions reported at 30-34%, with competition for lower skilled jobs as the main driver.
- Intra-communal Lebanese relations have slightly improved, but the data still shows fluctuation, with political and economic factors influencing tensions. For example, in July 2028, 4% of Lebanese cited negative relations compared to 34% in the latest July 2023 wave.
- Access to services is increasingly driving tensions across populations in Lebanon, particularly for electricity, shelter, and medical care.
- Forward-looking analysis for the South's escalation identifies four main tension drivers (please refer to slide 26 of the presentation [here](#) for more details): internal displacement, political and sectarian differences, anti-refugee sentiments, and aid bias.
- Monitoring online engagement on social media reveals two phases: initial focus on intervention and support, followed by discussions on war decisions, regional powers' involvement, and the role of the government.
- There are ongoing debates on internal displacement, reported thefts in the South, attacks on American franchises and embassies, and the UN and international community's role in the conflict.



Elina Silen, Chief Technical Advisor – Crisis Response (UNDP)

- With significant time pressure, urgent needs, a wide range of actors and a preexisting complex tension landscape, there is a high risk of assistance contributing to tensions.
- One of the priorities is to circulate a guidance note to partners responding in the South on respond to the escalation in a more conflict sensitive way. The document is currently being reviewed and will be circulated once finalized.
- Four points of concern raised for partners responding in the current situation:
 1. Lack of engagement, coordination, and communication with local authorities.
 2. Lack of communication of aid criteria/prioritization.
 3. Perception of aid bias on two levels; between beneficiaries and partners.
 4. A high number of visits by NGOs, UN, media.
- Appeal to partners to work cohesively and coherently through the interagency structure at the national level to mitigate potential drivers of tensions.

Sophie Etzold, GBV Sector Coordinator (UNHCR – Inter-Agency)

Regarding the tightening protection space and restrictive measures, Sophie mentioned that:

- There is a gradual tightening of protection space with increase and officialization of restrictive measures, including arrests and deportations across the country, including the South.
- This is leading to heightened social tensions and hostilities between host and refugee communities.
- The increase in raids by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the implementation of curfews is impacting many households.
- LAF reported several thousand pushbacks at the Lebanese-Syrian border in September.
- Up until end of September, 56 boats departed from Northern Lebanon/the southern coast of Syria towards Cyprus, including unsuccessful boat attempts.
- Increased negative public rhetoric on Gender and GBV issues was reported resulting in programmatic challenges and amendment of work modalities.
- An increase is observed in child labor cases and exploitation of children in streets, particularly street-bound children.
- There is also a notable rise in the number of younger girls and women entering the labor market, leading to reports of exploitation in various fields.
- In reference to the protection response in the South, protection actors (including child protection groups) are offering programs in collective centers, providing awareness sessions and services.
- Services are being expanded to displaced populations and families through hotlines and case management services.
- Increased restrictive measures in the South have been reported, particularly affecting displaced populations, leading to concerns about their ability to move and seek accommodation.
- Reluctance in allowing newcomers to rent in certain locations is posing challenges for vulnerable groups, and the need for non-discriminatory access to protection services must be safeguarded.



4. Winter Preparedness

Stephanie Laba, Inter-Agency Coordination Officer (UNHCR – Inter-Agency)

On Winter Preparedness, Stephanie highlighted that:

- The previous winter (2022-2023) was delayed, short, and warmer than usual.
- Over 28 LCRP partners were involved in responding to winter needs, reaching more than 7,000 people with emergency response.
- Response activities included, site improvements, support to municipalities, cash assistance, the distribution of shelter kits and core relief items, and temporary relocation.
- Standard support packages for winter are distributed and provided at both household and site/institutional levels.
- The challenges continuing this year include funding shortages, energy and fuel scarcity, potential infrastructure damage, shrinking protection space, municipal capacity, stock depletion, and potential access and security issues for partners.
- Proposed recommendations for the upcoming winter response need to focus on clear understanding of needs, prioritized advanced preparation, regular trainings, updated Geo split, and mainlined and updated contingency stocks.
- The preemptive distribution of shelter weather proofing kits harmonized post-distribution monitoring on the regional level, automated RNA reporting, and increased support to municipalities are also highly recommended.

Sector-specific were provided on anticipated challenges and gaps and how the sectors are managing to overcome the challenges considering the current situation.

Shelter Sector: Abdulrahman Abdelghani, Shelter Sector Coordinator (UNHCR – Inter-Agency)

- The winterization Shelter sector activities are mainly the distribution of shelter kits and preparing people who live in informal settlements for the winter season.
- The preemptive distribution of shelter kits allows families to weatherproof and close openings in their shelters, ensuring security for the winter.
- Some of the shelter kits that are typically used for the inter response are current being used in the South. While the numbers are not significantly high yet, the potential risk of stock depletion poses a challenge.
- Partners' limitations in accessing sites and difficulty in obtaining approvals is leading to interruption of distribution.
- The partners in the South are also currently not permitted to continue the weatherproofing program, where only 30% of families have been assisted so far.
- The risk of being unable to complete distributions by the end of November is emphasized, and support from institutions to expedite approvals given the urgency of the situation is requested.
- The sector plans for stock replenishment of shelter kits through discussions on procurement with the LHF and UNHCR.
- Additional funding is needed to ensure an adequate supply of shelter kits for both conflict situations and planned weatherproofing programs.

Basic Assistance Sector: Sonia Ben Salem, NGO Co-Coordinator (ACF Spain)

- The Basic Assistance sector is facing challenges in maintaining winter assistance, both for cash and in-kind items due to lack of funding.
- There are existing gaps in coverage for the Lebanese community, which are expected to increase this year.



- Efforts are being made to reach out to different organizations to identify those intending to cover winterization or provide cash assistance.
- The sector has been working on developing a map of the different cadasters, based on their elevation level, helping partners prioritize vulnerable areas affected by weather conditions.
- There is an increased response from partners planning winter assistance compared to the previous year. Yet, there remains uncertainty regarding the extent of coverage, with NGOs typically planning to implement in November or December.
- The sector commits to ongoing communication with partners, donors, flagging the expected gap in winter assistance.

WASH Sector: Jakub Pajak, WASH Sector Coordinator (UNICEF)

- Traditionally, the WASH sector winter interventions were limited to four-month developments.
- This year, the sector used data from the Wash Assessment Platform to identify informal settlements with a history of flooding in the past three years.
- The list of priority sites was shared with partners for preparedness work, including cleaning drains and other activities.
- Emergency dislodging and pre-end dislodging activities are part of the interventions, along with de-watering funds to remove water from informal settlements in case of flooding.
- Challenges include ongoing escalation affecting access to sites and human resources availability.
- Depending on partner staff responses to the escalation, the sector may face challenges in supporting informal settlements.
- The sector plans to support collective shelters with water heaters for showers and hot water in response to the ongoing escalation during winter.

Social Stability Sector: William Barakat, Sector Coordinator (UNDP)

- The Social Stability sector capacities and interventions are related to water drainage, stormwater canals, rehabilitation, and construction.
- Key partners are involved in cash-for-work activities, cleaning roads, and canal maintenance.
- Gaps in winterization efforts include limited municipal capacities and pressures on partners and donors beyond their capabilities.
- Suggestions for the way forward include prioritizing areas with the highest risk of winter impacts, focusing on sustainable solutions, and advocating for donors to support environmental protection.
- Operational issues faced by municipalities include partial coverage of stormwater canals, lack of canals in some areas, and challenges in mobilizing resources for road and canal maintenance.
- Municipalities face difficulties in contracting bulldozers for snow removal, limited capacities for snow lifting, and the need for a stock of salt for freezing weather.
- The importance of considering fuel for heating and lighting for municipalities' operations during winter needs to be considered and emphasized.

Area-specific inputs were provided on how lessons learnt from previous years can shape the preparedness and response for this winter season, including the possible implication of the current situation, and the measures taken to overcome the challenges.



North and Akkar Area: Nizar Gubartalla, Field Officer (UNHCR North Office)

- Emergency preparedness involves frequent training and refinement of tools, ensuring proficiency among partners in using assessment tools and referring cases appropriately.
- The geosplit system is automated and efforts have been made to improve the RNA tool.
- Challenges in the response include a predominantly reactive approach, severe weather causing collapse of tents and flooding of informal settlements, and constraints in constructing more robust structures due to regulatory and budgetary limitations.
- Mitigation efforts for the upcoming season involve allocating the budget for improvements at 15 sites, addressing operational resilience in collaboration with Concern.
- Innovative solutions to river flooding include projects to clean and deepen river beds and reinforce river banks, anticipating the impact of these projects with harsh weather events.
- Frontliner support and trainings involve specialized training for RNA frontliners by the Mental Health Psychosocial Support Task Force to address psychosocial needs during emergencies.
- The RNA emergency response mechanism is proven and robust, demonstrating its capability in addressing needs during harsh weather events.
- The impact of preparedness efforts in the previous year (especially the efficiency of river cleaning and structure rehabilitation) was positive despite a milder winter.

Beirut and Mount Lebanon Area: Dima Jamileh, Assistant Shelter Officer (UNHCR BML Office)

- Refresher sessions on safe referral mechanisms and continuous enhancements of the RNA tool are provided to partners in coordination with IM colleagues.
- Challenges include accessibility issues preventing partners from implementing weatherproofing activities. Efforts are made to resolve this issue for both winterization and emergency response activities.
- Anticipated challenges in case of an escalation in the South include movement restrictions, diminished capacity, and the need for better stock management for various emergency responses.
- The importance of having proper contingency stock planning for different emergencies and staying alert to avoid focusing all contingencies on one type of emergency is emphasized.

Bekaa and Baalback El Hermel Area: Marguerite Nowak, Senior Field Officer (UNHCR Bekaa Office)

- Approval for shelter kits has been received earlier this week, allowing for progress in that aspect.
- The Bekaa region typically experiences severe winters with significant snowfall.
- Three main adjustments to the winter program for this year are outlined:
 - Due to limited funding, there is less winter cash, leading to a greater focus on CRIs and in-kind support, including winter clothes.
 - A more strategic approach is taken, targeting areas exposed to harsher elements, such as altitude and flood-prone zones, based on data from the past 5 years.
 - Pre-positioning of materials for limited mobility has been done, and distributions have already started.
- Partners have been trained on the environmental or natural disaster RNA, distinct from the new one.
- Messages are being updated based on the current context, addressing issues like refugees burning non-fuel materials and an increase in fire incidents due to the confiscation of solar panels.
- Contingency stock is set aside to ensure the capacity to respond in case of displacement, in coordination with the national basic assistance sector.



South and Nabatieh Area: Arash Behazin, Field Officer (UNHCR South Office)

- A quick review was conducted on last year's winterization activities based on relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and complementarity.
- Winterization cash assistance program is not implemented this year.
- Five types of activities decided to proceed with are winter clothing distribution, correlative item distribution, weatherproofing as part of shelter interventions, rapid needs assessments and response during flooding and storms, and distribution of biomass fuel.
- Assessment of over 1,800 structures was conducted, with 64% deemed eligible for assistance.
- Weatherproofing activities had to be stopped due to the current situation.
- Core relief item distribution, including blankets and mattresses, planned for collective shelters and high-altitude villages is currently on hold.
- Main challenges faced include issues of access in many areas, except for parts of Tyre, Saida, and Jezzine districts, and population movements.
- Discussions with different actors on the ground are ongoing to potentially resume interventions ahead of winter.

Action Point: A concise updated winter paper will be put together based on the information shared in the meeting and considering the current situation.



Annex 1

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