



Lebanon Winter 2023-2024 Preparedness & Response Overview

As the winter season approaches, partners involved in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan are gearing up for potential seasonal storms characterized by heavy rain, snowfall, winds, and thunderstorms. This year, distinct challenges have emerged, exacerbated by the escalating aftermath of the Gaza war and its spillover into Lebanon. Displacement resulting from the conflict compels the reallocation of crucial resources initially designated for winter preparedness and response, thereby heightening the vulnerability of communities anticipating the impending severe weather conditions. Furthermore, there may be heightened obstacles to access, particularly in conflict areas, adding an extra layer of challenge to winter preparedness and response efforts.

Despite the significant challenges posed and heightened by the current context, valuable lessons from previous years have informed proactive measures under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan. Preparedness actions have been initiated at both household and site levels across all Lebanese governorates before the onset of winter. These measures aim to facilitate the mobilization of assistance, ensure the swift activation of Rapid Needs Assessments, and maintain robust communication across response partners. Amidst these complexities, the commitment to strategic planning and collaborative efforts remains central to mitigating the impact of winter and safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable populations in Lebanon.



Figure 1. A young boy bundles up against the cold in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. © UNHCR/Haidar Darwish



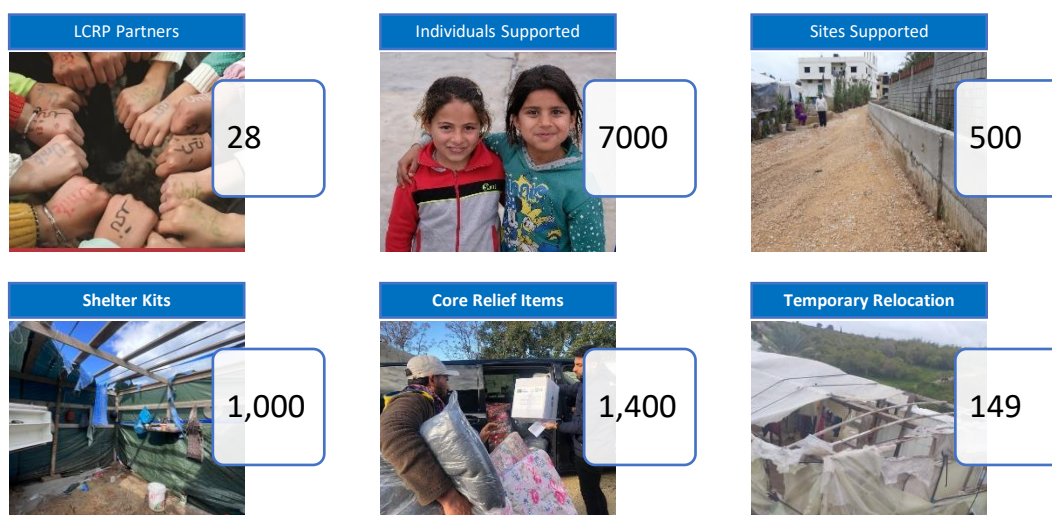
WINTER PREPAREDNESS

Lebanon normally contends with seasonal storms during winter, characterized by heavy rain, snow, strong winds, and thunderstorms, coupled with consistently low temperatures across various regions. This climatic combination, along with poor infrastructure and decreased institutional capacity, leads to a host of issues, including flooding from clogged canals and melting snow, landslides triggered by heavy rain and insufficient infrastructure, road blockages due to accumulated snow, and damage to shelters, particularly in informal settlements.

The prevailing harsh weather conditions exacerbate the already precarious living conditions in Lebanon, where a significant portion of the population is contending with the ongoing economic crisis. The majority of individuals face substantial challenges in affording sufficient heating and meeting electricity expenses, given the pervasive power cuts, placing their basic needs at significant risk. The recent surge in displacement further amplifies existing vulnerabilities. Moreover, the ability of institutions and municipalities to adequately prepare for winter and respond to weather-related emergencies is steadily diminishing due to financial constraints. Securing funds for essential aspects such as fuel, canal cleaning, solid waste management, and equipment maintenance and operation has become increasingly challenging. This poses a critical threat to the overall coping capacity of communities in terms of dealing with the compounding challenges of weather-related adversities and economic hardships.

The comprehensive winter response spans across multiple sectors, including Basic Assistance, Shelter, WASH, and Social Stability. The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) partners are collaboratively engaged in supporting refugee, vulnerable host communities, and institutions, to alleviate the impact of severe weather conditions. This involves the provision of winter cash assistance, implementation of municipal preparedness projects, enhancements to sites, critical winterization shelter repair, and the distribution of winter-related items and clothing.

2022-2023 at a Glance





Sectoral Emergency Preparedness & Response

Before the onset of winter, partners across the response engage in updating the contingency stocks. This includes joint planning to ensure preparedness for the impending season. In anticipation of winter emergencies, geo-splits is updated, and Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) teams are strategically established in collaboration with partners across different regions. These teams remain on standby, ready to be activated in the event of a substantial storm affecting multiple households, necessitating a coordinated, multi-sector response.

To enhance communication efficiency, practical channels are updated. This includes emergency WhatsApp groups at national and local level, involving the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) unit, and the Inter-Agency, to facilitate seamless coordination during emergency responses. Partners actively engage in post-distribution monitoring throughout the regions, aiming to assess the quality of the response. This ensures that distributions effectively meet the needs of families, with the gathered data serving as valuable insights to inform future emergency preparedness initiatives.

Reflecting on lessons learned and best practices from the previous winter season, it is evident that additional efforts are required across regions. This involves a steadfast commitment to adhering closely to the geo-split to prevent duplication of efforts and a comprehensive mapping of sites and partners. The RNA tool is updated as needed to incorporate contextual changes, while contingency planning is strengthened to enhance overall preparedness. Capacity building initiatives are coordinated among partners, emphasizing a collaborative approach. Furthermore, advocacy for funding is paramount to underscore the importance of preparedness interventions before emergencies. This includes securing ample support for municipal assistance, weatherproofing, cash assistance, and site improvements to ensure a comprehensive and effective response to winter-related emergencies.

Basic Assistance Sector

Under the Basic Assistance sector **winter cash assistance** is provided to vulnerable households to support purchasing of heaters, winter clothes, blankets, and fuel for heating. While cash transfers remain the preferred support modality for basic needs, the Basic Assistance sector continue to maintain the distribution of **in-kind Core Relief Items (CRIs)** on a smaller scale, when needed. In-kind assistance supports families to both prepare for the winter season and recover after losing basic household assets due to floods, fires, evictions, and/ or relocation.



Figure 2. Diab, 63 years old, Lebanese receives Core Relief Items in the distribution point in Al-Nabi Shayt, Baalbek – Hermel, Bekaa Valley in May 2023. © MEDAIR



In the face of mounting challenges, the Basic Assistance sector is confronted with the task of ensuring robust winter assistance, encompassing both cash-based interventions and core relief items. The primary hurdle lies in the insufficient funding available, posing a potential threat to the sector's ability to meet the growing needs. Vulnerable population from all nationalities, already grappling with various challenges, are experiencing gaps in coverage that are anticipated to widen this year due to the persistent economic crisis and the recent displacement from conflict areas in southern Lebanon. To address this, concerted efforts are underway to engage with diverse organizations, identifying those willing to contribute to winterization efforts or provide crucial cash assistance.

The sector is proactively working on creating a comprehensive map of different cadasters, categorized by their elevation levels. This strategic mapping enables partners to prioritize vulnerable areas that are disproportionately affected by adverse weather conditions. By doing so, the sector aims to optimize resource allocation and enhance the impact of winter assistance initiatives.

Acknowledging the heightened need for winter support, there has been an increase in response from partners compared to the previous year. However, uncertainties persist regarding the scope of coverage, as many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are typically planning to implement their initiatives in November or December.

The sector is committed to maintaining open lines of communication with partners and donors. This includes flagging the anticipated gap in winter assistance, thereby fostering collaboration and mobilizing resources to bridge these critical shortfalls. Through ongoing dialogue, the sector aims to foster a coordinated and comprehensive response to the challenges posed by winter, ensuring that vulnerable communities receive the support they urgently require.

Shelter Sector

The Shelter sector utilizes several modalities to improve the shelter conditions of vulnerable households living in Informal Settlements (IS), including **weatherproofing** and **minor repair activities** through the provision of in-kind shelter materials and fire-fighting equipment. In addition, partners share technical guidance and manuals with beneficiaries on recommended practices in shelter maintenance. **Site improvements** are conducted by the sector in high-risk areas such high altitude, flood-prone areas, previously affected areas to prevent negative consequences of the winter season such as through cleaning rivers and repairing infrastructure to prevent floods and landslides. Investing in site improvement has proven effective in decreasing the risk of flooding especially in the North and Akkar.

The preemptive distribution of shelter kits plays a pivotal role in empowering families to fortify their living spaces. However, there is a current concern about the potential depletion of stock, particularly in the South where certain shelter kits, commonly used for winter, are currently in use for the displacement that resulted from ongoing escalation. Although the numbers haven't reached critical levels, the looming risk of stock scarcity poses a significant challenge that demands attention.

Compounding the issue is the hindrance to distribution caused by partners' limitations in accessing sites and difficulties in obtaining necessary access approvals. This has resulted in an interruption of the distribution process, affecting the timely preparation of families for winter. Moreover, partners in the South are currently restricted from continuing the weatherproofing program, leaving only 30% of families assisted thus far. The urgency of the situation is underscored by the looming risk of incomplete distributions by the end of November.



Figure 3. Salma, a Syrian community member stands outside her tented home with her daughter and son after the team finalized the weatherproofing assessment at her home in Kfar Zabad, the Bekaa Valley in July 2023. © MEDAIR

In response to these challenges, there is a pressing need for support from relevant institutions to expedite approvals and facilitate the resumption of weatherproofing programs in the South. The sector is actively engaged in planning stock replenishment for shelter kits through discussions on procurement with key donors and lead agencies.

Crucially, additional funding is imperative to ensure a sustained and sufficient supply of shelter kits. This funding is vital not only for addressing immediate concerns in conflict situations but also for planned weatherproofing programs. The comprehensive strategy involves collaboration, efficient procurement, and securing the necessary financial resources to guarantee the shelter sector's ability to effectively navigate and mitigate the challenges posed by the winter season.



WASH Sector

The WASH sector plays a pivotal role in enhancing winter preparedness through its dedicated focus on managing a **safe water** supply and improving **wastewater management**, aligning seamlessly with the Ministry of Environment's environmental safeguards. This strategic approach involves targeting the most vulnerable areas and prioritizing the resolution of pressing issues. In the context of emergency response, the WASH sector undertakes key activities to address immediate challenges. This includes the critical task of **dewatering** flooded areas within informal settlements, ensuring that water-related risks are swiftly mitigated. Additionally, the sector provides essential support to families by facilitating their relocation to meet their specific WASH needs during emergency situations.

The winter preparedness initiatives within the WASH sector have undergone a transformative shift, departing from the traditional four-month development approach. This year, the sector adopted a more data-driven strategy, utilizing information from the WASH Assessment Platform to identify informal settlements with a recent history of flooding spanning the past three years.

To address these identified high-risk areas, a list of priority sites was compiled and shared with partners. Collaborative preparedness efforts ensued, focusing on essential tasks such as cleaning drains and implementing other proactive measures to mitigate potential risks.

However, ongoing escalation is adversely affecting access to sites and the availability of human resources. These challenges pose potential impediments to the sector's ability to effectively support informal settlements during critical times.

In response to the evolving situation, the WASH sector is prepared to adapt its strategies based on partner staff responses to the escalation. This flexibility is crucial in addressing challenges and ensuring that support reaches informal settlements in a timely and effective manner.

Looking ahead, the sector has outlined plans to extend support to collective shelters during the winter months. This includes the provision of water heaters for showers and hot water, responding directly to the ongoing escalation. By taking a proactive and data-driven approach, the WASH sector aims to bolster its winter preparedness initiatives, ensuring the resilience of communities and mitigating the impact of potential challenges.

Social Stability Sector

Social Stability sector partners support winter preparedness of local institutions and authorities, focusing on interventions related to enhancing sewage and water drainage infrastructure, such as rehabilitation, maintenance and construction of stormwater and rainwater canals. Sector partners also provide essential machinery and vehicles to municipalities, such as sewage and jetting trucks, to support the work on clearing canals and lifting snow, particularly in high-altitude areas. Partners also carry out relevant cash-for-work initiatives, for example for road cleaning. This activity also involves Livelihoods sector partners working to boost income generation.



Figure 4. Sewage & Jetting truck provision to Chtoura Municipality for sewage desludging and opening & cleaning clogged water canals to prevent flooding in winter, by UNDP. © UNDP.

Despite concerted efforts, gaps in preparedness for the winter season persist, primarily due to limited municipal capacities, stretching their capabilities thin. Operational challenges faced by municipalities include gaps in infrastructure, machinery, and human resources, leading to inability to operate and maintain existing and newly constructed/rehabilitated water and wastewater systems and machinery.

To this end, there is a need to prioritize areas facing the highest risk of winter impacts such as: 1) areas prone to flooding, such as around Al Marj in the Beqaa, Al Ghadir (river) in Mount Lebanon, etc.; 2) areas with no capacity (infrastructure and/or operational) to drain rainwater effectively; 3) areas near informal settlements lacking solid waste collection; and 4) areas with high altitudes requiring snow lifting and salt stocks to ensure access to essential roads, e.g., Aarsal. Emphasis should be placed on sustainable solutions, such as a clustering approach to cover larger populations, and a call to donors for support in environmental protection is crucial for long-term resilience.



Area Based Emergency Preparedness & Response

Winter preparations are actively underway across diverse regions, each with its set of challenges. This overview explores strategies in the North and Akkar, Beirut and Mount Lebanon, Bekaa and Baalback El Hermel, and the South and Nabatieh. Tailored approaches, from emergency response to innovative solutions, are being implemented to safeguard community well-being in the upcoming cold season.

In **North and Akkar** governorates, emergency preparedness is a priority, involving regular training and tool refinement to ensure partner proficiency. The automated geo-split system and improved RNA tool enhance response capabilities. Challenges include a primarily reactive approach and weather-related issues affecting informal settlements. Mitigation efforts involve budget allocation for improvements at 15 sites, addressing operational resilience. Innovative projects tackle river flooding, emphasizing cleaning and reinforcing riverbeds. Frontline workers support includes specialized training for RNA frontline workers, showcasing the robustness of the emergency response mechanism.

In **Beirut and Mount Lebanon** governorates, focus is on refresher sessions on safe referral mechanisms and continuous RNA tool enhancements are provided. Accessibility challenges hinder weatherproofing activities, prompting efforts to resolve this issue. Anticipated challenges in the South include movement restrictions and the need for better stock management. Emphasis is placed on proper contingency stock planning for different emergencies to ensure a comprehensive response.

The **Bekaa and Baalback El-Hermel** governorates marks progress with recent shelter kit approvals, anticipating severe winters. The region anticipates severe winters with significant snowfall. Adjustments to the winter program include a greater focus on CRIs and in-kind support due to limited funding. A strategic approach targets areas exposed to harsh elements based on data from the past 5 years. Pre-positioning of materials for limited mobility is underway. Partners are trained on the environmental RNA. Messages are updated based on the current context, addressing issues like non-fuel material burning. Contingency stock is set aside for capacity to respond in case of displacement.

In **South and Nabatieh** governorates, a review of last year's winterization activities informed decision-making. The cash assistance program is not implemented this year. Five activities proceed, including winter clothing distribution and weatherproofing. Over 1,800 structures were assessed, with 64% eligible for assistance. Weatherproofing activities were halted, and core relief item distribution is on hold. Challenges include access issues in many areas and ongoing discussions to potentially resume interventions ahead of winter.

As winter approaches, these comprehensive strategies underscore the commitment to addressing regional nuances and ensuring the resilience of communities in the face of seasonal adversities. The shared dedication of stakeholders and the ongoing refinement of tools and approaches affirm a collective effort to mitigate the impact of winter challenges and uphold the well-being of those in vulnerable circumstances.



CHALLENGES & GAPS IN THE 2023-2024 RESPONSE



Funding Shortfall



Resource Scarcity



Escalation



Infrastructure Damage



Access to Remote Areas



Protection Space



Municipal Capacity