UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency Ukraine

POST DISTRIBUTION MONITORING
WINTERIZATION RESPONSE 2023-2024

June 2024

Distribution of Rapid Thermal Kits that include insulation materials in the town of Lutizh, in Kyivska oblast. © UNHCR/Iryna Tymchyshyn

OVERVIEW

To mitigate the effects of Ukraine's harsh winter on displaced, war-affected, and other vulnerable populations, **UNHCR implemented a multi-faceted winterization response as part of an inter-agency effort** coordinated by the Emergency Shelter & Non-Food Item (NFI) Cluster. These efforts complemented a range of efforts by national and regional authorities to keep people warm and safe in their homes during winter. Strengthened protection referrals, with a particular focus on psychosocial support and legal assistance to support access to key civil and housing, land, and property documentation to support solutions from the start, accompanied UNHCR's winterization response.

Post distribution monitoring (PDM) is a core component of UNHCR's ongoing effort to **ensure accountability to those we serve and our donors**, **understand the impact of our interventions**, and to **adapt and course correct in future**. The methodology relies on random sampling of the beneficiary population, using standard, contextualized questionnaires and preserves the anonymity of respondents.

The key findings and lessons learned from the 2023-2024 winterization initiative are therefore crucial in informing our planning for the forthcoming winter, as ongoing attacks by the Russian Federation on Ukraine's energy infrastructure are resulting in significant rolling power outages throughout the country that are expected to continue in winter, compounding the risks facing vulnerable individuals and families. **Early investments in winterization programming and procurement—among operational agencies and donors—will be crucial** if people are to remain safe and warm in their homes and communities—and not be forced to move—in the difficult months ahead.

2023-24 WINTERIZATION RESPONSE SUMMARY OF KEY ACHIEVEMENTS*

1,038,638
People assisted as part of the Winterization Response Plan

Winterization Response Plan

One-off winter cash payment
643,910 — Reached with cash support for winter energy needs
143% — 450K Targeted

NFI
353,873 — Reached with essential & winterized items such as quilts, thermoses and clothes
85% — 416K Targeted

Shelter/Housing
12,681 — Received heaters, Rapid Thermal Kits (RTKs) or cash for rent
80% — 16K Targeted

Collective sites
28,174 — Benefitted from care & maintenance services in collective sites to ensure readiness for winter
157% — 18K Targeted

*Figures represent people reached with partners between **1 September 2023** and **29 February 2024**.
Cash assistance figures are subject to reconciliation and verification.
All reached figures are subject to verification and retro-active corrections may occur.

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KEY FINDINGS OF UNHCR'S POST-DISTRIBUTION MONITORING OF THE 2023-2024 WINTERIZATION RESPONSE

1. Cash assistance is an impactful, flexible, as well as the *preferred* means (among recipients) of mitigating adverse impacts of severe cold and heighted energy costs.

UNHCR's **winter cash assistance is disbursed without restrictions**, meaning that people choose for themselves and their families how to prioritize and address additional winter needs. UNHCR and partners relied on eligibility criteria and appropriate transfer values established by the humanitarian Shelter/NFI Cluster and the Cash Working Group, providing a total of **6,660 UAH per person** in winter cash. Cash assistance was transferred to people's bank accounts and, for people closer to the frontline, the cash assistance was transferred through mobile agents. UNHCR's winter assistance complemented the governments' social assistance efforts by contributing an additional safety net for the most vulnerable internally displaced and war-affected Ukrainians.

The majority of people (86%) preferred the cash assistance as the modality of support to winter. Some **12%** indicated that they would like to receive both cash assistance and in-kind assistance, to be able to receive more overall assistance. Virtually all cash recipients (**97%**) felt safe to receive or withdraw the cash as needed. Also, **93%** of all households indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the way UNHCR delivered cash assistance to them.

Markets throughout the country remained resilient and relatively well-supplied throughout the winter—giving people agency to prioritize what to buy and supporting local businesses and suppliers. UNHCR's PDM exercise underscored the vitality of local markets, with winter items being available in sufficient quantity (**93%**) and quality (**88%**) in all surveyed oblasts, however price increases for firewood and coal during the heating season were reported. There was no reported difference for those residing in oblasts closer to the frontline, where **94%** of respondents indicated that they found required items in local markets. These findings are in line with the data collected by the Joint Market Monitoring Initiative and the findings of the UNHCR NFI PDM.

A total 86% of all respondents who received winter cash highlighted one or more positive changes in their lives, with people being able to buy winter clothes, shoes, firewood, coal for heating, as well as pay utility bills for gas and electricity. Some **60%** of all households surveyed, indicated they used the cash assistance for direct winter related expenditures (winter clothes, firewood, payment of communal utilities), in addition to using the funds to help cover regular basic needs.

As part of its winterization strategy, UNHCR also increased focus on its **Rental Market Initiative** (RMI)—assisting 1,120 people to find adequate rental housing in advance of winter through the provision of (1) **conditional cash payments** to cover an initial six months of rent, and (2) **technical support** to develop fair contractual tenancy arrangements. UNHCR's monitoring found that **100%** of the interviewed households received the full cash entitlement (paid in tranches) and **92%** confirmed that the amount was sufficient to cover the rental costs. The majority covered the costs for the planned period of six months, with **8%** stating they would be able to use the rental support to cover costs beyond the six months. Additionally, **99%** reported that the cash assistance reduced the financial burden on the household and at the end of the rental assistance period, **91%** of the interviewed households remained in the same apartment. Significantly, **88%** of the households reported that they feel safe in the rented accommodation. For those who did not feel safe, **79%** stated that the ongoing war was the main reason.

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Maryna, her husband Dmytro, and their son Denys (7), fled from the city of Bakhmut in Donetska oblast and first found temporary accommodation in a collective site in Vinnytska oblast. The family would have preferred to move into a private apartment, but they were unable to afford the rent. After enrolling in the Rental Market Initiative programme implemented by UNHCR, the family received cash assistance for six months, which allowed them to rent an apartment and move out of the collective site. The family also received support to find employment and Dmytro was able to secure a part-time job, which will help him generate an income to continue paying rent in the longer-term, while his son is attending online schooling.

2. Effective coordination with the Government of Ukraine is essential—and significantly expands to the reach of UNHCR to quickly assist those in dire need with cash for winter

UNHCR's winter cash assistance in 2023-2024 was provided to some 643,910 people. Rapid identification and enrolment are crucial to assisting people in a relatively short seasonal window. **Coordination among the Ministry of Social Policy, the Pension Fund, UNHCR and partners—including through enrolment at multi-purpose protection centres—ensured the most vulnerable households were quickly reached and assisted**.

Across the board, households referred by the government noticed positive changes after receiving UNHCR's cash assistance, stressing that the cash assistance kept them warm, that they could now pay for utilities, or buy warm clothes. **Some two in three households noted a moderate or significant improvement in their living conditions and reduced stress levels**. The biggest positive impact was reported by government referrals from frontline villages in Kharkivska oblast, where **83%** felt a significant improvement in their living conditions. Individuals referred to UNHCR by the Pension Fund and local authorities reported using the money for winter-related expenditures, a finding consistent across all age groups. The same group also noted firewood and cooking fuel as the most important expenditure during the harsh winter months.

3. Non-food items remain impactful and appreciated, but cash is the preferred mode of assistance

A total of 353,873 people received **NFI assistance** this winter, delivered through UNHCR partners. While people reported that they are satisfied with the items received in the UNHCR NFI packages in terms of quality (**85%**), quantity (**90%**), and usefulness (**78%**), **71%** of the people noted that they would have preferred to receive cash assistance. The most useful items were the blankets, bed linen, and kitchen sets, followed by **40%** preferring mattress, solar lamps, and pillows.

In addition, during the winter period (October 2023 – January 2024) UNHCR also distributed **6,188 Rapid Thermal Kits (RTKs)** to 4,084 households (8,577 individuals) whose houses had poor insulation. The RTK included thermal insulation materials commonly used by Ukrainian families to insulate and seal off windows, entrance doors and ceilings. The targeted regions for the pilot project were Chernihivska, Kirovohradska, Kyivska, Mykolaivska, Odeska and Zhytomyrska oblasts with an objective to reduce heating costs through the improved insulation. The RTKs had a positive impact, and **88%** of the families reported the kits improved the thermal comfort of the houses. The quality of the materials used in kits were viewed as being average or above by **98%** of the households and **74%** felt that their distribution was timely.

DISTRIBUTION OF GENERATORS

One of the key challenges faced by civilians has been the frequent power cuts as a result of repeated attacks on energy infrastructure.

As part of the 2023-24 winterization response, and in close cooperation with the authorities, **167 generators were distributed** to a range of community centres, collective sites, hospitals, local departments, schools and other communal infrastructures in 20 oblasts.

This support aims to ensure the continuity of critical services, and to help people and communities be more prepared and stay warm in case of power outages.

Distribution of generators in Ivano-Frankivska oblast. © UNHCR

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As part of the winter response, UNHCR also supported collective sites hosting internally displaced Ukrainians to prepare for the cold winter months. The essential support included repairs and maintenance of heating and electricity grids.

Natalia, left her hometown of Kreminna in Donetska oblast in November 2022. She came to the Forestry College dormitory in Berezne, Rivnenska oblast, together with her son and his family. UNHCR had previously worked to improve the conditions in the dormitory by replacing all the old windows in the building (46 in total).

"The new windows are much better at keeping me warm. Now it's more comfortable, and there's also better air here."

WAY FORWARD: INTEGRATING LESSONS LEARNED INTO THE 2024-2025 WINTERIZATION STRATEGY

With the attacks on energy infrastructure continuing and the subsequent likelihood of substantial power outages during the winter season likely, **early planning of activities, investments and essential procurement are vital—as is the commitment of sufficient funds by donors**. UNHCR's winterization plan for the coming months builds upon lessons learned, experiences and expressed preferences of people served in 2023/24 and will comprise the following elements:

- Working in close partnership with the Ministry of Social Policy and Pension Fund, **UNHCR will prioritize winter cash assistance**, particularly in frontline areas in the eastern and southern oblasts. Pending the availability of sufficient funds, UNHCR plans to begin distributing winter cash assistance as early as September 2024, to enable people to adequately prepare for winter and remain in their homes during the cold season.
- Additionally, and based on positive feedback, **UNHCR will again provide Rapid Thermal Kits** for people living in rural areas as well as to identified collective sites, which has demonstrated relatively high impact for low cost.
- Based on availability of funds and considering the significant numbers of recent evacuees from frontline areas, **UNHCR will procure and distribute generators and power banks, and other winter-related items** to collective sites hosting IDPs with significant socio-economic and other vulnerabilities, including older and disabled people.
- **UNHCR will de-prioritize the distribution of non-food items**, based on the clearly cited preference for cash as the most versatile and impactful tool.

DONORS:

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by our top government donors and for the generous contributions from individuals and the private sector, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with softly earmarked and unearmarked funds.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Visit Ukraine's **Operational Data Portal** for more information products here.
- **UNHCR's Regional Flash Update** on the Ukraine situation can be found here.
- **Ukraine Protection Cluster Response Dashboard** can be found here.
- **CCCM Cluster Collective Sites Mapping** here
- **Shelter Cluster Response Dashboard** here.

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