

## LEBANON

# A REVIEW OF THE WINTER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

April 2016

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2014, UNHCR initiated a targeted seasonal support programme to help refugees cope with the additional burden related to winter through shelter activities, core relief items, and targeted cash assistance. In 2015, UNHCR doubled the extent of winter cash assistance compared to the previous year to account for the increasing vulnerability of Syrian refugees overall. In 2015, all food eligible and vulnerable refugees<sup>1</sup> falling under UNHCR's mandate were provided multipurpose cash assistance, with an amount dependent on the exposure to cold according to altitude.

On 22 March 2016, UNHCR brought together staff from the field and the various sector units to review the implementation of UNHCR's winter assistance program for 2015 - 2016. The workshop provided an opportunity to reflect and offer lessons learned that will inform the program design for the 2016 - 2017 winter season, a time when refugees face additional hardship and increased needs. This update provides a snapshot of the workshop's findings.

## Winter assistance 2015 – 2016

The 2015 vulnerability assessment for Syrian refugees (VASyR) found that 70% of refugee households are now living below the poverty line of USD 3.84 per person per day, as compared to 50% in 2014. Given the large-scale needs, and based on socio-economic vulnerabilities and exposure to winter conditions, UNHCR aimed to assist 163,000 refugee families, and 53,000 vulnerable Lebanese families between November 2015 and March 2016, reaching more than a million people in total. Cash support – an efficient and effective modality and preferred by refugees – was supplemented by distribution of fuel cards, blankets and stoves, as well as shelter weatherproofing activities.

The distribution of shelter weatherproofing kits, which help families protect their homes and shelters from the elements, is a year round activity; by the end of March, almost 27,000 households had received shelter kits, and more than 2,400 households have benefited from site improvements in informal settlements to reduce flooding due to winter rain and snow.

Core-relief items, primarily high thermal blankets and diesel stoves, were distributed to refugees who did not receive such items in the previous years or who were in need of additional assistance. This winter, UNHCR worked alongside the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPT), under the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), to support vulnerable Lebanese with high thermal blankets and food support in collaboration with WFP.

As UNHCR's 2015-16 winter assistance program came to a close, a Post-Distribution Monitoring exercise was initiated. More than 2,000 families were contacted by UNHCR through phone interviews with the aim of assessing how effectively beneficiaries were able to access winter assistance, and for which purpose winter assistance was used. These results, combined with targeted Focus Group Discussions, inform UNHCR's evaluation of the 2015-2016 winter assistance program.

*Amina, a widowed Lebanese mother of five, is receiving winter assistance from UNHCR in the form of blankets and cash. Her family is one of some 100,000 vulnerable Lebanese families targeted for UNHCR's winter support.*

*Life for Amina and her family has been a struggle ever since her husband was killed in a shooting two years ago in Baalbek.*

*"Since then, I have been struggling to make a living and earn an income for me and my children," says Amina.*



*Every day Amina bakes bread in her modest house in the Bekaa Valley in order to save the 1,000 L.L or 2,000 L.L she would otherwise have to spend to feed her family. "Any saving is good" she notes while preparing the dough.*

*As part of UNHCR's assistance to vulnerable Lebanese families, Amina has received eight blankets. Thankful for this assistance, Amina remarks "I can't afford to keep the stove on all the time and having these blankets would surely help keep us warm during winter."*

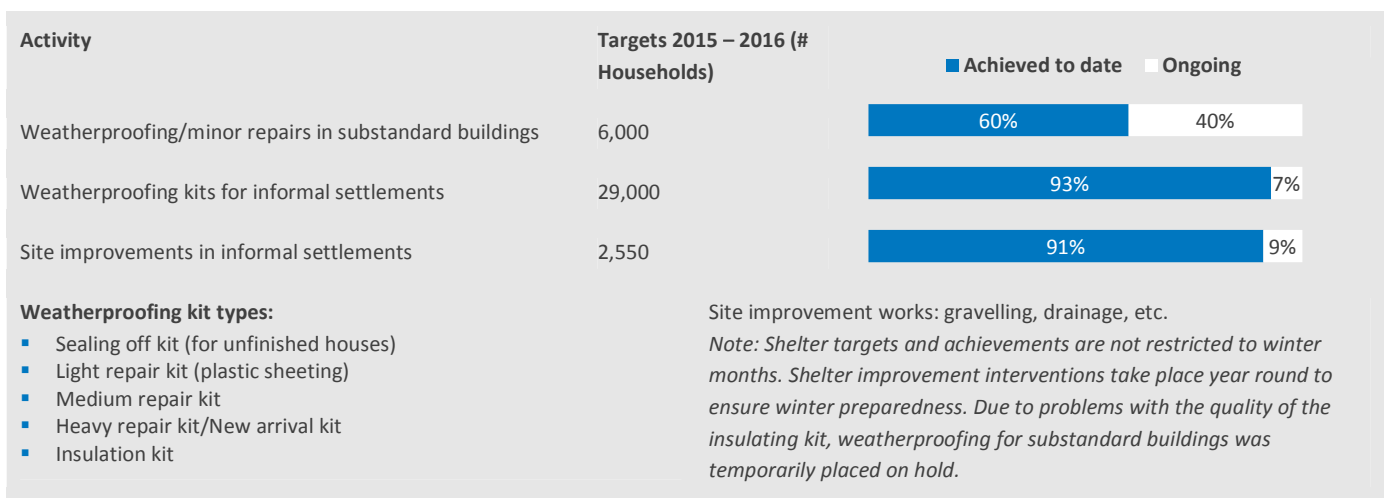
<sup>1</sup> Food eligibility and vulnerability are determined through individual and population assessments.

# COMPREHENSIVE DELIVERY OF ASSISTANCE

## Shelter

Although provision of shelter assistance is an on-going activity for UNHCR and partners, it holds particular relevance during the winter months when cold temperatures and precipitation can have severe impacts on substandard shelters and informal settlements. UNHCR interventions in this regard have focused on the provision of weatherproofing kits for informal settlements, targeted to reach 29,000 households over the winter months, site improvements in 2,550 settlements, and weatherproofing and minor repairs in substandard buildings for some 6,000 households. Close to 27,000 households received shelter kits and almost 2,400 households benefited from site improvements in informal settlements, such as the digging of drainage canals and the placement of gravel to reduce flooding due to winter rain and snow. Shelter support is provided all year round to ensure that refugees can live in as dignified living conditions as possible. UNHCR and partners will thus continue to work towards the targets set even after the end of the winter season.

### Targeting for shelter 2015 – 2016

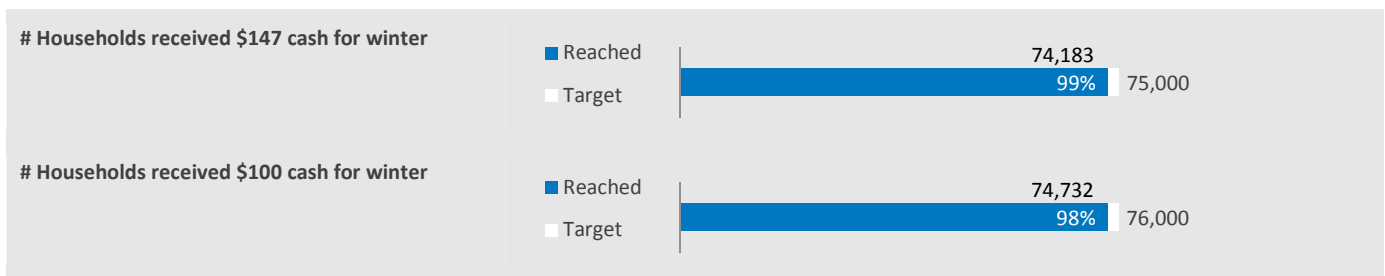


## Winter cash assistance

All refugees who were eligible for food assistance or otherwise determined to be socio-economically vulnerable were provided multipurpose cash assistance, with an amount dependent on the exposure to cold according to altitude. The approach intended to reach the most vulnerable refugees who have the greatest needs and provide families living at higher altitudes with additional resources for heating costs. Households living below 500 meters received \$100 per month, while households living above 500 meters received \$147 monthly. The 154,967 households targeted for assistance include all families considered food eligible, families assessed as highly vulnerable but not eligible for food assistance, and over 1,600 families of Iraqi or other nationalities. In total, \$88 million in unconditional cash assistance was provided to 145,228 Syrian and 1,276 non-Syrian households; 99% of the disbursed funds have been withdrawn as of mid-April.

Cash assistance was distributed using bank cards which were distributed to refugees by UNHCR and partners, and to which money was added on a monthly basis as winter progressed. Some 16,822 families received their winter cash assistance on the e-cards that WFP had been using for food assistance in order to avoid printing and distributing a second card, whereas the remainder received their assistance on cards printed and distributed by UNHCR and partners. As shown below, nearly 100% of the targeted beneficiaries were reached, with the difference being that some individuals failed to show up for card distribution despite numerous outreach and follow-up efforts.

### Cash assistance 2015 – 2016 (Households)



### Assistance provided in Arsal

Insecurity in Arsal due to armed clashes on its outskirts occasionally disrupted the distribution of fuel cards to families living in these locations. UNHCR and partners were constantly monitoring developments in Arsal and conducting distributions of fuel cards when the security situation allowed. To date, more than 8,000 families in Arsal received MEDCO fuel cards enabling them to purchase fuel to warm their houses.

Fuel Vouchers - Arsal	Targeted	Reached
First Round	9,280	8,063
Second Round	9,280	8,757

## Core relief items

While core-relief items (CRI), particularly blankets and stoves, featured prominently in previous winter assistance, the 2015 – 2016 winter program focused particularly on cash assistance for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the lessons learned from the previous year indicated that refugees expressed a preference for cash assistance over core-relief items; secondly, large scale CRI distributions have largely ceased as most of the refugees have already received the items; lastly, humanitarian actors saw cash assistance as a much more efficient, effective and dignified way to provide refugees with immediate support. Cash assistance was supplemented by core-relief items, primarily high thermal blankets and diesel stoves, which were distributed to refugees who did not receive such items in the previous years or who were in need of additional assistance. The distribution of CRIs was based on a predefined strategy between agencies and partners. Targeting priority was given to vulnerable families that had not previously received winter CRIs.

### Winter Core Relief Items Distributed

	Syrians	Lebanese	Iraqis and other nationalities
High thermal blankets	45,115	171,129	3,152
Stoves	3,982	301	-

### Assistance to vulnerable Lebanese

Working with the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPT), under the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), UNHCR provided assistance to Lebanese families who were identified by NPT as the most economically vulnerable. Over 27,000 vulnerable Lebanese received USD 30 per person per month for the winter months via WFP e-vouchers intended for food purchases, and an additional 170,000 Lebanese received high thermal blankets. UNHCR also pre-positioned 6,000 blankets at MoSA Social Development Centres to be distributed as and when weather conditions necessitate.

**NPTP Beneficiaries of High Thermal Blankets**

Lebanese	Individuals	Households
<b>North<sup>2</sup></b>	102,848	25,892
<b>Bekaa</b>	30,654	8,201
<b>Beirut-Mount Lebanon</b>	17,530	5,308
<b>South</b>	20,097	5,027
<b>Total</b>	<b>171,129</b>	<b>44,428</b>

## Coordination

Each year, the Basic Assistance sector activates a Winter Support Sub Working Group, as this sector in particular has the lead role for coordination among agencies for winter activities. The role of this Sub-WG is to coordinate emergency and ad hoc interventions, relay information, and outreach to other sectors (mainly shelter). The Basic Assistance sector defines seasonal / winter plans on a yearly basis during annual planning, specifically packages, duration and reporting systems which are consulted with partners through the sector. Furthermore, the Basic Assistance sector has the role of liaison with non-traditional actors outside of the Interagency plan. At the central level, dedicated outcomes were solidified in the sector plan, accompanied by dedicated programmes, budgets, and reporting tools. At the field level, the sector focused on referrals, implementation, follow up and outreach. UNHCR was an active participant and played a leading role in all coordination fora.

Reporting on winter activities is achieved through the Interagency common platforms, namely Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS, which allows recording of assessment and cash activities at the case level) and ActivityInfo (which allows for aggregate data at Household level for activities). Combined achievements are communicated via monthly updates, dashboards and analytical reports, as well as through workshops to analyse lessons learned and fora such as Interagency meetings, working groups, and donor briefing.

The 2015-2016 winter assistance was achieved through participation of 32 agencies, including United Nations specialised agencies, national and international NGOs throughout the country.

## Mass communication

Information regarding winter assistance was provided in the form of informational materials (Q&A and leaflet) and on an individual basis for cases that approached UNHCR and partners. In addition, UNHCR used SMS messaging, including a two-way SMS verification for beneficiaries already in possession of an e-card from the previous year, as well as an info-line in the form of a unique call center to provide support to beneficiaries. The two-way SMS and info-line were particularly effective in validating that the prior year's beneficiaries of cash assistance were still in possession of their ATM cards and PINs. Combined, the SMS system and call center reached 91% of the targeted refugees. Without the use of these systems, UNHCR would have had to conduct a time-consuming face to face validation or distribution of new



<sup>2</sup> Around additional 2,000 blankets will be distributed to around 500 HH

cards. The info-line was also used to follow-up with beneficiaries who failed to show for their new card distribution and helped decrease the no-show rate, allowing as many people to benefit from cash assistance.

## EVALUATION

### Post distribution monitoring results

Following provision of winter assistance, UNHCR implemented a Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) to assess the provision and impact of winter assistance. The PDM targeted 2,339 individuals by means of a telephone survey conducted by two operators.

In particular, the PDM sought to identify:

- Quality of processes, i.e. card distribution/telephone/verification of previous year's cards;
- Preference of cards;
- Use of winter cash assistance;
- Unmet needs;
- Other, e.g. communication preferences.

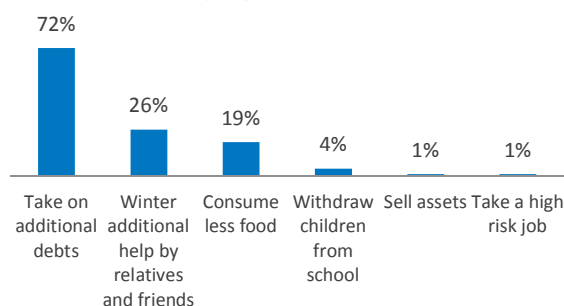
#### Sex of responder



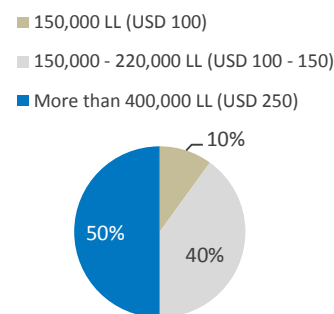
#### Responder information



#### Coping mechanisms



#### What funding would be sufficient?



### Quality of processes and card preferences

Respondents found the modality of cash distribution through cards to be effective and efficient. Almost 99% of persons confirmed that they had been treated with respect during the card distribution process. In general, respondents expressed having no preference at all for whether assistance was provided through a single or multiple cards.

With respect to cash withdrawal, 99% expressed having no problems withdrawing cash from ATMs. In the vast majority of cases (90%), it is the Principle Applicant (PA) (80%) or the spouse (10%) who withdrew the cash. In other cases, refugees called upon friends or family members (6%) or were assisted by other people or bank staff (4%).

### Sufficiency of funds and coping mechanisms

Families reported that winter cash assistance was not sufficient to meet needs. Over 81% found the assistance to be insufficient, and when asked about the amount they would suggest, the majority indicated that 250 USD (or more) per month would be a sufficient amount for the winter period.



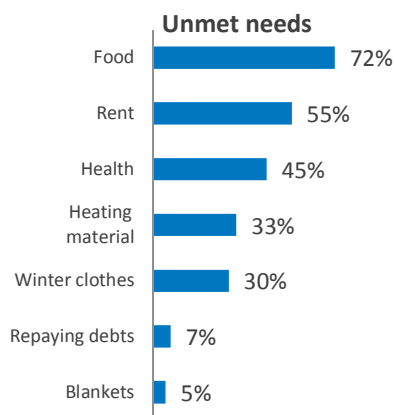
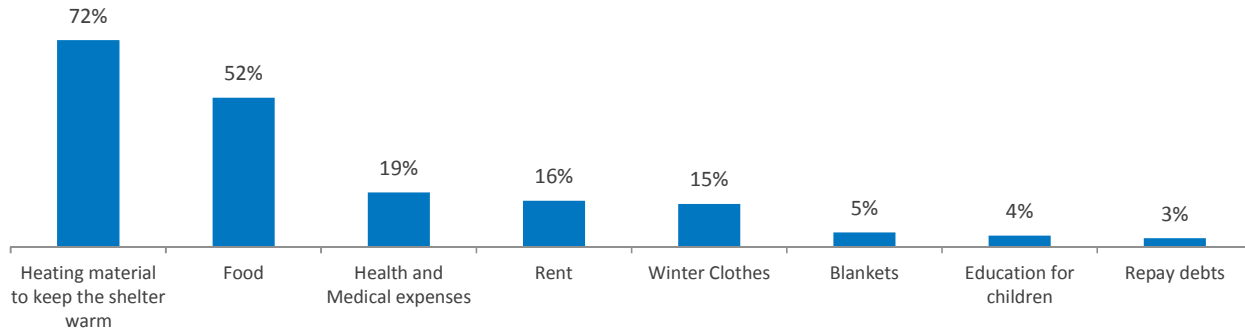
Over 87% of respondents indicated that they were facing difficulties covering basic expenditures, and that the most frequent coping mechanism was to take additional debts to meet needs during the winter period.

## Use of winter cash assistance

Families used the winter cash assistance to spend it mainly for heating material, food and health and medical expenses.

### Use of winter cash assistance

(non-cumulative, reflecting the percentage of beneficiaries who mention spending on a specific expense)



### Unmet needs

Beneficiaries identified food, rent, and health expenditures as primary needs that remained unmet during the winter months. Winter-specific expenditures such as heating material and winter clothes were also considered unmet expenses.

Considering that over 70% of families used winter assistance to purchase heating materials, and to a more limited extent winter clothes and blankets, it can be considered that this assistance helped to meet seasonally specific needs. However, given that food, medical expenses, rent, education, and debt repayment were all significant expenditures using this assistance, in practice, the targeted winter assistance was used as multipurpose cash to meet basic needs; this may also be a reflection of more limited economic opportunities during winter months which preclude alternative sources of income as Syrians have access to seasonal work primarily in the agriculture or construction sectors.

## Focus group discussions and feedback

In order to further assess the effectiveness of the winter assistance program and to complement the results obtained through the PDM, UNHCR conducted a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) with refugees, including non-recipients of assistance, in different areas of Lebanon. The FGDs attempt to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of UNHCR's program for the 2015-16 winter season as seen from the refugees' viewpoint. In addition, in line with UNHCR's commitment to mainstream age, gender and diversity, FGDs with persons with specific needs (as per the below methodology) were conducted to highlight whether particular groups have equal access to winter assistance.

### Methodology

Participants for the FGDs were selected randomly from the general population according to the following criteria in different regions of Lebanon:

- Individuals with a physical disability
- Older persons
- Single female parents
- Single male parents
- Single women

- Single men
- Randomly selected at large population

The FGDs discussed the individuals' perceptions of winter in 2015 compared to the previous year, their individual preparedness measures, and the usefulness of the assistance received. Participants were also asked to evaluate whether, in their opinion, support from UNHCR and other organizations reached the people most in need of assistance, if they understand how beneficiaries were selected, and how UNHCR and other organizations can improve their winter assistance programme.

## Results

The results of the FGD mirrored the results of the PDM in some respects, and focused on two key areas. First, respondents highlighted the utility and necessity of cash support to meet the additional needs of winter. Individuals who did not receive cash assistance prioritized heating as a main expenditure. Many families reported resorting to debts and community support to survive the winter, with health expenditure remaining a priority concern. Second, respondents believed that those selected for assistance were the most vulnerable, and highlighted key vulnerable groups that will continue to require particular assistance such as large families, single parents, and the elderly. However, the discussions noted also that there are vulnerable families who do not fall into one of these categories but may also require assistance. Respondents also suggested expanding assistance to target more families, even if it meant that each family would receive less assistance.

	Feedback	Conclusions and Recommendations
Coping Mechanisms	Winter less harsh in Beirut/Mt. Lebanon and Bekaa, but considered harsher in North and South Debt Neighbour support Little work to support income during winter	Winter causes extra strain Debt primary coping strategy Larger families face additional hardship
Extent of Assistance	Those who are assisted are assisted to a great extent while those who were not targeted for cash were perceived as receiving little to no assistance	Need for better coordination to maximize delivery of assistance to as many people as possible
Ranking of assistance	Cash and Food assistance are prioritized with preference for unconditional cash Health a priority concern Those not assisted prioritize heating	Continue cash programming Expand health outreach activities during winter Assistance still not sufficient
Equity of Assistance	Those who are assisted have a general belief that those assisted are most vulnerable But not all vulnerable are assisted; focus is on single parents, elderly and large families Include more beneficiaries even if less is given to each	Targeting criteria not known but can be understood Consider targeting by family size Consider different targeting approach to reach more people

## Winter needs temperature assessment

In an attempt to determine the actual cost of heating during the winter, UNHCR devised a formula calculation that took into account the shelter type, altitude and number of heating hours. The objective was to see if the amount provided for multipurpose cash was sufficient to meet the expected heating costs while having additional funds for other needs. The following table shows the results using the cost of USD.75 per liter of fuel. Calculations assessed the cost of fuel to heat for 8 and 12 hours daily, as many refugee families indicated that they only heated their shelters for part of the day, in different types of shelter and at different altitudes. It should be noted that while uninsulated makeshift shelters in informal settlements are particularly expensive to heat, partially insulated makeshift shelters are more cost effective to heat than both un-insulated and partially insulated substandard buildings at the same altitudes.



Shelter type	Altitude	Average minimum Temp (°C)	Uninsulated		Partially insulated	
			Seasonal Fuel consumption Cost (12/24h)	Seasonal Fuel consumption Cost (8/24h)	Seasonal Fuel consumption Cost (12/24h)	Seasonal Fuel consumption Cost (8/24h)
Makeshift Shelter in IS	alt < 500 m	10°C	\$ 429.48	\$ 286.32	\$ 290.75	\$ 193.83
	500m < alt < 1000m	5°C	\$ 504.04	\$ 336.03	\$ 336.83	\$ 224.56
	alt > 1000 m	-5°C	\$ 611.68	\$ 407.79	\$ 403.37	\$ 268.91
Substandard Building	alt < 500 m	10°C	\$ 368.18	\$ 245.45	\$ 324.99	\$ 216.66
	500m < alt < 1000m	5°C	\$ 417.37	\$ 278.25	\$ 365.32	\$ 243.54
	alt > 1000 m	-5°C	\$ 488.38	\$ 325.59	\$ 423.53	\$ 282.35
Apart/house	alt < 500 m	10°C	\$ 275.49	\$ 183.66		
	500m < alt < 1000m	5°C	\$ 310.57	\$ 207.04		
	alt > 1000 m	-5°C	\$ 361.21	\$ 240.81		

Households living below 500 meters received \$100 per month to meet their winter needs. This amount - \$400 for a four month winter season - provides enough income to meet heating costs in all shelter types and for both 8- and 12-hour heating, except in the case of an un-insulated makeshift shelter in an informal settlement where heating is used for 12 hours per day, at a cost of \$429.48. A household living in an apartment and using heat for only 8 hours a day would be able to allocate \$216.34 of this assistance towards other expenses.

Households living between 500 and 1,000 meters received \$147 per month to meet their winter needs. This amount - \$588 for a four month winter season – provides enough income to meet the heating costs in all instances.

Households living above 1,000 meters also received \$147 per month. The \$588 was only insufficient to cover the cost of heating an uninsulated makeshift shelter in an informal settlement where heating is used for 12 hours a day, at a seasonal cost of \$611.68, a difference of \$23.68.

This analysis suggests that in terms of the cost of heating, the winter cash assistance was sufficient, allowing some families, depending on the family's housing situation and heating preferences, to have additional funds for other purposes, up to \$381 in the case of a family living in an apartment and using heat for 8 hours a day.

The analysis may also suggest that a more effective targeting methodology would take shelter type into account and divert more funds, for example, to people who live in uninsulated informal settlements and substandard buildings at the highest altitudes.

## CONCLUSIONS



*Yasmin (left) serves her sister-in-law Amina (right), a coffee in a tent at an informal settlement in Mount Lebanon. Amina, 38 years old, came from Idlib in Syria three years ago. She lives with her five children in the informal settlement. Receiving UNHCR's winter assistance ensures that Amina and her family stay warm during the winter months. © UNHCR / M. Dudek*

### Lessons learned from 2014 – 2015

As a starting point for analysis, the lessons learned from the 2014 – 2015 winter season were applied to the 2015 – 2016 program, to identify areas where further improvement is possible or where objectives have been achieved. Among the areas where further improvement is possible, there is a pressing need for a harmonized feedback mechanism which allows humanitarian partners to communicate with and receive communication from individual refugees and the community as a whole. Too often, refugees don't know where to turn when they have questions about winter assistance or need additional assistance. A designated call center is one suggestion for enhancing our feedback and response process, an important part of remaining accountable to the refugee population. Likewise, refugees should be consulted early on in the project design stage. Refugees should be consulted, for example, on the targeting and outreach

strategy and should be duly informed on the objectives of the winter assistance program. Perhaps most important of all was the recommendation to start the planning and secure the funding at the earliest possible stage, by July if possible.

Among the areas where particular improvement was noted in 2015-2016 as compared to the previous year, was the harmonization of messages on targeting and assistance, improved written and verbal communication on winter services, , and less duplication of assistance through the use of tools such as RAIS and ActivityInfo. At the same time, however, as reflected in discussions with refugees, there was a lack of understanding of why certain refugees received assistance and others did not. Finally, the increased support to vulnerable Lebanese, the focus on cash as the preferred solution and a less restrictive targeting of beneficiaries, were lessons learned and implemented in the 2015-16 winter assistance program.

## Lessons learned 2016

A recent workshop to gather lessons learned on UNHCR's programme of winter assistance brought together UNHCR personnel from Beirut and field offices, and drew on studies and focus group discussions conducted with partners and beneficiaries. According to participants, winter assistance was timely and flexible, allowing UNHCR and partners to respond to extreme weather conditions, such as the snow storms that recently experienced in the North and the Bekaa. Challenges included coordinating winter assistance with other agencies given that agencies received funding at different times throughout the winter season.

### Thematic evaluation

**Shelter** is a fundamental element of winter support which also continues as a year-round activity. Analysis of the 2015-2016 shelter assistance highlighted the need to complete site improvements to informal settlements before the onset of winter, to plan in advance specific kits such as drainage kits, to improve quality and contents of some of the kits, and to conduct early identification and assessment of shelters to be rehabilitated. Areas for further development in 2016-2017 include improving the linkages between the Shelter and Basic Assistance sectors to avoid duplication of assistance, and to use a distribution tracking system that keeps more accurate records of the recipients of core relief items.

**Core relief item distribution** remained an important element of the 2015-2016 winter assistance despite the overall emphasis on cash, and it is suggested to continue targeting a small number of beneficiaries who have not previously received CRIs during the next winter season. The distribution of high-thermal blankets in conjunction with the NPTP emphasized the importance of supporting host communities and provided an opportunity for capacity building in terms of distribution.

**Winter cash assistance** was considered particularly beneficial by refugees who received this assistance. PDM indicates that it was primarily spent on basic necessities such as food, shelter, and heating, and that the modality of distribution and follow-up on cards was effective and efficient. UNHCR recommends maintaining the current card management and distribution system, streamlining approaches to avoid different or multiple systems, and maintaining cards as active so refugees can receive winter or other assistance in the future without having to collect a new card. Areas identified for improvement include approaches to ensure telephone numbers are updated, to advocate for rollover for funds, and to identify an alternative to the fuel cards used in Lebanon's Aarsal region.

**Mass communication** was considered effective, particularly the 2-way SMS used to verify cards prior receiving cash assistance for 2015-2016 for individuals holding an assistance card from the previous year. UNHCR recommends continuing the call centre on a permanent basis, and supports efforts to notify refugees as much in advance as possible to ensure all eligible beneficiaries are able to receive their assistance as well as establishment of mechanisms facilitating easy access to information about eligibility for assistance. The recent development of a mobile information tool which allows field staff to identify eligibility for assistance and change phone numbers, currently available only for UNHCR staff, is an important initiative which will assist UNHCR staff and partners to ensure regular and continuous communication with refugees.

**Interagency coordination** remains a crucial element to ensure harmonized assistance and avoid duplication among different actors throughout winter. Early discussions and planning were essential in achieving this coordination, and the need to finalize commitments from agencies and donors at an early stage is considered essential for timely and efficient programme delivery. The efforts to centralize reporting through interagency tools such as RAIS and ActivityInfo contributed substantially to efforts ensuring that assistance was distributed properly and without duplication.

Expanding the usage of these tools, and the development of common monitoring tools, were seen as areas to be considered for the 2016-2017 winter season.

**Targeting of beneficiaries** is the cornerstone of winter assistance, and was validated by refugees as an important means of reaching the most vulnerable families. Particular emphasis should be given to community consultations for eligibility criteria, and it was recommended to streamline eligibility criteria and more clearly communicate distinct categories of assistance to reduce confusion; however having differentiated amounts based on altitude was supported by the workshop participants to reflect the different winter support needs.

## Key achievements and challenges

### Key achievements

- Double coverage compared to 2014-2015;
- Funding was secured and allocated in a timely manner;
- Timely provision of assistance to refugees;
- Information was well received and understood;
- Implementation rate is high: 95% for Cash and 94% for Vouchers;
- The 2 way SMS and call center were effective in reaching beneficiaries.

### Key challenges

- Strategy was modified several times;
- Technical glitches in the two-way SMS resulted in some delays in actual planning/projection;
- Implementation through WFP cards was challenging, specifically PIN distribution, reporting, and reconciliation;
- Difficult to explain targeting criteria and benefits to the refugee population;
- Need for a harmonized feedback and response mechanism to address refugees' questions and concerns.

UNHCR wishes to thank its government and private donors for their generous contributions which allowed for the expansion of the 2015/6 winter assistance program.



Regional portal-UNHCR operation page: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>