

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

2020-2021 Regional Winterization Programme – Final Report

September 2020 – March 2021 / Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria

UNHCR developed a regional winterization plan for 2020-2021 based on the assessed most vulnerable needs of almost 3.8 million Syrian and Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. With the generous contributions received by early December 2020 and despite the challenges related to COVID-19 and access constraints, UNHCR was able to provide winterization support to almost 2.5 million people during the winter months.

The winterization programme was implemented from September 2020 to March 2021, with the majority of the assistance (both cash grants and winter items) distributed by December 2020. In addition, UNHCR provided emergency assistance to the most vulnerable persons affected by storms in Lebanon and floods in Syria in December 2020 and January 2021.

Early planning, preparation and procurement allowed UNHCR and its partners to reach beneficiaries and, wherever possible, to allow beneficiaries to receive their assistance on time to prepare for the harsh winter.



2.5 million
vulnerable people reached
with winterization assistance
including more than

2 million Syrians & **460,000** Iraqis
and refugees
of other nationalities



Total funding received:
USD 154,597,129

The winterization programme is implemented through UNHCR's own staff, government agencies, partners, and community outreach volunteers in coordination with the broader inter-agency response platforms.

UNHCR's winterization strategy focused on three broad areas of intervention:



Provision of seasonal cash assistance for vulnerable families to meet their additional needs during the winter months.



Provision of core relief items specific to winter such as high thermal blankets, plastic sheets, and winter clothes



Winterization of shelter including shelter weather-proofing and repairs, improvements to drainage systems and other infrastructure in camps and informal settlements

The provision of seasonal cash assistance does not overlap with the provision of core relief items and shelter assistance for winter.

SYRIA

Persons of concern assisted (as of 31 March)

		Type of assistance
Syrians	 716,407 individuals reached*	in-kind 100%
Iraqis & refugees of other nationalities	 13,794 individuals reached	cash 100%

* Includes 666,407 Syrian IDPs reached by UNHCR operations inside Syria and 50,000 IDPs through the cross-border operation from Gaziantep (Turkey).

- The UNHCR Syria Winterization Programme started on 1 September 2020 and was concluded on 28 February 2021 with 666,407 persons (139,158 families) receiving 2,003,595 core relief and seasonal items. Distributed items included high thermal blankets, plastic sheeting, sleeping bags and winter clothing kits in all 14 governorates in Syria. UNHCR during the exercise prioritized the needs of the most vulnerable people, including those recently displaced, new returnees, people living in hard-to-reach or newly accessible areas and in sub-standard shelters, who had not been assisted in the past.
- In Syria, all urban refugees registered with UNHCR received an unconditional one-time multi-purpose cash grant. The average amount of SYP 426,000 (around USD 340) is fixed for a family of five. The winterization grant is intended to help families meet their increased needs during the winter months and mitigate the risks of harmful coping mechanisms. Between November and December 2020, some 13,800 refugees (around 5,000 families) benefitted from the winterization cash programme. The main challenges faced during implementation were related to the bank liquidity and network connectivity in some distribution areas.
- The UNHCR Cross-Border operation from Turkey started its winterization assistance in November 2020 and completed the trans-shipment of all 10,000 winter core relief item (CRI) kits to north-west Syria by December 2020. The items were trans-shipped to northern Aleppo and Idlib governorates through the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing. All winter CRI kits were distributed through partners between November 2020 and February 2021, reaching around 50,000 Syrian IDPs in north-west Syria. The distributions process encountered some delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic as partners were trying to avoid large crowds at distribution sites. The winterization assistance was coordinated with the Shelter/Non-Food Item (NFI) Cluster. The winterization kits contained foam mattresses, high thermal blankets, plastic tarpaulins, a carpet and hygiene parcel. UNHCR also responded to the largescale flooding in north-west Syria in early 2021. Further information is available in Flash Updates [#1](#), [#2](#) and [#3](#).

Monitoring in Syria

In Syria, monitoring and verification mechanisms were in place throughout the winterization programme. A total of 411 post-distribution monitoring (PDM) exercises were conducted by UNHCR field staff members as well as partner monitoring visits. The beneficiaries provided good feedback on the assistance received and requested for an increase in certain items per family. In addition, UNHCR Syria is in the process of finalizing 360 PDM interviews for the winter cash assistance delivered to refugees during this programme. UNHCR also conducted a lessons learned review exercise for the 2020 - 2021 winterization programme, analysing good practices as well as areas for improvement in future programmes.

Monitoring of cross-border assistance

Winterization assistance was monitored by UNHCR partners as well as a UNHCR contracted third-party monitoring service provider. While all the beneficiaries were satisfied with the quality and quantity of the assistance, nearly 50 per cent of them expressed the need for additional items such as winter clothing as well as heating materials. An additional PDM by a UNHCR contracted third-party service provider was conducted in November 2020. A total of 712 surveys were conducted in eight distribution sites in four sub-districts: Atareb, A'zaz, Sharan, Aghtrin (Aleppo Governorate). The results showed that beneficiaries considered the selection process as fair. More than 95 per cent of respondents noted high quality of winterization kit items, with the most useful items being foam mattresses, high thermal blankets and hygiene kits. They also communicated the need for additional items, mainly mentioning heaters and charcoals.

LEBANON

Persons of concern assisted (as of 31 March)

	Type of assistance
Syrians  815,063 individuals reached	cash 100%
Iraqis & refugees of other nationalities  7,340 individuals reached	cash 100%

- UNHCR provided largescale winter assistance for refugees in Lebanon. However, implementation of the programme was impacted by the exceptional circumstances prevailing in the country and the rapidly deteriorating financial situation. The COVID-19 lockdowns declared by the Lebanese authorities hampered the distribution of cards and allowed for the validation exercise to be conducted only through two-way SMS system. Despite these challenges, by the end of the winter season the operation reached over 822,400 persons (202,000 refugee families) with winter programme cash-grants (LBP 954,000 per family). In addition, as part of UNHCR's regular programme, 64,029 persons (12,500 refugee families) were assisted with CRIIs (blankets, mattresses, kitchen sets, solar lamps and toilet soap) as well as food parcels and clothing.
- Winterization assistance was also extended to the Lebanese host communities, targeting individuals and institutions. Almost 54,130 Lebanese (around 11,000 poor families) received a one-off cash grant or fuel vouchers to the value of LBP 954,000 per family. Additionally, 38,000 Lebanese (7,600 families) received in-kind assistance like blankets, mattresses, solar lamps and hygiene kits in addition to 8,300 food parcels and 10,760 clothing items. Over 1,200 tons of fuel was also provided to 17 local hospitals and 26 primary health facilities all over the country to ensure uninterrupted supply of electricity during the winter months.
- During the winter season, UNHCR led the shelter response to the harsh weather conditions that hit Lebanon. Rapid needs assessments (RNA) were conducted to assess the situation in some 950 informal settlements, which were affected with floods, damaged shelters, and fire. Responding to those needs, UNHCR assisted 12,804 persons (2,416 vulnerable families) with the distribution of new shelter kits to reinforce or build up their shelters.

Monitoring in Lebanon

In February, UNHCR conducted a post distribution and outcome monitoring (PDOM) exercise through a phone survey to a nationally representative sample of 531 Syrian refugee families who received winter cash assistance. The data was assessed through indicators on expenditures of assistance, wellbeing, shelter conditions, food consumption and coping strategies. The post distribution component also included analysing indicators related to ATM access and use, distribution of assistance process and knowledge of existing complaint mechanisms. At the time of data collection, most of the refugee families reported having spent their cash assistance (87 per cent). The vast majority of respondents mentioned that they were able to find the items and services needed in the markets and shops (95 per cent) and reported not facing any safety risk related to receiving, keeping, or spending the cash (98 per cent). The top three expenditures as rated by respondents were food (first), rent (second), firewood, or fuel for cooking or heating (third). Most of the respondents (99 per cent) stated that the cash assistance improved their living conditions, reduced their financial burden (99 per cent), and reduced feelings of stress (99 per cent).

JORDAN

Persons of concern assisted (as of 31 March)

	Type of assistance
Syrians  241,027 individuals reached	cash 100%
Iraqis & refugees of other nationalities  27,694 individuals reached	cash 100%

- UNHCR Jordan completed its winterization programme in December 2020, reaching all prioritized families. In urban settings, UNHCR provided winterization assistance to 158,935 persons (44,150 families) of which 131,241 were Syrian refugees (31,857 families) and 27,694 were refugees of other nationalities (12,293 families). In camps, UNHCR provided winterization assistance to 109,786 Syrian refugees (22,590 families). Overall, UNHCR and partners assisted over 241,000 Syrians (54,447 families) and almost 27,700 refugees of other nationalities (12,293 families) with winter assistance.

- Some of the challenges encountered by beneficiaries in Jordan included the waiting time at ATMs, which often exceeded 30 minutes. Despite these challenges, the delivery of winterization cash assistance proceeded relatively smoothly.

Monitoring in Jordan

The data collection for the winterization assistance PDM report took place between December 2020 and January 2021 and the report is currently being finalized. According to preliminary findings, beneficiaries used cash to cover basic needs such as rent and food. The large majority of respondents (95 per cent) stated that the winterization cash assistance improved their living conditions during the winter at least slightly.



A gas seller in Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan. Photo by UNHCR / Lilly Carlisle

IRAQ

Persons of concern assisted (as of 31 March)

	Type of assistance
Syrians  187,477 individuals reached	cash 100%
Iraqis  342,346 individuals reached	cash 100%
Refugees of other nationalities  18,615 individuals reached	cash 100%

- The winterization programme in Iraq reached a total of 548,438 persons (118,996 families) including Syrian refugees (187,477 individuals/47,211 families), refugees and asylum seekers from other nationalities (18,615 individuals/5,991 families), as well as internally displaced and returnee persons (342,346 individuals/65,794 families). Of the total beneficiaries, 59 per cent live in the camps (321,382 persons), while 41 per cent (227,056 persons) live in urban, peri-urban and rural areas. The cash assistance was provided through mobile e-wallets for IDPs and through iris scan authentication payment (Eye-Pay) for refugees.
- UNHCR is one of the few actors in the country who provided specific assistance for the winter to the most vulnerable persons of concern. Overall, the winter cash assistance implementation slowed down in December 2020 due to some movement restrictions and limitations in the number of beneficiaries who could cash out at a given period due to COVID-19 health regulations, as well as the devaluation of Iraqi Dinar announced by the Central Bank of Iraq.

Monitoring in Iraq

The list of the beneficiaries for winter has been shared with a partner for random sampling and data collection for the PDM report of the programme. Data collection started in April 2021 and the results will be finalized in the coming weeks.



Displaced Iraqi, Aziz Khalid, 12 years old standing in front of his family shelter in Dawudiya IDP camp in Duhok governorate. Dawudiya is located in a mountainous area where it snows heavily during winter. Photo by DMCR/ Dawudiya Camp Management

EGYPT

Persons of concern assisted (as of 31 March)

		Type of assistance
Syrians	 47,053 individuals reached	cash 100%
Iraqis	 1,199 individuals reached	cash 100%
Refugees of other nationalities	 48,964 individuals reached	cash 100%

- Between December 2020 and March 2021, a total of 97,216 eligible refugees and asylum-seekers (46,920 families) were provided with winter cash assistance, including 47,053 Syrians (17,866 families), 1,199 Iraqis (508 families), and 48,964 refugees and asylum-seekers of other nationalities (28,546 families), primarily from sub-Saharan Africa. Out of those assisted, 3,003 were unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), including 249 Syrian UASC, five Iraqis, and 2,749 of other nationalities.
- In efforts to improve collection rates, UNHCR Egypt enhanced its communication with refugees and asylum-seekers and information sharing on winter assistance. Customized notification messages were sent to refugees and asylum-seekers informing them about their assistance. Beneficiaries who had to collect their winter assistance via iris recognition were informed which iris-enabled post office was closest to their address, and all recipients received a URL to help them find the nearest post office. Further, through its partner, UNHCR called refugees who had not collected their assistance by the middle of the programme to ensure they were aware of the assistance type, location, and deadline, and to address any issues. Calls were successfully conducted with over 3,500 families. The most common challenges for non-collection related to lack of awareness of the assistance, problems with iris recognition and expired documents. UNHCR had negotiated with Egypt Post Office to accept expired documents as an exception for refugees and asylum-seekers due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The calls were therefore successful in notifying the beneficiaries about the assistance and expired documents policy, as well as trouble shooting any challenges faced during the cash disbursement.

Monitoring in Egypt

The data collection for PDM in Egypt is still ongoing. In view of COVID-19 pandemic circumstances, PDM for 2020-2021 is taking place remotely via phone interviews. As of mid-April 2021, some 190 families had already been interviewed. Preliminary results show that 55 per cent reported having received the amount expected from UNHCR. Around 82 per cent felt safe while withdrawing or spending their assistance, and those who felt unsafe reported COVID-19 related concerns or theft as the main reasons. While 90 per cent of families were able to find the items they needed on the market, 58 per cent communicated that prices of goods and services had increased, especially for food items. Out of the total number of families interviewed so far, 93 per cent spent all cash assistance received.



During UNHCR's monitoring of a core relief item distribution in Idlib Governorate, Syria.
Photo by UNHCR / Ziad Hanna

Donors:

UNHCR is grateful to the donors who have contributed to the winterization programme for the Syrian and Iraqi IDPs and refugees with unearmarked and earmarked funds as well as those who have contributed directly to the operations.

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