

Minutes of the National Basic Assistance Working Group Meeting Beirut, 24 January 2020

Meeting Location	NRC, Weavers Center Floor 1 st F.	Meeting Time	14:00 – 16:00
Chairpersons	Khalil Dagher (UNHCR) Jason Meisner (ACF) Hadi Haddad (MoSA)	Meeting Duration	2 hours
Minutes by	Maria Noel Chehade		
21 Represented Agencies	ACF, ANERA, Banin, CAMELEON, CARE, Caritas Switz., CRS, Danish Red Cross, DFID, ECHO, EU, LHDF, MERATH/LSESD, OCHA, Red Cross, SAMS, SI, Swedish Embassy, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP		
Agenda	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Update on the Ongoing Situation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Targeted Assistance b) Economic Situation – Basic Assistance and FSS Sector 2. Basic Assistance Sector Workplan 3. GRM for Cash and Food Assistance 		

1. Update on the ongoing situation:

a) Targeted Assistance (attached slides):

63,998 vulnerable households received monthly multi-purpose cash in December 2019:

- 55,086 Syrian refugee households received \$175 multi-purpose cash grants from: ICRC, LRC, IOM, UNHCR, WFP;
- 8,087 Palestine refugees from Syria households received \$100 multi-purpose cash grants from UNRWA;
- 825 vulnerable Lebanese households received \$175 multi-purpose cash grants from LRC;
- 2,420 Syrian refugee households with children eligible for the Integrated Child Wellbeing Programme implemented by UNICEF as of October 2019.
- \$10,867,950 was the total value of assistance injected in the local economy in various forms of regular multi-purpose cash (fully withdrawn in LBP by different households at the official rate of LBP 1,500 to \$1).

225,672 vulnerable households reached with Winter support by the end of December 2019:

- 196,052 (unique) households reached with cash for winter, supported by UNHCR (175,574 HHs), LRC (1,140 HHs), and UNICEF (25,338 HHs);
- 20,681 vulnerable Lebanese households supported by UNHCR (20,000 HHs receiving one off fuel / cash grants of \$200 / LBP300,000 per HH) and LRC (681 HHs supported with cash for winter – standard package);
- 8,939 HHs reached with cash for winter by UNRWA.

b) Economic Situation: Basic Assistance and Food Security Sectors updates:

Basic Assistance Sector Update (attached slides):

- The Basic Assistance sector continue to track the consumer price index (as a measure of inflation), evolution of the informal exchange rate in the parallel market (as a proxy of deteriorating purchasing power), and assistance redemption rates (based on the MPC assisted caseload of WFP and UNHCR under the LOUISE platform – as a proxy for access to markets) in its ongoing contingency mapping and analysis;
- The consumer price index has recorded as 6% cumulative increase as of October 2019 and until December 2019 – mainly driven by the changes of prices in the consumer goods market;
- Refugee households continue to be able to withdraw their assistance (in Lebanese pounds) during the months of November, December, and January and redemption rates are somehow unchanged (despite a positive spike in December to the loading of winter assistance). The only different to pre-October period is portrayed by the need for multiple travels to ATMs points sometimes due to shortage of liquidity to fully redeem assistance, which comes with an increased cost of transportation;

- Between December 2019 and January (23) 2020, the informal exchange rate market has been extremely volatile and function of local and regional political, security, and economic variables. The Lebanese pound broke for the first time the psychological barrier of 2,500 on the 9th of January. Regulations included by the syndicate of exchange houses has put a ceiling for dollar buy at 2,000 on January 16, yet a third market emerged with two additional buy and sell rates. Fluctuations in the parallel markets are the main drivers of prices in the consumer goods markets and further constraining the purchasing power of households resulting in unmet needs.

Food Security Sector Update (attached document):

- Food prices increased between 8% and 15%.
- SMEB Food basket cost increased by 35% between the second week of October 2019 and the second week of January 2020; the food basket price went above LBP 40,500 as of December 2019 with a national average of approx. LBP 48,316.
- The info obtained through CAS reconfirms numbers observed through food monitoring WFP is conducting through its network;
- Inflation is primarily driven through the unofficial exchange rate; it's not a question of supply and demand;
- Consumption patterns are being monitored and results will be shared once available;
- Shops are overall functioning and access has been overall ensured; nevertheless, 91% of suppliers charged WFP contracted shops above LBP 2000 for USD 1;

2. Basic Assistance Sector Workplan Presented:

6 thematic areas were identified in the Basic Assistance sector workplan attached. This plan will be further updated with an intersectoral area. Feedback on the areas identified and suggestions are welcome by Friday 21st of Feb 2020.

- a) Contingency planning: since the start of the ongoing socio-economic situation sectors were following up closely to determine its impact on households, operations and programming. The Basic Assistance sector is looking at contingency through a three staged approach: (1) monitoring, (2) analysis, and (3) adaptation. The first two phases are ongoing and overlapping. Identified information needs are mainly on the evolving vulnerability of Lebanese households, and change of expenditure patterns (pre-post crisis) of different population cohorts, as well as the percentage coverage of the SMEB of a Syrian refugee family receiving the full assistance package (cash and food assistance – accounting for 71% pre-crisis). The third phase is expected to start towards the second to third quarter of the year: it looks at necessary programmatic adaptations based on information available – and information gaps filled throughout.
- b) Winter assistance: 2019 – 2020 winter support activities are ongoing and expected to be finished by end of March 2020. Lessons learned and preparations for the 2020 support plan should start as soon as possible given the current ongoing change in the operational environment.
- c) Re-targeting exercise / Recalibration of the desk formula: a standard key milestone that takes place as of the second quarter of every year and as soon as the VASYR 2020 data collection is finished. This year's exercise should include and interactive targeting session with the BAWG on operational needs and technicalities, communications plan to be developed with key messages, technical work and conflict sensitive operationalization scenarios – given the current situation.
- d) VASYR 2020: this yearly exercise comes with increased importance as it will identify main differences in the living conditions of Syrian refugees 6 to 8 months into the crisis. Contextualization workshops in the field and at central level should be taking place as soon as the preliminary findings are out.
- e) Monitoring and evaluation framework: the main activity that will be carried out under this area is the soon to be launched update process of the existing post distribution and outcome monitoring questionnaires. The revision process will bring together technical M&E focal points of cash actors who should work on making the tools lighter and better capturing of outputs and outcomes of the cash programmes based on operational experience. The tools were developed in 2016 through a similar joint exercise.

- f) Protection Mainstreaming and Accountability Mechanisms: based on the recently concluded Protection Risk Assessment (PRA) exercise, some operational areas within the cash programme were recommended to be looked at. The PRA includes field-based observations and recommendations shared by field coordinators and partner staff on areas where protection mainstreaming elements needs further strengthening. A detailed presentation should be taking place in the next working groups.

3. GRM for Cash and Food Assistance (*attached slides*):

- The Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) implemented by WFP and UNHCR, aims to enhance accountability to refugees – discontinued or previously non assisted;
- Founded on the principle of self-initiation - affected refugees initiate a review by placing claims through designated channels;
- Data-driven analysis based on UNHCR data from Nov 2019; Complements the Targeting Formula; Reviewed by Development Analytics and enhanced accordingly; Designed through consultations with refugees;
- Process explained:
 - Eligibility for Cash and Food announced on 10 Sep 2019 and then GRM open until 30 Nov 2019;
 - Call centre was used as the preferred channel and most widely advertised;
 - Discontinuation mitigating measure: discontinued and with specific needs + GRM from 2018 automatically included in GRM analysis pool and no need to place a claim;
 - Last year (2018 – 2019) – 113K claims, 67k unique claims, 5,700 included;
- Assistance packages: were determined based on a combination of: a) need to include profiles that are the most commonly/systematically miscategorized by targeting formula, b) level of 'assured vulnerability' of these profiles, c) family size (food assistance only to small household is not as impactful as providing multipurpose cash – no economies of scale;
- Inclusions: 2,490 Syrian refugee households were included in cash and food assistance + 2,930 included in food assistance only. All families will receive 10 months of assistance starting January 2020;
- eligibility to successful cases was announced on January 6th, 2020 by SMS and no targeted communication to non-successful claimants is planned.