

October 2020

Multipurpose Cash Assistance Post Distribution Monitoring for Syrian Refugees

Basic Assistance Unit

I. Introduction

In September 2020, some 55,000 Syrian refugee families in Lebanon were supported with UNHCR's multi-purpose cash assistance program (MCAP). As part of a global basic needs approach, UNHCR MCAP helps families meet their basic needs with safety and dignity through the provision of cash. Assisted families have access to cash through an ATM card and PIN number that can be used at ATMs across the country. Since March 2020, families can also redeem assistance in shops contracted by WFP to purchase food items.

Since the beginning of 2020, MCAP transfer value has increased from LBP 262,500 until April 2020 to LBP 320,000 in May, and 400,000 starting July 2020, in order to try to compensate for price inflation observed in Lebanon since the end of 2019.

Using innovative methodologies and ensuring the highest standards of data protection, UNHCR is able to assist the poorest, most socio-economically vulnerable families. An econometric model was developed using data from the annual Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR). Using expenditure as a proxy for poverty, and by applying the model to UNHCR refugee data, refugee families are scored and ranked according to their predicted expenditure. Families that have a monthly expenditure below the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) of US\$ 87/capita/month are classified as Severely Vulnerable and eligible for MCAP. The 2020 VASyR reports a dramatic increase of the number of Syrian refugee population in Lebanon living below the SMEB, reaching 89% from 55% in 2019.

With such a large population in need and with limited resources, UNHCR targets the poorest families in each area of operation in Lebanon (Mount Lebanon, Bekaa, North Lebanon and South Lebanon). Humanitarian cash actors in Lebanon, including UNHCR, were able to support around 36% of the severely vulnerable population with monthly multipurpose cash assistance in September 2020, leaving a large portion of the eligible population unassisted.

II. Methodology

In September 2020, UNHCR conducted a phone survey of MCAP beneficiary households receiving monthly multipurpose cash assistance since the beginning of the year. These households were Syrian Refugees. The survey implemented a **Simple Random Sampling (SRS)** approach and completed 354 household surveys. In response to the challenges posed by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic—especially with regards to refugee movement and access to services—this iteration of the MCAP PDM was tailored to focus on process level indicators. This includes examining whether families faced unusual challenges in accessing ATMs or WFP contracted shop, using their card, or in using the assistance received.

III. Key findings

- **Process Level**

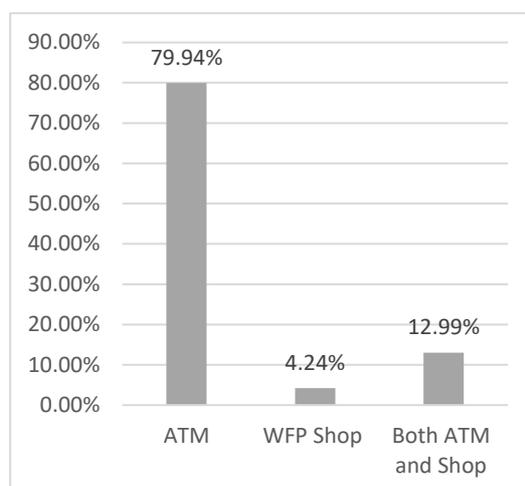
- On average, it took **31 mins to reach an ATM** from the house and **cost around 5,500 LBP**. An average trip to a WFP shop averaged 18 mins and cost 5,500 LBP each way. These values were the highest in Bekaa followed by the South.
 - Roughly, 24% reported very long waiting time and large gathering of people. No other safety concern was expressed.
- **Outcomes**
 - The UNHCR cash assistance was mainly spent on **food (40%), rent (19%), health (12%), and Hygiene costs (12%)**
 - The assistance had mainly a moderate effect on the level of improving the households living conditions (60.5%), reducing their financial burden (66.1%), and reducing their feelings of stress (62.4%)
 - About 28% of interviewed household reported having met more than half of their basic needs
- **Socio-economic conditions and well being**
 - 98.6% reported a price increase of any items/services in the last 4 weeks, which was in line with the socio-economic crisis and currency devaluation in Lebanon.
 - 83.9% of the households borrowed money or took out new loans in the last 4 weeks
 - The average current debt reached 1,216,000LBP while the average new debt in the last 30 days was 362,000 LBP per household
 - Over **80.2%** of respondents reported feeling very negative or negative (63% and 17.2% respectively) about their ability to repay their debts on time. However, **only 3% of the households reported harassment** or threats to pay back their debts.
 - A majority of the families skipped paying rent or debt repayments to meet other needs (61%), took out new loans or borrowed money (84%), and reduced expenditure on hygiene items, water, baby items, health, or education in order to meet household food needs (65%).
 - 88% of the respondents reported knowing how to report complaints and feedback on the cash assistance from UNHCR. However, the majority would opt to complain via a local leader (85%) only then followed by the hotline (11.2%).

IV. Assistance Access and redemption

Cash withdrawal from the ATM was the main redemption modality adopted by beneficiaries (92%). Only 13% opted for a mixed redemption method where they use a mix of ATM withdrawals and WFP shop redemptions (figure 1).

When compared to the April PDM cycle, a 14% increase in the number of households opting for the ATM only was observed as oppose to a decline in the percentage of households choosing to only redeem the assistance at the WFP shop (6%) or using both the ATM and shop (11%). These results are not in line with the May results where the majority of households reported using their card at an ATM only (95%), 4% redeemed at only WFP contracted shops and 1% reported using both modalities.

Figure 1. Share of households reporting to have received their assistance through each modality



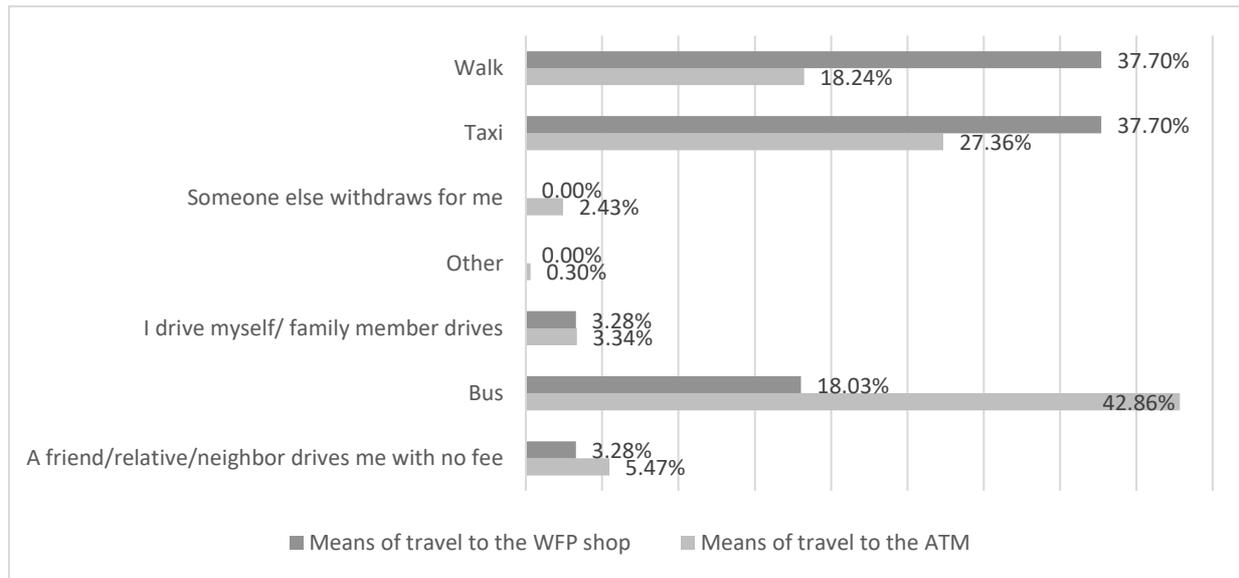
V. ATM access and safety

Majority of the respondents (70%) reported taking public transportation such as a bus or a car to reach the ATM while 18% walked instead. Conversely, 56% of those who went to the WFP shop used public transportation and 38% walked. The average one-way journey to the WFP shop and ATM took 18 minutes and 30 minutes respectively. Both destinations costed on average 5,500 LBP. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the mean of transportation to the ATM and WFP shop. Table 1 shows the cost and average travel time by governorate and at national level.

Table 1. Average time (minutes) and cost (LBP) for a one-way trip to the ATM or WFP shop

Area	Average time (in minutes) to reach the ATM	Average cost (LBP) to reach the ATM machine (one way)	Average time (in minutes) to reach the WFP shop	Average cost (LBP) to reach the WFP shop (one way)
Bekaa	33	6,434	17	5,278
Mount Lebanon	18	2,561	16	3,571
Nabatiye	113	35,000	10	20,000
North	29	4,607	21	5,250
South	32	6,182	22	6,917
National Average	30	5,512	18	5,443

Figure 2. Means of travel distribution to the ATM and WFP shop



No major safety or access constraints to the ATM were noted. A limited number of respondents complained about a long waiting times (25%), large gathering of people (25%), not being allowed to use the ATM (<1%), and being allowed to use the ATM a during specified time (<1%). These reported numbers mark an improvement from the April monitoring cycle where 38% reported long waiting/large gathering of people, 37% were not allowed to use the ATM, and 1% were allowed to use the ATM at a specific time.

V- Assistance access and utilisation

No major concerns were reported with regards to the access and utilisation of assistance. The majority of respondents reported feeling safe or not at risk in each of these categories: indicated no security issues going to the shop or the ATM (97%), no problems in deciding how to spend the cash assistance (98%), keeping the money at home (98%), spending the money (99%), and no safety risk of harm related to the cash assistance (99%). This is a retrogression from the May results that stated none of the surveyed families reported feeling unsafe deciding how to spend the money, keeping the money at home, or going to spend the cash.

Only 5% of respondents indicated that no one was available to assist them with withdrawing assistance; less than 1% of respondents combined reported issues with any of the following: (i) the PIN code, (ii) poor service at bank or shop when withdrawing money, or (iii) paying additional money or doing favours in order to withdraw or spend cash. No one reported service refusal by markets, shops, traders, or wholesalers.

VI. Covid-19 related challenges

The effect of Covid-19 on the access and utilisation of the assistance remained negligible: (a) 92% of households did not report any issues related to movement restrictions affecting their withdrawal of cash assistance; (b) 90% reported no movement restrictions that affected their spending; (c) 99% reported no difficulty withdrawing or spending money due to a positive Covid-19 case within the household; and (d) less than 1% experienced any other issues in accessing and using their cash assistance. Likewise, the May monitoring cycle indicates that 10% of families reported that movement restrictions linked to COVID19 effected their ability to withdraw cash or go to the markets.

VII. Availability of Items in Shops

98% of interviewed households were able to find the items and services they needed in the contracted markets and shops. However, 99% of households also reported price increases of items/services in the last 4 weeks from these shops. This price increase is likely linked to the current local currency devaluation.

VIII. Priority Expenditures

The priorities of cash spending were from 98% (increased from 91% in May), rent (47%), health costs (30%) and hygiene items (29%).

Table 2 Table representing the percentage of households spending money on listed items

Expenditure	Percentage
Food	98%
Water	10%
Hygiene items	29%
Health costs (including medicines)	30%
Rent	47%
Shelter repair (e.g. rehabilitation, materials)	0%
Household items (e.g. mattress, blankets, jerry can)	0%
Firewood / Fuel for cooking or heating	0%
Clothes / shoes	1%
Utilities and bills (e.g. electricity, water bills, phone calling credit)	17%
Assets for a livelihood activity (e.g seeds, tools, farming, fishing, petty trade etc)	0%
Education (e.g. school fees, uniform, books)	0%
Entertainment (including alcohol, cigarettes)	1%
Transport	2%
Debt repayment	11%
help to other family members / relatives / friends	0%
Legal assistance / documents	0%
Other (please specify)	1%

IX. Effect of the assistance

The assistance had a moderate effect in improving the living conditions of 60% of the households, and nearly 20% of households reported a significant improvement. About 77% of households reported a

Table 3. Assistance effect on the households

	Improved living conditions (%)	Reduced the financial burden of your household (%)	Reduced feelings of stress (%)
Not at all	1.69	1.41	1.13
Slightly	18.36	21.75	21.47
Moderately	60.45	66.1	62.43
Significantly	19.49	10.73	14.97

significant/moderate reduction in financial burden, 77% reported a significant/moderate reduction in feelings of stress. On the other hand, only 3% reported that all their needs were met, and 25% reported that more than half of their basic needs met. About 49% of respondents reported being able to meet half of their household's basic needs; 25% reported meeting less than half of their household needs,

X. Preference for Assistance Modality

When asked "if the assistance could be started again, which of the following would you prefer?", 98% preferred "Cash through ATM" and 1% chose a "Combination of cash and items".

XI. Debt

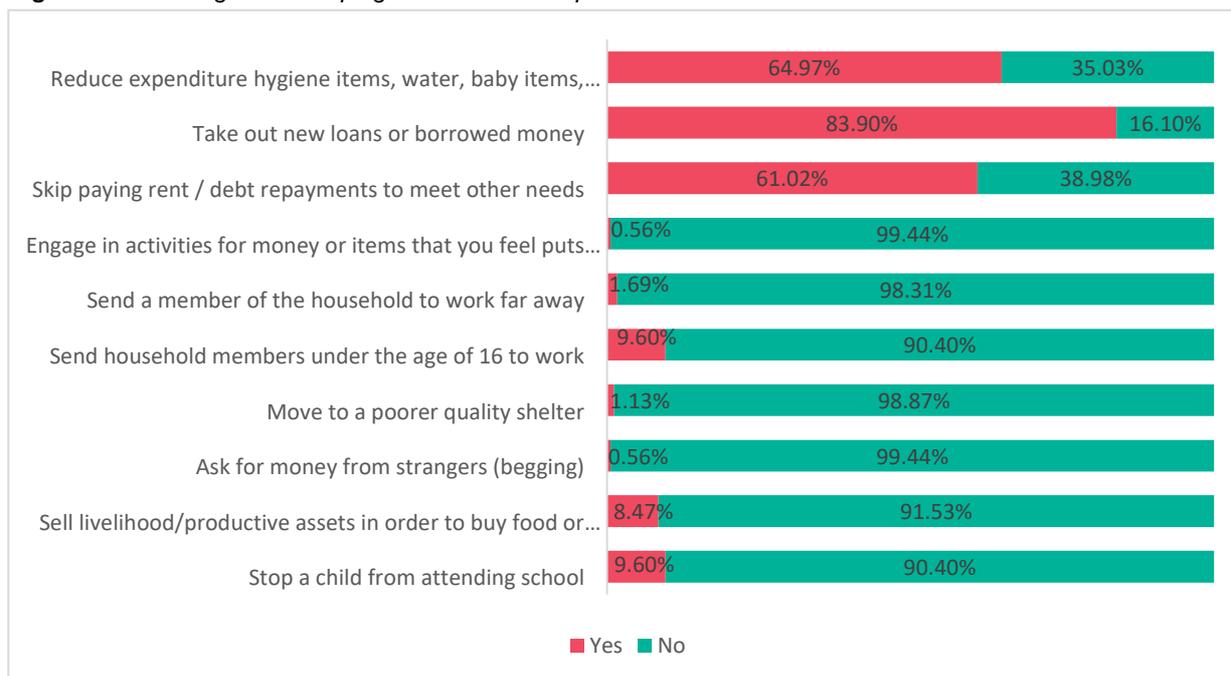
92% of the respondents claimed borrowing money and/or receiving credits in the past 3 months (90 days) with a current debt averaging 1,216,000 LBP. Additionally, households reported the average or 362,000 LBP of new debt per household from borrowing or crediting (formal and informal debt) in the last 30 days.

Over **80.2%** of respondents reported feeling very negative or negative (63% and 17.2% respectively) about their ability to repay their debts on time. However, only **3%** of the households reported harassment or threats to repay debts.

XII. Coping mechanism

About 61% of families reported skipping rent or debt payments in order to cover other needed expenditures. 84% of households surveyed borrowed additional money, and 65% reduced expenditure hygiene items, water, baby items, health, or education in order to meet household food needs.

Figure 2. Percentage of the coping mechanisms adopted



XIII. Accountability

88% of the interviewees claimed to know how to report complaints and feedback on the cash assistance from UNHCR with 85% opting for local leaders to file a complaint or provide a feedback (Table 3).

Complaints / reception desk	0.32%
Complaints and suggestion box	1.60%
Complaints and suggestion box Via local leaders	0.64%
Hotline	11.22%
Via local leaders	84.62%
Via local leaders Complaints / reception desk	0.64%
Via local leaders Complaints and suggestion box	0.96%