



Basic Assistance Working Group Meeting: July 2021- Minutes of Meeting			
Date	23/7/2021	Time	11:00am
Facilitators	Ruba Cheaib	Duration	2 hours
Minutes Prepared by	Ruba Cheaib		
Agenda	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sector updates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - June Assistance and coverage - Socio-Economic Indicators - Transfer Value for MPCA - Dollarization 2. WFP situational analysis 3. LOUISE Operational Updates 4. Winter 2021 Basket and Transfer Value 5. Presentation the SGBV Risk Mitigation Committee 6. Presentation from the Social Stability Sector 7. AOB <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PSEA Focal Points for BA - M&E Taskforce 		
Agencies represented	<p>Action Against Hunger (ACF); Armadella; American University of Beirut (AUB); Cash Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Organizational Network (CAMEALEON); Care International in Lebanon; Caritas Austria; Caritas Lebanon; Caritas Switzerland; CESVI; CISP; DanChurchAid (DCA); ECHO; Inter-Agency; International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); Inter-Agency; LebRelief; Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA); Norwegian Refugee Council; Nusaned; Oxfam GB; Save the Children; Secours Islamique France (SIF); SPHERE Building Tomorrow (SBT); Tafaol Association; Trócaire; UNFPA; UNHCR; UNFPA; WFP.</p>		

1. Sector Updates (presented by Ruba Cheaib)

a. Assistance- June 2021- (coming from Activity Info Reporting)

- In June 2021, around 169,500 households received multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA), the majority of which (around 160,000) were Syrian households. Around 1,300 Lebanese and 8,000 Palestinian households. Additionally, around 5,400 households received child specific cash grants through UNICEF Integrated Child Wellbeing Program (ICWP).



- Coverage of MPCA to displaced Syrians has increased in June, mainly due to expansions in the UNHCR caseload. For Lebanese, a small drop is noted in May- however this is due to delays in payments from some partners which will occur this months, and retroactively for June. For the Palestinian, a stable coverage remains.
- The total amount of USD value disbursed, including the ICWP, in June is US\$6,200,000. This USD value is calculated using respective partner exchange rates as assistance is disbursed in LBP.
- Using the estimate of 267,000 Syrian families in extreme poverty (from VASyR 2020), in June, 90% were targeted with either food assistance and/or MPCA, leaving around 26,000 families receiving neither food assistance nor MPCA. Of those, 185,000 are receiving MPCA (some receiving food assistance as well, while others do not). In July, UNHCR has increased their caseload to cover those 55,000 caseloads that only receives food assistance as of June. In June, around 30% of families that are in extreme poverty were not receiving MPCA.

b. Socio-Economic Indicators

- *Exchange rate:* The unofficial exchange rate is often closely linked to price fluctuations in the market, directly impacting the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) value, and this potential coverage and transfer values. A significant jump in noted in the exchange rate in July, following political instability in the country, namely when the PM designate stepped down. The LBP to USD rate rose to around 23,000. Exchange rates among BA partners range from 15,000LBP/USD (LOUISE agencies), 12,000LBP/USD to 3,900LBP/USD. To be able to track partner exchange rate, a page has been added to the online Sector reporting dashboard where exchange rates will be displayed. This is feeding in from the Activity info database set up to track partner exchange rate, in the BA sector, but also others. So far, reporting on exchange rates has been low, but partners are kindly urged to regularly report on the exchange rates they have with Financial service providers. Contact Ruba and Raffi for questions on the database.
- *Consumer Price Index (CPI):* CPI for June 2021 has been released by the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS). A continued upward trajectory is still noted in the annual change of the CPI over time. The monthly change May to June 2021 was recorded at +10%. The annual change comparing June 2020 with June 2021 stood at +101%. A detailed sheet of the different commodities and services is available at <http://www.cas.gov.lb/index.php/93-english/statistics-by-topics/economic-statistics-en/185-cpi-en-2>
- *Survival minimum expenditure basket (SMEB) monitoring:* Most data coming in to monitor the SMEB comes from WFP price monitoring while other components are adjusted using data from the monthly CPI. The SMEB is separated into three components: the food basket, the non-food basket and other non-food services. The value of the SMEB basket in June 2021 stood at around 2,450,000LBP, a 12% increase since May 2021. The food basket increased by 14% while the non-food basket increased by 19%. Other non-food



services costs increased by 3%. The non-food services components of the SMEB will be updated using VASYR 2021 data, which will be available soon.

- *MPCA Transfer Value:* The transfer value for MPCA at 400,000LBP. The transfer value for MPCA is intended to cover the full non-food SMEB (1,100,000 LBP in June), accounting for income. Income estimation for Syrians used to calculate the transfer value comes from VASyR 2020 and will be updated once VASyR 2021 results are available. Estimated average household income among Syrians as of VASyR 2020 was at 262,000LBP per month. Assuming that level of income, the gap between the MPCA transfer value (400,000LBP monthly) and the estimated needs is around 447,000LBP per month. Thus, the MPCA transfer value is covering less than half (47%) of the estimated needs. Noting that currently, there are also gaps in coverage of the food basket with food assistance under the Food Security Sector. There is a lot of frustration among partners with regards to the low transfer value and the impact that is likely having on beneficiaries. We have heard the governments position on the concerns of raising the value linked to tensions with Lebanese, where coverage of cash assistance remains low.
- *Dollarization:* Following some donor led discussions in June, a two phased approach has been suggested with the first phase focusing on dollarization of the NPTP (Lebanese); dollarization of assistance for Palestine refugees and other programmes that can be quickly dollarized that do not focus specifically on Syrians (ex. cash for work; UNICEF Haddi). Following that phase, and after a lessons learned/evaluation exercise, dollarization of social assistance for Syrians (including MPCA) will be initiated. Currently dollarized programs under the Sector: “Haddi” program by UNICEF; UNRWA MPCA to PRS; LRC MPCA to Syrian and Lebanese. There is concern with regards to making sure this is well coordinated and harmonized, we are now seeing that under the BA and Livelihoods sector transfer values in USD are not being harmonized, but there is also a large discrepancy between the values in USD and those still in LBP. We have yet to see a clear communication plan and timeline for phase two. A key priority is that this is a learning process so that partners who have not yet dollarized can learn from lessons of partners who have disbursed in dollars. It is also important to keep an eye on coordination and monitoring of the risks and mitigation measure, namely when moving to phase two. The coordination of the dollarization of cash assistance was initially being coordinated under the Cash Task Force (set up during the blast response). If that is not materialized, these discussions will begin within the BA Sector, especially on transfer values. Partners have voiced the strong need to initiate the transfer value discussions within the BA Core Group to determine and set transfer values in USD. Discussions on risks and communication will have to be coordinated with the livelihoods, food security, and protection.
- While we wait for the dollarization to go through, partners are urging that the transfer value in LBP is re-visited to ensure that a meaningful assistance is being provided. While partners do not deny a potential risk of tensions with increase

transfer values, the decision can be made by weighing the likelihood and impact of these risks, versus the risk of not providing vulnerable families with a meaningful assistance value. It may be beneficial to show that the sector plans to carefully monitor potential risks if the transfer value is to be increased.

- Update from WFP on the dollarization of the NPTP: four scenarios have been presented to the NPTP steering committee. Implementation of this can vary from a minimum of two months to a maximum of four months once the decision is made.

2. WFP RAM Situational Analysis (Presented by Abdallah Souhani, WFP)

- *Imports:* Data from the Port of Beirut shows a 20% decrease in unloaded food weight when comparing August 2020 to June 2021 versus the same period in this year and an 18% decrease in January 2019 to June 2020 versus the same period in this year. Cereal imports recorded a 9% change when comparing January to February 2020 versus 2021. Edible vegetables has decreased by 41%, sugar by 26%, live animals by 17%.
- *Stock coverage of WFP contracted shops:* The decrease in imports has mainly affected the brand diversity and quality, while traders have been able to maintain stocks. By the week of July 12th, stock coverage has nearly stabilized to similar levels in March 2021. 84% of WFP contracted shops reported having more than 2 weeks of stock coverage and 39% had more than 4 weeks of coverage. Shops in BML had the highest stock coverage, lowest was in the North.
- *Product availability and delivery in WFP contracted shops:* Only 39% of shops reported scarcity in some products during the week of July 12th. However, challenges are appearing in receiving and delivering new orders. 88% of shops are expecting to receive their orders within one week (down from 97% in the beginning of June) and 67% are receiving the full order (down from 71% at the beginning of July). Only 7% of WFP shops have some subsidized products, 3% were able to place renew orders for subsidized and only 2% received the full order.
- *SMEB price evolution:* A 14% increase between May and June in the food SMEB is noted reaching 270,000LBP/person/month. The basket has increased by more than five times since October 2019. For the non-food SMEB (12 commodities), a 19% monthly increase in noted between May and June, reaching around 408,000LBP per family per month. A 372% increase is noted since October 2019.
- *Fuel inflation and news:* Fuel shortages resumed across the country, following more availability of fuel in the past two weeks. However, the major challenge is with regards to the Deiseal shortages which are more severe effecting hospitals, bakeries, factories are shutting down due to the shortage. The subsidies rate has increased for all combustible fuel to 3,900 LBP/USD. Gasoline price increased by 212 percent, diesel by 259 percent, and cooking gas by 189 percent since the beginning of December 2020.
- *Subsidies update:* “De-facto” rationing of subsidies continues. Cash assistance will be provided to 500,000 families, with an amount of up to USD 126 per



family per month (exact amount vary with family size), however funding source in unknown. Food Importers have around USD 200 million dollars in delayed payments with the Central Bank for previously approved imported subsidized products. Negotiations ongoing currently on payment mechanism and duration. The price of a large pack of bread has increased by 200% since June 2020, with prices varying depending on point of sale (bakeries versus supermarkets).

3. LOUISE Operational Updates (Presented by Charbel Habib, WFP)

- LOUISE preferential exchange rate was increased to 15,000LBP through BLF, and applied for the July cycle.
- As a normal practice to reduce loads at ATM, cards are uploading over several days with loadings staggered over 13 days for MCAP and MPC. Loadings for WFP Food e-card were staggered over four days. No uploads are occurring over the weekend to allow enough time for replenishment.
- ATM monitoring and crowd control continues by UNHCR/WFP/UNICEF field teams and partners with no major issues reported. Some issues with off site ATMs with limited operating hours due to electricity cuts. Finalizing the installation of additional ATMs in El Minnieh, North and Marjeyoun, South respectively. Almost all (99.9%) of redemption occurred in BLF banks. Redemption rates remain high (98%) in June indicating the families have access to their entitlement. Only one bank (other than BLF) is now accepting the LOUISE card.
- Programmatic updates: Increase caseload of UNHCR MCAP assistance by 51,500 additional Households in July. All households are previously food only assisted households (WFP Food E-card). WFP did not perform any expansions in July, awaiting an increase in transfer values. UNICEF's Integrated Child Well-being Program increased transfer values to 500,000 LBP/child, capped at 2 children in June 2021. New social assistance program "Haddi" (non-LOUISE program) reaching around 70,000 individuals/children of all nationalities (first payment to go through on June 28th with a transfer value of 40 USD/child.
- No changes when it comes to transfer values. Food assistance remains at 100,000LBP/month/person and MPCA 400,000LBP/month/family. WFP and UNHCR in discussions with MoSA to increase food component to 200,000 LBP/individual, and MCAP/MPC assistance to 700,000 LBP/HH as of July 2021 (if request is approved).

4. Winter 2021 Basket and Transfer Value (Presented by Ruba Cheaib)

- In previous years, through an expenditure basked approach, transfer values for winter cash assistance had been determined by using expenditure data collected through household visits (targeting) through the year. Expenditure data in the winter was compared to that in other times of the year to estimate increased expenditure in winter.
- This year, a rights-based approach is used to determine the winter cash transfer value by developing a basket, like the SMEB, but only for winter needs.



- For Syrians, those living under the MEB are targeted for winter cash assistance, for Lebanese, the NPTP estimations are used and for PRS and PRL, are also based on targets identified throughout the year.
- The winter basket covers winter specific non-food items and resources for heating. The item lists include different types of clothing for adults, babies and children as well as blankets and mattresses. Costs for these items are still pending, largely coming from estimations from UNHCR Supply unit.
- Fuel for heating covers 300L of diesel for the winter season and 1kg gas bottle per month. The estimation for diesel needs comes from consumption data collected in other countries operations (namely Syria) but also UNHCR Winter PDM for previous years which showed similar findings of fuel expenditure during the winter across the country. Electricity was included as it was flagged through some discussions with field colleagues that expenditure increases in the winter. However, no sources have been available to estimate increased expenditure on electricity in the winter and since regular electricity costs are available in the SMEB, this component may be dropped.
- When the basket and prices are finalized, the transfer value will be determined, providing a range of value to allow for flexibility. The minimum will likely account for heating costs while the max value would include costs clothing and other items. Usually, winter assistance is provided to cover at least three months and for a max of five months, as a one-off payment at the start of winter or as a monthly payment throughout the season.
- A guidance note will be developed on winter cash assistance. In Mid-August, a winter mapping will be conducted to partners to understand plans and better coordinate.

5. Presentation from the SGBV Risk Mitigation Committee (presented by Hajar Chamoun, ACTED)

- The SGBV Risk Mitigation Committee (RMC) was initiated by the Inter-Agency SBGV task force to support the 2017-2021 LRCP strategy commitments. BA was one of the prioritized sectors.
- Two focal point for BA with the role to work with the BA coordinator and actors to identify needs and joint activities for SBGV mainstreaming and mitigation as well as to link BA and SGBV actors for support.
- GBV risk mitigation consists of a range of activities within humanitarian responses that aim to identify GBV risks and take specific actions to reduce those risks to ensure vulnerable populations' have safe access to and use of humanitarian services.
- There is an increase in GBV in Lebanon, a recent survey shows that 53% of partners reported increase claims related to GBV. Figures are usually under reported and expected to increase as the economic situation deteriorates. There is a real need to BA sector ad SGBV committee to collaborate further. Points to explore include: Integrating GBV risks-related criteria in the cash assistance assessments and looking at how cash assistance assessments can be

entry points of identification of GBV cases and their referrals to GBV services providers.

- From the SGBV perspective, there are certain mitigation measures that need to be put in place when it comes to dollarization to ensure that vulnerable persons are not exploited.
- Available resources: IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action. Includes thematic area guides with sector-specific recommendations for GBV risk mitigation across the programme cycle. While there is not a BA chapter, guidance under the Food Security and Livelihoods are relevant to the BA Sector. The guide provides information on how to implement mitigation during all stages of the project cycle. The second resource: GBV pocket guide. This includes decision trees, do and donts, and helps identify relevant services in specific areas. It is available in both English and Arabic. (<https://gbvguidelines.org/en/pocketguide/> . It is recommended that field staff undergo a training when sharing this tool. The SGBV committee is ready to support on this.
- A survey will be shared with partners to get a better understanding of the BA partners existing actions, risks, challenges, support needs, suggested joint actions or entry points for GBV RM in Basic Assistance.
- GBV referral pathways and other resources will be shared with the group.
- The SGBV RMC will also be involved in the reviewing of the Protection Risk Assessment and M&E tools.

6. **Presentation from the Social Stability Sector (presented by Fadel Saleh, UNDP)**

- Since 2017, within the framework of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, UNDP and UNHCR, together with other partners, have set up and developed a tension monitoring system to share, consolidate and analyze information on tensions in Lebanon. The system informs the overall Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). This system is based on different data sources which include the regular perception surveys which are conducted by UNDP and the research company ARK to follow trends in terms of perceptions with regards to key elements potentially being tension factors. These inputs have served to expand and deepen our understanding of the evolution of tensions in particular localities, as well as of the factors that contribute to those tensions using rigorous methods that triangulate and validate multiple data sources.
- The surveys are done quarterly with a sample of 5,000 respondents making the results generalizable on the adult population in Lebanon. The current wave covered the period between April and May 2021.
- Main findings included:
 - Quality of inter-communal relations between refugees and host communities is deteriorating particularly in Akkar, Baalbek-Hermel, South and Beqaa.
 - Intra-communal relations are also deteriorating.
 - Primary reason for inter-communal tensions: Unemployment – competition over jobs



- Intra-Lebanese tensions are primarily driven by political/sectarian divides at followed by economic factors.
- More volatile situation – marked with increased violence, security incidents and use of arms.
- Recommendations:
 - Prioritize and invest in prevention, addressing the drivers of tensions and conflict, building sustainable peace, and expediting more comprehensive recovery.
 - Clear understanding of local tension drivers should be applied in planning and implementation.
 - Programming should be more holistic where humanitarian assistance should be coupled with other key interventions such as peacebuilding and psychological support.
 - Community and peacebuilding initiatives that nurture mutual caring and cooperation among individuals could ameliorate some of the resentments generated by the crisis.
 - Conflict-sensitive needs assessments and more systematic follow-up is needed.
 - With regards to the perception data, Tension Monitoring Update Dashboard – provides an overview of findings from a regular national representative perceptions survey.
- The data generated is uploaded with links to reports as well as District and Governorate Level Fact Sheets. The available data provides insights into the overall communal tensions in Lebanon and their drivers. The data is disaggregated by gender, age, nationality, and area specific.
- For more information, please contact Fadel Saleh <fadel.saleh@undp.org> (Conflict Analyst and Conflict Sensitivity Mainstreaming Officer) and refer to the dashboard here:
<https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fapp.powerbi.com%2Fview%3Fr%3DeyJrljoiZGZhMDExMjYtNzFmZC00YjU3LWE0Y2YtNTcyMmZhNjAyNTliliiwidCI6ImIzZTVkYjVILTl5NDQtdNDgzNy05OWY1LTc0ODhhY2U1NDMxOSlsmMiOjh9&data=04%7C01%7Ccheaib%40unhcr.org%7Cd1baa19318064c39417408d952765827%7Ce5c37981666441348a0c6543d2af80be%7C0%7C0%7C637631490525284000%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ikk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=JZ5wO8Ft0K760PFcjG8nNyKoqDEnjG2%2FAZOCi6YD6wg%3D&reserved=0>

7. AOB

- Two Sector focal points have been identified for the BA Sector: Malak from UNHCR and Manale from WVI. An update will be provided in the next meeting on planned work
- An M&E taskforce will be set up within the force. Rachel from Oxfam will be co-leading the group to move forward on some of the priorities. A sign up sheet will be sent out to the group for agencies and individuals to participate in the taskforce.



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