



Minutes of NATIONAL INTER-AGENCY MEETING

16 April 2021, 9:00-11:00

Remotely on Zoom

Chairperson(s)	Assem Abi Ali – LCRP General Supervisor, MoSA Elina Faber Silen – Senior Inter-Agency Coordinator Camilla Jelbart Moose – Senior Inter-Agency Coordinator
Agenda of the Meeting	1. Opening 2. Key Findings from Q1 Tensions & Protection Monitoring 3. Storm response 2020 - 2021: Update and Lessons Learned 4. Brussels V Conference Outcome 5. LCRP COVID-19 Business Continuity for 2021 (including update on Risk Communication and Community Engagement)

Proceedings

1. **Opening** – *Assem Abi Ali – LCRP General Supervisor, Ministry of Social Affairs:*

- The LCRP General Supervisor initiated the meeting by indicating that the situation in Lebanon is becoming very sensitive and there are huge tasks in front of us that need to be achieved. However, the collaboration between all the stakeholders (government, CSOs, UN agencies, international community and local NGOs) is a key factor for success.

2. **Key Findings from Tension & Protection Monitoring** – *Elsa Bousquet, Protection Sector Coordinator, Catherine Philippe, Protection Officer, UNHCR & Fadel Saleh, Conflict Analysis and Reporting Officer, UNDP. Annex 1: National Inter-Agency Meeting Friday 16 April PPT*

- **Update on the Protection situation for February and March 2021:** based on Protection sector inputs collected through partners and continuous interactions with persons of concerns through community outreach and helplines. Main points of concerns are the deteriorating socio-economic situation leading to lack of access to livelihoods and drastic inflation of basic commodities price; all population groups express major needs in relation to food, livelihoods, cash, shelter and health; harmful coping mechanisms on the rise; and alarming deterioration of mental health status. Main protection risks identified during February and March 2021 are:
 - *COVID-19 – vaccination:* Lack of understanding on COVID-19 vaccination campaigns reported among all communities, especially for older persons and others at high risks.
 - *Access to services and discriminatory measures:* Total lockdown led to major challenges related to the increase in needs, and continuous increase in discriminatory restricted access to (WFP-contracted and other) shops and to buy subsidized products for refugees.
 - *Eviction:* Eviction threat and eviction remains a critical concern in all areas in Lebanon (individual and collective) mostly due to inability to pay rent.
 - *Legal Residency and Civil Documentation:* De-prioritization mostly due to inability to offer costs. Significant barriers remain for most refugees.
- **Key findings of the Protection Monitoring for March 2021:** the findings were based on a randomized sampling where 2,305 households were consulted (99% Syrian, 1% other nationalities), which included information on the impact of the socio-economic situation, coping mechanisms, priority needs, age, gender and diversity, restrictive measures, legal residency, mental health, and host community relations.



- **Overview of the recent tension trends for Q1:** the main tension trends for 2021 are: an overall increase in community insecurity, related to theft, crimes and clashes; rising economic and labor-related tensions; clashes between demonstrators blocking the road and civilians wanted to pass; shortages in main commodities with implications on rule of law; tensions related to subsidized goods.
- **Questions and Discussion points:**
 - [Protection Focal Point (MoSA)]: *Is any work being done by the Social Stability sector with the Lebanese media around inter communal tensions?* Under the SoST sector, there is a key component pertaining to working with the local media and communication and outreach in terms of strengthening Conflict Sensitivity. Also, communication around various sources of tension is a priority for this year and is a thematic topic that will be discussed with the core group, and ultimately reverting back in terms of the outcomes. There are a number of partners engaging through communal level communication, accessing networks through peace building groups, use of social media platforms and media campaigns. However, within this context and the surge in incidents, more political instrumentalization is expected, which can be an issue that should be further addressed.
 - [Food Security Sector Coordinator]: *On communication related to perceptions of aid bias, how can we work more collectively on channeling out right information?* This stems as a core issue from CS and DNH (do-no-harm) programming. Based on assessments and consultations with over 160 individuals from 64 partner agencies, there is a problem of communication, even for projects within specific localities. Accordingly, to strengthen this matter of communication, localities should be informed about what is being done, by whom and why. Four Inter-Sector CS guidance notes are going to be issued at the end of the month and two of them will particularly be relevant to the topic (one on targeting and one on project design).
 - [Protection Focal Point (MoSA)]: *There was a recent incident in Tripoli over food baskets distribution which resulted in one casualty. Do we have concerns that similar incidents might occur in the future?* This incident in Tripoli highlights the high propensity to violence and there are concerns about possible similar incidents. This was also evident last summer, around August and September in Tripoli and in the Beqaa, where similar incidents took place during aid distributions. As the situation declines, competition over subsidized products are resulting in physical confrontations and clashes. The situation will be monitored closely. We are looking at enhancing coordination with partners (within the response or out of the response), especially local charities in terms of distribution mechanism (DNH and communication with beneficiaries), rather than focusing on ad hoc strategies only.
 - [Food Security sector coordinator]: *Can we work on tips for partners on how to conduct more conflict-sensitive distributions?* Yes, we can. There is a guidance note that was developed during COVID-19 which looks at in-kind distributions. Some of the useful lessons learned from partners can be incorporated in the note, noting that it also includes guidance on how to do better outreach.

3. Storm response 2020 - 2021: Update and Lessons Learned – Lindsey America - Simms, Inter-Agency Coordination Officer and regional Emergency FPs - Yara Attallah (Bekaa - Zahle Office), Georges Estephan (Tripoli Office), & Bruno Stolze (Mount Lebanon Office). See Annex 1: National Inter-Agency Meeting Friday 16 April PPT

- The presentation gave an overview of the impact of 2020-2021 extreme weather season and the main preparedness actions taken. Main impact by regions were:



- *Beirut & Mount Lebanon*: 5 sites impacted twice; shelter and core relief items highest reported needs; food parcel gap due to lack of funding; water sector facing funding challenges; frequently reported on inability to meet basic needs.
- *Bekaa & Baalbeck- El Hermel*: displacement of 60 individuals from Arsal 138; recurring need for de-flooding, plastic sheeting, shelter kits and core relief items; tent installation and rehabilitation challenges, limited site improvement capacity in prone areas, lack of sufficient water channels; snow hindered transportation of shelter kits.
- *North & Akkar*: 719 families displaced from informal settlements in Qleiaat Akkar; challenges with temporary relocation within settlements due to COVID-19; repeated flooding of sites located near rivers: 45 sites; transportation cost challenges.
- *South & Nabatieh*: 176 families displaced and relocated; shelter kits and core relief items highest reported need; hygiene kit needs in Saida; scabies outbreak; assistance gaps: food parcels, stoves minor shelter and WASH repair; recurring issues are site flooding with wastewater and drainage gaps, tensions, lack of site improvement, weather proofing gaps, latrine needs.
- Lessons learned and key actions to improve the response ahead of the next season (see details in PPT):
- Coordination: [North] It was challenging to have two RNA partners in one area, one conducting the assessment and the other conducting the distribution and this led to delays in response or not finding the exact case location. It was agreed with the RNA partners to allocate one partner per area for both assessments and distribution which improved the response.
- Assessment: [North] Concerns were raised by the RNA staff in risk of being infected with COVID-19 while conducting shelter/HH level assessment. As a result, the RRT team shared the ISs P-codes of identified COVID-19 cases to alert the RNA staff for additional precautionary measures (no individual case details were shared).

4. Update on Brussels V Conference - Assem Abi Ali, LCRP General Supervisor, MoSA, Camilla Jelbart, Senior Inter-Agency Coordinator, Maria-Noel Chehade, LHDF, & Jinane Saad, LHIF. See Annex 1: National Inter-Agency Meeting Friday 16 April PPT

- The LCRP General Supervisor mentioned that the conference can be considered a success and confirmed that there is still international commitment to address the impact of the Syria Crisis in the region. He expressed hope that a significant share of funding support will be allocated to the response in Lebanon given the compounded crises.
- The Government of Lebanon participated in the conference through the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and MoSA. The LCRP General Supervisor participated in a side event on poverty within displaced and host communities. The position articulated by the Government of Lebanon at the conference on key issues was as follows:
 - Confirming that displaced and host communities suffer from the same issues and decline in available resources due to many obstacles.
 - Emphasizing the need to continue with COVID-19 vaccination of displaced and Lebanese populations to reach a safe percentage in the near future.
 - Calling for social protection for all vulnerable communities in Lebanon and indicated that poverty and vulnerability issues are affecting all populations, regardless of nationality.
 - Addressing the sustainable resolution of the situation of displaced Syrians by granting a voluntary, safe and dignified return.
 - The Prime Minister also addressed rising tensions and the threat this presents for social stability and the state of Lebanon in general.
 - The Lebanese delegation also thanked the international community for its commitment and funding to Lebanon throughout the years.



- A brief presentation of progress against previous conference commitments made by the Government of Lebanon, EU and UN (from the Lebanon Partnership Paper, 2018) was shared, based on monitoring of data under the LCRP. Overall, the monitoring found that while sustained funding for the response has been maintained and action has been taken on a number of policy commitments, progress in contributing to improved living standards has been limited in the recent period (under protection, education, health, social protection and livelihoods) due to the sharp decline in socio-economic conditions and multiple crises faced by Lebanon.
- LHDF reported back from their engagement in the conference and highlighted that the conference held a strong focus on perspectives from organizations and voices from the field. LHDF is keen to see these perspectives maintained in future conferences and consultations to enhance collaboration and engagement of CSOs, government and international actors. LHDF also flagged that more donor support is needed with a focus on supporting local actors in their response and advancing the localization agenda. Finally, LHDF emphasized that this must be met with a well-coordinated and streamlined response that includes meaningful and inclusive decision making of NGOs. A key takeaway is that localization should always remain a top priority in the discussions around Lebanon, in particular within the context of the Syrian crisis.
- LHIF reported back from their engagement in the run-up to and during conference: LHIF and LHDF conducted consultation sessions in Lebanon with the EU and the UN ahead of the conference to support the engagement of international and local NGOs and voices from Syrian civil society. Coordination is still ongoing with the EU to understand better how the independent mentoring report of the Brussels Commitment will be managed and looking forward for NGO participation in that process. As a positive outcome from the conference, LHIF flagged the reaffirmation of the non-refoulement commitment by the PM and DPM and the commitment to accelerate residency permits and support access to documentation. LHIF highlighted the need to address access challenges as there were no clear points on this during the conference. Finally, in terms of the overall results of the funding, there almost 26% decrease in funding from the Brussels Commitment, which is understandable due to the global financial crisis, but there is a need to look on how this decrease will impact Lebanon specifically.

5. COVID-19 Business Continuity for 2021 (including update on Risk Communication and Community Engagement) – Elina Silen, Senior Inter-Agency Coordinator, & Iman Al Khatib, RCCE National Coordinator, UNICEF. See Annex 1: National Inter-Agency Meeting Friday 16 April PPT

- The LCRP Business Continuity Plan was put in place in Q2 2020 to review the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on LCRP operations, outlining risks and critical interventions needed to ensure life-saving access to services and protection of the most vulnerable displaced persons from Syria and vulnerable Lebanese in the current deteriorating context. It aims to safeguard the LCRP's critical operations, following a risk mitigation approach. The document is updated on a quarterly basis and has recently been updated in April 2021.
- *What's new for 2021?* The 2021 planning assumption for the LCRP is that the COVID-19 outbreak continues. Therefore, COVID-19 prevention measures have been mainstreamed into each sector strategy and lessons learned have been incorporated into strategies – for example on blended approaches and adapting guidelines. Across the response, partners have adapted programmes within the context of COVID-19.



- *Current impact on the operational environment:* main constraints include: operational constraints (including access to electricity and fuel); planning for shifts in exchange rate and currency; procurement challenges; gaps in evidence-based planning; constraints in following adequate health and safety measures; limited resources to carry out remote activities; reduction in activity due lockdown and restrictions; access issues and Impact of institutional closures and increasing backlog.
- *Prevention and Preparedness measures:* Ensuring mapping and referrals of services to improve response capacity; expanding partner networks; shifting to blended approaches and alternative modalities; budgets for PPE; preparing for a shift to voucher operations; preparing for increase of in-kind distributions; social distancing; support to RCCE.
- The updated LCRP BCP for COVID-19 will be shared with the full Inter-Agency email list during the last week of April.
- The RCCE Pillar lead updated on the latest Risk Communication and Community Engagement, where the RCCE works with national health authorities and other partners to develop, implement and monitor an effective action plan for communicating effectively with the public, engaging with communities, local partners and other stakeholders to help prepare and protect individuals, families and the public's health during early response to COVID-19 and the vaccination process. The RCCE is advocating for the right of all the different communities and populations to take part and register for the vaccine, including the stateless population.
- *RCCE External Communications update* include information about the following points:
 - **Preventive measures messages** are shared on a continuous basis with communication material.
 - **Easter messages** were shared prior the Easter holidays and Ramadan messaging will also be disseminated throughout the holy month.
 - The **updated version of the Q&A** has been shared with a focus on myth-busting around AstraZeneca, mutations, breastfeeding and pregnancy.
 - A third video from the set of produced videos to support the National Vaccines Deployment Plan was recently launched, providing step by step guidelines on the four stages of the beneficiary's journey inside a vaccination center.
 - Three packages of the #VACCINATED Social media have been shared till now, in both Arabic and English, highlighting frontliners, medical staffers and elderly getting vaccinated and sharing their testimonies.
 - **Social Media Packages:** The latest package includes simplified messages that were identified from the Q&A and designed into social media posts, in both Arabic and English, tackling AstraZeneca and adverse events reporting packaged for social media.
 - **Posters on adverse effects:** Posters providing step by step guidelines on how to report adverse events were produced and were distributed to vaccination sites through MoPH.
 - **New campaign to boost the registration on the vaccination platform:** Currently in the design stages of a new campaign that aims to promote a clear message on the effectiveness and efficiency of the vaccines.
 - **COVID-19 Call center material:** External Communication material to increase the visibility of the COVID-19 call centers and the 1787 hotline are in the development phase.



- **COVID-19 Vaccines Public Discussion Tracker:** This monitoring and social listening tool is shared on a weekly basis every Friday, providing insight to public opinions on the COVID-19 vaccine
- *Partner cooperation* can be achieved through: mobilization of IA partner; combining efforts to address rumors and misinformation; updating and sharing the Q&A; advocacy at central level.