Vulnerability Assessment Framework

VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (VAF) IN JORDAN

At the beginning of the VAF project in late 2013, considerable amounts of data on Syrian refugees was available. However, the tools used to analyse and collect this data varied significantly between partners. The use of different vulnerability criteria meant that data was not full comparable or able to be combined in a comprehensive picture.

Vulnerability is defined as: *the risk of exposure of Syrian refugee households to harm, primarily in relation to protection threats, inability to meet basic needs, limited access basic services, and food insecurity, and the ability of the population to cope with the consequences of this harm.* [1]

WHAT IS THE VAF?

In response to a growing awareness that the impact of assistance differs across various beneficiary populations, the UNHCR office in Jordan continues to collect comprehensive data that allows for both the targeting and prioritization of refugees from Syria known as the Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF). The goal of the process is to gather data on and identify urban Syrian refugees' vulnerabilities in order to facilitate more efficient and effective programming in Jordan. In order to do this, the VAF includes both a targeting component, which allows for increased knowledge on the vulnerabilities and assistance required by each case, and a prioritization component, which acknowledges that certain cases require different (more and /or faster) assistance than others. Together, these components allow for UNHCR and for partners alike to better identify the needs and vulnerabilities of the population of concern and prioritize cases in need of urgent assistance. The VAF however by nature is not solely a UNHCR initiative but a collaborative initiative developed with the engagement of donors, UN agencies and INGOs operating in Jordan.

BENEFITS OF STANDARDISING CRITERIA

The development of standardized criteria for vulnerability and the different thresholds also allows for humanitarian actors to talk about relative vulnerabilities in equivalent terms and to track those vulnerabilities across the refugee population and both map and respond to the vulnerabilities identified. By using the VAF questionnaire as the standard and agreed tool within broader

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assessments, data collected by agencies for different purposes may be more comparable, contributing to a greater store of knowledge and analysis of the refugee population, beyond any one assessment.

Through sustainably pooling household assessments the VAF expands greater operational response and coverage in terms of reaching those that are the most vulnerable. This is more effective when used in tandem with existing coordination mechanisms; RAIS to record assistance and service provision allowing cross-checking to limit duplication, or enhancing the provision of complementary assistance and services where gaps are present.

1. Supporting service delivery by providing a common platform for agreement on approaches to undertaking assessment and analysis
2. Informing strategic decision making for humanitarian partner organizations through coordinated assessments, gap analysis and prioritization
3. Planning and strategy development including sectoral plans, adherence to standards and funding needs
4. Advocacy to address identified concerns on behalf of Sectors and affected population
5. Contingency planning / preparedness for known funding reductions

The VAF process seeks to put in place an observation and reporting system that supports the humanitarian community to:

1. Establish a profile of vulnerability among Syrian refugee households and enable monitoring of changes in vulnerability over time;

2. Target assistance in a more efficient and equitable manner, based on the application of common vulnerability criteria;

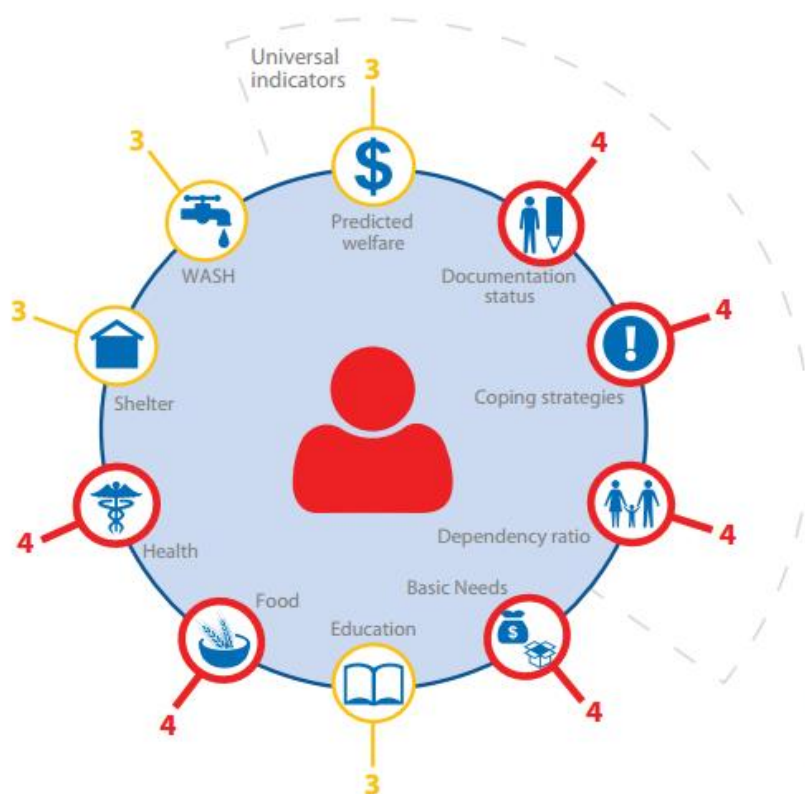3. Strengthen the coordination and decision-making of the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

SECTOR INVOLVEMENT IN THE VAF:

In tandem, vulnerability indicators and criteria has been developed through consultative processes with the sectors, using different combinations of data points.

The Sector trees provide a technical focus on intervention provision based on vulnerability priorities at the sector level. This data provides clear leadership and accountability in the main areas of the humanitarian response at country-level through the sector forums as an enabler. The VAF team worked with each of the sectors to develop customized sector trees based on the data points available in the VAF questionnaire with modeling and criteria approved with formal endorsement. Sector level indicators/ criteria provides a detailed case-level snapshot analysis of the vulnerabilities that each case is experiencing.

Sample case-level snapshot
Severely vulnerable

38 year old widowed Syrian female with 4 children.

Universal indicators

3 — Predicted welfare

3 — WASH

3 — Shelter

4 — Health

4 — Food

3 — Education

4 — Documentation status

4 — Coping strategies

4 — Dependency ratio

Basic Needs — 4

CHART 18
Source data: VAF home visits, Single record,
Date: Jan - Feb 2015,
Level: case

Sample case-level snapshot/Severely vulnerable
38 year old widowed Syrian female with 4 children.

$	Predicted expenditure 3	Predicted per capita 43 JOD		
	Documentation status 4	PA Documentation — PA is missing MOI	Family Documentation — Family registered	
	Coping strategies 4	1 emergency strategy being implemented		
	Dependency ratio 4	1 autonomous adult 4 children		
	Basic Needs 4	Coping strategies — Emergency strategies	Dependency ratio — Poor dependency	Economic state — High debt per capita
	Education 3	Attendance risks — Finance main risk	3 school aged children — 2 years missed education — 2 children attending	
	Food 4	Social vulnerability — High dependency ratio, Single headed	CARI score — FCS = 103, 20% spent on food, Emergency	
	Health 4	Access to services — Missing PA doc, not had problems accessing	Family composition — No under 5's and over 60s in case	Existing conditions — Existing disabilities present
	Shelter 3	Housing conditions — Missing essential items, showing poor signs	Security of tenancy — Has contract but high debt	Family composition — Female-headed house, high dependency ratio
	WASH 3	Health — No issues	Access to latrines — Shared access with 1 house and safe access	Access safe water — Municipality source 1 instances without	Waste management — 0 instance water 3 instances solid

In March 2015 a technical review report was shared with sectors which mapped the results of the initial models across the VAF baseline survey results. VAF sector trees were reviewed from mid-late 2016 where the sectors took this opportunity to review and revise their scoring criteria looking back at nearly two years of implementation and contextual changes. The sector tree scoring enables a vulnerability level to be assigned at the case level based on responses given in the questionnaire. Together with other periodic surveys, the VAF can provide spatial analysis to understand geographic areas with concentrations of vulnerable refugee cases. Spatial analysis also facilitates decision-making and prioritization by geographical area. Individual case scores support partners in taking decisions on who should be assisted with what type of assistance should be provided based on the scoring results.

The application of this analysis varies from sector to sector. While this multisector approach encompasses agreed upon indicators from many sectors, it will not be the sole basis of information for assistance for all agencies but instead it will rather act as an identification flag for further in depth needs assessment.

By nature the purpose of using the multi-sectoral format it allows organizations to target their beneficiaries more closely in alignment with the scope of their programmatic focus. This however does not mean that Agencies/ INGOs have to limit themselves to one particular sector, but rather data can be accessed and complementarily used through selecting one or multiple combinations of the following universal or sector indicators, depending on the programme scope:

Universal indicators
1. Predicted Welfare
2. Dependency Ratio
3. Coping Strategies
4. Documentation Status
5. Disability (to be introduced in 2017)

Sector Indicators
1. Socio economic vulnerability / Basic Needs
2. Food Security
3. WASH
4. Shelter
5. Health
6. Education

Additionally, vulnerability is seen as being multi-dimensional and differential, scale dependent, and dynamic in nature. Because of this complex definition, the VAF uses a series of community-based approaches to perfect and verify the eligibility (inclusion/exclusion) criteria for the targeting mechanisms informed by the sectors (basic needs, health, education, shelter, WASH, food security and by proxy protection).

Understanding the scoring system, see hypothetical scenario below:

INGO ABC has been approved funding to undertake a Basic needs Cash intervention based on the following criteria:

Target Group: The most vulnerable Syrian refugee families that are socioeconomically vulnerable, have a high level of aid dependency, are food insecure and engaged in negative coping mechanisms.
No. of Cases to receive 6 months regular cash assistance: 500
Areas of Operation: Governorate/ District: Irbid; Ramtha and Bani Obeid (District selection will be available to cater to specific areas of operation.)

Depending on the type of intervention your organization is responding to; the criteria in which is supplied by the donor or what other considerations you would like to include additionally as vulnerability factors. The VAF Module can be used to effectively improve eligibility, prioritization and targeting and used in such a way by allowing organizations to pick and choose their data based on their independent needs given the multi-faceted and multi-sectoral nature of the tool.

For example if organization ABC have been approved funding to provide 500 cases in Irbid with regular cash assistance for a period of 6 months, and although it is a Cash Based intervention, the target group doesn't not have to be limited to prioritization through the Basic Needs Score (socioeconomic vulnerability) but additional scores can be used in unison / parallel to improve targeting. This enables assistance and services to reach cases that are the most vulnerable at a multitude of facets when additional criteria can be applied based on programmatic requirements.

VAF Scoring can be interpreted by the following, irrespective of the sectors or universal indicators you select to filter from:
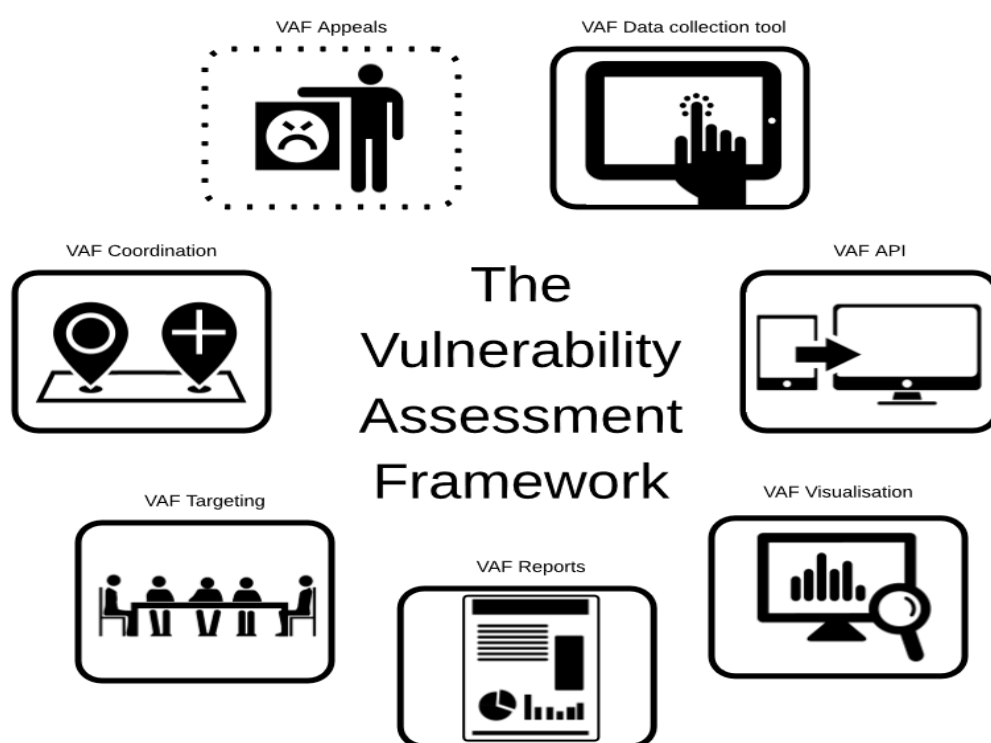1 = low vulnerability
2 = moderate vulnerability
3 = high vulnerability
4 = severe vulnerability

INGO ABC applied the following scoring filters **Basic Needs**, **Food Security**, **Welfare, Dependency** and **Coping Strategies,** which resulted in:

Case A		Case B		Case C	
Basic Needs score:	4	Basic Needs score:	4	Basic Needs score:	3
Food Security score:	3	Food Security score:	4	Food Security score:	1
Welfare score:	2	Welfare score:	4	Welfare score:	2
Dependency:	2	Dependency:	4	Dependency:	2
Coping Strategies:	4	Coping Strategies:	4	Coping Strategies:	1

Based on results that the Score selection returns, as displayed in hypothetical scenario below: Case B, is most vulnerable compared to Case A and Case C, therefore similar profiles to Case B should be targeted to receive assistance after cross-check to ensure the case has not received the same assistance from another agency/organization.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Step 1: VAF data collection is undertaken

Step 2: Data collected is uploaded to RAIS from ODK tablets via UNHCR supplied software

Step 3: RAIS synchronization of ODK Forms and algorithm calculates vulnerability scoring

Step 4: Vulnerability scoring is available to VAF partners in the form of the VAF Module in RAIS for visualization and decision making.

Step 5: VAF data is then used for targeting, prioritization and eligibility determination for programmatic responses as needed based on sectors of intervention and geographic location of operation

Step 6: Agencies/INGOs can select their beneficiaries based on vulnerability results selecting those that are the most vulnerable

Step 7: Agencies/INGOs Cross check through RAIS via case assistance history and via existing coordination mechanisms to ensure potential beneficiaries have not already been assisted by another agency or INGO for the same intervention/purpose.

Step 8: Beneficiaries not previously assisted can then be assisted and assistance instance uploaded to RAIS via bulk-upload module.

Step 9: If cases are ineligible to receive assistance and would like to request re-assessment they can contact the UNHCR hotline to appeal.

HOW MANY ASSESSMENTS HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN?

May 2014 to February 2017

- 136,829 VAF assessments have been undertaken on urban Syrian refugee cases in Jordan
- 35,359 VAF assessments of the above figure are duplicate assessments (cases that have been re-assessed as a result of contacting the UNHCR hotline and appealing / or based on change in circumstance and/or change in family composition etc.)
- 101,470 VAF assessments of the total number are considered to be unique assessments, estimated number of individuals that have been assessed is 341,018 (again subject to change due to alteration in case composition.)

VAF DATA USED IN OPERATIONAL INTERVENTIONS:

- Eligibility and prioritization for DAFI scholarships
- Determining eligibility and prioritization for unconditional cash assistance (i.e. UNICEF Child cash grants)
- Determining eligibility and prioritization for monthly cash assistance/ regular cash assistance
- Winterization gap analysis, budgetary forecasting and identifying how many individuals within each governorate are in desperate need of winterization assistance
- Identification and prioritization of beneficiaries for Shelter rehabilitation
- Identification and prioritization of beneficiaries for WASH interventions
- Identification and prioritization of beneficiaries for Cash for rent
- Identification and prioritization of beneficiaries for Shelter renovation
- Eligibility and prioritization of beneficiaries to receive Food vouchers in Urban areas; and
- Aided as additional UNHCR criteria and selection process for Resettlement programme.
- Identification of cases that are ranked either highly or severely vulnerable in regards to missing documentation

WHO IS USING THE VAF IN JORDAN IN AN OPERATIONAL CONTEXT?

Acronym	Agency
ACF	Action Contre La faim
ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
CARE	CARE International
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
GRC	German Red Cross
ICMC	International Catholic Migration Commission
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross/Crescent
IOCC	International Orthodox Christian Charities
LWF	The Lutheran World Federation
MECI	Middle East Children's Institute
MEDAIR	Medair
MC	Mercy Corps
NICCOD	Nippon International Cooperation for Community Development
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PLAN	Plan international
PU-AMI	Première Urgence - Aide Médicale Internationale
WRG	World Relief Germany
WFP	World Food Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees