

2018-2019 Regional Winterization Programme – Final Report

September 2018 - March 2019 / Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt

- With thanks to the generous contributions received from donors, UNHCR was able to provide winterization assistance to its entire target of those in need.
- The winterization programme was implemented from September 2018 to March 2019. UNHCR completed distribution of most of the winterization assistance by January 2019.
- Early planning, preparation and procurement allowed UNHCR to reach its entire target and, wherever possible, to allow beneficiaries to receive their assistance as early as possible to prepare for the harsh winter.
- In addition to its regular programme, UNHCR provided emergency assistance to the most vulnerable persons affected by storms in Lebanon and floods in Syria & Iraq.

3.6 million Syrian and Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees provided with winterization assistance: 2.8 million Syrians and over 836,000 Iraqis **(100% of planned beneficiaries)**

USD 198 million
total budget for the winterization programme

67% of winter assistance delivered in the form of cash directly to IDPs and refugees, 33% in the form of in-kind winter specific core relief items (CRIs).



Children play in the snow at an informal settlement in Aarsal, Lebanon. ©UNHCR/Diego Ibarra Sánchez/January 2019

UNHCR's winterization strategy focuses on three broad areas of intervention:



Provision of seasonal cash assistance for vulnerable families to meet their additional needs during the winter months.



Provision of core relief items specific to winter such as high thermal blankets, plastic sheets, heaters and gas cylinders, and winter clothes.



Winterization of shelter including shelter weather-proofing and repairs, and improvements to drainage systems and other infrastructure in camps and informal settlements.

The winterization programme is implemented through UNHCR's own staff, government agencies, partners, and community outreach volunteers in coordination with the broader inter-agency response platforms.

SYRIA

Persons of concern assisted

Type of assistance

Syrians*  **1,275,000** persons assisted

in-kind **100 %**

Iraqis**  **22,958** persons assisted

cash **100 %**

*Includes 1.2 million Syrian IDPs, returnees and host community members reached by UNHCR operations inside Syria, and 75,000 IDPs through cross-border operation from Turkey. **The figures for Iraqis include refugees of other nationalities.

- By the end of March 2019, UNHCR assisted more than 1.27 million people with winterization assistance in Syria including through cross-border operations from Gaziantep (Turkey). Some 1.2 million Syrian IDPs, returnees and host community members (240,000 families) have been reached from inside Syria in 13 governorates. UNHCR also provided emergency winterization assistance to the new arrivals in Al-Hol camp, north-east Syria. In February, UNHCR took part in the largest ever interagency convoy to deliver desperately-needed aid including winterization assistance to more than 40,000 people stranded in the Rukban makeshift settlement in south-eastern Syria, on the border with Jordan. In addition, four per cent of winterization assistance was kept as emergency stock to respond to ongoing emergencies in northeast Syria, Afrin and possible displacement from Idlib.
- UNHCR adopted the non-food item (NFI) sector's needs-based distribution policy in which specific items were provided to families according to their needs instead of full winterization package. This included high thermal blankets, sleeping bags, additional plastic sheets, and winter clothes. Assistance was prioritized for newly displaced vulnerable families (including people displaced multiple times), people living in a difficult conditions, spontaneous and self-organized returnees, as well as people in newly accessible locations who have not been assisted in the past.
- Meanwhile, UNHCR Syria completed its winterization programme for refugees and asylum-seekers from Iraq and other countries and reached 22,958 individuals (7,200 families) by end-February. An one-off cash assistance of USD 54 was provided to the families to cover additional expenses during winter, such as for fuel, electricity, blankets and clothing.
- Between October 2018 and February 2019, a total of 75,000 vulnerable people were assisted with 15,000 winterization core relief items (CRI) kits in north-west Syria by UNHCR and its partners through cross-border interventions from Gaziantep. As part of the flood emergency response, 82 damaged tents in IDP sites were replaced and an additional 4,000 emergency CRI kits were distributed. Close communication with the UNHCR-led Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) and Shelter/NFI Clusters was maintained to coordinate the response, prevent duplication in assistance, and target the locations where the need was highest. The main challenge encountered by UNHCR and its partners during the winterization was the suspension of verification and distribution activities for a couple of days in January and February due to the security conditions in north-west Syria.

Monitoring in Syria

Assessment and monitoring visits were conducted during distributions by partners, as well as post-distribution monitoring (PDM) interviews held with beneficiaries and dedicated focus group discussions. These exercises helped in receiving feedback from beneficiaries in order to improve delivery performance and quality of items and to identify needs and gaps in conjunction with partners. In particular the early commencement of winterization implementation in September 2018 was well received by both partners and beneficiaries.

Monitoring of cross-border assistance

The third-party PDM was conducted in December 2018 and some 96 per cent of those surveyed were satisfied with the received assistance and 84.5 per cent of beneficiaries reported that all the items in the kit were useful. On the basis of the results of early PDMs during implementation, items that were not found useful by beneficiaries were removed from the winter kits going forward.

LEBANON

Persons of concern assisted

Type of assistance

Syrians  **899,260** persons assisted

cash **100 %**

Iraqis  **9,621** persons assisted

cash **100 %**

- UNHCR completed its winterization programme in Lebanon in December 2018 and provided cash assistance to 167,339 vulnerable Syrian refugee families (899,260 individuals) and 2,539 refugee families (9,621 persons) from Iraq and other countries.
- Assistance was provided through the common card and funds could be withdrawn from any ATM in Lebanon to ensure that families had time to procure necessary supplies for the winter months. To avoid delays in provision of assistance, UNHCR worked simultaneously on validation of beneficiaries, card and pin distribution and loading of winter assistance to ATM cards. In addition, UNHCR expanded the use of iris scanning to physically validate refugees benefitting from cash assistance, to ensure that the right families were in possession of the right cards and received the assistance they were entitled to.
- In order to ensure uninterrupted provision of information to refugees during this crucial time, the Call Centre worked extended hours (from 8AM – 8PM) with some 50 operators, to address queries and provide feedback related to winterization assistance while maintaining its regular service to the refugee population.
- In addition to its regular programme, UNHCR also provided emergency winterization assistance to families affected by the two winter storms that hit Lebanon in January, impacting over 47,000 people in 678 sites across the country. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Affairs, over 60 actors from the inter-agency coordination structure responded to the disaster and provided emergency shelter assistance and core relief items (CRIs). UNHCR provided blankets, mattresses, plastic sheets and weather-proofing shelter kits for some 17,000 refugee families.
- Winterization assistance was coordinated by the Basic Assistance Working Group composed of UN agencies, NGOs and the government (through the Ministry of Social Affairs). The Lebanon One Unified Inter-organizational System for E-Cards (LOUISE) played a key role in multi-agency collaboration and coordination.

Monitoring in Lebanon

The PDM exercise was conducted in Lebanon through household visit surveys and focus group discussions. Themes in the survey included winter needs, expenditure, coping strategies, food consumption, debt, livelihoods, winter cash spending, community relations, access to ATMs, challenges with card usage, and complaints and feedback. The findings highlighted the complementarity between different assistance packages including winter cash assistance (WinCAP), food, and multi-purpose cash assistance (MCAP). This is evident firstly in terms of wellbeing where a larger proportion of families that only receive WinCAP have lower wellbeing scores compared to those who receive multiple types of cash assistance. This was also true in terms of food consumption scores and expenditure patterns. Nonetheless, almost all families (regardless of assistance) had to resort to negative coping strategies, highlighting the stress and hardship that comes with the winter season.

JORDAN

Persons of concern assisted

Type of assistance

Syrians*  **336,052** persons assisted

cash **97%** in-kind **3%**

Iraqis**  **23,483** persons assisted

cash **100%**

**The figures for Iraqis include refugees of other nationalities.

- UNHCR began its winterization programme in October with the distribution of winter assistance in Zaatari and Azraq camps and also in urban areas. In camps, UNHCR reached 109,821 individuals (about 24,052 families) with cash for gas to cover the cost of gas refills and cash for winterization to address shelter maintenance. Distribution of heaters and high thermal blankets in both camps reached 48,900 individuals.
- In urban areas, 227,513 Syrian refugees (53,424 families) received a one-off cash assistance (per family) from October to December 2018 through the multi-agency Common Cash Facility system. UNHCR focused its winterization efforts on its existing beneficiaries, families who are on the waiting list for cash assistance, and those highly vulnerable families not receiving regular monthly assistance. Early identification of winter funds allowed UNHCR to spread winter funding to a larger portion of the population this year.
- UNHCR and other partners utilized the Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) to identify eligible families for winter assistance. A range of emergency mechanisms were put in place to assist refugees during the winter months, including through the UNHCR call centre. Around 72 per cent of beneficiaries who contacted the helpline with a winterization query were able to resolve it using the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, which allowed timely support for the large volume of calls received.
- For the Iraqis and refugees of other nationalities, a one-off cash assistance payment at household level was provided to 23,483 individuals from October to December 2018 through the Common Cash Facility system.

Monitoring in Jordan

The inter-agency Winterization Task Force created a set of indicators and a common data collection tool to conduct a common PDM exercise. UNHCR developed templates for data collection, to ensure easy aggregation of the data. The common PDM questionnaire was used by each organization after cash distribution, and the anonymized data sets were uploaded to a centralized data base for immediate analysis by all contributing partners once PDMs were completed. The overall PDM is currently being reviewed ahead of release.



Syrian refugee men in Zaatari Camp cycle through the mud and rain to go to work. UNHCR/L.Carlisle

IRAQ

Persons of concern assisted

Type of assistance

Syrians*  **245,835** persons assisted

cash **85%** in-kind **15%**

Iraqis  **778,824** persons assisted

cash **79%** in-kind **21%**

*Mostly Syrian refugees but also includes refugees of other nationalities

- Throughout the 2018-2019 winter season, UNHCR provided critical support to Syrian refugee and Iraqi IDP families in camps and out of camps in the form of cash and winter-appropriate CRIs including blankets, plastic sheets, jerry cans for kerosene, and heating stoves. By the end of March, a total of 12,797 Syrian refugee families (63,985 individuals) were provided with essential winter items and 36,370 Syrian refugee families (181,850 individuals) received a one-off cash grant. In addition, 56,189 Iraqi IDP families (337,134 individuals) received seasonal CRIs and 73,615 IDP families (441,690 individuals) received a one-off cash grant. As part of collaborative efforts and due to capacity limitations of other partners, UNHCR stepped in to provide cash assistance to close to 7,000 additional families who had been identified by the Cash Working Group as in need of assistance.
- Throughout its interventions, UNHCR coordinated closely with government authorities, UN agencies and humanitarian actors to maximize efficiency and avoid duplication. Hotlines were available throughout distribution to allow beneficiaries to seek assistance and report complaints or problems faced in receiving their grants.
- To deliver cash more efficiently and effectively, two financial service providers were engaged, allowing the scale-up of implementation. Mobile money solutions provided safe transfers to beneficiaries, enabling flexible collection. The financial risk was also managed by mobile money solutions companies, including cash delivery in hard-to-reach areas and camps. UNHCR, in close collaboration with financial service providers, also addressed remuneration challenges and successfully managed to open mobile money wallets for those beneficiaries who lacked some key customer information. To strengthen the efficiency of implementation, in future UNHCR plans to introduce advanced verification of beneficiary lists and iris scanning for registration and cash collection.

Monitoring in Iraq

Throughout the implementation period, UNHCR carried out monitoring visits and focus group discussions with beneficiaries. Cash assistance was also monitored by cash-out agents. In addition, UNHCR has invested in gathering evidence on the impact of cash for winterization by engaging an external partner for the PDM exercise. PDM is ongoing and will allow UNHCR to improve the quality of its service delivery and to ensure accountability to its persons of concern in the next winter assistance exercise.



A Syrian refugee in Domiz-1 Camp, Duhok, registers his family for UNHCR's Cash for Winter programme. UNHCR/Rasheed Hussein

EGYPT

Persons of concern assisted

Type of assistance

Syrians  **83,061** persons assisted

cash **100 %**

Iraqis  **465** persons assisted

cash **100 %**

- As of end-February 2019, a total of 83,061 Syrian refugees (29,694 families) and 465 Iraqi refugees (236 families) had collected their grants for winter assistance provided by UNHCR, indicating a collection rate of 90 per cent for Syrians and 39 per cent for Iraqis. The assistance was paid through the Egypt Post Office and refugees had until mid-February 2019 to withdraw their cash grant from one of the over 4,200 Post Office branches spread across Egypt. The main distribution areas were Greater Cairo, Alexandria and Damietta which have the highest concentration of refugees.
- Winter assistance was coordinated through the Basic Needs and Cash Working Group. In addition to the above, UNHCR through Caritas provided winter assistance to some 3,163 unaccompanied and separated children of all nationalities with funds received from UNICEF.
- To respond to concerns and enquiries from refugees, UNHCR's infoline has dedicated call attendants who respond to calls and provide information in seven languages (English, Arabic, French, Amharic, Oromo, Somali and Tigrinya). UNHCR utilized its ProGres database to target refugees and asylum-seekers for assistance, with eligibility criteria developed by a multi-functional team. This ensured that statistical analysis on vulnerability thresholds was informed by protection experts and community consultations with refugees.
- A survey involving cases of uncollected assistance was undertaken and data analysis is ongoing to understand the low collection rate particularly by Iraqi refugees and to address any issues that are identified in future programmes.

Monitoring in Egypt

Post-distribution monitoring was conducted in March and data analysis is being finalized. Initial key findings indicate that 88 per cent of respondents were able to access the market for the items and services they needed. However, a general increase in the cost of goods and services was noted countrywide. Before receiving winter assistance, 98 per cent of respondents were resorting to negative coping mechanisms to meet their needs of whom 73 per cent reported postponing the purchase of necessary clothing items. The top three items of expenditure reported were related to rent, food and clothing. Overall, 87 per cent of the respondents mentioned that the assistance positively impacted their living conditions; 96 per cent indicated that the support had to some extent reduced their financial burden and, correspondingly, 78 per cent reported that it had improved their psychosocial well-being.

Donors: UNHCR is grateful to the donors who have contributed to the winterization programme for the Syrian and Iraqi IDPs and refugees with unearmarked and earmarked funds as well as those who have contributed directly to the operations.

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