

2019-2020 Regional Winterization Programme – Final Report

September 2019 - March 2020 / 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 prioritized target of those in need.

The winterization programme was implemented from September 2019 to March 2020. UNHCR completed distribution of most of the winterization assistance by January 2019.

In addition to its regular programme, UNHCR provided emergency assistance to the most vulnerable persons affected by storms in Lebanon and floods in Syria and Iraq.

Early planning, preparation and procurement allowed UNHCR and its partners to reach beneficiaries and, wherever possible, to allow beneficiaries to receive their assistance on time to prepare for the harsh winter.

As of end-March, nearly 3 million Syrian and Iraqi IDPs and refugees were reached with winterization assistance in the region, mainly in the form of cash payments, winter specific core relief items and shelter materials.



3 million vulnerable people reached with winterization assistance this season

including more than

2.5 million Syrians



458,000 Iraqis including refugees of other nationalities

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.

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 provision of seasonal cash assistance does not overlap with the provision of core relief items and shelter assistance for winter.


SYRIA

Persons of concern assisted (as of 31 March)

Type of assistance

Syrians  **811,833** persons assisted

in-kind **100 %**

Iraqis & refugees of other nationalities  **15,010** persons assisted

cash **100 %**

- In Syria, UNHCR's winterization campaign started at the beginning of September 2019. By the end of March 2020, UNHCR Syria completed its winterization programme with assistance provided to 811,833 Syrian IDPs, returnees and host communities (173,366 families). Almost 2.5 million winterization items were distributed including high thermal blankets, additional plastic sheeting, sleeping bags, winter jackets and winter clothing kits in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Hama, Homs, Aleppo, Tartous, Latakia, Dar'a, As-Sweida, Quneitra, Al-Hassakeh, Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor governorates. This winter, UNHCR Syria had planned to reach 1 million IDPs, returnees and host communities (200,000 families) throughout the country. UNHCR reached over 80 per cent of its planned target. Approximately 15 per cent of the winterization items were kept as a contingency stock to respond to potential emergencies in north-west Syria as well as in newly accessible areas of Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa governorates.
- UNHCR completed the provision of winterization assistance to all out-of-camp refugees and asylum-seekers in Syria in December 2019. The total number of assisted refugees was 15,010 individuals (5,338 families). UNHCR delivered one-off winterization cash grants (total value of USD 2.1 million) to people who were eligible for multi-purpose cash grants (MPCG) through ATM cards and to those who were not eligible for MPCG (non-ATM cardholders) through vouchers.
- As part of the UN cross-border operation from Turkey, between 1 October and 31 December 2019, UNHCR assisted around 50,000 individuals (10,000 vulnerable households) with winter non-food item (NFI) kits. This assistance was coordinated with the Shelter and NFI Cluster to target areas where the needs were highest and to prevent any overlap in the provision of assistance. The winter NFI kits consisted of high thermal blankets, plastic tarpaulins, solar lamps, jerry cans, foam mattresses, kitchen set, hygiene parcels, sanitary pads and baby diapers.

Monitoring in Syria

In Syria, monitoring and verification mechanisms were in place throughout the winterization programme. UNHCR, together with its partners, regularly attended distribution activities, met beneficiaries and collected feedback on the winterization response. During the winterization programme, a total of 276 post distribution monitoring (PDM) exercises were conducted by UNHCR field staff members and/or by UNHCR's partners, in addition to 120 monitoring visits by partners. These exercises allowed UNHCR to receive feedback from the beneficiaries in order to improve deliveries and the quality of items. PDM also helped identify needs and gaps in coordination with partners. In March, some PDM exercises had to be put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions.

Monitoring of cross-border assistance

Winterization assistance was monitored by both UNHCR partners and a UNHCR contracted third-party monitoring service provider. The PDM was conducted over two rounds during November and December 2019. The PDM included 2,078 beneficiaries from 35 communities and camps, representing 30 per cent of those who received assistance. While all the beneficiaries were content with the assistance, 99.5 per cent requested for the provision of other items such as winter clothing, heating items and fuel, in addition to those already received. An additional PDM by a UNHCR contracted third-party service provider was conducted in November and December 2019. A total of 350 beneficiaries (178 households) in seven distribution sites said they considered the selection process as fair. In terms of quality of the received items, 83 per cent of respondents described them as good, while 17 per cent of survey respondents stated the items were of medium quality. When asked if they still used the items from the NFI kit, 94 per cent of respondents stated that they were still using them.

LEBANON

Persons of concern assisted (as of 31 March)

Type of assistance

Syrians  Over **900,000** persons assisted

cash & in-kind

Iraqis & refugees of other nationalities  **6,741** persons assisted

cash **100 %**

- In Lebanon, the delivery of winter cash assistance began in November 2019 and was completed in January 2020. Implementation was impacted by the exceptional circumstances prevailing in the country and the deteriorating financial situation. The operation continued to witness a higher impact on programmes due to the reduced liquidity and availability of cash, increased pressure on banking services, and an unstable exchange rate at non-official markets.
- To ease overcrowding at ATMs, UNHCR staggered the loading of winter cash assistance over several days. The Office also increased the capacity and working hours of the call centre to maintain and strengthen communication with refugees.
- Winterization assistance was also extended to host communities, targeting individuals, communities and institutions. Poor Lebanese families received a one-off cash grant or fuel vouchers to the value of USD 200 per family. Support to communities consisted of procurement of fire-fighting trucks, cleaning of canals and provision of bins for solid waste management. Support with fuel and medicines was also provided to local hospitals.
- In total, close to 1 million people including Syrian refugees, refugees of other nationalities and vulnerable Lebanese received winter cash assistance during the 2019-2020 winterization programme.

Monitoring in Lebanon

Data collection for post distribution and outcome monitoring took place during February and March 2020. A total of 1,261 refugee families were interviewed through household visits to assess the impact of assistance on beneficiaries and the extent to which families were able to access the assistance with safety and dignity. The PDM findings highlighted the complementarity between different assistance packages including winter cash assistance, food, and multi-purpose cash assistance. This was evident firstly in terms of per capita monthly expenditures compared to those who received multiple types of cash assistance. Families who received assistance were also able to spend more on heating than those who were not assisted or received only one type of assistance. The food consumption patterns also showed more positive outcomes with 60 per cent of families having acceptable food consumption patterns compared to 51 per cent among the non-assisted families. Nonetheless, almost all families (regardless of assistance) had to resort to negative coping strategies in trying to meet their basic needs, highlighting the stress and hardship that comes with the winter season.



In Lebanon, single mother Sobhye Abed Majeed El Omar receives cash assistance from UNHCR. Photo © UNHCR Lebanon


JORDAN

Persons of concern assisted (as of 31 March)

Type of assistance

Syrians  **343,129** persons assisted

cash 100 %

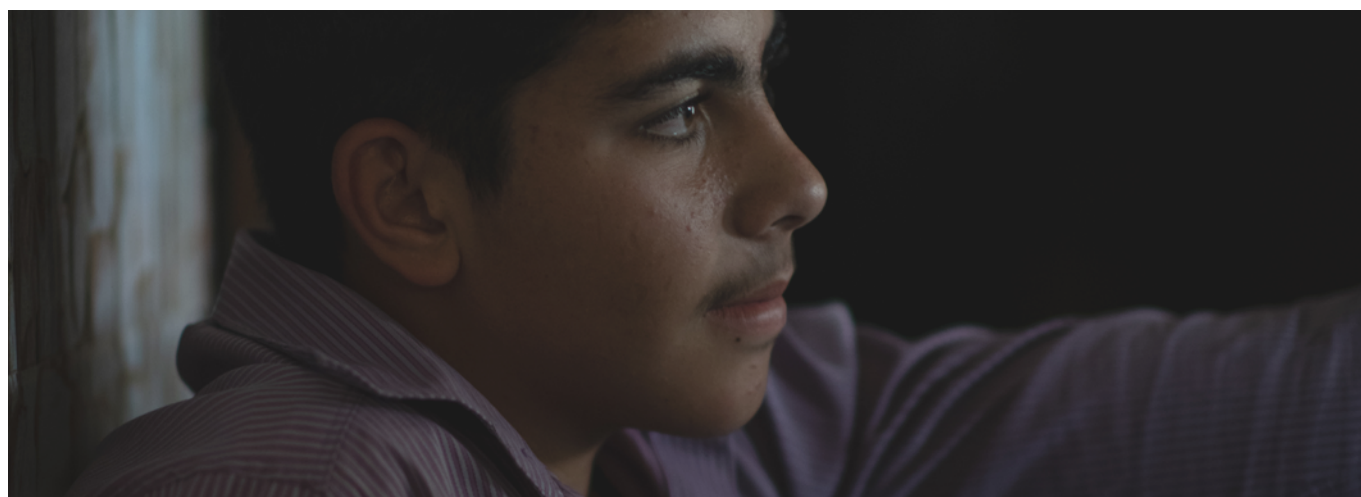
Iraqis & refugees of other nationalities  **29,473** persons assisted

cash 100 %

- In Jordan, UNHCR completed its winterization assistance programme in December 2019. UNHCR provided cash-based winterization assistance to approximately 370,000 individuals (more than 90,000 families) including over 70,000 refugee households in urban areas and over 22,000 households in the refugee camps of Zaatari and Azraq. Families received cash grants totalling JOD 241 (approximately USD 340), to cover the cost of a gas heater, a gas cannister, gas refills for four months, and blankets for each family member.
- UNHCR adheres to a 'one refugee' approach (not discriminating against different nationalities/origins) and remains one of the few agencies that continues to assist non-Syrian refugees in Jordan, including Iraqis, Yemenis, Sudanese and Somalis among other nationalities. Winterization assistance included approximately 15,000 non-Syrian families in urban areas from the total of 90,000 families supported in winter. Special attention was given to female-headed households, the elderly, people with disabilities, children who are alone or otherwise at risk, and people with medical needs as well as survivors of violence or torture. The multi-agency Winterization Task Force, co-chaired by UNHCR, coordinated winter interventions in urban areas. Strong collaboration between members of the task force ensured uniform criteria for selection of beneficiaries, standard assistance packages for transparency and fairness, and avoidance of duplication of assistance.

Monitoring in Jordan

Through regular PDM, UNHCR kept track of how cash assistance was used, its impact on recipient well-being, and gathered key feedback from beneficiaries on the cash distribution mechanism. The [PDM of winter assistance](#) was undertaken in January, with a representative sample size of 566 individuals of all refugee nationalities. The majority of respondents (93 per cent) accessed their winterization assistance through the iris scan system. The distribution of cash assistance was staggered throughout November and December 2019 to reduce crowding, and the amount must be withdrawn within a three-week period. Ninety-seven per cent of respondents reported having spent their winterization cash assistance by the time of the interview in mid-January 2020. The majority of respondents noted that the assistance had not allowed them to fully cover their winter needs (463 out of 565), but 94 per cent stated that the winterization cash assistance had improved their living conditions during the winter, with cash the preferred mode of distribution.



Ri'bal, 15, is living with his family in Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. "Even when we have the heater working, it doesn't make a difference, it only lasts for one or two hours and we never feel truly warm." Photo by UNHCR / L. Carlisle

IRAQ

Persons of concern assisted (as of 31 March)

Type of assistance

Syrians  **176,825** persons assisted

cash **100 %**

Iraqis & refugees of other nationalities  **405,938** persons assisted

cash **100 %**

- In total, during the winterization programme for 2019-2020, over 582,760 individuals (103,710 families) received winter cash assistance. UNHCR reached 100 per cent of the prioritized households for assistance with the available funding resources. UNHCR assisted 176,825 Syrian refugees (35,365 families) and 20,750 refugees from other nationalities (4,150 families) to ensure they could meet their basic and most urgent needs through the provision of winter cash assistance. UNHCR winterization assistance targeted the most vulnerable families living both in refugee camps, urban, peri-urban, and rural areas based on socio-economic targeting. Female-headed households accounted for 26 per cent of the winter assistance recipients. Each household received IQD 480,000 (USD 400). IDPs and returnees living in camps and urban areas also received assistance this winter. A total of 385,188 IDPs (64,198 families) benefitted from the winter cash assistance. Each family received IQD 240,000 (USD 200). Around 28 per cent of the IDP beneficiaries were in urban areas while 72 per cent were in IDP camps.
- The implementation of cash-based interventions in Iraq, including winterization assistance, was affected by the exceptional circumstances in the country due to demonstrations and mass protests. Following calls for a general strike in October 2019, telecommunication, banking, and transportation systems were periodically blocked. This resulted in a lack of liquidity and the availability of cash. To mitigate the problem, UNHCR, in close collaboration with financial service providers, distributed cash assistance through a phased approach as well as introduced additional distributions during the weekends to ease the pressure on service providers and avoid tensions within communities. Moreover, in March 2020, local authorities and the national government of Iraq imposed restrictions on movements to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As a result, some beneficiaries were affected by the measures and were unable to cash-out. SMS were sent to those who were affected by the lockdown measures to assure them that their assistance could be withdrawn once movement restrictions were lifted.
- Winter cash assistance was provided using UNHCR's fraud-proof biometric iris-scanning system or mobile e-wallets, either in the premises of the financial service providers or in the camps through cash distribution events. Special attention was provided to female-headed households, the elderly, and people with medical needs. UNHCR coordinated closely with the Shelter and NFI Clusters, as well as with the Cash Working Group, to ensure the smooth and timely implementation of the winterization programme.



Monitoring in Iraq

UNHCR's winterization assistance programme in Iraq was followed by PDM. The PDM was carried out by a partner, based on the data provided by UNHCR on the beneficiaries selected for the programme. The purpose was to assess the effectiveness and impact of assistance provided by UNHCR. The data collection was done through phone surveys. While the specific data collection for IDPs and returnees is still ongoing, the PDM among the refugee population in Iraq found that 92 per cent of refugee beneficiary households found the assistance to be helpful in covering their winter needs. Only 8 per cent reported not finding the assistance useful and also reported dissatisfaction primarily over the low amount of the assistance received. Refugee beneficiary households also reported a decrease in resorting to negative coping strategies after receiving cash assistance to meet their priority needs during the winter months. Refugee beneficiary households reported spending the winter cash assistance primarily on winter items. Around 96 per cent of households reported that the assistance was distributed on time to meet their winter needs. In addition, 99 per cent of all households reported that winter items were available for purchase in nearby markets. Finally, almost all beneficiaries were either satisfied or very satisfied with the distribution process of winterization assistance.

EGYPT

Persons of concern assisted (as of 31 March)

Type of assistance

Syrians  65,028 persons assisted	cash 100 %
Iraqis  582 persons assisted	cash 100 %

- In Egypt, the distribution of winter assistance started in December 2019 and continued through the end of February 2020. As of end-February, 65,028 Syrian refugees and 582 Iraqi refugees had collected their winterization assistance. In addition, UNHCR supported 53,693 refugees of other nationalities including Sudanese, South Sudanese, Ethiopians and Eritreans with winterization assistance. Overall, UNHCR remained the primary actor providing winter assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt.
- The 2019-2020 winterization programme marked a high collection rate across the different nationalities due to enhanced targeting criteria and building on lessons learned from previous years. The overall collection rate for the winter assistance reached 97 per cent, representing a significant increase compared to last year's winter programme. The beneficiary selection process was complemented by an extensive vulnerability assessment which allowed for large-scale data collection on refugee living conditions. In addition, building on lessons learned from last year's programming, a waiting list was planned at the onset of the programme to account for non-collection. A total of 22,271 individuals (7,790 cases) were added to the programme after analysing non-collection trends.
- The assistance was paid through the Egypt Post Office and refugees were provided with a one-month collection period between mid-December 2019 and mid-January 2020 to withdraw their cash grant from one of the over 4,200 Post Office branches across Egypt. Refugees and asylum-seekers added later on from the waiting list had a three-week collection period until the end of February. All eligible refugees and asylum-seekers were notified on the assistance duration via customized SMS sent in several languages including Arabic, English, Oromo and Somali.

Monitoring in Egypt

A one-month PDM was conducted to collect information on the outcomes of the winterization assistance programme, as well as to assess the quality of the distribution process. The PDM commenced at the beginning of March 2020 and was scheduled to take place until the end of the month using face-to-face interviews carried out at partner premises. However, heavy storms followed by the COVID-19 pandemic posed some challenges and phone interviews were conducted in the second half of March. A total of 154 cases were sampled, of whom 54.5 per cent of interviews were face-to-face, 43.5 per cent were conducted via phone, and 2 per cent were interviewed via home visits due to potential protection risks. Around 97 per cent of respondents reported being safe when accessing the financial service provider, while nearly 87 per cent confirmed that no problems were faced when receiving, withdrawing or spending the cash assistance. The PDM also showed that 96 per cent of respondents were able to find the goods and services needed in the market, despite the high inflation of prices in local markets. The main items of expenditure were related to health, clothing, food and rent. Of note, three-quarters of recipients spent their winter assistance on clothing needs.



Om Mustafa is a 69- year-old woman who lives with her husband in Bkas village in Lattakia governorate. She returned to her house and found it partially damaged. They had to settle in using temporary arrangements. “We returned, but we couldn’t find our belongings. Everything has gone with the crisis!” she told UNHCR staff during a core relief item/winterization distribution exercise.

“Although my husband is 75 years old, he is still working in our farm. The items included in the flood response kit were very helpful and the winterization items helped us to stay in our beloved home,” she added. Om Mustafa appreciated the assistance provided by UNHCR.

Photo by UNHCR / Reem Al-Raie

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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