Key Highlights
Post-Distribution Monitoring Survey
Integrated Social Protection Programme for Children with Disabilities
RURAL DAMASCUS GOVERNORATE, SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC, MAY 2022
I- About the Integrated Social Protection Programme for Children with Disabilities

The Integrated Social Protection Programme for Children with Disabilities combines regular and unconditional cash transfers with case management services to facilitate the referral of children with disabilities to available social services and increase their social inclusion. It is the largest social protection intervention for children with severe disabilities in Syria.

The programme promotes an integrated social protection model with links to public services, and a view to prepare the ground for a future transition from an emergency response to a nationally-owned social protection scheme.

The programme is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL) through a network of specialized national non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Since the programme started in 2016, over 30,000 children with severe disabilities – and over 150,000 people in families of children with disabilities – have benefited from the programme in seven governorates. In Rural Damascus Governorate, the programme is implemented in partnership with Al Qutayfah Health Charity.

How does it work? For a 24-month period, families of children with disabilities receive a regular quarterly transfer equivalent to US$ 40 per month or US$ 120 per quarter. In addition, each child is followed throughout the period by a trained case manager.

How are children with severe disabilities identified? The national registry and identification of children with disabilities have been significantly affected by the conflict. To address this situation, UNICEF identifies eligible children through a network of national NGOs, community platforms, community and religious leaders and outreach activities/field assessments. To be enrolled in the programme, children must provide a recent medical report attesting to her/his disability or a national disability card.

II - About the survey

The Post-Distribution Monitoring Survey was conducted in January and February 2022 in Rural Damascus Governorate among 260 families of children enrolled in the programme. The children surveyed were part of a cohort of 711 children who were enrolled in the programme in September 2021 across 9 of the 11 districts of the governorate1. At the time of the survey, families and children had already received two quarterly cash payments of SYP 300,000 each in October and December 2021, as well as five months of continuous case management (September 2021 to January 2022).

Surveyed families were identified following a random sampling design according to a proportional allocation of children among the 30 sub-districts reached. The sample size was 36.5 per cent2. Data was collected between 19 January and 2 February 2022. Data was collected using KoBo3 and analyzed using SPSS.

The objectives of the survey were to:

1. Understand the socio-economic characteristics of families benefiting from the programme;
2. Assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme following five months of implementation; and
3. Collect feedback about beneficiaries’ perceptions of and satisfaction with the programme.

---

1 The districts include: Rural Damascus; Qatana; At Tall; Duma; Darayya; Al Qutayfah; Az-Zabdani; Yabroud and An Nabk
2 The sample was identified following the standard statistical formula to present a five percentage-point interval confidence and an anticipated non-response rate of five per cent. The total number of children enrolled in the programme in September 2021 (i.e. 711 children) was used as the Sampling Frame. The non-response rate was zero.
3 KoBo Toolbox is a free open-source tool for mobile data collection.
III- Demographic profile of surveyed families

There were 1,493 people in the 260 families surveyed: 54 per cent were children 0-17 years of age; 16 per cent were 18-29 years old; 11 per cent were 30-39 years old; 12 per cent were 40-49 years old; and 7 per cent were 50 years old and above (Graph 1).

There were slightly more males (52 per cent) than females (48 per cent) in surveyed families. When broken down by age groups, there were more boys than girls among children (55 per cent boys versus 45 per cent girls), while there was a notable male deficit among the age group 30-39 years old (Graph 2).

The average number of members per family was 5.74, with more members in male-headed families (5.96) than female-headed families (4.46). There were slightly more members on average in internally displaced person (IDP) families (5.86) than in resident (5.78) and returnee families (5.34).

The average age of family members was 21.9 years old.

Eighty-five per cent of families were headed by males while 15 per cent were headed by females.

The size of families greatly varied: 9 per cent of families had 3 members or less, 40 per cent had 4 to 5 members, 33 per cent had 6 to 7 members, 15 per cent had 8 to 9 members, and 3 per cent had 10 or more members (Graph 3).

The average number of children per family was 3.09.

The average number of children with disabilities per family was 1.15. Ninety per cent of families had one child with a disability, while 9 per cent had two children with disabilities and 1 per cent had three children with disabilities.

Fifty-eight per cent of families were displaced at the time of the survey, 23 per cent had returned to their areas of origin after a period of displacement and 19 per cent of families had never been displaced (Graph 4).
About 20 per cent of family members aged 6 years and above had not received any form of education; 34 per cent had achieved basic education (grades 1-5) and 27 per cent had achieved higher levels of education. There was a slightly higher proportion of men with no education (22 per cent) than women with no education (19 per cent) (Graph 5).

The average (mean) monthly expenditure among families was SYP 402,996 (or 59,671 SYP per capita). This is over 50 per cent below the Minimum Expenditure Basket, which was estimated at SYP 122,277 per capita in January 2022, or an equivalent of SYP 701,870 required for a family of 5.74 people to meet its basic needs. This illustrates the high level of vulnerability of families enrolled in the programme.

The economic profile of families, as measured by the level of families’ monthly expenditures, varied greatly: 10 per cent reported that their monthly expenditures were below SYP 300,000; 52 per cent that it was between SYP 300,000 and SYP 399,999; 24 per cent that it was between SYP 400,000 and SYP 499,999; and 14 per cent that it was above SYP 500,000 (Graph 6).

Graph 4: Displacement status of families

Graph 5: Education status of family members aged 6 years and above by sex

Graph 6: Distribution of families according to expenditure category

4 Syria Cash Working Group
At the family level, monthly expenditures were relatively homogeneous across different groups. Resident families and returnees had on average slightly lower expenditures (about SYP 398,000) than displaced families (about SYP 406,000). Male-headed families also had slightly higher expenditures (about SYP 405,000) than female-headed families (about SYP 390,000) (Graph 7). When broken down per capita, however, average expenditures were higher among female-headed families (SYP 104,000 per capita or US$ 41.6) than among male-headed families (SYP 73,000 per capita or US$ 29.2).

**Key highlight # 2: Food was the top expenditure for families, accounting for 51 per cent of their monthly expenditures, followed by fuel, accounting for 10 per cent**

The breakdown of families’ monthly expenditures was as follows: 51 per cent was spent on food; 10 per cent on fuel (cooking, heating, transportation); 8 per cent on diapers; 7 per cent each on debt repayment and health; and 4 per cent each for education and rent (Graph 8).

The share of food expenditure in Rural Damascus was much higher than the share observed in other governorates, illustrating greater economic vulnerability of families in Rural Damascus. For example, PDM surveys conducted in Al-Hasakeh and Hama Governorates indicated that monthly food expenditure was on average two and four per cent respectively. The share of fuel expenditure was also very high (10 per cent), illustrating both the recent increase in fuel price and the increased fuel consumption of families during winter months. For example, while the PDM surveys conducted in October 2021 in Al Hasakeh and Hama Governorates indicated that monthly fuel expenditure was on average two and four per cent respectively, the PDM surveys conducted in January 2022 in Aleppo and Rural Damascus indicated that it was 10 per cent in both governorates.

**Key highlight # 3: The average monthly income reported by families, excluding the cash transfer received from UNICEF, was SYP 235,558 (or US$ 94)**

The average monthly income reported by families was SYP 235,558, or about 40 per cent less than the mean monthly expenditure reported by families (SYP 402,996). The difference between income and expenditure reported by families might be related to (i) under reporting of income; (ii) exclusion of the cash transfer received from UNICEF; and (iii) increasing debt burden among families.

At the family level, the average income reported by male-headed families (242,000 SYP) was higher than among female-headed
families (199,000 SYP). Resident families had on average higher income (SYP 255,000) than returnee and displaced families (SYP 232,000 and SYP 230,000 respectively) (Graph 9). When broken down per capita, however, average reported income was higher among female-headed families (SYP 51,000 per capita or US$ 20.4) than among male-headed families (SYP 43,000 per capita or US$ 17.2).

There were important variations among families about their level of income: 32 per cent reported that their monthly income was less than SYP 200,000; 45 per cent reported that it was between SYP 200,000 and SYP 299,999; 16 per cent reported that it was between SYP 300,000 and SYP 399,999; and 7 per cent reported that it was over SYP 400,000. There were also important variations according to the sex of the family head: twice as many female-headed families (54 per cent) than male-headed families (28 per cent) reported that their monthly income was less than SYP 200,000 (Graph 10).

Regarding the source of families’ income, the most important source reported by families was regular salaries and wages (45 per cent) followed by daily wages (35 per cent), remittances, borrowing, sale of assets and/or charity (8 per cent), pension (5 per cent) and own business (2 per cent) (Graph 11).
**Key Highlight # 4: The economic dependency and vulnerability of female-headed families is much greater than of male-headed families**

There were seven times more female-headed families that were dependent on charity, borrowing, remittances and sale of assets as their most important source of income than male-headed families (Graph 12).

Greater economic dependency and vulnerability among female-headed families were also illustrated by the facts that:

- 28 per cent had no income-earner compared to only 8 per cent of male-headed households (Graph 13);
- 15 per cent were living in a dwelling that they owned compared to 48 per cent of male-headed families (Graph 14); and
they almost systematically owned fewer assets than male-headed families (Graph 15).

Key highlight # 5: The unemployment rate was almost four times higher among women than men

The overall unemployment rate among working-age family members (15 years and above) was 24 per cent: 15 per cent for men and 55 per cent for women (Graph 16).

Key highlight # 6: The housing situation of families is closely associated with the economic and displacement status of families

There was a direct correlation between the families’ housing situation and their level of expenditure. While the proportion of families living in their own accommodations was homogenous across expenditure quintile, there were notable differences in terms of whether the families were living in rented accommodations or accommodations hosted by others. For example, twice as many families in the lowest expenditure quintile were living in accommodations hosted by others than in the highest expenditure quintile. Conversely, the proportion of families renting their accommodations was much greater among families in the highest expenditure quintile than the lowest one (Graph 17).

Key highlight # 7: Reducing food intake and accommodations costs were the most common mechanisms used by families to cope with the economic hardship

The most common mechanisms cited by families were reducing food intake (portion size or number of meals) (28 per cent); reducing accommodation costs (28 per cent); choosing less preferred but cheaper food options (18 per cent); seeking humanitarian assistance from NGOs (5 per cent); receiving cash assistance / remittances from family members (5 per cent); and working more than one job and/or hazardous work (5 per cent) (Graph 18).
V- Profile of Children with Disabilities

Key highlight # 8: The most common types of disability among children were severe intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, monoplegia, Down syndrome and autism

About one third of children benefiting from the programme had severe and profound intellectual disabilities (34 per cent), followed by cerebral palsy (18 per cent); monoplegia (18 per cent); Down syndrome (9 per cent); autism (8 per cent); lower limb loss on both sides (2 per cent); and severe hearing impairment (2 per cent) (Graph 19).

Key highlight # 9: Sixty-five per cent of school-age children with disabilities have never attended school or any other form of education

Only 35 per cent of children enrolled in the programme have ever attended school or any other form of education: 20 per cent have attended formal school; 2 per cent specialized education; 11 per cent non-formal education; and 2 per cent early childhood education. There was no notable difference between boys and girls (Graph 21).
Among children who had ever attended school or any other form of education, 84 per cent reported that they attended during the 2021-2022 school year. More girls (90 per cent) than boys (81 per cent) attended during the 2021-2022 school year.

**Key highlight # 10: Health issues are the main reason children have never attended any form of education**

Among children who had never attended any form of education, 81 per cent of families quoted health barriers as the main reason children are out of school. The second most important reason quoted by families was financial barriers (36 per cent), followed by the refusal of the school to enroll the children (24 per cent) and the school not being accessible/equipped for children with disabilities (17 per cent) (Graph 22).

These findings indicate that the formal education system is often not equipped to meet the specific needs of children with severe mental disabilities. In this regard, there is a need to expand the availability of specialized education services.

**VI- Programme impact**

**Key highlight # 11: Three quarters of the cash transfer was used for food, health, clothes and diapers**

The top expenditures with the cash transfer were food (30 per cent); health (20 per cent); diapers (14 per cent each); heating (12 per cent); clothes (10 per cent); education (6 per cent); dept repayment (4 per cent); and others (4 per cent) (Graph 23).

Families were asked to list the various areas in which they have used the cash. Food was the most common expenditure cited, with 88 per cent of families reporting that they have used some of the cash for food-related expenses. This was followed by health (86 per cent); heating (60 per cent); diapers (58 per cent); clothes (44 per cent); education (28 per cent); dept repayment (18 per cent); and rent (12 per cent) (Graph 24).

**Recommendation# 1:**

Implement complementary education interventions to respond to the specific learning needs of children enrolled in the programme and support and advocate for school rehabilitation to be accessible and disability-friendly.
Key highlight # 12: Sharp increase in families’ expenditures on health and education after the receipt of the cash transfer

Families were asked to estimate their monthly expenditures on key areas for their children with disabilities before and after receiving the cash assistance. On average, families’ monthly expenditure on health for these children increased by 171 per cent while they increased by 136 per cent for education and 103 per cent on clothes and diapers.

Key highlight # 13: Increased awareness of caregivers about services available to children with disabilities thanks to the case managers

Following five months of enrolment in the programme, nearly all children had received support from case managers to access essential services (99 per cent). When asked whether they consider themselves more aware of services available compared to prior the programme, 93 per cent of families responded affirmatively. There were slightly more female-headed than male-headed families who reported a greater awareness.

The most common types of services to which case managers referred families were health (86 per cent), followed by education (26 per cent), obtaining a disability card (25 per cent) and hygiene/diapers (24 per cent). Sixteen per cent of children were also supported to access food and non-food items. Very few families reported receiving referrals to livelihood opportunities (two per cent) (Graph 25).

Key highlight # 14: Strong positive impact of the programme on increasing access to essential services for children with disabilities

Families were asked about the types of services the child with a disability began receiving after her/his enrollment in the programme. The most notable impact was in the health sector, where 24 per cent of children received rehabilitation services and physiotherapy for the first time and another 22 and 20 per cent received specialized and basic health care services for the first time respectively. After five months of enrollment in the programme, 10 per cent of children also gained access to specialized education and 1 per cent to formal education for the first time (Graph 26).
Key highlight # 15: Strong positive impact of the programme on increasing availability of disability cards: the percentage of children with a disability card increased by seven-fold thanks to the referral of case managers

All children with disabilities should have a disability card issued by DOSAL in coordination with the Department of Health (DOH). The cards facilitate access to social services and government benefits. Disability cards also provide important economic advantages such as reduced public transportation costs.

The registration process for these cards has been largely disrupted by the conflict. DOSAL and DOH have limited capacity to issue disability cards to the full backlog of children who require them. To address this situation, one of the key objectives of the programme is to support families to obtain a disability card for their children through referrals by their case managers.

Prior to the start of the programme, only 14 per cent of families reported that their child had a disability card. Following five months of participation in the programme, the percentage of children with a disability card increased seven times, reaching 91 per cent. An additional 5 per cent of families reported that at the time of the survey they were in the process of obtaining a card. Among families who reported they had obtained a disability card for their child after the start of the programme, all of them (100 per cent) reported that the card was obtained as a direct result of support from their case manager (Graph 27).
Key highlight # 16: Very high level of satisfaction with the services of case managers but need to improve beneficiaries’ satisfaction with the cash payment in terms of its frequency and amount

Satisfaction with the services provided by case managers was very high among beneficiaries (93 per cent). Beneficiaries also expressed a relatively high level of satisfaction with the proximity of the cash transfer location (70 per cent satisfied/very satisfied), the amount of the transfer (65 per cent satisfied/very satisfied) and the frequency of the transfer (67 per cent satisfied/very satisfied) (Graph 28). At the same time, there is a need to further improve beneficiaries’ satisfaction with the frequency and amount of the cash transfer.

In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the frequency of the transfer was changed from every two months to every three months to limit physical contact. International experience has shown that the more frequent and regular cash transfers are, the more they help smooth household consumption and the more positive impact they have. While more frequent transfers are highly desirable, the limited availability of the financial service provider (FSP) in Rural Damascus prevents an increase in the frequency of the transfers for the time being.

The amount of the transfer (US$ 40 monthly) has remained the same since the programme started in end 2016. The value of US$ 40 in January 2022 was about 21 per cent less than its 2016 real value in local currency. In this regard, there is a need to review the amount of the transfer provided to families.

Recommendation# 2:
Pending greater availability of FSPs in the governorate, introduce more frequent transfers

Recommendation# 3:
Review the cash transfer amount and continuously index it to inflation
POST-DISTRIBUTION MONITORING SURVEY
INTEGRATED SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES