Winter response 2022-2023
Cash assistance for highly vulnerable families
Monitoring usage of the first tranche of cash assistance

Key Highlights
Rural Damascus Governorate

UNICEF Syria, January 2023
Humanitarian “Cash Plus”
2022-2023 winter response

The response focuses on four highly vulnerable groups of families in urban and peri-urban slums where housing infrastructure has been destroyed and where there is high level of displacement:

1. Female-headed families
2. Families with children and/or adult with disabilities
3. Families with children and/or adult with a chronic illness
4. Families with orphan children

The intervention has two distinct components, which complement each other to maximize the impact of the intervention on the most vulnerable children.

1. Unconditional cash assistance: this component aims to support families cope with the economic hardship and help them meet some of the basic needs of their children during the harsh winter months. Each family is receiving a total of US$ 180 (paid in Syrian Pound equivalent). Cash is paid in three installments of US$ 60 each over the course of the winter season.

2. Referral services for vulnerable children: this component aims to identify the most vulnerable children in families and respond to their specific needs. It complements and leverages the cash assistance with dedicated support to help families respond to the specific vulnerability of their children.

- Three types of vulnerability are targeted: (i) children without legal documents; (ii) children with disabilities; and (iii) children out of schools. Children falling under these categories are systematically identified and receiving support from a community/social worker to refer them to relevant services.

- The referral component targets factors that are necessary for cash transfers to have an impact, but that cash alone does not change. For example, this includes improving the availability of supplies or services, such as obtaining a legal document or being enrolled in schools.
I- Introduction

This report highlights the findings of the rapid Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) survey conducted among families benefiting from UNICEF’s humanitarian cash for winter response in Rural Damascus governorate.

The report focuses on the use of the cash assistance among families who received their first cash payments between 24 November and 3 December 2022 (Batch # 3). It follows the two previous rapid PDM surveys conducted among families who had received their first cash payment between 2 and 13 October (Batch # 1) and those who received it between 1 and 17 November (Batch # 2).

II - Winter response in Rural Damascus

In Rural Damascus governorate, 40,000 highly vulnerable people (7,855 families) in 13 communities in Al Qutayfah and Kafr Batna sub-divisions are benefitting from the intervention.

Cash assistance: The first instalment of cash assistance was paid to all families between 2 October and 3 December 2002. Families received their payments in the same sequence as they were registered. To facilitate payments, families were grouped into three batches, or payment lists, as follows:

- Batch # 1: first cash instalment paid to 3,216 families (2-13 October)
- Batch # 2: first cash instalment paid to 3,284 families (1-17 November)
- Batch # 3: first cash instalment paid to 1,355 families (24 November-3 December)

Referral services: Of 18,166 children among the 7,855 families benefitting from the response, 1,278 children, or 7 per cent, were identified as falling under the three vulnerability criteria for referrals. These families are being followed up by community workers who are helping refer children to relevant services. Among vulnerable children, 46 per cent were children with disabilities (or 591 children). Of those, 292 children were found eligible for the Integrated Social Protection for Children with Disabilities. These families are now on the waiting list of the programme.

Rapid PDM survey

The survey was conducted between 5 and 15 December 2022 among families who had received the first tranche of cash assistance in Batch # 3.

The survey collected two indicators using Kobo: (i) how families have used the cash assistance; and (ii) at what speed families have used the cash assistance.

Families in the sample were selected according to a standard statistical formula to represent a five percentage-point confidence interval and an anticipated non-response rate of five per cent. A stratified random sampling methodology was used to achieve a proportional allocation among the eligibility criteria of the intervention.

The sample size was 450 families (33 per cent). Of families selected in the sample, six families refused to be interviewed (1.3 per cent non-response rate).
III- Key highlights

Energy was the top expenditure, accounting for one-third of the cash usage

On average, surveyed families reported that 33 per cent of the cash was used to purchase energy products such as fuel, gas, or wood for heating and/or cooking. The second-top expenditure was food (24 per cent), followed by health (18 per cent) and clothes (16 per cent). These four sectors accounted on average for over 90 per cent of the use of cash by families (Graph 1).

As observed in previous payment lists, the use of the cash assistance for education and water and sanitation was negligible, with 4 per cent and 3 per cent of the cash used in these areas respectively.

The use of cash by families for energy products increased five-folds in comparison to families who had received their first cash payment earlier in the winter response

Families who received their first cash instalment in Batch # 1 (2-13 October) spent on average five times less on energy products (7 per cent) than families who received their first cash instalment in Batch # 3 (24 November-3 December). Families who had received their first instalment in Batch # 2 (1-17 November) also had spent less on average on energy products (27 per cent) (Graph 2).

The sharp and gradual increase of cash usage for energy products reflect the colder weather and the high level of energy inflation that occurred during this period. For example, day/night temperatures in Rural Damascus dropped from 37/15 degrees on 1st October to 16/6 Degree on 1st December. During this period, the price of 1 litre of diesel increased by 50 per cent, from SYP 6,000 to SYP 9,000.

Graph 1: Use of the cash assistance

Note: “Others” include rent, debt repayment, transportation, and savings.
All families reported that part of the cash was used to purchase energy products

The proportion of families who reported using part of the cash assistance for energy increased from 19 per cent in Batch #1, to 86 per cent in Batch #2 and 100 per cent in Batch #3 (Graph 3). This confirms that families are adapting their consumptions to meet seasonal needs and that energy is a top priority need for families during wintertime.
The use of cash was closely related to the type of vulnerability affecting families

Families with a member with chronic illness or disability spent five times more on health than other families. For example, families with a child or adult with disabilities spent on average 25 per cent of the cash for health-related expenses, compared to 6 per cent among female-headed families (Graph 4). The same close correlation between health expenditures and type of vulnerability was observed in previous payments lists (Graph 5).

As observed in previous payments lists, female-headed families have used a higher portion of the cash to purchase clothes than other families.

Graph 4: Use of the cash assistance by families' characteristics

Graph 5: Use of the cash for health by types of vulnerability: comparison between lists #1, #2 and #3
The use of cash assistance to purchase food was less consistent across categories of vulnerability than in previous rounds

Only 18 per cent of the cash was used for food among families with a child or adult with disability, compared to 29 per cent among female-headed families. In previous payment lists, food expenditures were very consistent across families, regardless of their types of vulnerability. For example, average food expenditures varied between 31-34 per cent and 22-25 per cent in the first payment and second payment lists respectively (Graph 6).

Families tend to use the cash in few areas

On average, families used the cash on 3.9 fields (i.e. areas in which the cash was spent on): two per cent of families reported that they have used the entirety of the first instalment in one field only; six per cent in two fields only; 27 per cent in three fields; 37 per cent in four fields; 17 per cent in five fields; and 11 per cent on six or more fields (Graph 7).

As observed in previous rounds, female-headed families tend to prioritise the use of cash and focus on the purchase of fewer items than male-headed families: 42 per cent of female-headed families reported that they have...
used more than half of the cash to purchase one item only, while this was 33 per cent among male-headed families.

- These findings confirm the importance of providing families with unconditional assistance rather than conditional cash or vouchers/in-kind assistance. Families prioritize different areas, based on their specific vulnerability and individual needs.

On average, it took families only 3.3 days to use the first tranche of cash

The speed at which families have used the first cash instalment was very quick. It was even quicker than the speed observed among families in Payment List # 1 (4.1 days on average) and the speed observed among families in Payment List # 2 (3.6 days on average). There was no significant difference according to categories of beneficiaries.

Forty-one per cent of families reported that they used the entirety of the cash within two days only, compared to 31 per cent and 27 per cent in list # 1 and list # 2 respectively (Graph 8). These findings confirm the profound economic hardship faced by families, who are increasingly in dire need of cash to cover their basic needs.

Graph 8: Speed at which the cash assistance was used: comparison between Payment Lists # 1, # 2 and # 3

IV- Expression of thanks and funding gap

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These early contributions have been instrumental to help UNICEF address the lessons learned from past winter responses and implement the current response in a timely and quality manner. However, UNICEF has not secured enough funding to provide families with their third round of cash assistance in February 2023.

There is an immediate funding gap of US$ 2.1 million to cover the response in Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Rural Damascus governorates. Urgent assistance from partners is required in this regard.
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Batch # 3