

SAVING  
LIVES  
CHANGING  
LIVES



## After one year of UK-funded multi-purpose cash in Lebanon, what have we learned?

In November 2017, the World Food Programme (WFP) received US\$100 million (£77 million) from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID).

That money was channelled towards a new phase of WFP programming in Lebanon — multi-purpose cash for the most vulnerable Syrian refugees.

Since then, 36,000 Syrian families have been receiving cash to buy food but also a top-up intended for their other basic daily living requirements such as household supplies and medicine. For the first time, the recipient was entirely free to withdraw their cash each month and spend it however they decide. One year later, WFP and DFID are able to understand the impact that cash has made on Syrian refugees living below the poverty line.



November 2018



### WHO RECEIVES MULTI-PURPOSE CASH?

WFP has always decided eligibility for food assistance based upon a rigorous screening exercise, more commonly referred to as ‘targeting’. Until 2016, that targeting was largely dependent upon data collected directly from individual household visits— a costly and laborious process with room for error. Since WFP began combining data collected as part of the annual inter-agency needs assessment the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR), along with data from within the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ (UNHCR) refugee database. That combination is now used to establish a formula that attributes a vulnerability score to each refugee household and rank them according to it. The score is based on economic vulnerability using socio-demographic indicators.

The UK Government’s contribution is earmarked for the 140,000 people at the bottom of that ranking, essentially the poorest of the poor. An additional 40,000 individuals within the same vulnerability category receive the same multi-purpose cash from other donors, namely the European Union, Germany and Norway.

Those entitlements are US\$27 (£20) per person per month for food, in addition to a monthly top up of US\$175 (£130) for the family. That cash can be withdrawn from any automated teller machine (ATM) in Lebanon and spent on basic needs, food or otherwise. They have autonomy on how to spend the cash.

However that cash is spent, it represents a huge impact not only on the lives of those holding it, but also on Lebanon. Every dollar transferred onto an e-card and withdrawn from an ATM is then directly injected into the local economy.

Building on the results of a study conducted by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) WFP’s programme was meticulously designed over months to ensure that it is suitable for both recipients and Lebanon. Beyond suitability, the multi-purpose cash programme is frequently validated on an individual family basis. Syrian families in possession of an e-card loaded with DFID cash are called to WFP-staffed centres twice per year to ensure that the right people have the right e-cards. With cutting edge bio-metric technology, WFP ensures a level of security previously unseen, and with it provide greater assurance that donor funds are targeting struggling families that desperately need it.

### WHAT HAS WFP LEARNED?

Jumping forward, November 2018 marks the one-year anniversary of multi-purpose cash transfers in Lebanon, delivered in partnership with the UK. Following regular monitoring of the programme by WFP, a comprehensive set of results is now available. They highlight that multi-purpose cash works, and it works well.

Through said monitoring, WFP knows that families receiving DFID’s multi-purpose cash are spending the majority of it on food. In fact, **46 percent goes on food**. Most of the cash is prioritised as intended — on women’s, men’s and children’s greatest need; food. Furthermore, when asked about their most pressing needs, **90 percent of families said food is their top priority**.



Daas and Salma now have homework to finish. Photo: WFP/Edward Johnson

## FOOD FIRST

Thirty-three year old father of four Nasser explains, 'it's food first, then education.' Since receiving DFID's multi-purpose cash in 2017, he has been able to enrol two of his children, Daas and Salma in school for the first time.

Had Nasser been able to work, he could have generated additional income for the family. He is not alone — **94 percent of families receiving multi-purpose cash rely on it as their primary source of income** for a variety of reasons.

In terms of overall spending allocations across families, food is followed by rent (15 percent), medical expenses (10 percent), non-food items (5 percent), transportation (5 percent) and other costs such as education or legal fees (19 percent).

Each annual VASyR has indicated that the majority of Syrian refugees have been forced to prioritise their limited income across a number of essential needs to survive, often at the expense of their well-being. DFID's multi-purpose cash has proven to complement that unfortunate reality; the majority continues to be used to buy food and the top up covers other needs, essentially protecting the US\$27.

A benefit of cash over food handouts is that it protects dignity. The process of withdrawing cash and spending it in local shops provides a level of normalcy and integration within communities that cannot be afforded with the food boxes traditionally associated with WFP assistance. For that reason, **98 percent of Syrians stated they prefer cash over other kinds of assistance.**



## FOOD CONSUMPTION SCORE

Central to WFP's food security analyses is measuring the target group's food consumption score. It is calculated using the frequency of consumption of different food groups consumed by a household during the seven days before the survey.

Since the introduction of multi-purpose cash one year ago, three rounds of monitoring have passed, each showing a food consumption score improvement among families receiving DFID's multi-purpose cash.



Biometric validations help ensure the right people have the right food assistance. Photo: WFP/Edward Johnson

Those results build upon the findings of the BCG report, namely that refugees “who received unrestricted cash had similar or better food security than those who received food vouchers.” It goes on to suggest that refugees with access to cash can even purchase 20 per cent more food than those offered vouchers. Cash transfers have consistently proved effective and value for money in other larger studies.



A staggering **89 percent of families have accumulated debts**. DFID’s flexible cash provision is allowing families the option to help repay those bills in part, as well as put cash aside for hefty hospital bills or extra fuel for heating in winter.

There’s a hearty smell from Terkiye’s kitchen. The family of five is watching a pot of green beans and mushrooms cooking, next to a basin of smashed tomatoes. With some bread, that is the first of only two meals the family will eat today. It’s nutritious, not particularly filling, but it is what they can afford.

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After three years of WFP assistance, the family is used to spending US\$27 each on food. The habit continues and the extra US\$175 is channelled purely into their other needs. Right now, that is eight-year-old Faysal’s medical bills. He is midway through two surgeries to correct short ligaments in his feet that prevent him walking. DFID’s cash is being saved up and after one more month, the family will be able to afford the second operation and his transportation to Beirut and back to their shelter in the Bekaa Valley – something they would not have been able to do without the flexibility this programme, and simple, straight forward cash brings.



Multi-purpose cash, using vital funds from the British taxpayer, is making an important difference to the lives of tens of thousands of vulnerable Syrian families across Lebanon. Not only is it putting food on the table and paying for vital medicine for the sick and elderly, it is importantly empowering families to choose how best to meet their own needs and to plan for whatever the future may bring in months to come.

Multi-purpose cash is a big step forwards in the right direction of responsible programming, grounded in evidence, and made only possible with the financial support of the United Kingdom and its people.

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