

Winterization 2023-24 After Action Review Workshop Report

29th May 2024

Venue: Tuğcan Hotel, Gaziantep Türkiye



Report compiled and reviewed by:
SNFI Cluster Coordination Team

1. Introduction:

Approximately 1.8 million internally displaced people reside in over 1,400 self-settled camps with minimal or no access to electricity, water, sanitation networks, livelihoods, and camp management. Of the camp's population, 80% are women and children who have experienced displacement multiple times over several years. Around 800,000 individuals live in old tents, the majority of which are over two years old.

Long, cold, and unpredictable winters cause severe suffering for 2 million people living in North-West Syria without adequate shelter. 2.1 million individuals require winter assistance. There is a constant urgent need for increased winterization support to protect displaced persons from freezing temperatures. During winter, heavy snowfall, extensive flooding, leaking tents, and muddy roads exacerbate the already harsh living conditions in self-settled, overcrowded IDP sites and camps. The deteriorating economic situation and rising prices make it increasingly difficult for families to meet their winter needs throughout the season.



Photo Credit: Shafak Organization- An IDP site in NWS exposed to floods.

For many families, this season (between October 2023 to March 2024) marks their twelfth winter in displacement. The diminishing of winter support forces individuals to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as reducing food and medicine expenses and burning clothes or plastic materials which can produce toxic fumes and pose fire hazards. Cold temperatures also heighten the risk of respiratory and waterborne illnesses. These conditions have severe implications for the mental health of affected communities.

The shelter NFI cluster has, throughout the winter, encouraged donor contributions and urged its members to help keep displaced persons warm by providing fuel, cash assistance, and insulation items such as warm winter clothing, high thermal blankets, and carpets. A timely winterization response has consistently mitigated

protection risks for children, older individuals, and other vulnerable groups, and minimized negative coping mechanisms.

2. Summary of Cluster Members' presentations

Cluster members from INGOs, LNGOs, IOs, and UN agencies were invited to present and discuss best practices, lessons learned, and field feedback to improve the approach to Winterization projects in NWS. The Cash WG, SCHF representative, and some SAG members also attended the workshop.

Eight members, who had the largest winter assistance caseload, presented lessons learnt, best practices and results of their PDM findings in addition to anecdotal information they may have encountered. The order of the presentations was CARE, GOAL, UNHCR, GCs, SHAFAK, VIOLET, PIN, and NRC. A total of 35 participants from 27 organizations attended the workshop.

Below, are key summaries from the presentations:

a) Challenges

- **Disruption of Cash Flow:** During winter 2023-24, cash flow to NWS was disrupted due to new **T.C. Posta ve Telgraf Teşkilatı (**PTT) regulations. This required adjustments in transfer methods and cash withdrawals. During this period, cash distribution activities were temporarily suspended.
- **Winter cash value:** There were concerns about the value of assistance distributed not being enough to cover needs due to inflation and deteriorating macro-economic factors. According to GOAL's PDM report findings 71% of beneficiaries reported an increase in fuel costs compared to previous years.
- **Scarcity of smaller denominated bank notes:** There was a shortage of USD 50 bank notes, both in terms of quality (old, torn etc) and quantity. GOAL overcame this challenge through intensive coordination with the Financial Service Providers (FSPs) to ensure sufficient USD 50 bank notes for the targeted people.
- **Shrinking fund pool and waning donor interest:** Due to diminished competing priorities and donor interest in NWS, members were able to raise only 30% (approximately 29 million) of the financial requirement to fully support 2.1 persons in need, reaching only 760K INDs.
- **The selective targeting approach** for humanitarian assistance, specifically winterization support, continues to face resistance from local authorities and affected population. These difficulties stem from the pressing needs and challenging economic circumstances in NWS.
- Many families still use winter assistance to buy food, repay debts incurred from food purchases, or meet other family needs. This underscores the need for as much complementary assistance as possible.
- Referring to the clean fuel rather than the refined oil to be purchased through the grant. PIN distributed informational brochures indicating the type of fuel as per the SNFI cluster recommendations.

b) Lessons Learnt and Best Practices:

1. **Coordination with SNFI Cluster is essential for effective interventions:** Ensuring a high level of coordination with the SNFI Cluster, while closely working with our local partners, is essential for effective interventions. Additionally, strengthening the capacity of local organizations involved in cash distribution is crucial for sustainability and long-term impact.
2. **Clear communication and Engagement with affected population:** Providing transparent information about the cash distribution process, eligibility criteria, and timelines helps build trust and mitigates misconceptions.



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3. **Robust Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms for assessing impact and effectiveness:** Regular monitoring visits, beneficiary feedback mechanisms, and post-distribution/Third Party Monitoring (TPM) surveys can provide valuable insights for future programming, suitable modality, and improvement.
4. **Cash remains the preferred modality among assisted and affected households** as evidenced in the monitoring findings.
5. **Vulnerability Criteria:** Using inclusive guidelines mitigated any potential tension between affected vulnerable people, which in turn reduced the number of complaints concerning our winterization response.
6. One of the members suggested exchanging the amount to Turkish Lira (TRY) for the ease of transfer as the Turkish Lira (TRY) has exhibited some level of stability in the last few months.
7. Organizing the distribution using coupons that indicate the date and the queue number for each beneficiary was found to be efficient in moderating conflict
8. Coordinating across many levels, including the relevant stakeholders, local authorities, and field supervisors was encouraged, as it showed more accuracy in terms of targeting and geographical coverage.
9. Enabling beneficiaries to redeem vouchers at different retailers encourages competition in terms of quality and prices among those retailers. Additionally, organizations were actively conducting price monitoring assessments to ensure prices did not exceed thresholds and penalised those that did (if at all).
10. Using the E-voucher system greatly contributed to efficiently and effectively managing assistance to a reasonably high degree.
11. Community consultation in selecting the winter aid inventory increases efficiency and can reduce the aid-selling issue.
12. The ability to use E-vouchers multiple times contributes to a seamless redemption process, mitigates crowding at redemption points, and respects the different redemption hours for different family members.
13. Investing in strong quality control procedures ensures the effectiveness of the intervention.

c) Cash, Voucher and In-Kind Modalities

- **Winter Requires Timely Action:** Proactive preparation has proven to be highly effective. As evidenced by partners that prepared and provided assistance early, almost all cash distributions were successfully completed before **December 30, 2023**.
- **Appropriateness and Timing of Assistance:** According to GOAL PDM, **86% of respondents preferred cash assistance**, 9% preferred vouchers, and 5% preferred food kits. The same large percentage (**99%**) **found the assistance appropriate for their winter needs**.
- **In-Kind Winter Items Delivery:** Global Communities PDM indicates that 49% of the beneficiaries partially or fully used the kit. (**51% sold all of it and 13% sold part of it**). Many beneficiaries requested better quality items or additional ones. About 8% wished to replace the in-kind project with cash, 6% wished to add hygiene items, food, heating, or kitchen items to the kit. **Beneficiaries also requested an increase in the amount of assistance**.
- **Accessibility to Markets:** PDM from NRC reported that 100% of respondents had access to local markets and could find all their winter needs there. 77% of respondents prefer cash modality in the future, 15.4% prefer Voucher, 6% In-kind, and 1.43% E-transfer.
- **According to People in Need (PIN):** All respondents reported preferring to receive assistance in the same modality and all preferred USD currency, except for one respondent who preferred to receive it as in-kind assistance. 90% of respondents reported spending this assistance on fuel for heating

(e.g., kerosene, alternative fuel), 68% used it for debt repayment, 55% spent the assistance on food, and 19% spent it on fuel and appliances for cooking.

d) Overall Impact of Winterization Assistance:

- **Increased Resilience:** Enhanced preparedness for harsh winter weather.
- **Basic Needs Secured:** Vulnerable families are able to meet essential needs.
- **Reduced Vulnerability:** Decreased reliance on harmful coping mechanisms such as burning plastics or clothes for heating, child labor, early marriages, and risky activities.

e) Recommendations:

- **Continued Advocacy for Increased Funding:** In collaboration with the S/NFI Cluster, more advocacy for increased funding is suggested.
- **Adjust Cash Distribution Amount:** The proposal to alter the cash distribution amount based on family size and local price variations was considered. However, due to funding limitations, it was deemed unfeasible at this time.
- **Integrate E-system into Winter Interventions:** The E-voucher system should be used for our winter intervention, distributing the same monetary value in 2 or 3 rounds. This practice provides consistent support during the winter months and aids beneficiaries in managing their resources effectively.
- **Relevance of Assistance:** Given the positive feedback on winterisation assistance, the continuation of this activity is recommended.
- **Type of Assistance / Specifications:** Based on the positive feedback, it is recommended that the assistance package be increased for future projects.
- Cash assistance is the preferred modality.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with different beneficiary groups, including women, girls, Persons With Disabilities (PWD), and the elderly, are recommended to discuss the required winterization materials, access issues, concerns, and preferred markets. Early engagement with the targeted people is a best practice and will positively impact future steps.
- **For E-voucher assistance:** Beneficiaries appreciated the inclusion of clothes and shoe items in the list. If stoves are needed, consider valuing them separately from the allocated amount for fuel. Preparing for the project in advance and addressing contracting issues before winter is advised. Diversifying materials in terms of quality and packaging (weights), monitoring and facilitating in the market, and enhancing visibility will help beneficiaries have a smooth redemption process. Inclusion considerations should be added in the retailer's selection criteria.

3. Shelter NFI Cluster Observation:

- **Lack of Funds and Changed Priorities:** Some cluster members with secured funds reported a change in priorities, resulting in reprogramming and shifting their plans to other program activities, mainly shelter-related ones.
- **Vulnerability and Timely Response:** A timely winterization response has always mitigated protection risks, including for children, older persons, and other vulnerable groups, and reduced negative coping mechanisms.
- The region has experienced recent climate change, resulting in a shift in the winter cycle that requires better-timed programming of winter aid.

- **Delayed Response and Late Funds for Winter Response:** There is an increase in unsustainable negative coping strategies, which is severely impacting the environment and public health. This is also increasing the risks of fire incidents in IDP sites.
- **Selected Targeting Approach:** One of the presenting organizations highlighted that they have piloted selected targeting due to the shrinking available funds. This requires a harmonized coordinated approach in the same community where another organization proceeded with blanket distribution, creating a problem and tension in the field.
- **Modalities:** The cluster encourages the three modalities of cash, voucher, and in-kind for winter response. Cash and vouchers enable beneficiaries to pick their preferable items and will minimize the related risk of selling items if in-kind. However, the cluster keeps pushing towards keeping an envelope for in-kind items that will best serve in emergency conditions and responses. The cluster urges the members to avoid delivering different modalities in the same community/sites.

4. Centrality of protection:

Winterization lifesaving activities always underscore the paramount importance of protection as a central tenet. In the frigid depths of winter, where unpredictable weather conditions prevail, safeguarding lives becomes a non-negotiable imperative. Whether it's rescuing individuals stranded in snowstorms, navigating floods and dire situations in IDP sites, or providing emergency aid during winter emergencies, protection forms the cornerstone of every operation. In essence, the centrality of protection in winter lifesaving activities epitomizes the unwavering commitment to preserving human life amidst nature's harshest challenges. It was encouraging to hear at the workshop that a large percentage of the respondents reported that they felt completely safe at all times while traveling to receive assistance/service, during the receipt of the assistance/service, and upon return to their places.

5. Accountability to the affected population:

According to PiN, all respondents confirmed that they were not asked to provide anything in exchange for this assistance and all of them confirmed that no one made them share all or part of the received assistance.

96% of respondents reported that they knew how to give feedback or submit a complaint related to the services we provide. The remaining 4% reported that they did not know; however, they were able to reach the field team during the distribution.

6. Action Points:

- The Shelter NFI cluster through the IM TWiG will facilitate a session to develop a **harmonized PDM tool**. Participants will be requested to share PDM questionnaires for harmonization and consolidation that will include minimum questions/indicators to be used in future PDMs by all partners for winterization related assistance.
- **Selected Targeting:** The Shelter NFI cluster will facilitate a discussion with the SAG on selected targeting, incorporating the engagement of GOAL, PIN, SHAFAK, and CARE representatives. This will assist in drafting inclusion and exclusion criteria mainly for the affected population in IDP sites. The same approach should be harmonized with CWG (with MPCA) to avoid possible retaliation from persons who may not be assisted. Harmonize targeted over blanket approaches – for partners who are involved. Include reports on targeted or blanket assistance in plans, which will aid in reducing duplication and improving coordination. One selection criterion will simplify work for all



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organizations. LA may interfere with organizations' response, in which case partners should move to the next site. It was agreed that the S/NFI Cluster will shift from blanket to fully targeted winter approach in the next season, with further meetings with a smaller group to discuss the peculiarities and issues and make recommendations on how to implement this transition.

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- **Quality of local heating fuels:** Assess the quality of local fuel and advocate for eco-friendly solutions in parallel. Use secondary data with support from partners, ensuring the fuel is of good quality. PIN will share a report on fuel quality and methodology. Make sure storage doesn't pose a risk. Foreign/European fuel is highly combustible and depletes quickly, making it a preferred and sustainable choice.
- **Cash versus in-kind assistance:** The pros and cons of cash assistance should be shared with donors by the SNFI cluster.
- **Instalments for cash contributions:** The cluster does not impose a restriction on the number and quantity of instalments.
- **Integration and synergy of initiatives:** Increase cash for heating and complimentary assistance i.e., food. This should be addressed in initial assessments.
- **Target early distribution** of winter assistance.
- **Transition to \$180 cash winter assistance:** This transition was agreed upon by participants based on agreements and analysis from the previous winter additionally it is not recommended to review the size of HH.

Acknowledgment: The S/NFI Cluster would like to thank UNHCR for their support in providing the workshop venue and refreshments.