

### Cash Assistance to Non-Camp Refugees in the Syrian Crisis: Experiences & Implications

Cash programming has been used on an unprecedented scale in the Syrian crisis, largely due to the urbanised nature of the Syrian refugee caseload in affected countries; and the well-developed markets and banking systems. Although needs vary in each refugee context and for different groups, the majority of Syrian refugees cite their main needs as food and shelter, with refugees across the region reporting they must prioritise household needs as they cannot meet all of their basic necessities.<sup>1</sup> Cash allows families to meet these self-identified priorities, as well as give refugees choice and dignity.

This article will outline the main contexts in which urban Syrian refugees find themselves and their specific vulnerabilities, especially with regards to access to labour markets, credit and assistance. In particular, there is a need to understand and respond to the psychosocial needs of men, and how the crisis has undermined their breadwinner/ provider role in the family – which the humanitarian response has failed to adequately address until now.

The article will review, from the Danish Refugee Council's perspective, how humanitarian programming for non-camp refugees has evolved in order to better meet refugees' changing needs in the face of protracted displacement in a more holistic manner, incorporating more traditional humanitarian responses with innovative and large-scale cash programming. The article will also explore experiences and observations around conditional versus unconditional cash. Conditional cash, which seems to offer a more straightforward transition from traditional sector-based humanitarian responses, also has drawbacks in terms of stigma, discrimination by vendors, and pricing issues (taxation, artificial control of market dynamics). At the same time, unconditional cash raises concerns about agencies' loss of control / diversion of assistance, compromising nutrition, and creating dependency. Regardless of the modality, the lack of technical nutrition rigour in cash programming requires stronger monitoring to better understand the nutrition outcomes and implications on urban refugees.

Comment [LS1]: Include examples?

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<sup>1</sup> In Lebanon, qualitative (focus group discussions) and quantitative (household surveys by phone) in 2014 indicate that refugees' main needs are food, shelter and healthcare. In Turkey, focus group discussions revealed the main needs as food and shelter; refugees have very little access to credit/debt sources, and therefore have limited time to accumulate enough money to buy food and meet rent/utility obligations.