



# Evaluation of GRC's Regular Cash Assistance Programme in Jordan

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## ABSTRACT

The GRC has commissioned this report to critically review their regular cash assistance program in Jordan, funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). The primary objective of this research is to better understand the impact and effectiveness of the regular cash transfer program as compared to beneficiaries' and contextual needs.

## **I. Executive Summary:**

The German Red Cross (GRC) began implementing humanitarian programming in response to the Syrian Crisis in Jordan in 2013, and has provided thousands of Syrian refugees with improved access to basic needs to improve wellbeing. Refugees and host community members alike face numerous barriers in Jordan due to the protracted nature of the crisis, limited access to livelihoods and high unemployment rates, heightened security controls, and reduced access to and availability of assistance. These barriers have led to high levels of socio-economic vulnerability, resulting in the adoption of negative coping strategies, heavy reliance on aid organizations, and increasing tensions within host and refugee communities. The GRC has, for the last year and a half, sought to address these challenges through improving families' access to financial resources by providing regular cash assistance to Syrian refugees on a monthly basis.

The Cash Transfer Program falls within a regional program with the overall objective of contributing to the improvement of the living conditions of the Syrian population affected by the conflict, as well as of the Syrian refugees and host communities in the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. In this vein, GRC has provided an average of 679 Syrian households per month in Irbid Governorate (northern Jordan), which has one of the highest concentrations of Syrian refugees in the country with 136,048 registered refugees, with regular cash assistance. Each month, beneficiaries are able to access funds through Cairo Amman Bank ATM machines in their area either using an iris scan technology or ATM cards. This modality has offered vulnerable households with a dignified way to meet ongoing needs and make their own decisions about how to use available funds.

The GRC has commissioned this report to critically review their regular cash assistance program in Jordan, funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). The primary objective of this research is to better understand the impact and effectiveness of the regular cash transfer program as compared to beneficiaries' and contextual needs. Importantly, the research will also consider the impact of the closure of the program, planned for June 2017, to identify any lasting impact of the assistance for beneficiaries and evaluate the exit strategy adopted.

The **key research questions** are:

### **Impact and Relevance:**

- *What was the impact of the cash assistance on beneficiary's lives? In what ways do the refugees feel the assistance has improved their living conditions? What did the project change in the beneficiaries' lives during the project lifetime? Do the refugees feel better off today than before the program?*
- *Was regular and unrestricted/unconditional cash assistance the most appropriate response mechanism to cover the actual needs of the beneficiaries?*
- *How might the exit from the cash program affect the beneficiaries? Is there anything that will remain as a positive sustainable change? What are the expected*

*negative impacts after the end of the program?*

- *How did households decide how to use the cash and were there tensions between men and women or between different generations?*

#### Effectiveness

- *To what extent were the expected objectives achieved/are likely to be achieved? Were objectives achieved on time?*
- *What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?*
- *Did people get the right amount of cash? Did beneficiaries see payment levels as fair and adequate?*
- *Is there any evidence of anti-social use?*

#### Efficiency and Coordination

- *Has the newly created Common Cash Facility (CCF) been an efficient and appropriate platform for the cash intervention?*
- *Were project activities sufficiently coordinated with other organizations?*
- *Was the intervention cost-efficient? What were the external costs borne by the beneficiary?*
- *Was the project implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives?*

**Key data and findings** regarding the impact, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the program are summarized below:

#### Impact and Relevance:

The regular cash program has been a highly effective way to address the various needs presented by beneficiaries living in Irbid governorate. By allowing beneficiaries the flexibility to choose when and on what they would spend assistance, GRC has been able to address a wide range of needs while simultaneously empowering the households with the agency to make their own decisions and live in a dignified manner. Both in post-distribution monitoring and focus groups, households identified concrete ways in which the regular cash assistance enabled them to make positive changes in their lives, including through paying off debt, upgrading their shelters to better quality or larger spaces, placing children (back) in school, and improving their dietary consumption. Beneficiaries supported through this project were able to prioritize the use of funds easily, without tensions arising within the household, as rent continues to be the top priority for the vast majority of vulnerable Syrians.

Although beneficiaries in focus groups and post-distribution monitoring were less

confident that changes would last beyond the assistance duration, all agreed that the RCA had helped them avoid negative coping strategies to date. Some of the lasting changes reported by PDM respondents included staying out of debt, being able to save small amounts of money each month, and improvements in health conditions of family members. Beneficiaries in FGDs indicated that the exit of the program would have negative consequences for their families and cited few available coping strategies. Many of the households in the caseload include multiple members with chronic illnesses, disabilities or elderly, making it extremely difficult to access livelihoods opportunities and more sustainable avenues to address everyday challenges. On the other hand, FGD participants primarily indicated that changes they made as a result of assistance would likely have to be reversed once they no longer received monthly assistance. In all cases, the assistance was never planned to offer a sustainable solution for socio-economic vulnerability and has met the objective of enabling beneficiaries to improve their households' supply situation and overall wellbeing during the project duration.

### Effectiveness

The RCA program has indeed met the objectives set out in the project proposal documents, mainly by improving the supply situation of vulnerable Syrian families. Despite challenges during the start-up phase of the project, including bank delays and the delayed finalization of an agreement with UNHCR, the program reached an average of 679 households per month for the last year and a half to meet the objectives of the project.

In general, beneficiaries reported satisfaction with the amount of cash received each month as it enabled them to cope with rental costs on an ongoing basis. As rent has been continuously cited as the top priority need, beneficiaries indicated that the amount of assistance should always be enough to cover this cost. Most families in FGDs explained that once their priority needs were covered (usually rent, food, or medicine), they were able to use any leftover funds on other needs like education supplies or household items. Beneficiaries did not report using funds for anti-social uses (e.g. cigarettes, alcohol, or other items not considered beneficial to the household) to a significant level. Although a handful of beneficiaries admit using a few Jordanian dinar per month for cigarettes, they also explained that this was only the case once urgent and priority needs had been met. Furthermore, as the funds were unrestricted and unconditional, one of the added values of this approach is to enable beneficiaries to make their own decisions to better their own lives, however that may be.

### Efficiency and Coordination

The regular cash assistance program has been a cost-efficient way for GRC to address the high levels of needs within the most vulnerable households in Irbid. By partnering with the UNHCR early on, GRC was able to mitigate the delays at project start by coordinating with UNHCR to assist its caseload for the first seven months. This coordination also significantly reduced the burden of work on GRC, as UNHCR was responsible for referring vulnerable households off of its regular assistance waiting list

(over 11,000 households in 2017). Although GRC did conduct initial verification exercises, the resources required were low in terms of both staffing and logistics. However, the research indicates that overall socio-economic vulnerability was not significantly affected by the assistance and households remained in dire situations throughout the project. The impact of the project, as mentioned above, was more prominently in reducing the risk of adopting negative coping strategies and improving conditions throughout the assistance duration.

The newly created CCF has provided GRC with an efficient way to coordinate beneficiary lists each month and resulted in significant benefits from the iris scan technology, which is more secure and guarantees that the designated cash collector is the only one who can access funds. The iris scan technology resulted in safer beneficiary data as well, as the UNHCR stores all iris scan data on the EyeCloud Server, thereby removing the need for the bank itself to store beneficiary information. In terms of cost-efficiency, the platform was able to reach the most favorable fee levels at the end of 2016. However, based on the calculations provided by GRC, the bi-lateral IFRC agreement with the bank outside of the CCF would have resulted in more favorable fees. In fact, even while paying the minimum level of fees through CCF, GRC paid 7% more than would have been available through the bilateral IFRC agreement. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the financial risks of working through the CCF, for which the added value depends on the total funds from all cash providers involved. Regular risk assessments and mapping of expected cash funds are required to ensure agencies do not incur additional fees. However, as a small program, GRC benefited from the convenience of the CCF in that the systems and processes with the bank were already set up, as well as the improved coordination with UNHCR and other cash actors.

**Key recommendations** include:

- During the course of long-term assistance provision, systematically verify the level of vulnerability and/or need within the caseload through regular re-assessment processes to ensure the most vulnerable are assisted and others are removed or transitioned to other programs. Re-assessments could entail shorter follow-up questionnaires designed and implemented by GRC to capture the primary indicators of socio-economic vulnerability (e.g. using the VAF sector trees) and performed bi-annually;
- Noting the long waiting list for UNHCR regular assistance, consider a rotation schedule for all beneficiaries of regular cash to receive monthly assistance for a designated period (e.g. 6 months) before being replaced by other vulnerable households in need;
- Develop case management capacities in the cash team to address recurring, non-cash needs through internal or external referral;
- Ensure all team members are able to provide basic information about other services available to regular cash beneficiaries, and, more specifically, about their

ability to access healthcare support through JHAS;

- Continue to use the CCF due to organizational added value (less resource-heavy for the individual agency, scalability, security);
- Regularly assess the added value of the CCF in terms of expected cash levels from other agencies to manage the risk of paying higher levels of fees;
- During the exit stage, ensure clear messaging on what to expect and what steps to take for the beneficiaries;
- Ensure beneficiaries are provided with ample warning time (2 months or more) to identify alternative coping strategies and plan accordingly;
- Depending on the time of year, provide lump sum assistance instead of monthly aid for the last few months of the project to ensure beneficiaries have financial resources to cope with costs (e.g. Ramadan, winter needs);
- Advocate to UNHCR for 1) clear messaging on RCA criteria and process (including waiting list), 2) appeal mechanism for beneficiaries who are removed from the waiting list.