



NORWEGIAN  
REFUGEE COUNCIL

**SUPPORTING  
DIGNIFIED CHOICES**  
NRC cash-based NFI distribution  
in refugee camps in Jordan

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Jordan has directly assisted more than 360,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees in both formal camps and host communities since it began operations in November 2012. NRC is the lead partner of UNHCR in Zaatari and Azraq camps in providing refugees with shelter and the management and distribution of non-food items (NFIs).

In the second half of 2014 NRC began piloting a market-based cash and voucher approach in lieu of centralized NFI distributions and hopes to expand these activities further in 2015. A cash and voucher approach provides beneficiaries with greater choice and flexibility to meet their household needs. More generally cash-based programming can empower beneficiaries, particularly women within the household, can reduce negative coping mechanisms and have broader multiplier effects for both refugees and host community including the private sector than traditional in-kind assistance.

This short policy brief explores NRC assessments related to a move to cash and vouchers, current analysis related to pilot activities in Zaatari and plans for future expansion including large-scale winterization activities in Azraq.

## Syrian refugee camps in Jordan

In Jordan, the estimated 16 per cent of Syrian refugees in formal camps continue to rely on the Government, UNHCR and humanitarian partners like NRC to meet their basic needs including shelter and regular distribution of non-food items (NFIs). Of the 97,000 registered Syrian refugees in camps more than half are female and

some 57 per cent children under the age of 18 years.

In a displacement situation, camps are often considered a last resort yet in Jordan they have been instrumental to facilitate and initially accommodate the enormous inflow of refugees that the country experienced in 2012 and 2013. The two major refugee camps – Zaatari and Azraq – continue to provide a capacity to the Jordanian government to keep the borders open, which is crucial for the more 11 million persons in need inside Syria including 6.5 million internally displaced facing violent threats on a daily basis.

The numbers of new Syrian asylum seekers to Jordan has significantly dropped since peaks of 2,000 to 4,000 per day in the first half of 2013, and Syrian refugees in camps in Jordan remain very vulnerable and in need of continued assistance and protection.

NRC Jordan is the lead partner of UNHCR in providing refugees with shelter and NFIs in Zaatari and Azraq camp which has to-date included:

- Support to more than 300,000 Syrian refugees on first night in the camp through 24/7 day presence and management of Reception Areas in Zaatari and Azraq
- Distribution of more than 77,000 UNHCR tents in Zaatari and the collection and recycling of more than 14,500 tents
- Construction of more than 3,500 innovative Transitional Shelters (T-Shelters) in Azraq able to support some 19,000 refugees through local contractors and now incentive refugee labour
- Distribution of close to five million NFIs in Zaatari and Azraq camps through centralized distribution centres on behalf of a wide range of UN agencies and NGOs.

1. UNHCR figures as of 9 October 2014. See <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country>.



The size of the refugee camps in Jordan presents challenges to effective delivery of humanitarian assistance and services. In Zaatari, participatory assessments identified the need to strengthen access for female-headed households, persons with disabilities and older persons to registration, distribution and services in the camps.

In Zaatari, NRC has conducted exit interviews with Syrian refugees who frequent our replenishment sites and regular post distribution monitoring to understand the distribution process from the beneficiaries' perspective and gather feedback on items distributed.

### Key analysis from NRC Jordan's Camp Shelter beneficiary engagement in Zaatari\*:

- More males than females come to collect distributions (58% male compared to 42% female)
- On average it takes males 32 minutes to reach the site and females slightly longer at 37 minutes
- Seventy per cent of males come alone

on foot while 50% of women access the site with a family member or neighbour

- The average waiting time at distribution site is 16 – 18 minutes with no major differences between males and females
- The vast majority of respondents felt safe collecting NFIs at distribution sites, 11% felt 'fairly' safe and only 4% 'unsafe'. Among women the responses were 79% safe, 18% fairly safe and 3% unsafe
- More females (23%) than males (12%) reported problems at the distribution site mostly related to long queues, incorrect sizing of items provided (often related to infant diaper distributions) and weather conditions
- Between 20 and 40% of beneficiaries reported not receiving or receiving unclear information regarding distribution or wrong information related to eligibility criteria
- Although very limited resale of items was reported in the survey, those that did sell their items spent the money on additional hygiene items, generally laundry powder, dishwashing liquid and household detergents



NRC staff distributing soap bars and other hygiene items in exchange for vouchers at the Zaatari refugee camp

\*NRC Jordan Exit Interview data (May–July 2014) and Post-Distribution Monitoring Report (July 2014)

2. Syria Regional Response Plan (2014)

3. Good Humanitarian Donorship. See <http://www.goodhumanitariananddonorship.org/gns/home.aspx>. See also SPHERE standards available at <http://www.sphereproject.org/>.

## Beneficiary-led programming

The information received through various beneficiary feedback mechanisms, as well as activities implemented by other humanitarian actors, has clearly indicated that the potential for alternative programming are available, especially such that promotes dignity, better responds to the actual needs, promotes participation in decision-making and ultimately ensures better beneficiary accountability.

In particular, NRC has interviewed beneficiaries to understand their preferences around the delivery of NFI items. The vast majority i.e. 69% of all respondents, and 65% of women indicated that they would prefer to receive their assistance through established shops in the camp rather than central distribution sites. When asked about the perceived safety of various assistance modalities including in-kind, cash and vouchers, a generally high perception of safety was recorded across the modalities although vouchers were seen as slightly safer, particularly for women.

## Value of a market-based cash and voucher approach

A move to cash and voucher system provides refugees with greater choice, flexibility and transparency through their ability to choose what basic items their household needs and when to shop. Cash-based programming empower beneficiaries, particularly women, reduce negative coping mechanisms and have broader multiplier effects for both refugee and host community populations than traditional in-kind assistance.

For aid agencies, vouchers allow for more flexible provision of NFIs and reduce pressure on agency logistics chains. Site monitoring and post distribution monitoring also allow agencies to understand

beneficiaries' shopping preferences and needs and identify vulnerable households for follow up community services support.

Cash-based programming can also have wider benefits for host communities and private sector. NRC Jordan is currently partnering with three Jordanian companies registered to implement cash and voucher work in the camps. Replacing a range of in-kind items with cash in any form also reduces the re-sale of distributed items by refugees which immediately decreases the value and impact of the provided assistance, tends to distort local markets and negatively impacts neighbouring host communities.

## Beneficiary spending patterns

In September 2014 NRC Jordan began piloting in Zaatari the provision of NFIs through limited value vouchers. New arrivals and UNHCR referrals in Zaatari have been receiving cash-value vouchers equivalent to the retail value of the soap, laundry powder, toothpaste and other basic hygiene items they would previously have received in-kind from UNHCR (approximately JOD 2 per person).

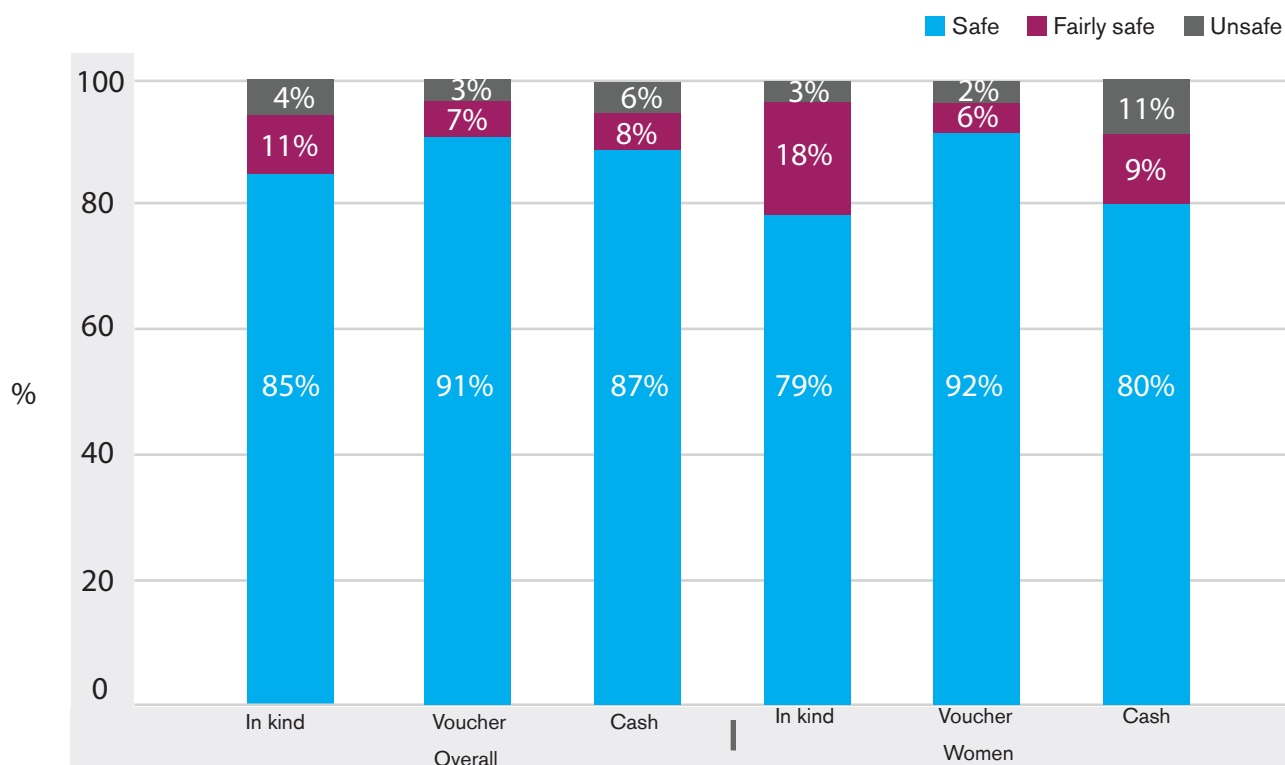


Safeway Supermarket clerk processes the Norwegian Refugee Council's vouchers in the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan

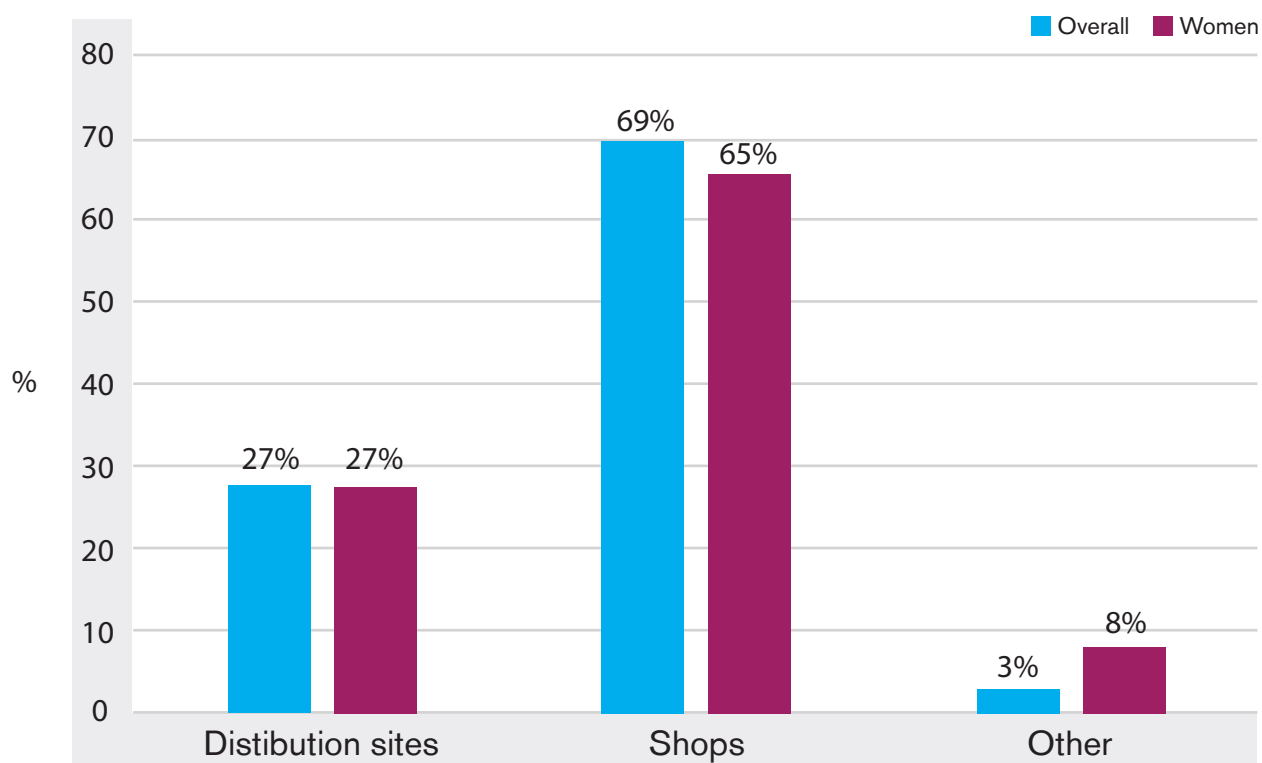
5. NRC Jordan, NFI Beneficiary Preferences Assessment Report, July 2014.

\* NRC Jordan Exit Interview data (May – July 2014) and Post-Distribution Monitoring Report (July 2014)

### Perceptions of assistance modality safety



### Preferred location to receive assistance



6. See CaLP, Making the Case for Cash, July 2011; C. Blattman and P. Niehaus, Show them the Money: Why Giving Cash Helps Alleviate Poverty, published in Foreign Affairs (May/June 2014); and WFP/UNHCR, Examining Protection and Gender in Cash and Voucher Transfers, July 2013

Refugees can spend their vouchers at either of the two registered supermarkets in the camp.

The monitoring of spending patterns in the initial stages of the project has revealed that the vast majority of beneficiaries were spending their vouchers on the day of issue.

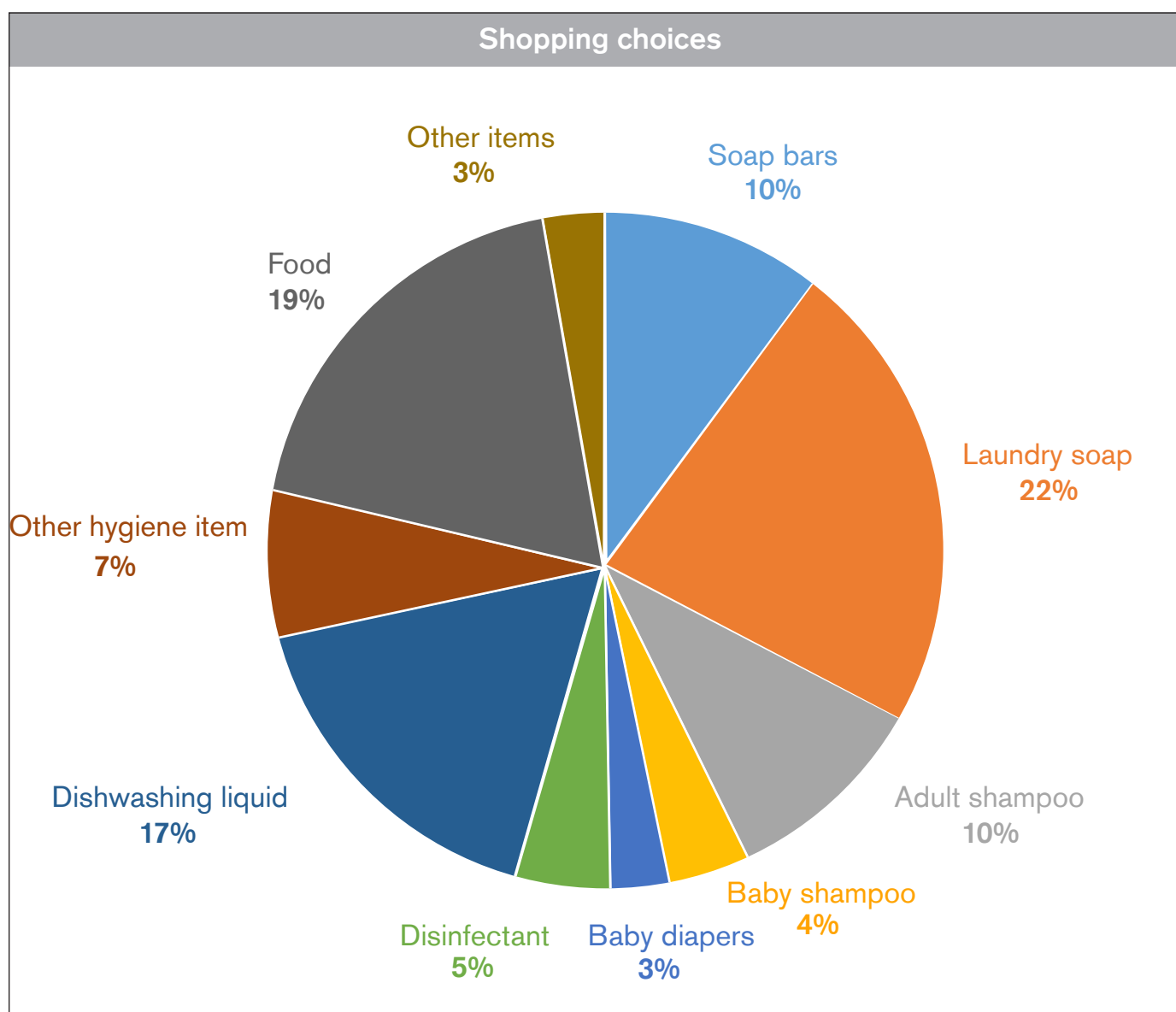
Real-time data shows that some 2/3 of refugees are purchasing hygiene and/or cleaning items with around 1/3 spending the vouchers on food, as NRC vouchers have minimal conditionality with refugees able to spend their vouchers on any items in the stores other than tobacco products.

Adult males tend to do the majority of the shopping on behalf of the household (con-

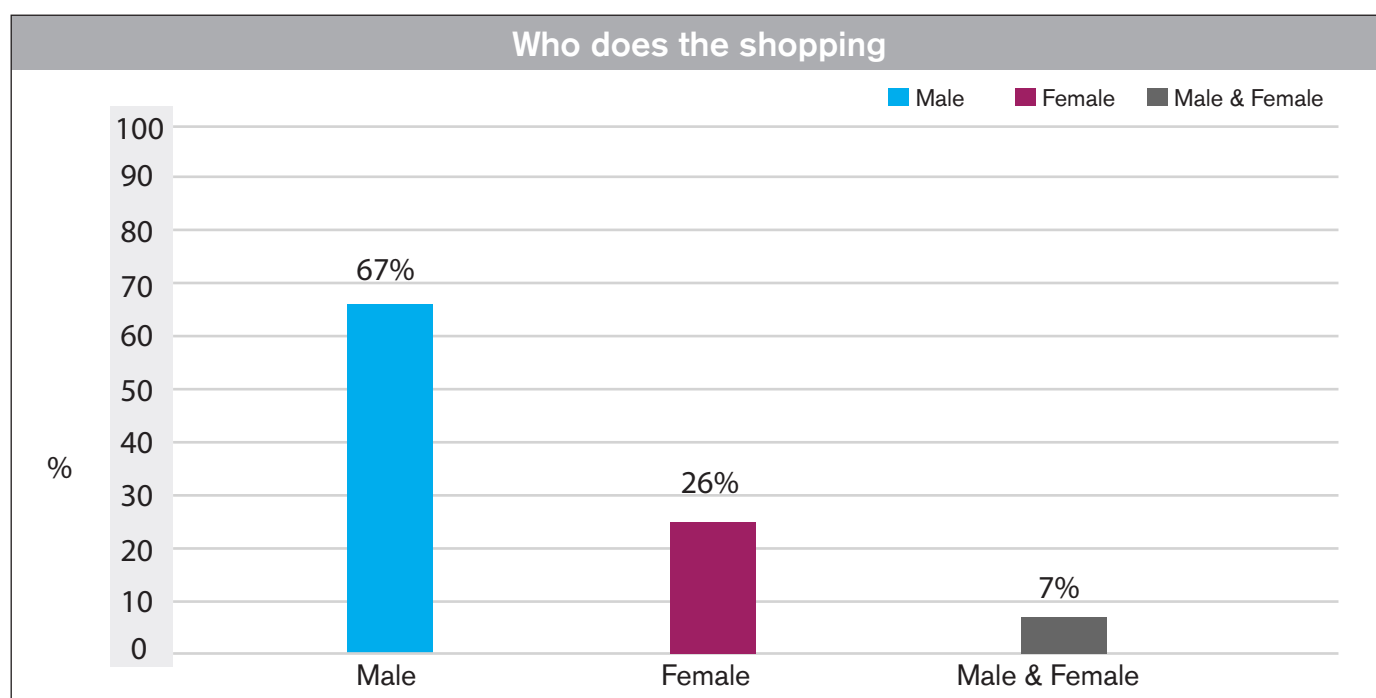
sistent with previous distribution collections). This trend continues to be monitored and explored by NRC outreach staff during post-distribution monitoring.

## Further expansion of cash and voucher programming in Jordan

The lessons learnt from the initial pilots in the Zaatari camp have been transformed into a full-scale cash-based replenishment distribution of one item to some 22,000 female population within UNHCR's eligibility criteria. The next initiative relates to winterisation activities in Azraq through funding provided by ECHO. Each registered Syrian refugee in the camp receives JOD 15 value voucher to be spent on winterization items (heaters, blankets etc) or other house-







hold needs at the registered supermarket in Azraq.

A second wave of cash-based distribution is planned in January 2015 to provide continued support across the winter months. The scale of NRC's cash and voucher programming in formal camps in Jordan has quickly developed to some of the largest activities of this type worldwide.

In 2015, NRC hopes to further expand cash and voucher programming and is exploring

further opportunities with all camp distribution partners. NRC is also in discussions with UNHCR and WFP to utilize their centralized cash grants system in camps (OneCard/ECard).

Such activities fit with wider inter-agency strategies for camps to become more self-reliant and sustainable and gradually reducing the dependency on regular hand-outs and other types of emergency assistance, while providing dignified choices for the beneficiaries.

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is an independent, humanitarian, non-profit, non-governmental organization providing assistance, protection and durable solutions to refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide. In 2014, NRC requested more than USD 33 million in response to the Syrian Regional Response Plan (the largest appeal by an NGO) to support the continuation of our essential services across the shelter, non-food item (NFI), education, youth and protection sectors.

NRC Jordan is a key partner of UNHCR and UNICEF and works closely with Government of Jordan authorities, line ministries and municipalities/local authorities and international and national NGOs to provide assistance and essential services to Syrian refugees throughout Jordan and mitigate the impact on host communities. NRC supports humanitarian sector coordination including in the shelter, NFI, education and youth sectors. All NRC activities in Jordan are rooted in the priorities defined through Jordan level response plans based on coordinated needs assessments and sector response strategies.

NRC's Jordan is Camp Shelter Programme is currently supported by:





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