Empowered Aid - Lebanon
Food Distribution (Pilot 2): Safety Audit Findings

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Overview

In May 2020, URDA, CARE Lebanon, and the Global Women's Institute distributed 500 food parcels to a targeted group of Syrian refugees who met UNHCR vulnerability criteria. This not only supported needs identified by the humanitarian response but was also part of Empowered Aid's efforts to reduce sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in aid distributions by identifying risk factors (Phase 1) and building evidence on safer distribution mechanisms and monitoring (Phase 2).[1]

Specifically, this food distribution was designed using recommendations made by Syrian refugee women and girls during Phase I of the Empowered Aid study, in which they described the SEA risks they face when accessing distributions and ways to minimize these risks.[2] With the onset of COVID-19, we expanded the distribution design and monitoring to better capture the pandemic's effects on women and girls' access

[1] For more information about Empowered Aid, visit https://globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu/empowered-aid. Findings from the first phase in Lebanon can be found in the report online here: https://globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu/empowered-aid-resources.
[2] See the recommendations within Empowered Aid's policy brief on reducing SEA risks in food distribution, as well as within the main results report for Lebanon.

to information, concerns related to SEA and other forms of violence, and knowledge of reporting mechanisms and services—at a time when refugee communities had few other avenues for communicating this information with aid actors.

The food parcel distribution took place in two informal tented settlements (ITS)[3] in Sahel Akkar (251 families) and Mhammra Akkar (250 families), and applied two different distribution modalities recommended in the first phase of Empowered Aid. In Sahel Akkar, aid recipients were organized to arrive in small groups of 20 people at a time, at pre-assigned times. In Mhammra Akkar ITS (managed by URDA), items were distributed directly to recipients' homes through a "door-to-door" process.

Both of these modalities recommended by women and girls in the first phase of Empowered Aid in 2019, coincidentally aligned with COVID-19 health and safety restrictions. It is important to note that, given the context of COVID-19, some of the challenges reported in distribution monitoring may reflect the strict conditions of Lebanon's 'general mobilization state' (put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19) rather than challenges specific to the distribution being monitored.

Table 1. Food Parcel Distribution Monitoring Summary		
Type of distribution	Targeted Distribution at pre-assigned times (adapted)	Door-to-door distribution (adapted)
Location of distribution	Sahel Akkar Informal Tented Settlement (ITS), unmanaged	Mhammra Akkar Informal Tented Settlement (ITS), managed by URDA
Date of distribution	05 May 2020	05 May 2020
# of people reached	251	250
# observational safety audits	2	2
COVID-19 situation	during-COVID-19	During COVID-19

Several tools were used to monitor the distribution. At the distribution, staff carried out both safety audits and a 'point of distribution' short, in-person questionnaire. After the distribution, a post-distribution monitoring (PDM) survey was conducted via phone. This report shares findings from the safety audits, and findings from the point of distribution questionnaire and longer post-distribution phone survey are reported separately. Taken together, they provide recommendations for improving this specific distribution as well as general information that can be used by all distribution actors to improve the safety of aid recipients (particularly women and girls) in the context of COVID-19 lockdowns and other restrictions.

Methods

GWI, CARE and URDA adapted the safety audit from an existing tool used by aid actors like CARE and IRC, and GWI trained staff on how to safely and systematically conduct safety audits. To ensure that the entire

[3] Throughout this report, we will use "ITS" interchangeably with "settlement."

team understood the newly adapted distribution monitoring tools and were comfortable with administering each, separate trainings were held on each tool. The safety audit (observational tool) training began with a review of the purpose of a safety audit and the importance of using gender analysis when observing distributions. The team also reviewed the WHO ethical and safety considerations when conducting research related to gender-based violence in emergencies[4], spent ample time in the training practicing with the safety audit tool, and planned for data collection.

After introducing the tool and its objectives to the CARE/URDA staff, a 'Gender Analysis Observation Activity' was conducted where participants are asked to take part in an observational gender analysis, walking around the room/office/surrounding area and observing what types of safety risks that may exist for women and girls and taking note of each. Moreover, participants were trained on ethical and safety considerations for GBV-related data collection.

Two safety audits were carried out in each distribution location by inter-agency teams consisting of one staff from each of the two operational partners, URDA and CARE. The safety audit is an observational tool that can be conducted while maintaining social distance and provides a systematic way in which to record structured observations of aid processes.

Checklist of Key Findings

Findings are first summarized in an easy-to-review checklist and then detailed more thoroughly, before sharing recommendations arising from these findings.

SAFETY AUDIT CHECKLIST			
Location			
Distribution site	Sahel Akkar *(Pre-assigned times)*	Mhammra Akkar *(Door-to-door)*	Notes **Red text denotes areas for improvement*
ACCESS			
Clear method for handling complaints	√	√	Additional channels for receiving complaints, in addition to the Shawish, are needed.
Accessible visibility materials for complaints	√	√	Additional channels for communicating distribution information, in addition to the Shawish, are needed.
Clear & timely communication on the distribution	**√**	**√**	

[4] World Health Organization (WHO). (2007) *WHO Ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies*. www.who.int/gender/documents/OMS_Ethics&Safety10Aug07.pdf

Did the distribution start on time?	√	√	Both distributions started on time, however the average time in the unmanaged camp was more due to the challenging weather conditions.
Appropriate behavior of staff/volunteers	√	√	
Inappropriate behavior of staff/volunteers			No inappropriate behavior observed. On the contrary, staff was very supportive by carrying the food parcels on behalf of the PSNs and giving priority to the elderly to collect the aid.
Defined distribution area	√	√	
Separate access points for men and women		√	The URDA-managed ITS had a gate, thus had separate access points for men and women, unlike the unmanaged settlements in Sahel Akkar.
Distribution area is clean and free of dangerous objects		√	Unmanaged ITS in Sahel Akkar had garbage and stray animals.
SAFETY			
Overcrowding at distribution point	√		There was a bit of over-crowding in the unmanaged ITS due to the weather on the day of distribution (it was windy and rainy) with no cover. Staff put in place crowd control measures such as placing the chairs (used to ensure social distancing while waiting) in an area between the houses to minimize wind flow. **Recommendation**: Provide distribution teams with portable, wind and rain resistant structures in case the site has limited or no options for protecting aid recipients from bad weather.
Adequate crowd control measures	√	√	
Shade/covered area at distribution point		√	In the unmanaged camps, there was no shade or covered area to protect aid recipients from the rain
Ratio of male to female staff/ volunteers	Equal women	Equal sex-ratio	This is one of the Phase 1 recommendations applied to these distributions.
More male than female staff			The staff was divided equally among females and males.

Alternative food parcel collectors	√		Recipients who wished to send alternatives to collect the aid informed URDA staff beforehand when they called to remind them of the distribution.
Active measures in place to prevent or mitigate SEA	√	√	PSEA helpline numbers where shared with the aid recipients. Female staff was present during all times of distributions in both location.
Interactions between taxi drivers and aid recipients			Distributions occurred within the settlements where recipients live, therefore there was no interaction with taxi drivers.
Handwashing facilities available		√	Handwashing facilities were not visible in the unmanaged ITS. At a minimum, future distribution teams should install a mobile handwashing station to ensure COVID-19 safety practices can be followed.
Refugees not on the list registered on the spot and distributed food parcels	N/A	N/A	All 501 families targeted by URDA received food parcels.
DIGNITY			
Model of distribution considers the dignity of aid recipients	√	√	Door-to-door distribution was reportedly a safe and comfortable modality to the aid recipients considering the weather conditions (rainy) at the day of the distribution. On the other hand, this was a bit challenging at the pre-assigned times distribution as there was no shade/cover to protect the aid recipients from the rain.
Latrines at the distribution point	**√**	**√**	Latrines are present but are not visible and it is unclear whether they are publicly available
Latrines are lockable		**√**	Not visible in the unmanaged ITS
Latrines are sex-segregated		**√**	Not visible in the unmanaged ITS; in the managed ITS they are understood to be sex-segregated but not visibly marked as such
Latrines have visibility and are well lit		**√**	Latrines were visible and well-lit at the managed ITS but not the unmanaged ITS.
PSNs treated with respect at distribution	√	√	PSNs were given priority in terms of support. For example, staff supported elderly by

			carrying their boxes into the tent keeping social distancing measures in place.
EQUITY OF THE DISTRIBUTION			
Everyone received the same agreed upon food parcel content	**√**	**√**	All aid recipients received the same agreed upon food parcel content at each distribution site.
Do vulnerable individuals receive their due ration?	**√**	**√**	All vulnerable individuals received their due ration at each distribution site.
INFORMATION ON THE DISTRIBUTION			
Informed about criteria for receiving food parcels	**√**	**√**	All aid recipients were informed of criteria for receiving food parcels at each distribution site. However, this was done by passing all information through the Shawish and therefore does not adequately account for the potential risk. Multiple information channels should be used.
Informed of changes to the criteria	**√**	**√**	There were no changes to criteria at each distribution site.
Information dissemination for vulnerable groups	√	√	Information cards were distributed to all aid recipients
Pre-address understood by all aid recipients	√	√	
Persons with special needs (PSNs) participated in post-distribution monitoring (PDM)	√	√	A short questionnaire was administered to a sample of aid-recipients, including PSNs, as well as a follow-up phone survey. These findings are captured in separate reports.

Main Findings

Access

Method for handing distribution complaints

In both distributions, CARE and URDA staff were identified as wearing their respective organization's vests for visibility purposes. In terms of access to information, a safety auditor in Mhammra stated that the beneficiaries in the managed ITS had a clear method of handling complaints due to the presence of the *Shawish,* (usually defined as the person in charge and the most powerful decision maker in the ITS) to whom they would approach in case of such incidents.

In the unmanaged ITS in Sahel, one safety auditor was approached by many refugee women, who expressed frustration about their lack of awareness on how to submit a distribution (or other)-related complaint. They were thankful the team shared and explained a leaflet (see Annex A) in addition to hotlines for PSEA-related complaints, all in Arabic.

Annex A:

جميع المساعدات الإنسانية هي مجانية. من غير المسموح لأي أحد أن يطلب منك أي خدمات مالية، جنسية أو غيرها بمقابل الحصول على هذه المساعدات. في حال واجهت أي سوء سلوك: قبل، خلال أو بعد إستلام .....من قبل منظمة كير الدولية في لبنان و (الجمعية الشريكة)، يمكنك الإبلاغ بأمان وسرية من خلال التواصل مع منظمة كير الدولية في لبنان عبر الإتصال، أو إرسال رسالة صوتية أو خطية على الرقم التالي: 81212331. لن يمنعك الإبلاغ من الحصول على المساعدة

All humanitarian aid is free. No one can ask you for any financial, sexual or other services in exchange for this aid. In case you faced any inappropriate behaviour: before, during or after receiving ..... by CARE International in Lebanon and (the partner organization), you can report safely and confidentially by contacting CARE International in Lebanon through calling or sending voice or text message on the following number: 81212331. Reporting will not prevent you from getting assistance.

Communication around schedule and status update; timeliness of distribution

The *Shawishs* were the focal points for communicating distribution information in all distribution sites. Prior to distribution, URDA staff communicated with the *Shawishs* who, in turn, verbally communicated the time and date of distribution to the aid recipients. 'Shawish' is the term used for an ITS leader, typically a Syrian or Lebanese community leader who acts as a gatekeeper of information about aid distributions and other important events. Shawish are the primary brokers between refugees living in informal tented settlements and aid workers, municipal officials, employers, security agents, or journalists.[5]

Information is power, especially information about how to receive aid, thus it is important to consider how, and through whom, information is communicated and/or gathered. As highlighted in the Recommendations, using multiple and varied points for information sharing and communication (i.e., people, women's organizations, hotlines, SMS, billboards, dramas, etc.), instead of concentrating information in one or a few interlocutors, is one way to minimize SEA risk.

Layout, accommodation, and cleanliness of distribution points

The unmanaged ITS in Sahel did not have a defined area in which the distribution was conducted and there were no separate access points for men, women and persons with specific needs (PSNs). Alternatively, the managed ITS distribution site in Mhammra was defined by a large gate with adequate crowd control measures with a guard, especially when the distribution was taking place.

[5] "Whether a camp receives aid, whether farmers hire its residents, and how many security raids it endures all depend on the skill, savvy, and connections of its *Shawish."* For more on the extremely powerful role of the Shawish in administering humanitarian aid and other forms of assistance in Lebanon, see for example: Dziadosz, Alexander, "State of Exception", *Harper's Magazine*, November 2020. https://harpers.org/archive/2020/11/state-of-exception-lebanon-refugee-crisis.

Safety

Crowding and crowd control

Distributing food parcels to smaller groups of aid recipients at pre-assigned times in itself served as a useful measure of crowd control; hence the distribution point in Sahel was not overcrowded. The team placed plastic chairs one meter apart in two sex-segregated lines for each group of 20 aid recipients. In one of the unmanaged ITS, two of the aid recipients started negatively shouting at each other due to personal disputes while waiting in line to receiving the assistance. This escalated into a physical fight which was eventually stopped by their family members and neighbours who separated the two men. One of the men went back to his tent and then only came back to receive the food box. The other man went back to the tent and sent his son to receive the box on his behalf.

In the managed ITS in Mhammra, the door-to-door distribution modality meant that crowding was not an issue, as food parcels were delivered directly to recipients' households. Distributors maintained adequate spacing during these household visits (due to COVID-19 social distancing measures). Distributers wore vests with URDA or CARE logos.

Waiting area attributes and accommodation for PSNs

In Sahel, there was no shade or covered area to protect aid recipients from the elements while waiting for the distribution, which proved challenging on one day of the distribution as it was raining. In Mhammra on the other hand, recipients were waiting inside their tents as aid was delivered to their doors.

Timing of distribution & registration details

In both settlements, the distribution timing was similar with an average of 4 hours each (10am-3pm in Mhammra and 11am-3:30pm in Sahel) to deliver to all 501 aid recipients, both starting in the morning and ending in the afternoon. In the URDA-managed settlement in Mhammra, the 250 food parcels were delivered to all families as this is the number of households present in the settlement. In the unmanaged settlement in Sahel, the same number of food parcels (251) was distributed to families identified as vulnerable according to URDA criteria. In one of the unmanaged settlement, other Syrian refugee families, in addition to Lebanese nationals residing in the settlements or nearby, approached the staff asking if they can register for assistance. URDA staff informed them of the process and that they would communicate this need to relevant organizations who might be able to provide support.

Staffing and volunteers

The ratio of female and male staff and volunteers is below. The larger number of staff present during distribution at the unmanaged settlement was due to the more challenging circumstances within an unmanaged settlement.

Type of distribution	Location	# female staff.	# female volunteers	# male staff	# male volunteers	Totals
Door-to-Door distribution	Mhammra (managed settlement)	2	-	2	-	4

Pre-assigned times distribution	Sahel (unmanaged settlement)	3	-	2	1	6
Ratio of female: male staff/volunteers overall:				***Approx. 5 females: 5 males***		

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)

No incidents were reported. In terms of SEA risks, in addition to the risks noted in other sections of this report, in Sahel several tents had unlockable doors which may increase risk of SEA or other abuse or theft post-distribution, as those households have no way to secure the goods they received.

Dignity

In Sahel, where groups of 20 people came at pre-assigned times, there was a large space that had pre-placed chairs spaced at 1 meter for social distancing. Unfortunately, one safety auditor reported witnessing visible trash throughout the ITS site. In contrast, both safety auditors in Mhammra said the managed ITS was extremely clean, organized with no visible trash.

Several alternative food box collectors were identified, either through a prior phone call or during the distribution in both distribution locations. In Sahel, some of the women recipients bought their children with them to help carry the food box. In the managed ITS in Mhammra, URDA male staff (with the presence of a female staff) supported the recipients, especially PSNs, by placing the food box directly on the front door area of the tents, taking into account social distancing and not entering the tent fully.

Both safety auditors in Mhammra highlighted the positive outcome of the door-to-door modality, which they believe reduced the sensitive circumstance of receiving aid that might be humiliating to some of the recipients.

Latrines

In Mhammra, all latrines were identified as lockable and sex-segregated by “awareness of the residents”; however, no signs were visible on the door nor did they have light. In the unmanaged ITS, facilities were not visible nor indicated by signs, which suggests that the aid recipients who live there are otherwise made aware how to access latrines.

Equity of Distribution

All safety auditors reported that in both distributions, everyone received the same agreed-upon food box. There was no discrimination observed by age, sex, or disability.

Information on the Distribution

Across both distributions, aid recipients from the Syrian refugee community were informed of the criteria for receiving food boxes by the *Shawish*, who disseminated the information verbally after being informed by URDA staff about the location and timing. All communication was done in Arabic.

Follow Up

Issues identified during the distributions for immediate follow-up, and details of actions taken:

Location	Action	Person Responsible	Done
Sahel	Inform relevant agencies of Syrian refugee families & Lebanese host community who would like to register for assistance.	URDA	URDA Focal point ensured URDA has the targeted list of beneficiaries in the camps and will deliver assistance if in line with their needs.
Sahel	Women and girls reported they do not have access to complaint-services in their area and lacked information on who to call to file a complaint or ask for information.	LF/CARE	A list of helpline numbers was provided to the PSNs
Mhammra	Women and girls asked if URDA/CARE can conduct awareness sessions on parenting skills.	LF/CARE	Request was shared internally within CARE and URDA. The helpline and accountability officer in CARE is looking to detect NGOs for such services. Moreover, the helpline number was shared in the information card and it was explained that they can call and ask support for such services.

Recommendations

1. **Specialized childcare volunteers during distribution:** Women often were observed coming to distributions with small children, with difficulties supervising them and attending to the distribution simultaneously. A dedicated mother/childcare space staffed by specialized volunteers will help to provide a safe, clean, and nurturing environment for both distributors and aid recipients.
2. **Sex disaggregated lines.** Women reported that sex-segregated lines make them more comfortable. This can also be defined by a sign and/or rope to divide both lines.

3. **Ensure gender-balance in distribution teams**: Have equal if not more, female staff present during all process of distributions, particularly those interfacing directly with women aid recipients. This could include women's groups and other community groups (including the women's co-researchers in this project) who are experts in contextual safeguarding.
4. Ensure all **latrines are sex-segregated, lockable, and provide accommodation for PSNs** such as the elderly and those living with disabilities. In Mhammra, residents indicated latrines are understood to be sex-segregated, however signage could be provided. In Sahel, latrines and handwashing facilities were not visible; follow up should be conducted to ensure these communities have adequate WASH access particularly considering the pandemic. Latrine accommodation for PSNs is also needed specifically.
5. **Ensure the presence of female staff at all times when aid is delivered at household level.** Staff could be either all female, or mixed gender teams. This can reduce risk of SEA especially towards vulnerable groups such as widows and single women.
6. **Create/utilize multiple and diverse methods for sharing information and receiving complaints**: Information is power, and Empowered Aid's phase 1 findings highlight how important it is to create/use multiple gender-responsive and inclusive channels for sharing information. It is also important to provide feedback mechanisms such as complaint boxes and hotline services.
7. **Additional complaint mechanisms,** such as women community workers or networks, are needed to ensure that there are multiple and diverse ways to report complaints.
8. **Establish defined areas for distributions with sex-segregated, crowd control measures**. These may include a controlled area with a restricted sex-segregated entrance and exit.
9. **Identify safe ways to aid transport of heavy items**. For example, if aid recipients and particularly PSNs require help carrying the parcel into their tent, this can be done by mixed-sex teams of male and female staff or volunteers.
10. Ensure **trained staff are present** to identify and monitor the distribution process, paying attention to refugees with specific needs.