

Northern Syria Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket: Guidance Document

Cash Based Responses – Technical Working Group
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1. Introduction

The Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) for northern Syria outlines the minimum culturally-adjusted items for survival for a household for one month. The basket comprises the basic energy requirements of 2,100 kilocalories per person per day, fuel for cooking, and non-food items. This guide has been designed for use by programme staff developing cash transfer programmes for northern Syria. While it does not set a standard value for the SMEB, a standardised methodology is recommended to ensure value of the basket is calculated as accurately as possibly for differing programme areas across northern Syria.

The SMEB for northern Syria was developed by members of the cross boarder Cash Based Responses - Technical Working Group (CBR-TWG) based in Turkey, with input from the Turkey cross boarder FS, WASH and Shelter and NFI working groups.

2. Background

Since the beginning of the civil war Syria has faced a complex and deteriorating humanitarian situation. Decreasing humanitarian space coupled with a highly mobile population has required a multifaceted response to the vast humanitarian crisis. Drastic changes to pre-existing market structures have moved the subsidy driven economy towards an increased reliance on imports.

The decreased productive base has devastated Syria's economy causing high rates of unemployment and lack of income generating opportunities. As a result households are increasingly facing financial constraints exhausting their ability to benefit from access to essential, life-saving commodities. Given the protracted nature of the crisis, where possible, it has been recommended that humanitarian organisations develop programmes using modalities that support existing market structures and stimulate local economy.ⁱ

As organisations move towards providing cash based assistance in order to support local markets and minimize the pipeline, access and security concerns of providing in-kind assistance, it has become apparent a common methodological approach to cash based programming is needed. As such, the SMEB was developed as a step towards developing common guidelines to harmonise cash based programming in Syria.

3. How the SMEB was developed

Rather than developing a full minimum expenditure basket including rent, utilities, and a more extensive list of items; it was agreed that the MEB for northern Syria should focus on strictly survival needs: hence Survival Minimum Expenditure basket (SMEB). For the purpose of the SMEB the term 'survival' is defined by the Technical Working Group as providing the necessary items for a household to continue existence in spite of a specific shock or difficult circumstances.

Further, as the humanitarian crisis deepens it was agreed that once calculated, the total value of SMEB should not exceed or drastically differ from a household's monthly basic need expenditure in order to avoid disparity or tensions between beneficiary and non-beneficiary households. Therefore, using basic survival commodities as a criterion was agreed as the most appropriate methodology.

Given that price and availability of both food and non-food commodities in northern Syria are subject to fluctuation due to both supply, demand, and currency factors; a standardized process for determining the value of the SMEB is used rather than setting a standard transfer. The result of this method will ensure SMEB values will more accurately represent the monetary requirement to meet basic needs by location.

Members of the Cash Based Responses – Technical Working Group were consulted to review an initial

draft of the SMEB and to review selected items based on information from post distribution monitoring and general observations from cross border field staff's visits. Quantities of each item in the basket were determined using the same sources and consulting with the WASH, NFI and FS Working Groups. The quantities per item were subsequently checked against price monitoring data from across northern Syria and focus group discussions about how much is needed to meet a household's basic needs for one month.

Food items

The food items and quantities were selected to represent the recommended daily energy requirements of 2100 Kcal per person per day based on a 6 person householdⁱⁱ. See table below for the energy breakdown of the daily recommended ration the SMEB is based uponⁱⁱⁱ.

Item	Unit	Quantity
Bulgur wheat	Kg	15
Rice	Kg	19
Bread	Kg	37
Dried pulses	Kg	19
Ghee	Kg	7
Sugar	Kg	5
Salt	Kg	1
Fresh seasonal vegetables	Kg	6
Chicken	Kg	4
Eggs	Kg	6
Tomato paste	Kg	6

Table 1: Food items and quantities

RATION CONTENTS	Daily Ration g/person/day	Energy kcal	Protein g	Fat g
BULGUR WHEAT	80	274	9.8	1.1
RICE, WHITE, MEDIUM GRAIN	100	360	6.6	0.6
BREAD, MADE FROM WHEAT	200	540	20.7	6.9
BEANS, DRIED	100	340	22.0	1.2
GHEE, BUTTER OIL	40	350	0.1	39.8
SUGAR	25	97	0.0	0.0
SALT, IODISED [WFP]	5	0	0.0	0.0
CHICKEN, MEAT AND SKIN, RAW	30	65	5.6	4.5
EGG, WHOLE, CHICKEN, FRESH	30	43	3.8	2.9
TOMATO PASTE, CANNED	30	25	1.3	0.1
TOMATOES, RED, RIPE	30	5	0.3	0.1
Ration totals:	670	2,098	70	57

Table 2: Daily energy requirements breakdown

Cereals^{iv}: Rice, bulgur and bread were selected as the cereals to include. Bread was selected over flour and yeast as it was recommended that bread is traditionally purchased rather than produced in the home.

Pulses/legumes/nuts: Dried pulses were left purposefully unspecified to allow programme staff to select pulses available in the local market; price monitoring has shown there is limited difference in the prices of dried pulses^v.

As the price and availability of fresh vegetables changes by season it was agreed to include a set quantity, the price per kilo of which would be set by drawing an average price from monitoring the price of available vegetables.

Oil/fats: Vegetable ghee was included over vegetable oil as reports show this is more frequently used.

Eggs/meat/poultry/offal: Eggs and poultry were both included with the quantity split accordingly to allow for covering adequate protein sources. The quantity of eggs was increased over poultry as it was anticipated the price per kilo of poultry would distort the total value of the SMEB.

Sugar/honey: Sugar was included.

Miscellaneous: Salt and tomato paste were included.

Non-food items

As with the food items, other items selected for inclusion in the SMEB are a representation of the minimum culturally appropriate non-food items required for a household to meet their basic needs for one month. CBR-TWG members and the WASH and NFI/Shelter working groups fed into the process of defining the selection and quantity of items.

Hygiene consumables: The hygiene consumables were selected based on a combination of cluster standards and consultation with the WASH WG and PDM data from IRC, GOAL and Mercy Corps.

Cooking fuel: Traditionally Syrian cylinder gas was the most commonly used fuel for cooking. However, as the crisis has deepened the availability of the Syrian produced gas cylinders has become less reliable and prices have increased. As a substitute manually refined kerosene is becoming more regularly available and used. Due to the availability and variability in prices manually refined kerosene was selected to be included in the SMEB over Syrian produced gas.

Non food items	Unit	Quantity
Individual soap	Pcs	12
Laundry/dish soap	Kg	2
Toothpaste	Pcs	2
Sanitary pads	Packet of 10	4
Manually refined kerosene	Litre	25
Water	Litre	2790
Other (6 % of total)	%	0.06

Water: Access and availability of water varies significantly across Syria with some locations receiving or buying tacked water and other locations with access to functioning water systems. As such the prices vary largely. For the purpose of the SMEB the minimum recommendation of 15 litres per person per day^{vi} was included as per the minimum recommendations of the Turkey cross boarder WASH sector. It should be noted that the cost of water treatment has not been included in the SMEB. However, it is recommended that if water treatment is required, it should be delivered in-kind or if locally available, through a restricted voucher at household or community level as deemed appropriate.

Other: Based on 2014 PDM data from GOAL's unrestricted voucher programme in Syria, an average of 6% of the voucher value was spent on 'other' items not included as NFI, hygiene or food items. As the SMEB does not include a standard Lumpsum for health, communications or transport it was agreed to include an additional 6% of the total SMEB transfer value for 'other' items while keeping to the mandate of representing survival minimum needs.

Seasonal or programmatic additions

At time of writing the SMEB outlined is designed to cover a base level of survival needs and does not include additional seasonal requirements. Additions or 'top-ups' to the basic basket will need to be made to ensure seasonal life-saving needs are met with the differing seasons such as; fuel for heating, clothing etc. This will be developed in coordination with the CBR-TWG and relevant working groups as a next step and updated on a regular basis.

Additional harmonised 'top-up' baskets may also be developed in consultation with relevant sectors to achieve more specific programmatic objectives. As an example, programmes with a focus on nutrition, shelter winterisation or school kits & clothing will be developed as required.

Limitations

While the SMEB has been developed alongside organisations implementing programmes in northern Syria it should be noted the data available to inform this process is limited and of varying quality. As such a section on how to monitor the SMEB has been included later in this document. It is recommended that the SMEB is reviewed by the CBR-TWG at appropriate intervals.

4. Calculating a location & HH specific SMEB

The following section outlines how to use the survival minimum expenditure basket to establish location specific transfer value and secondly, how to adjust the transfer value appropriately for differing household sizes based on the items and quantities defined in the table below.

Northern Syria Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket				
Item	Unit	Quantity per HH 6 per month	Price per unit	Total price per month
Bulgur wheat	Kg	15	0	0
Rice	Kg	19	0	0
Bread	Kg	37	0	0
Dried pulses	Kg	19	0	0
Ghee	Kg	7	0	0
Sugar	Kg	5	0	0
Salt	Kg	1	0	0
Fresh seasonal vegetables	Kg	6	0	0
Chicken	Kg	4	0	0
Eggs	Kg	6	0	0
Tomato paste	Kg	6	0	0
Individual soap	Pcs	12	0	0
Laundry/dish soap	Kg	2	0	0
Toothpaste	Pcs	2	0	0
Sanitary pads	Packet of 10	4	0	0
Manually refined kerosene	L	25	0	0
Water	L	2790	0	0
Other (6 % of total)	%	0.06	0	0
TOTAL				0

Price monitoring and setting

Before establishing the value of the SMEB for a programme area it is recommended to begin monitoring price and availability of the commodities. Daily monitoring at least one month before setting the price per unit will ensure the SMEB value represents the minimum survival expenditure costs accurately as possible.

A monthly market monitoring report is produced by the CBR-TWG which captures price and availability of SMEB items in major markets of sub-districts across northern Syria^{vii}. This data can be used to help inform budget development and to cross reference against other price monitoring data available. However, establishing a monitoring system for price and availability in smaller markets where project participants will purchase goods from should also be established. Monitoring availability of the goods within the market using a scale can provide more accurate information; see CBR-TWG market monitoring tool as a guide (Annex 2).

Setting price of goods to establish total SMEB value

Using the average or median price per unit of each commodity from price monitoring can be entered into the SMEB calculation tool (Annex 1).

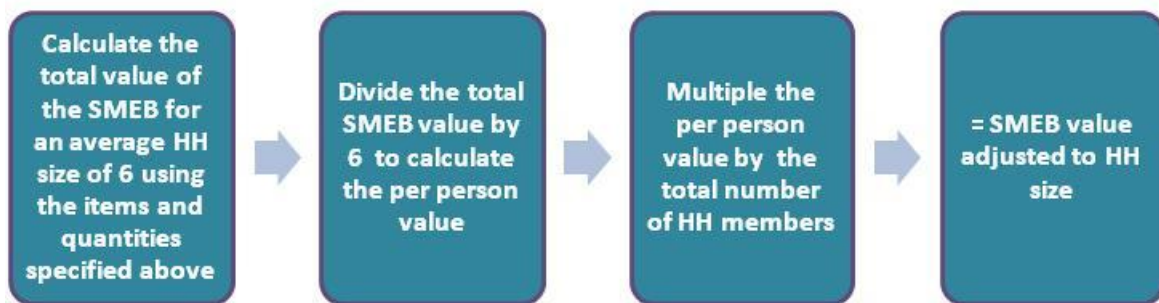
Calculating fresh seasonal vegetables price per unit: Suggested that a minimum of 3 different types of vegetables are selected for price monitoring and the average price per kilo over the monitoring period is

used to calculate the fresh vegetable quantity.

Calculating the % for 'other': Once all SMEB items have been valued, 6% of the basket value should be added to achieve the total SMEB value. This will be automatically included using the SMEB calculation tool.

Adjusting transfer value for different household sizes

The SMEB was developed based on an average household size of 6. However, it is recommended to adjust the total SMEB value to more accurately represent differing household sizes using the calculation below.



Example: After calculating the total value of the SMEB it came to a total of 30,000 SYP, to calculate the total value for a HH of 8; $30,000/6 = 5000$, $5000*8 = \underline{40,000}$. The total SMEB value for a HH of 8 then equals 40,000 SYP

Monitoring

Where possible existing information from price and availability monitoring and post distribution monitoring from cash transfer and in kind programmes has been used to inform the development of the SMEB. However, the CBR-TWG will review the SMEB on a regular basis to ensure it appropriately represents basic survival needs for households in Syria.

The following questions are recommended to be included in post distribution monitoring. While not extensive, as a minimum these should be included alongside questions on; the process of the transfer modality, market information, quality and quantity of goods available, and access based questions.

Question	Option
What did you spend the transfer on and how much?	List
If purchased fuel for cooking, what type and what quantity?	List
In your opinion is the total value of the vouchers sufficient to meet your needs for one month?	Enough/not enough/too much
What did you purchase using your own money this month?	List

Other considerations

Cash for work

It should be noted that when calculating daily rates for Cash/Voucher for Work' programmes rates should be based on monitoring and analysis of the local labour market, not based on the total value of the SMEB.

Harmonised daily rates and total days worked in a month will be harmonised in a separate guidance note

produced by the CBR-TWG. As many organisations operated in neighbouring locations, it is important to harmonise the transfer rate while ensuring daily rates exceed going market rates.

5. Annexes

Annex 1: SMEB Calculation tool, attached

Annex 2: Price and availability monitoring tool, attached

ⁱ Cash assistance recommended in key findings and sector specific recommendations of the 'Multi Sector Needs Assessment' (MSNA)

ⁱⁱ Sphere Handbook, Minimum Standards in Food Security and Nutrition, <http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/how-to-use-this-chapter-3/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Food ration planning tool Nutval <http://www.nutval.net/>

^{iv} Here follow the categorisation used by the HDDS. Cereals; roots and tubers; pulses/legumes/nuts; oil/fats; eggs; sugar/honey; milk and milk products; meat/poultry/offal; fish and seafood; vegetables; fruits; miscellaneous.

^v GOAL Syria Monthly Price Monitoring Report

^{vi} Sphere Handbook, Minimum Standards in Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion <http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/water-supply-sanitation-and-hygiene-promotion-wash/>

^{vii} Note access to sub-districts will change between months depending on access of participating.