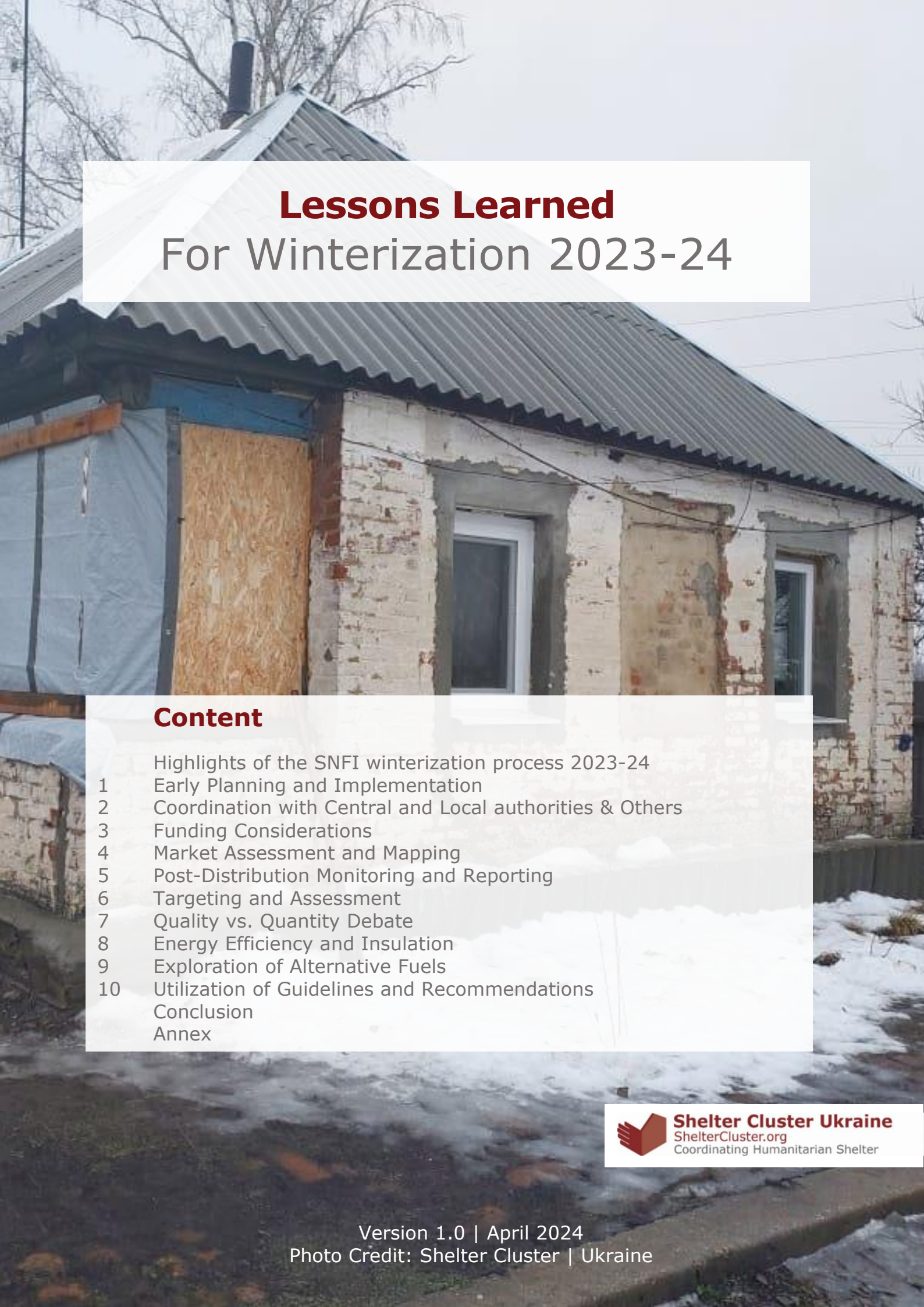




Lessons Learned For Winterization 2023-24

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Shelter Cluster Ukraine
ShelterCluster.org
Coordinating Humanitarian Shelter

Highlights of the winterization 2023-24

1. During the 2023-2024 winter season the Shelter Cluster partners collectively reached over 1.84 million individuals through winterization support. The cluster response was 45% cash based and 55% in kind. The response was geographically focused primarily on the crescent with the vast majority of support going towards winter energy needs (918K), winter NFI (462K) and winter clothes (308K).
2. Since 2015, the Shelter Cluster implementation of winterization has focused on 4 objectives: personal insulation through the distribution of winter clothing and NFIs, heating of individual shelters through the distribution of solid fuel or cash equivalent, insulation of substandard housing, and heating provision in social infrastructure.
3. The Shelter Cluster promptly addressed the identified gaps in winter energy requirements as communicated by local authorities. Partners efficiently mobilized resources to bridge these gaps, ensuring that the needs of vulnerable populations in frontline oblasts were met.
4. Assistance was guided by the principle of deduplication, where partners were encouraged to confirm whether beneficiaries were already receiving state subsidies and assess whether the amount received was sufficient to meet their needs. The Shelter Cluster has consistently worked to minimize duplication in winter activities both within and between clusters through traditional coordination mechanism.
5. Government estimates indicated that 5.6 million people required winterization assistance. Initially, humanitarian organizations aimed to assist 1.44 million individuals, ultimately reaching 1.66 million. Financial requirements totalled \$372 million, with \$270 million covered, leaving a gap of \$102 million, which accounts for 27% of the total requirements.
6. Planned activities for winterization included providing winter clothing, non-food items (NFIs), heating appliances (electric heaters and solid fuel heaters), addressing winter energy needs (fuel/cash/voucher), rental support, and insulation of substandard homes.
7. Our Priority assistance categories were winter energy needs (638,324 Target with 918,029 reached), NFIs, and winter clothing.
8. In the 2023/2024 winterization effort, 51 reporting partners collaborated, with UNHCR, IOM, ACTED, and SPIR contributing the most, and involving 89 implementing partners, with UNHCR, IOM, and Proliska providing the most assistance.
9. Following Ministry of Reintegration Order No. 309 dated 22.12.2022, nine regions were identified as priorities for assisting with solid fuel, excluding the Kyiv region: Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhya, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Chernihiv oblasts. (The Crescent)
10. The Shelter Cluster has regularly provided updates to the Humanitarian Country Team on the progress of winter activities. Additionally, we actively participate in weekly coordination meetings convened by the government of Ukraine to ensure effective engagement and alignment with ongoing efforts.
11. Since the full-scale invasion in February 2022, the provision of winter assistance has become even more challenging due to the increase of geographical territory found within the 40 km zone of the contact line.

Please refer to the latest results for this winter season in the Shelter/NFI Cluster Ukraine Winterization Dashboard in our website following this [LINK](#).¹



¹ Our high results despite a low budget can be attributed to the fact that the total reach for each unique beneficiary surpasses the allocated funding. This discrepancy occurs because certain interventions have a lower dollar value per person, allowing us to fulfil our targets while operating within a limited budget.

1 Early Planning and Implementation

SNFI cluster [HNRP Objective 2](#), focuses on Winterization and identifies seven winter-specific activities. Additionally, certain regular activities under cluster objectives 1 and 3 also contribute to the winter well-being of the people, early planning and implementation are crucial. Each activity presents its unique set of challenges, which are best addressed earlier in the year rather than later. While the focus of the cluster and its partners during the summer has always been on repairs, the security and logistical challenges of Ukraine's full-scale invasion require the Shelter Cluster and its donors to begin planning for distribution much earlier in order to ensure that those living in hard-to-reach areas which are almost impassable in the winter months received the recommended amount of solid fuel in advance of the winter months.

Recommendation:

- **Distribution of Solid Fuel:**
 - The distribution of solid fuel through both cash and in-kind modalities requires the most resources in terms of logistics, monitoring at household level, and coordination of partners and with local authorities.
 - In 2023, a Winterization Recommendations document was published in August but due to delays in funding, partners, authorities, and the Cluster team only started to agree on targets beginning in October.
 - Even with targeting in place, funding for some partners did not begin until December causing deliveries of solid fuel to begin only in December and in some cases January or February.
 - Since December 29th 2023, the intensity of Russia's attacks on the Crescent regions of Ukraine have complicated the already challenging logistical aspects of distribution of solid fuel.
- Highlight the importance of commencing planning and implementation well in advance of winter.
- While Building Blocks and RAIS tools helps to de-duplicate between cash recipients, it is also noted that many of the cash recipients had not been assessed for their needs prior to being checked for de-duplication. All partners considering cash as a modality should also verify the heating needs of beneficiaries prior to proceeding with de-duplication.
- Winter planning and implementation should be grounded in realism, aligning with on-the-ground findings and needs. Setting overly ambitious targets far in advance may inadvertently widen the gap between plans and reality.
- Early commencement of winter activities during the summer months. Possibly from May/June.
- Highlight the benefits of early planning and implementation for ensuring timely assistance delivery. It's imperative to stress that delivery delays often occur when not accounted for in the early planning stages.

Stakeholders: Authorities Cluster Partners Donors

2 Coordination with Central and Local authorities & Others

As a result of our detailed and advanced coordination last winter together with the local authorities, Shelter cluster gained a comprehensive understanding of the general situation expected in the upcoming winter. The Ukraine Shelter Cluster coordinates the provision of solid fuel in collaboration with the Government² of Ukraine who provides a state subsidy program. This means that in each region (Oblast) of Ukraine, the Oblast through local

² About 30 regional and localized meetings were conducted with about five to seven meetings conducted in each oblast. The planning and implementation of Winter response have been discussed within up to 10 meetings with Ministry of Reintegration. This included Subnational Shelter Cluster meetings, presentations at General Coordination Meetings, and ad-hoc winterization oblast meetings.

Hromadas was responsible for providing the information on gaps. However, In the early months of this collaboration between October to December 2023, the risks associated with delayed collaboration and communication became evident which would primarily result in a lack of understanding of which capacities stakeholders had to cover which needs. This delay can potentially hinder the cluster's and authorities' ability to develop contingencies. As an example of Shelter Cluster's effort in close collaboration with partners and authorities, by following this link, you can access the list of all coordination meetings held during the last winter: <https://sheltercluster.org/east-hub/pages/shelter-cluster-meetings-and-outcomes>

Another positive development is the establishment of an energy sector coordination mechanism led by UNDP, SNFI cluster will continue to engage on winter energy issues.

Recommendations:

- **Distribution of Solid Fuel:**

- The Ukraine Shelter Cluster coordinates the provision of solid fuel in collaboration with the Government of Ukraine who provides a state subsidy program. This means that each local Hromada authorities was responsible for providing assistance in areas not impacted by the war or where humanitarian partners had less access than local authorities. This requires careful coordination with Oblast, Raion, and Hromada authorities throughout the planning process at field level and at national level with the Ministry of Integration. A potential delay can potentially hinder the cluster's and authorities' ability to develop contingencies to replace assistance not yet delivered, understand which vulnerability categories are eligible for state subsidies and which one's state subsidies can't cover, which modality is most appropriate where, and to know precisely which household will receive which quantity of fuel by whom. To this aim, during the course of the winter period, at Subnational level, the Shelter Cluster held regional coordination meetings to plan on the coverage of targets and to monitor the status of implementation.
- Early and regular coordination with the Government of Ukraine (GoU) to align respective interventions.
- Need for structured meetings between Shelter Cluster partners and GoU for effective coordination Shelter Cluster should continue such meetings at individual Oblast level chaired in collaboration with the Oblast authorities. This was a good practice for the 2022-23 winter period.
- Capacity building initiatives for GoU on vulnerability criteria and logistics This includes the provision of tools to facilitate collection of data, sharing of information on coverage of persons and gaps, and organized trainings.
- Partners ensuring solutions for logistics (offloading) and costs at distribution points and after the handover from authorities for the last-mile delivery. This also may include providing logistical support to authorities as in many cases it was observed that local authorities lacked the appropriate equipment and capacity to do this last mile delivery.

Stakeholders:

Authorities

Cluster

3

Funding Considerations

The 2023-24 winterization period observed a deterioration of the security situation primarily in the prioritized oblasts especially from the end of January until March. Donetsk, Kharkivska, Kheronska, and Mykolaivska Oblasts all experienced significant security deteriorations on snow and moisture ridden roads which further brought obstacles to the delivery of solid fuel. An earlier delivery of solid fuel would have avoided both the weather-related and security related challenges. This would require funding to be provided by latest in September to ensure delivery by October.

The UHF second reserve allocation focusing on winter provided a massive boost, but the process from launch to funds allocation must be expedited. SNFI cluster constituted over 90% of the total humanitarian winter response strategy but was one of the most delayed funds in terms of implementation with some solid fuel being distributed outside of the mandatory winter window. As the Shelter Cluster aims to increase its monitoring of winterization the following recommendation is made to ensure the achievement of the

targeted provision of solid fuel for the 2024 to 2025 period: The fuel must be available for use in the home ideally before the start of the winter season at latest during November. The quantities distributed should cover the household's needs for the entire winter season as defined in the SNFI guidance document. Fuel distributed from March onward will be considered a failure to cover the winter energy needs of the activity and could be excluded from Cluster's reporting.

Recommendation:

- Earlier timing of fund allocation in relation to winter timeline in consultation with Shelter Cluster.
- Importance of funding flexibility to address evolving needs and challenges.

Stakeholders:

Donors

4

Market Assessment and Mapping

Between planning phase to implementation phase, one of the primary logistical challenges was in setting the price for procurement and transfer value for purchase of solid fuel. The global market, the decreasing supply of good quality fuel, and subsequent rise in demand in the winter months caused an increase in winter prices during the winter season. This implied that from planning stage when targets were agreed to delivery stage, Shelter Cluster partners had to adjust their targets and the amount of fuel distributed to the number of beneficiaries. For next year's implementation of solid fuel, it will be helpful for the cluster to improve identification of available functional markets for solid fuel, suppliers, government's management of prices, inflation, and assistance provided by humanitarian organizations in purchasing from the local market. It should be noted that an earlier delivery time of solid fuel would also mitigate the risk of increased demand on the winter months.

Recommendations:

- Local authorities' recommendation for modality of response in each area. Hromada and Oblast authorities already have a good idea of which modality of assistance is most appropriate where. This was identified in the monitoring mission reports of the East Hub Shelter Cluster for Donetsk, Kharkivska, Khersonska, and Zaporizka Oblasts. This monitoring indicates in areas closer to the contact line (15 km buffer or less), suppliers are not willing or able to deliver and that there is no transportation, so in-kind solid fuel is appropriate. Whereas in areas near larger cities with available transportation, working network, and ability of local population to use transportation, cash or voucher could be considered. Modality is not shaped by geography alone, and there are number of other considerations that are touched on in other parts of this document.
- Importance of market assessment before implementation of winter assistance programs.
- Mapping of Financial Service Providers (FSPs) to facilitate cash-based assistance.
- Utilizing market data for informed decision-making and efficient resource allocation
- Considerations for sourcing and pricing of firewood to ensure sustainability- It is also important that cash interventions have better monitoring to ensure that beneficiaries use their cash to purchase wood from certified suppliers. This ensures that no harm will be done to the environment. Beneficiaries often sought to have savings by contracting with uncertified suppliers who would cut wood in areas where the cutting of trees is not permitted thus contributing to deforestation.
- Liaise with JMMI team to consider widening market initiative to cover additional SNFI items such as solid fuel.

Stakeholders:

Authorities

Cluster

Partners

5**Post-Distribution Monitoring and Reporting**

Shelter Cluster has been recommending PDM indicators to partners which were refined and shared with interested partners throughout the 2023-24 period to enable partners to collect information that could help in observing trends and provide additional quantitative data to the various monitoring missions that were conducted by the Shelter Cluster team at the field level during the 2023-24 period.

However, no PDM data was shared with the Shelter Cluster team to be able to monitor quantitative trends that would also support more nuanced technical recommendations or to be able to pick up on any additional winterization recommendations that would strengthen the Cluster's technical guidelines for the next year. Moreover, it should be noted that much of the Shelter Cluster's emphasis has been on the provision of solid fuel as this is where the bulk of the coordination efforts were focused. This area had the most Shelter Cluster partners and required many meetings with the local authorities, so it is not surprising. Therefore, other indicators could be used to measure the effectiveness of other activities such as distribution of winter NFIs, clothing, and installation of insulation. For the list of indicators please see [PDM Questions to beneficiaries on solid fuel draft](#).

Recommendation:

- Engage in PDM tool development adding appropriate SNFI focused questions.
- Significance of promptly sharing monitoring results with relevant stakeholders
- Integration of monitoring findings into future winter assistance planning
- Importance of transparency and accountability in reporting processes
- A central depository of PDM data can be created through sharing a Kobo account with several participating organizations with the general findings being made available to Shelter Cluster partners through an interactive dashboard.

Stakeholders:

Partners

6**Targeting and Assessment**

The past two years of winterization implementation have been unprecedented in terms of the amount of funding that has been provided to Ukraine. This has resulted in partners having a high capacity to cover a significant amount of needs as compared to when the response was only focused in the Donbass region. This trend of funding is expected to decline however in the 2024-25 period, limiting Shelter Cluster partners' capacity to respond to the same level of needs as in the first two winter seasons following the full scale Russian invasion. This requires the Shelter Cluster to prioritize appropriate assistance according to the vulnerability of the individuals and their specific winterization needs. However, not having a clear strategy in place that aligns with both GoU and donor criteria could lead to mistargeting resulting in an inability to cover those who are most in need. It is imperative to use Shelter cluster and Protection cluster's Vulnerability guidelines to ensure effective and targeted assistance delivery and coordinate these criteria with the local authorities. Local authorities have already started on the preparation of such lists, and Shelter Cluster targeting should again seek to compliment those persons who are most vulnerable.

In the 2024-25 Winterization Recommendations, the Shelter Cluster should also emphasize shelter vulnerability such as housing type, size of family and use of rooms within the shelter, type of materials for windows and doors insulation in addition to vulnerability criteria as key indicators that partners should use in needs assessments for selecting beneficiaries and for determining the modality and amount of solid fuel to be provided. It is notable that these indicators were required indicators in earlier versions of the Shelter

Cluster's winterization recommendations but were not as emphasized in previous versions of the winterization recommendations. The understanding of how much heating an individual shelter and its inhabitants' needs is a key baseline indicator and should be included in every partner's need assessment. This also could lead to identification of a complimentary winter activity, winterization insulation.

Recommendations:

- Utilization of indicators for informed targeting and assessment
- Tailoring assistance **modality** based on proximity to conflict zones and market functionality.
- Ensuring transparent and consistent targeting criteria across stakeholders

Stakeholders:

Authorities

Cluster

Partners

7

Quality vs. Quantity Debate

It has been challenging to determine how to utilize our assistance to maximize impact according to the population in need. These discussions vary significantly from one context to another, and the risk lies in partners not having a coordinated strategy based on the specific context. This lack of alignment may compromise the effectiveness of our interventions.

Recommendations:

- **Distribution of Solid Fuel:**

- In this year's winterization recommendations, the baseline amount of a standard amount of solid fuel for one winter was removed from the winterization guidelines and many partners decided to select the minimum amount of solid fuel instead of the recommended amount of solid fuel. Partners who had selected this option often explained that they aimed to assist as many beneficiaries as possible with less assistance. In the 2024-25 winterization recommendations, these amounts should be further nuanced to illustrate in which situations the minimum amount might be appropriate (new need created towards the end of the winter period, capacity of the beneficiary to purchase a portion of the baseline amount on their own, etc.) vs the recommended amount.
- In terms of quality, it was highlighted that the quality of both coal and wood have significantly deteriorated and that there is a need to completely shift to alternative forms of energy where and when possible, for solid fuel. If partners did not observe that coal was already a challenge in 2023, its availability will continue to deteriorate in the next two years and should look to be replaced. Sunflower briquettes or other alternatives could be explored and cooperation with development / recovery actors interested in increasing the supply of these briquettes by supporting local businesses or farmers who may have lost livelihoods due to lack of demining could explore the biofuel market for winterization as both a lifesaving and supply generating option therefore creating a nexus approach.
- In both these areas, the Shelter Cluster is recommended that partners do not stretch themselves so thin by covering many beneficiaries with the minimum amounts of solid fuel as this often is what leads to duplications of assistance and less effective value for money. The recommendation therefore is to cover less households with the recommended amount of solid fuel during the 2024-25 period. This will ensure that those targeted households are the most in need and will have the required amount of solid fuel during the winter months. This relates also with the Cluster's recommendation of monitoring the intervention for the 2024-25 period (as mentioned above).
- It was observed that some agencies continued to deliver high cost imported solid-fuel stoves without incorporating all installation components such as exhaust flues. More attention to SNFI guidance compliance is necessary.

- Discussion on prioritizing quality over quantity in assistance provision with the cluster, community, and the authorities.
- Informing donors about challenges posed by limited funding and competing priorities.
- Creating discussions with Stakeholders about the importance of balancing quality and quantity within financial constraints

Stakeholders:

Authorities

Donors

Cluster

Partners

8 Energy Efficiency and Insulation

Increasing Russian attacks on Energy infrastructure will have a large impact next winter in front-line oblasts. This may create additional needs for heating by those who are typically dependent on gas or electric heating. Many of these households would not have the appropriate infrastructure of solid fuel stoves and therefore should be prioritized for support with improvements on insulation and personal insulation. Furthermore, Energy prices are continuously rising, posing challenges for households to afford their bills. One approach to addressing this issue is to explore technical solutions aimed at assisting partners and the targeted households to improve insulation and reduce energy consumption by securing the thermal envelope more effectively. (Insulating sub-standard houses as well as light and medium repairs)

Recommendations:

- Prioritizing repair of damaged houses for improved energy efficiency
- Technical specifications for insulation to enhance effectiveness.

Stakeholders:

Cluster

Partners

9 Exploration of Alternative Fuels

Since 2016, the Shelter Cluster has been calling to look at alternative sources of fuel for coverage of winter needs. As mentioned above the time to look beyond coal has already well arrived, and wood is posing continual challenges on the environment which has already suffered significant damage since 2022. Sunflower briquettes were especially appreciated by beneficiaries in the 2023-24 period, but in some regions, there are insufficient suppliers for this type of heating kit.

Recommendations:

- Long-term strategies for diversifying fuel sources
- Challenges and opportunities in introducing alternative fuels.
- Importance of collaboration with local authorities and stakeholders for successful implementation
- Engage livelihood actors e.g., FSL cluster partners to consider localized solid fuel production projects.

Stakeholders:

Partners

10 Utilization of Guidelines and Recommendations

Shelter Cluster's [Winter Recommendation Guideline](#) is valued document for partners, working alongside the "[Activities Handbook](#)" document to enhance the winter aspects of activities. However, there are numerous technical nuances that can contribute to improvement of the guideline. These should be reviewed collaboratively with operational perspectives and insights from our partners. However, this guideline serves as the primary document, requiring stakeholders to familiarize themselves with its contents.

Recommendations:

- Encouragement for partners to utilize existing guidelines and handbooks.
- Importance of briefings for local authorities to ensure alignment with recommendations.
- Suggestions for incorporating lessons learned into future winterization guidelines.
- Updating our guidelines with the latest technical guidelines.

Stakeholders:

Cluster

Partners

Conclusion

The outcomes presented in this paper have been a collaborative effort between our Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) and our subnational coordinators, who have contributed to the findings of this document. The collected and detailed list of the lessons learned is annexed at the end of this document.

It's important to mention that the core winterization activities are based on structured collaborations between Shelter Cluster, its partners, and Government authorities at national and subnational levels. While this list of lessons learned may not encompass all possible findings, it represents the main and most critical ideas.

Accurate data and analysis collectively gathered from the field level will play a crucial role in early planning and fund allocation for winter initiatives. Shelter Cluster remains available for consultation and collaboration to enhance coordination for the upcoming winter season.

Annex

Winterization Lessons Learned for 2023-24 – [LINK](#)