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# UN COMMON CASH STATEMENT
## PROGRESS REPORT | SEPTEMBER 2021

*This report outlines key progress and challenges under the UN Common Cash Statement (UNCCS) and the vision and priorities ahead. It builds on more than two years of implementation, the UNCCS Q&A and a number of surveys and lessons learned workshops conducted with countries in 2021. While the focus has largely been on implementation in the seven focus countries,[1] the UNCCS continues to grow globally, leveraging the experience gained in recent years, building on existing common guidance.*

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[1] Afghanistan, Bangladesh, CAR, DRC, Ecuador, Niger and Yemen

# OVERALL PROGRESS

Since the launch of the UNCCS, the signatories have made significant progress in its three pillars:

**1 Harmonised Cash Programming**

**2 Collaborative Procurement**

**3 Systems interoperability**

## Key Highlights

- Harmonized cash transfer mechanisms in 25 countries since 2019

- Progressive implementation of UNCCS plans in the seven focus countries in 2020-21

- Multi-country learning exchange event in April 2021

- 20-country survey on procurement to inform further harmonization in 2021

- UNCCS good practices and learning shared for cross-fertilization

- Common Procurement Registry, including FAO, IOM, UNFPA, identifying common procurement opportunities globally

- Strengthened coherence between UNCCS and country Cash Working Groups

**Joint guidance and tools since 2018:**

Minimum Core Assistance Delivery Dataset for Affected Populations providing a basis for data collection and future systems interoperability

Trilateral Data-Sharing Agreement for Cash Assistance (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF) providing the basis for data-sharing

Guidance for Collaborative Procurement for Humanitarian Cash Transfers

## Country-Level Implementation

Collaborative procurement has been/ is being conducted in six focus countries[2] including through piggybacking, collaborative contract clauses and joint procurement. Informed by the Guidance for Collaborative Procurement, 25 countries have leveraged common procurement, inclusive of other agencies beyond UNCCS, to simplify cash delivery from the perspective of people in need. UNCCS focus countries have also considered options for systems interoperability at country level, avoiding duplication and enhancing programmatic collaboration, in line with the Global Trilateral Data Sharing Agreement (DSA).

[2] Afghanistan, Bangladesh, CAR, Ecuador, DRC and Yemen

UNCCS signatories are also increasingly engaging in the harmonization of cash assistance, specifically joint feasibility studies, needs and market assessments, post-distribution and price monitoring, Minimum Expenditure Baskets (MEBs), mapping of complaints and feedback mechanisms and common risks and data registries. Cash Working Groups (CWGs) have engaged throughout these processes with key activities planned to support collaborative approaches to cash.



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**Ecuador**

UNICEF, WFP and UNHCR conducted joint procurement and harmonized programming delivering seamless and complementary cash assistance for food, basic needs/core relief items and education to refugee and migrant households. Systems interoperability and improved data sharing are also on-going.

Bilateral systems interoperability between WFP *SCOPE* and UNHCR *proGres*, linked with *Building Blocks*, allowed other agencies (e.g. UNICEF and IOM) to access beneficiary data to provide emergency cash and voucher assistance (CVA) for affected people. Agencies have also engaged in collaborative procurement through piggybacking on financial service provider (FSP) contracts.

**Bangladesh**

**Afghanistan**
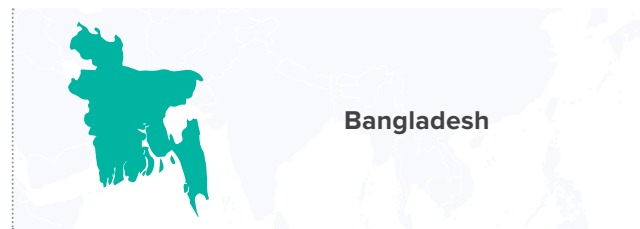
Signatories have harmonized cash assistance through collaborative FSP procurement and working closely with CWGs and NGOs. UNHCR and WFP have piggybacked on existing Long-Term Agreements (LTAs) with FSPs and initiated discussions on joint procurement of new FSPs. The agencies have also mapped out data through the Minimum Core Assistance Delivery Dataset for Affected Populations.

Agencies have assessed entry points for systems interoperability through a comprehensive interoperability assessment including agencies beyond the UNCCS. WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF have kick-started the process for joint procurement of FSPs building on previous piggybacking arrangements. The signatories have also developed a joint risk framework for CVA.

**Yemen**

**Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**

The UNCCS agencies have harmonized joint feasibility assessments. Collaborative procurement is on-going, and opportunities exist to pursue joint advocacy on documentation for IDPs. WFP and UNHCR also delivered joint CVA in the emergency response for refugees from Central African Republic and developed joint targeting approaches for the relevant refugee contexts.

The operation engaged in joint feasibility assessment and harmonized monitoring. They also leveraged country-based pooled funding to pilot certain aspects of the UNCCS in collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). Collaborative procurement is a priority going forward.

**Central African Republic (CAR)**

**Niger**

The team conducted joint feasibility assessments, MEB development and mapping of cash activities in collaboration with the CWG. UNHCR and WFP have piggybacked on each other's FSP contracts, using the same transfer mechanisms.

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# Global Working Group: Procurement and Finance

The 2020 Guidance for Collaborative Procurement for Humanitarian Cash Transfers has been implemented in 25 operations. Globally, the UNCCS Procurement and Finance Working Group (PFWG) established a register of existing and up-coming contracts with FSPs to fast-track the identification of common procurement opportunities in operations. The register was extended to include agencies beyond the three operational UNCCS signatories, including FAO, IOM and UNFPA. UNCCS is keen to build bridges with the NGOs on procurement, including through leveraging the collaborative clause in current FSP contracts which provides the opportunity for any partner – big or small – to benefit from the already negotiated fees and conditions. This can reduce parallel payment mechanisms while recognizing the different procurement procedures of the UN and NGOs. The PFWG engaged in several learning exercises with country offices to simplify and harmonize joint procurement. This included a survey of UNCCS agencies in 20 countries followed by a series of interviews on collaborative procurement. The feedback will guide the way forward and priorities for this group in 2021-2022.

## Survey and Interview Findings on Collaborative Procurement

> Findings from 20 countries identified piggybacking as the most frequently used and preferred collaborative procurement approach, followed by the systematic inclusion of a collaborative clause in individual agencies' contracts with FSPs and joint procurement.

> While operations highlight the usefulness, effectiveness and suitability of collaborative procurement, they emphasized the need for lighter processes and harmonized common tools for joint procurement.

> UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP are now working to harmonize their internal agency-specific request for proposal (RFP) documents (including terms of references, technical and financial assessments, etc.) and align processes to ensure they maintain standards required by each agency.

> UNCCS is keen to do the same with NGOs. Increased engagement between programme and procurement staff at country level is required to ensure ownership of the complex processes.

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## Global Working Group: Data and Systems

The Data Interoperability Task Team (DITT) supports focus countries on DSAs and systems interoperability. This workstream depends on increased funding for systems adjustment and development, and above all DSAs. The UNCCS developed and signed the Trilateral Data-Sharing Agreement for Cash Assistance (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF). They have fleshed out requirements for a Data Sharing Portal to enable and facilitate confidential biographic and assistance data exchange between agencies' corporate systems through interoperability solutions, which will be open to other agencies.

The Minimum Core Assistance Delivery Dataset for Affected Populations, agreed between the wider humanitarian community, is being implemented as a minimum data set to be collected from beneficiaries for the purpose of enrolling for assistance; a pre-condition for pursuing systems interoperability. Mapping of country-specific interoperability initiatives and opportunities has been  conducted  in some of the pilot countries.

UNICEF has developed an internal beneficiary management information system (MIS) system *HOPE* that will become interoperable with other signatories' systems. WFP and UNHCR have progressed significantly on interoperability solutions between WFP *SCOPE*/ UNHCR *PRIMES* systems, including a biometric data interoperability solution which has now been deployed.

UNICEF and UNHCR have co-developed a payment module under UNHCR's *CashAssist* for UNICEF MIS *HOPE* that will feed into the interoperability solution between the two agencies. Some of the agencies have increased technical agencies' capacity dedicated to field support and implementation on interoperability. Moreover, meetings and briefings with other agencies and organizations have taken  place to promote systems interoperability beyond the UNCCS agencies.

Agencies are also scoping the possibility of making inclusive beneficiary list comparison accessible in some settings to the wider humanitarian community.

# WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT TO DATE?

## Lessons Learned: Voices from the Field

A lesson learned multi-country workshop took place in April 2021 among the seven UNCCS focus countries and the global support team to capture experiences and share learning. The key lessons include:

- UNCCS implementation is context-specific adapted to each unique operational situation.
- The main drivers for country collaboration are the need to simplify assistance from the perspective of people in need, prevent overlapping activities, avoid data duplication, ensure programme and targeting complementarities and maximize resources through FSP procurement and systems interoperability.
- Dedicated capacities and resources are required to ensure collaboration.
- Meaningful collaboration takes time to reach a common understanding, trust and buy-in.

- Honest and, sometimes, difficult discussions may be required to establish regular channels of communication to move work plans forward.
- The frequency that agencies meet to discuss their CVA in a particular context dictates how much and how quickly the UNCCS' activities will progress.
- While there is a wide variety of positive experiences on the interaction between the UNCCS and existing CWGs, ongoing messaging is required to ensure that there is clarity on the difference between 'operational collaboration' and 'coordination'.
- Country streamlining of collaborative procedures requires additional support at global level.
- Documenting and sharing learning of UNCCS work in different operational contexts can help increase 'cross-fertilization' among UNCCS focus countries.

## Challenges

**1** In some contexts, limited overlaps in populations assisted exist among all three UNCCS operational agencies, meaning restricted trilateral programming opportunities.

**2** Government policies or bans on CVA are in place in some operations which constitute a main blockage. UNCCS agencies have come together on joint advocacy.

**3** Limited capacities, staffing and resources are in place for UNCCS activities.

**4** Competing operational priorities (such as COVID-19, droughts) limit focus on collaboration.

**5** The mainstreaming of cash assistance internally within organizations is already challenging, delivering it jointly with others poses additional layers of complexity.

**6** Organizational cultures and different mindsets often add complications.

**7** Where access to digital services for payments and beneficiary's identification is limited, implementing systems interoperability, identity or CVA digitization can be challenging.

**8** Getting actors around the same virtual table, including governments but also technical and operational colleagues (procurement, finance, logistics, IM, etc.) can be difficult.

**9** Ensuring ownership of operational and technical workstreams (procurement, data interoperability) at country level can be demanding for staff, who are already overstretched.

**10** COVID-19 enabled certain aspects of collaboration, but also slowed down the response, showing a reduction in frequency of UNCCS engagement.

**11** Strengthening alignment between country and global priorities is key along with regular communication and knowledge management.

# VISION AND PRIORITIES GOING FORWARD

- Expand the UNCCS to other countries when serving the same populations.
- Pilot and document use cases for interoperability in operations that can be replicated/ scaled up.
- Build stronger collaboration with governments and other partners to avoid parallel systems, when possible, making the UNCCS overall more inclusive.
- Continue harmonization of procurement tools and processes and strengthen collaboration around digital payments.

- Establish a Data Portal or similar technology solutions to facilitate appropriate data-sharing for operational agencies enabling improved access to personal data for the purpose of CVA.
- Increase learning exchanges and frequent communication between countries and between HQ and focus countries, including through a knowledge management platform.
- Build capacity and understanding on collaborative cash approaches among in-country senior management.