

CASH ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION WHY, WHAT AND HOW?

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This document provides an overview of cash and protection including what it is, when and how it is used. It also provides links to key resources, including guidance, research and tools along with a few good practice snapshots from 25 country operations.

OVERVIEW OF CASH ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION

UNHCR's cash assistance directly addresses protection in two ways:

- 1 Ensuring the safe and dignified delivery and use of cash assistance through protection mainstreaming; and
- 2 Embedding the use of cash in programming for protection.

A large part of [UNHCR's 2020 cash assistance](#) was dedicated to achieving specific protection outcomes, including in the COVID-19 response. The most common protection support through cash is helping persons with specific needs to meet their basic needs. Cash is also actively used to achieve protection

outcomes in the areas of child protection, education, reintegration of returnees, GBV prevention and response, and enabling access to documentation (see Annex II for country examples). 95% of UNHCR cash is also delivered unrestricted, giving the choice to the recipients on how to best meet their own needs. The [2020 CBI Post-Distribution Monitoring](#) highlights that cash, together with in-kind assistance and services, positively contributes to improved living conditions, reduces stress, and can help prevent displaced populations from resorting to negative coping mechanisms, such as removing children from school, child labour and begging, survival sex, early marriage or returning prematurely to conflict zones.

UNHCR AND CASH ASSISTANCE

Scaling up and strengthening the use of cash assistance is a corporate priority. As a key objective, UNHCR leverages cash to achieve important protection and solutions outcomes. Since the launch of the [Policy on Cash-Based Interventions](#) in December 2016,

UNHCR has delivered more than
USD 3 BILLION
to vulnerable populations in
100 
countries,

with cash now exceeding in-kind assistance. Building on three decades of experience in cash programming, cash assistance is used for a wide range of purposes including protection, basic needs, education, shelter, health, and livelihoods. Beyond the monetization of assistance, it is also actively used as a vehicle to further solutions, with cash being an enabler for financial inclusion, social protection, social cohesion and self-reliance.

CASH ASSISTANCE FOR PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS

Cash reinforces protection and solutions through:

- [Mainstreaming protection principles](#) (safety dignity, avoiding causing harm, meaningful access, accountability and participation & empowerment) and [gender considerations](#) in UNHCR's cash assistance and [mitigating the risk of abuse of power](#) when working with financial service providers and other market actors.
- Helping displaced populations improve their living conditions and [reduce reliance on negative coping strategies](#).
- Responding to beneficiary preferences and [providing a choice](#) to persons of concern on how to meet their basic needs through unrestricted cash assistance.
- Improving the environment for asylum and co-existence through [boosting the local economy](#) of host countries and [contributing to social cohesion](#).
- Helping refugees to [return and reintegrate](#) in their home country.
- Increasing [refugees' self-reliance](#) using cash transfers as part of broader livelihoods interventions.
- Linking refugees and others of concern to national [social safety net programmes](#), furthering socio-economic inclusion.
- Paving a [pathway towards financial inclusion](#) through the use of digital payments to refugees.
- Embedding [cash in education programmes](#) to facilitate school enrolment, attendance, and retention.
- Using cash assistance in the [prevention, mitigation and response to GBV](#).
- Leveraging the use of cash to [further child protection outcomes](#).

Resources:

- **Annex I** presents an overview of existing guidance on cash and protection including for i) protection mainstreaming in cash, and ii) cash in relation to education, GBV, gender, child protection, social cohesion, return, social protection, financial inclusion and self-reliance.
- **Annex II** provides a few snapshots of the use of cash for protection in UNHCR operations.



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CASH AND PROTECTION – GUIDANCE, RESEARCH AND PROJECTS

Cash and Education

[Cash and Education: Direction and Key Considerations](#) outlines the key direction and considerations for cash and education to be pursued by UNHCR staff and partners when delivering humanitarian assistance. [A global review of UNHCR programmes in refugee settings](#) concluded that cash assistance can have a positive impact on school attendance and educational outcomes. The size and duration of the transfer greatly influence impact along with complimentary programming that further enhances education outcomes. Findings also highlighted that conditionality does not automatically lead to greater educational outcomes and that effects of cash tend to be limited to the duration of programme participation.

Cash and Gender Based Violence

[Cash Assistance and the Prevention, Mitigation and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence \(SGBV\)](#) documents research from Ecuador, Lebanon and Morocco and provides learning and recommendations when using cash assistance for the prevention, mitigation and response to GBV. The research found that cash assistance can strengthen women's household decision-making and contribute to reducing overall tensions within families. Cash was also found to have a positive influence on resilience through reinforcing social networks and providing a sense of dignity and control over one's situation. However, to maximise protection outcomes, key priorities include the strengthening of communication on the scope of assistance from the onset and ensuring strong case management system and core programming, such as psychosocial support.

Cash and Gender

[Cash Assistance and Gender](#) outlines key considerations and learning to be used when delivering cash assistance to people of concern to UNHCR. Research and studies show that cash assistance can render women and girls

less vulnerable to sexual exploitation and negative coping mechanisms and have a positive impact on intra household relations. However, in societies with unequal gender dynamics and entrenched gender roles, cash assistance alone has a minimal impact and needs to be combined with complimentary/ core protection interventions. Close and context-sensitive attention to gender and vulnerability in design, implementation and monitoring is essential for every cash assistance to exacerbate existing gender inequalities and ensure equal access to assistance.

Cash and Child Protection

In 2020, UNHCR released a [Guidance on Promoting Child Protection Outcomes through Cash-Based Interventions](#). It outlines the key steps required for i) maximizing child protection outcomes through unrestricted cash; and ii) using cash in targeted child protection programming. It provides details on how, if and when cash, alongside Best Interests Procedure and other child protection programming, can promote outcomes related to meeting basic needs; reducing reliance on harmful coping strategies involving children; facilitating access to child protection services and needs; contributing to a sense of dignity and empowerment for children; and improving household dynamics by addressing pressure points. The Guidance has been informed by an extensive literature review, key informant interviews and findings from a [Cash and Child Protection research project](#) that was carried out in UNHCR MENA in 2018/2019.

Cash and Return

Since 2016, UNHCR has transferred more than USD 210 million in cash to assist returning refugees. The use of cash can reduce logistics overheads associated with in-kind repatriation assistance packages, while also ensuring that returnees have adequate resources available to rebuild their lives and livelihoods, make their own choices and stimulate the local economy in

the areas of return. UNHCR has developed guidance on [The use and calculation of cash grants in voluntary repatriation](#) to support UNHCR staff and partners involved in voluntary repatriation in ensuring that the provision of cash for voluntary repatriation reflects the latest global standards for cash and maintains a focus on the objective of supporting sustainable voluntary returns.

Cash and Social Cohesion

UNHCR uses cash in the context of increasing social cohesion and asylum space. When refugees shop in the local markets and contribute to the local economy, host communities see a stake in their presence. [Studies](#) in several countries show that cash delivered to refugees produces an income multiplier for host communities. A [joint study with CDA](#) (Collaborative Learning Projects, founder of the Do No Harm framework) on the effects of cash assistance on social cohesion in Kalobeyei settlement in Kenya, highlights the importance of maximising the potential social cohesion outcomes early on in programme design.

Cash and Social Safety Nets/ Social Protection

In line with the objectives of the [Global Compact of Refugees](#) and building on the World Bank IDA-18 initiative, UNHCR is leveraging and aligning cash assistance to link with national social protection systems. UNHCR promotes the inclusion of refugees in social safety nets. Actions are informed by the [Aligning Cash with national safety nets in refugee settings](#), which explores the potential for alignment between humanitarian cash assistance and social safety nets in forced displacement situations. It builds on a [UNHCR Mapping of Social Safety Nets for Refugees – Opportunities and Challenges](#) and learning from field experience, including [Cameroon](#), where UNHCR has implemented a transitional safety net, mirroring the transfer value and timing of the national social assistance programme.

Cash for Livelihoods

Cash is an integral element of UNHCR's [Global Strategy for Economic Inclusion 2019-2023](#). Cash is provided to support small business investments, skills development, agriculture, transport and accessing financial services. Livelihood activities supported through cash also

include the [Graduation Approach](#), where UNHCR and partners provide start-up business grants and regular consumption support throughout the programme intervention. Cash assistance may be provided to help people of concern to relocate to areas within the country, where they find better livelihood opportunities to become self-reliant. For example, as part of the interiorization strategy in Brazil, UNHCR provides refugees and migrants hired for formal employment through the livelihoods scheme, with cash assistance to enable them to cover their basic needs during the first month of employment in their new home until they receive their first salary.

Cash and Financial Inclusion

UNHCR actively uses cash assistance to promote financial inclusion. By 2020, more than 47 country operations have successfully managed to increase refugees' access to formal bank accounts and mobile money. [Digital payments to refugees: A pathway towards financial inclusion](#) outlines current achievements in this area and provides reflections on challenges and opportunities. UNHCR's Cash Assistance and Access to Formal Financial Services provides guidance to humanitarian practitioners on how to assess regulations relating to "Know Your Customer"(KYC) requirements, in view of delivering cash assistance to refugees and others of concern and promoting their financial and digital inclusion. In partnership with the GSMA, UNHCR also produced the report [Displaced and Disconnected – Connectivity for Refugees](#) that documents the legal and regulatory requirements for displaced populations to access financial services and mobile connectivity.

Mitigating Risks of Abuse of Power in Cash Assistance

UNHCR and WFP have implemented a joint project to identify and mitigate risks of abuse by private sector service providers in their delivery of cash assistance. The project has been implemented in nine operations and the most common risks identified include: overcharging of additional fees when cashing out; liquidity issues; lack of respect and treating vulnerable as real clients; poor national regulation on customer protection; data protection; lack of feedback and complaints mechanisms; lack of communication around cash; quality of banknotes; and corruption issues. The two agencies will soon publish a practical toolkit that will help practitioners mitigate identified risks.

CASH AND PROTECTION – SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FIELD

In **Ukraine**, UNHCR and NGO partners provided **cash for protection** to persons with specific needs in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. This included individuals who remained stranded at the Entry-Exit Checkpoints (EECP) in eastern Ukraine when movement across the contact line was suspended. With this assistance, affected persons were able to rent apartments close to the checkpoints, allowing them to stay in dignified spaces while waiting for permission to cross to their places of residence in nongovernment-controlled areas (NGCA).

In the **Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey** and **Ukraine**, UNHCR and partners provided cash assistance to vulnerable refugees to help them meet **urgent or regular needs** as part of their protection case management support services.

Cash assistance in **Kenya, Morocco, Tunisia** and **South Africa** helped **people with specific needs** and covered **subsistence needs of unaccompanied children** in **Ethiopia, Sudan** and **Yemen**.

Survivors and people at risk of GBV received cash assistance, along with counselling and livelihoods support, in the **Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Lebanon, Morocco** and the **Republic of Congo**.

Cash was used **to meet protection and mixed solutions needs** in **India** and as part of governmental safety net programmes in **Ukraine** and **Zambia**.

In **Costa Rica** and **Mexico**, UNHCR supported **asylum systems and reception mechanisms**, by providing adequate shelter and cash assistance for vulnerable groups.

In **Iran**, UNHCR provides cash assistance to **persons with disabilities**. It includes cash covering aids and equipment including wheelchairs, hearing aids, white sticks, glasses and prosthesis. People with disabilities,

or families with disabled family members are also targeted with cash for basic needs.

In **Brazil**, UNHCR's cash assistance supports the government's innovative **Voluntary Internal Relocation Programme (Programa de Interiorização)** that promotes the relocation of Venezuelans from Brazil's isolated northern state of Roraima to other parts of the country, which has created new economic and local integration opportunities for over 50,000 refugees and migrants in 675 Brazilian cities.

In **Pakistan**, UNHCR launched an emergency cash grant distribution to over 216,000 affected persons to tackle the negative socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. UNHCR's cash assistance, set up in close coordination with the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees, **aligns with Government's Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme and mirrors its targeting strategy and cash transfer grant size**.

In **Jordan**, post-distribution monitoring found that cash assistance had a positive impact on the living conditions of refugees by **improving their quality of life and reducing feelings of stress**. Some households also reported **improved relations with the host community**, who benefitted indirectly from the cash assistance through increased economic activity.

In **Yemen**, the post-distribution monitoring highlights how carefully crafted CBI, closely engaging case management, can foster a reduction of harmful coping mechanisms and drive positive impact on protection/well-being.

