



Leveraging Cash and Voucher Assistance in Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response

A wide-open opportunity for change in humanitarian settings

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Cash and voucher assistance (CVA) is now a common tool in humanitarian action used to meet the diverse needs of those displaced by crisis and conflict, and it is on the rise. [Preliminary findings](#) from the 3rd Grand Bargain Cash Workshop this May suggest an estimated 60% scale-up of total cash and voucher delivery from 2016 to 2018; this translates to around US\$4.5 billion in CVA (including programming costs) delivered in 2018. Despite a push [by several humanitarian actors since 2015](#), its use for protection outcomes – including to support the prevention of and response to gender-based violence (GBV) – trails behind that of [all other sectors](#).

GBV is a tremendous concern in humanitarian crises. According to [a recent rapid gender assessment](#), 48% of female Venezuelan migrants at the border in Colombia are at risk of GBV. In conflict zones in [South Sudan](#), up to 65% of women and girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence or will in their lifetime. Although the magnitude remains unclear, many [Rohingya refugee men and boys](#) who fled to Cox's Bazar were targeted for sexual violence in Myanmar during the campaign of ethnic cleansing and continue to be exposed to GBV in Bangladesh. This sexual violence against men and boys intersects with GBV against women and girls; refugee women and girls face more controlling behaviour from the men in their lives, including in some cases intimate partner violence. Displaced persons with diverse sexual orientations, gender identity and expression or sex characteristics face shockingly high risks of GBV; in [India, Lebanon, Uganda and Ecuador](#), the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) found examples that ranged from verbal abuse on public buses, to the denial of housing and employment, physical abuse and rape by members of the host community and other individuals who are displaced, and even instances of individuals being killed.

CVA, while not always appropriate, can play a key role in the prevention of and response to GBV. GBV case managers should be proactively assessing the extent to which CVA may or may not support action plans to protect those who are at risk and support survivors in their own recovery. This requires coordination between GBV case managers and cash providers. Inaction is harmful. For example, CVA can help prevent early marriage or support GBV survivors to afford essential health or legal services. But if steps are not taken to assess the need, make referrals, tailor assistance and carefully monitor outcomes, humanitarians are doing harm. Every tool at humanitarians' disposal is needed and should be used to support those at risk of GBV and survivors. Cash and vouchers need to be in play.

Humanitarian actors working in the areas of CVA, protection and GBV have already made commitments to strengthen the integration of CVA into GBV prevention, mitigation and response. The [Agenda for Collective Action](#), arising from the 2018 Gender and Cash Based Assistance Symposium, called stakeholders to “monitor and respond to protection issues, including risks of gender-based violence” and

“enable cash, gender and protection specialists to work together and ensure quality programming.” The [Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies](#) directs humanitarian actors to adopt and implement institutional policies and standards to strengthen gender equality, prevent and respond to GBV, and enhance accountability for taking action. Apart from these key commitments, a growing [body of evidence on CVA, gender and protection](#) as well as [practical assessment and monitoring tools](#) now exist to support humanitarian practitioners to do better.

At the event entitled ‘The Potential of Cash and Voucher Assistance to Empower Women and Reduce Violence: Evidence, Practice and Future Research’ in May, more than 40 stakeholders from NGO, UN, donor and research communities shared their perspectives on the ways that CVA can address GBV. The results of their [collective analysis](#) yielded no surprises:

- There is an insufficient focus amongst stakeholders, including implementing agencies and donors, on gender aspects in CVA, including GBV.
- Knowledge management on gender and CVA is not collated or coordinated.
- There are deficits in know-how and programming examples to challenge gender norms during crises.

It is time to move from initial commitments and the development of tools to supporting those at the front lines with training to use these tools, and humanitarian financing to support quality programming and evidence building.

Momentum is building. The recently produced [Cash and Voucher Assistance and Gender-Based Violence Compendium](#) to the [IASC GBV Guidelines](#) was a collective effort between 15 organisations. In order to achieve CaLP’s [Global Framework for Action](#) and the GBV Area of Responsibility’s [strategic objectives](#), respective member agencies with the support of the humanitarian donor community, including members of the Good Humanitarian Donorship network, need to capitalise on this momentum to grow field capacity, practice and evidence at the intersection of CVA and GBV.

A recent [report](#) from the IRC and VOICE lays out some recommendations for how this might work in practice. CVA must be mainstreamed across these recommendations to include:

- Funding must be proportionate to need and must consider start-up and implementation costs of integrating CVA as a tool for GBV prevention and response where appropriate.
- Growing leadership and expertise to address GBV must include recruiting and training a pool of experts to integrate CVA.
- Support for local women-led organisations should include capacity building and joint learning on cash for GBV outcomes.
- Tracking GBV prevention, mitigation and response must include CVA for GBV outcomes.

Meanwhile, a [recent mapping](#) highlights gaps in the evidence base around using CVA within GBV case management. Specifically, it showed a need for immediate and rigorous studies across a variety of contexts that look at:

1. the impact of CVA for the most excluded and marginalised groups of GBV survivors and individuals at risk, including women with disabilities, married adolescent girls and trans women;

2. how different forms of CVA (for example, cash with conditions, cash without conditions, cash-for-work) and ways of delivering CVA (ATM card, mobile money, cash the old-school way) influence prevention and recovery;
3. what activities paired with CVA are most effective — gender discussion groups, links to sustainable livelihoods, financial literacy training, etc., to achieve refugee women’s protection; and
4. the long-term impacts once the short humanitarian program cycle wraps up and displaced individuals continue to recover from shocks and may have to respond to new ones.

We have come a long way in our understanding, and now we need to move from talk to action. WRC and CARE are championing CVA for the prevention of and response to GBV by developing and rolling out practical guidance and tools, modelling implementation and building evidence across diverse humanitarian settings and building the capacity of humanitarian peers to institutionalise and scale best practice. This work complements CaLP’s efforts to strengthen its focus on [gender and inclusion](#) to better understand and program CVA for the intersecting vulnerabilities and capacities of displaced populations. These efforts have been collaborative with other dedicated stakeholders across the CVA and GBV communities of practice. However, more focus and resources are needed to make significant, timely and crucial strides to reduce exposure to risks for displaced individuals and to more effectively support GBV survivors.

This blog originally appeared on the Cash Learning Partnership’s website:

<http://www.cashlearning.org/news-and-events/news-and-events/post/535-leveraging-cash-and-voucher-assistance-in-gender-based-violence-prevention-and-response>

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