



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



LEARNING ON CASH AND CHILD PROTECTION

Ukraine Crisis 2023

This document outlines key highlights from the Ukraine crisis (Moldova, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania Poland and Ukraine) on CBI and child protection along with some good practices examples and learning from the various country operations. It aims to support the implementation of the [UNHCR Guidance on Promoting Child Protection Outcomes through CBI](#).

SUMMARY OF KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Cash as an enabler for child protection

Across the operations, UNHCR (and some partners) ensured that cash assistance is provided in a safe and dignified manner, mitigating the protection concerns linked with economic need. To contribute to the protection of children, UNHCR and partners established protection desks staffed with trained personnel for the registration of cash assistance, as well as a referral and fast-track mechanism for children and families in urgent need, including the inclusion of children at risk in the eligibility criteria. Because of the close relationship between cash and child protection, cash has become an enabler for the protection of children.

Solid population data – a key requisite

UNHCR used beneficiary enrolment for cash to identify and refer particularly at risk children and families who may require additional support and protection. This was also a recommendation of the Protection Cluster in Ukraine. Registration staff were trained and UNHCR and partners developed dedicated fast track procedures for children requiring cash assistance to facilitate pre-enrollment and enrollment.

Understanding the national legal framework and child protection systems

UNHCR analysis in Ukraine and surrounding countries of the child protection national legal framework and national systems was a key element in designing UNHCR's programme and cash assistance and identify areas for advocacy and technical assistance. Also, it enabled the adaptation of global guidelines and approaches to cash and child protection, and establish referral to the national child protection services MPCA to mitigate economic vulnerability to child protection risks: At the onset of the emergency, UNHCR in the surrounding countries of Ukraine and the Protection Cluster in Ukraine immediately highlighted that "mitigation of economic vulnerability

INTRODUCTION

Context of the cash assistance in the Ukraine crisis

Phase 1 UNHCR introduced transitional safety nets to give governments more time for refugees and IDPs to be included in social protection. Inclusion efforts include the alignment of cash to the social assistance and strong engagement with the generous governments. This is transitional cash assistance for a period of three months, until the newly arrived have regularized their stay and can be included in the national social protection system and/or when they enter in the asylum procedure.¹ In most countries, this assistance took the form a Multipurpose cash grants aimed at covering basic needs of refugees.

Phase 2 By end 2022, CBIs under the Ukraine response evolved from a larger scale intervention toward more refined targeting and strengthened integration with national systems. (Romania, Poland, Slovakia). In Bulgaria, cash started in the second part of 2022 only and was already protection - oriented, i.e. using refined targeting. In Ukraine and Moldova, it remained at-scale with rather wide criteria.

Phase 3 The next phase of the cash assistance in 2023 has the aim to achieve specific protection objectives to targeted groups of vulnerable refugees while pursuing strong linkages with the national systems.

¹ Standard Operating Procedures for Cash Based Interventions Poland

to child protection risks within the general population is achieved through multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA)". Eligibility criteria should consider the vulnerability of children.

Participation of children in CBI decision-making

In 72 percent of households with children, all adult household members were involved in deciding how cash assistance should be used. However, 28 percent of households considered the opinion of children. Overall, operations conducted Focus Group Discussions with children before and after cash distributions to verify the level of awareness of children on CBI. The results proved that children were aware and enrolled for CBI.

Cash assistance contributes to the prevention of child protection risks through influencing school enrolment

Parents indicated that the dedicated cash assistance for education contributed positively to their decision to enroll their children in national schools, saying that "in cases where they were hesitant, it tipped the balance in favor of enrolment" or accelerated their decision"

Linkages to social protection

Referral to national systems is key and should be strengthened. UNHCR introduced transitional safety nets (cash assistance as an interim measure until forcibly displaced persons have access to the national systems) to give governments more time for refugees and IDPs to be included in their social protection schemes.

Accountability to Affected Populations

Early in the crisis, UNHCR and partners established feedback mechanisms accessible including with safeguards for the use of children, through the phone line, e-mail and walk-in at the Cash Enrolment Centres, where a Helpdesk operates so that the refugees can contact UNHCR, the government, or partners. Such arrangements allowed for further identification of child protection cases.

CONTRIBUTION OF CBI TO CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

The UNHCR Guidance on Promoting Child Protection Outcomes through CBI, highlights that the contribution of cash assistance to child protection outcomes depends on several factors, including the design and objectives of the cash programme, the protection environment, the nature and causes of various child protection issues, family composition and situation, and the availability of complementary programmes and services.

Cash assistance is more likely to positively contribute to child protection outcomes when economic vulnerability is a key direct or indirect cause of the child protection issue, where child protection considerations are integrated in the design and monitoring of the cash assistance, where the value of the cash assistance is sufficient to address the basic needs of children/their household, and where the cash assistance is complemented by child protection and other basic services.





Coordination and engagement of child protection in cash coordination fora

At the country level, the Working Group (CPSWG) participates in the Cash Working Group (CWG) regularly and invites the CWG chairs to attend CPWG meetings when relevant. This engagement ensured that the design and delivery of cash assistance are child-friendly and contribute to child protection.

Use of existing guidance

UNHCR guidance on promoting child protection outcomes through CBI provides practical and provided necessary guidance in emergencies, which could have been leveraged and promoted more in this crisis. It must, however, be supplemented by a thorough analysis of the legal framework and national child protection systems.

Cash assistance can contribute to child protection outcomes by

- ▶ Responding to basic needs that, if not addressed, can place children at risk and increase households' reliance on harmful coping strategies that involve children.
- ▶ Improving children' access to education, including promoting better attendance.
- ▶ Facilitating children's access to services to cover one-off or specific and immediate needs, such as transportation, health services, legal support, or other interventions identified as part of the case management process.
- ▶ Contributing to a greater sense of dignity and empowerment for children by ensuring their participation in cash assistance programmes.
- ▶ Improving family dynamics and well-being by alleviating financial pressure and increasing choice and participation for adults, thereby positively influencing the household environment for children by providing better care, increasing resilience, and reducing family tensions
- ▶ Impact on children will vary depending on level and duration of the cash assistance.



EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

MOLDOVA: CASH AS AN ENABLER FOR CHILD PROTECTION

Due to the large influx of refugees, and third-country nationals, during the early stages of the response, cash enrolment was critical in identifying and referring those at high risk, including children, to the protection desk. This role was crucial given that most of the population was in transit to other EU countries, with approximately 30% remaining in Moldova.

The following joint actions contributed to the effective collaboration of the Child Protection and Cash teams:

- ✓ The coordination between the protection, including child protection and cash teams began from the beginning of the response, allowing for joint planning and implementation.
- ✓ Co-locating the protection desks and cash enrolment on-site for timely identification and referrals.
- ✓ Training cash enrollers on the safe identification and referral of persons at risk including children at risk, particularly unaccompanied and separated children

- ✓ Put in place a fast-track process to prioritize access to at-risk children to cash assistance, together with other persons at risk.
- ✓ The deployment of experienced child protection and cash staff facilitated rapid coordination and the adaptation of the global guidance and standards to the local circumstances, based on overall assessment of protective and risks factors, to provide cash to unaccompanied children over 16 years old first to meet their immediate needs followed by the best interests assessment.

In addition to the above, the operation recommends when rapidly scaling up cash assistance to recruit cash enroller and protection staff for the protection desks immediately. It is also recommended to train protection staff on cash enrolment so the cash enrolment and protection interviews can be done by one person to reduce the number of interviews and facilitate immediate access to cash assistance based on the child's best interests.

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

BULGARIA: CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN THROUGH SECTORAL CASH

Cash for Education, in addition to MPC, plays a critical role in preventing protection risks that may face refugee children who are at risk of dropping out of schools.

In Bulgaria, through a project funded by the UNHCR in 2022, the Refugee-Migrant Service (RMS) of the Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC) handed 500 prepaid cards worth BGN 100 each (55 USD) to Ukrainian refugees who registered their children in Bulgarian schools to purchase. The distribution of prepaid cards started in September and lasted for two months. The main criterion for receiving this type of support was the presentation of an official note that a Ukrainian refugee child is enrolled at a Bulgarian school. For each such document presented regarding a Ukrainian refugee child, one prepaid card was granted by a representative of the BRC, and it was strictly ensured that the prepaid card could only be redeemed for the purchase of only educational materials, backpacks, notebooks, pencils, pens, etc.

The prepaid-cards could be redeemed at the bookstore nation-wide chain Orange (online or in-person), which won the public tender for providing this type of service. The entire amount of the cards did not need to be spent at once but could be used multiple times, provided there was an amount of money left on it, until 31.12.2022. The data provided by Orange show that refugees complied with this deadline and purchased only stationery and school supplies.

Feedback from the parents was that the availability of the cards has positively contributed to their decision to enroll their children at Bulgarian schools (in cases where they were hesitant, it “*tipped the balance in favor of enrollment*” or accelerated their decision).

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

POLAND: INTEGRATING CHILD PROTECTION IN THE CASH STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

In Poland, cash SOPs outline the following key child protection principles that should be considered in all stages of the cash-based intervention, and guidance for providing cash to unaccompanied children:

Child protection principles

- ✓ **Best Interests of the child:** Decisions on cash assistance for unaccompanied or separated children, and other children at risk, should always be guided by the best interests principle.
- ✓ **Do no harm:** put measures in place to ensure that cash provision prevents harm to children.
- ✓ **Participation of the child:** facilitate children participation in different stages of cash assistance and take their views into consideration

Guidance for providing cash for unaccompanied children

When an unaccompanied child is identified in the Cash Enrollment Center, the child is immediately referred to the Blue Dot/ Child protection staff to assess the best interests of the child and refer them to national services/ Court to identify or formalize care arrangements.

For unaccompanied children with a caregiver (non-blood relative)

- ✓ The child protection team refer the unaccompanied child to the relevant Social Service Center in the location of residence of the child to formalize the care arrangement through the family court.



- ✓ Cash will be released to the caregiver based on the outcomes of the best interest assessment
- ✓ If the Family Court rules against the current caregiver, cash payment should be transferred to the new caregiver and considered as a new case.

For unaccompanied children without a caregiver

- ✓ The child protection team refers the unaccompanied child to the relevant Social Service Center/Family court for accommodation and to appoint a caregiver.
- ✓ Enrolment in the Cash Programme will be put on hold until the Social Services Center/ Family Court appoint a caregiver, which by administrative instruction does not take longer than 72hrs.

- ✓ For unaccompanied children above 16 years old: the CP staff conduct a best interests assessment to assess the child's living circumstances, level of maturity and safety to receive cash assistance. In line with Polish legislation, children aged 16-17 still require the presence of a legal guardian when receiving cash assistance.

- ✓ In very exceptional situations, e.g. a child has an immediate need that would require an immediate intervention, the child protection officer can approve the provision of cash assistance. Protection Officer should accompany the child to the Enrolment desk to complete the enrollment process.

In addition to the SoPs, the Child Protection Sub-Sector Working Group is working on detailed guidance on Cash Assistance provided to unaccompanied or separated and other children at risk children



EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

MULTI-PURPOSE CASH ASSISTANCE TO UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN UKRAINE

In support of internal displaced persons and other affected populations, UNHCR, in coordination with government and humanitarian partners, defined the targeting criteria for multipurpose cash assistance that contributes to the protection of children, and caregivers as follows:

- ✓ *Single headed households with at least 1 child under 18 years of age or older family members (over 55 years of age);*
- ✓ *Elderly headed household (i.e. composed of one or more individuals >55 years old or a person over 55 years of age responsible for at least one child <18 years old);*
- ✓ *Foster families caring for UASC (documented);*

Provision of cash assistance to unaccompanied children

UNHCR and partners identified the following key considerations and process in providing cash to unaccompanied children

With respect to all unaccompanied children

- ✓ All unaccompanied children that come to the Cash Enrolment Center, regardless of their age, should be referred to the Protection Desk for assessment.
- ✓ Regardless of their age, no child should be enrolled on their own.

With respect to unaccompanied children above the age of 16

- ✓ The Protection Desk is required to refer the child, above the age of 16, to the Child Protection Service (national system entities). The Child Protection Service will assess the protection and care needs of the child, and in most cases, will either place the child into an appropriate alternative care arrangement (i.e., foster care, childcare facility), or will assign the child a legal representative from the Child Protection Service, based on the 'act of needs' prepared by the Center of Social Services.

With respect to unaccompanied children below the age of 16

- ✓ The Protection Desk is required to refer the child below the age of 16 to the Child Protection Service. The Child Protection Service will assess the protection and care needs of the child and will place the child into an appropriate alternative care arrangement (i.e., foster care, childcare facility, etc.), if placement with the child's family is not possible or in the child's best interest.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM POST-DISTRIBUTION MONITORING

The outcomes of the Post-Distribution Monitoring suggest that most of the refugees and IDPs in this crisis prefer cash as a modality; they are satisfied with the transfer mechanism and their top expenses are food, housing, clothing, hygiene items and health care. 82.80% of the households who were interviewed rated cash as their preferred modality for assistance, 94% reported being able to find key items/services when needed and 64% reported significantly (36%) or moderately (28%) improved living conditions after cash distributions.

- ✓ **MOLDOVA:** *“The assessment re-confirms that Cash-Based Interventions (CBI) positively contribute to protection outcomes by responding to basic needs, increasing household well-being by alleviating financial pressure and enabling the participation of cash recipients in meeting their needs. In the context of the Ukraine response,*

and identified child protection needs, CBI plays a critical role in preventing secondary separation.”²

- ✓ **UKRAINE:** *“With only the very minimal income our family currently has, this support was extremely needed. We were able to buy medicines, food supplements for children and other necessary things, as we have fled Kharkiv with only a few belongings,”* said Liudmyla.³

- ✓ In 72 percent of households with children, all adult household members were involved in deciding how cash assistance should be used. However, 28 percent of households considered the opinion of children.⁴

- ✓ **SLOVAKIA:** the operation conducted Focus Group Discussions with Unaccompanied children to assess the care arrangement of unaccompanied children and access to support, including the cash assistance. The results proved that children were aware and enrolled for CBI.

² UNHCR Moldova, Concept note on cash based assistance, Transition to context specific targeting, page 8.

³ UNHCR Ukraine, Multi Purpose Cash Assistance, 2022 Post Distribution Monitoring Report, page 16.

⁴ UNHCR Ukraine, Multi Purpose Cash Assistance, 2022 Post Distribution Monitoring Report, page 21.

UNHCR KEY REFERENCES ON CBI, CHILD PROTECTION AND EMERGENCIES

- ✓ New UNHCR CBI Policy 2022-2026 sets out a *“why not approach”* for cash, meaning that cash is UNHCR’s primary modality to meet basic needs over core relief items; the latter which assistance needs to be better justified in the future.
- ✓ In June 2021, *“Guidance on promoting child protection outcomes through cash-based interventions”* addresses the question of how cash-based interventions involve and impact children, which is fundamental in the context of an increasing reliance on cash as the preferred transfer modality for UNHCR. The document also deals with issues related to how cash transfer programmes offer new opportunities and challenges for creating protection outcomes for children.
- ✓ In September 2021, UNHCR released *“Cash assistance and protection, why, what and how”*. This document provides an overview of cash and protection including what, 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.
- ✓ In the second half of 2022, UNHCR issued *“Cash assistance in emergencies, lessons learnt from recent emergencies”*, which draws from existing practice and presents six case studies from recent emergency responses. It highlights outcomes and lessons learnt to support and motivate operations in increasing the use of cash assistance in emergencies, along with key tips for setting up cash in emergencies.



Key figures

According to the last Ukraine situation flash update of December 16th 2022, *“while close to 7.9 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded across Europe, 4.7 million refugees from Ukraine have registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes.”* The same update also estimates the presence of *“5.9 million of IDPs within Ukraine. Currently, 3.69 million people were reached with assistance, 858.654 of whom received individual cash assistance from UNHCR to support their basic needs. Interagency Cash Working Group partners have reached 4.32 million people with cash assistance”*.

According to UNHCR database, there are 423.524 children below 18 who were displaced by the conflict.



Key recommendations

- ✓ Consider the impact on children, and on child protection outcomes, in the design of cash assistance.
- ✓ Consider child protection outcomes in the cash assistance plans, including in unrestricted cash plans, to mitigate the effects of limited funding.
- ✓ Enhance the participation of children in the design, implementation, and monitoring of cash assistance, as only 28 percent of households considered the opinion of children in deciding how cash assistance should be used.
- ✓ Strengthen referral to national systems.
- ✓ Develop a mechanism to give accountability to guardians to manage the cash on behalf of the children.
- ✓ Strengthen the outreach activities , to reach all children at risk children who were not able to come to the enrolment centers or Blue Dots
- ✓ Using Best Interests Procedure to determine the use of cash for children at risk: Unaccompanied and separated children identified through the cash enrolment desks were referred to child protection teams to conduct the Best Interests Procedure to determine whether and how unaccompanied children over 16 should receive cash. Having Ukrainians in the team proved an invaluable asset as it addressed the language and cultural barriers and allowed children to express their views and needs better. This is a good practice.
- ✓ **Blue Dots:** The establishment of Blue Dots and cash assistance registration desks facilitated the coordination between child protection and cash teams for timely identification of children and families at risk and referral to appropriate services.

KEY ACTIONS OUTLINED IN “THE GUIDANCE” TO STRENGTHEN CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES THROUGH CBI

Key actions for cash focal points	Key actions for child protection focal points
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with child protection focal points to identify <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I) child protection risks and II) opportunities to contribute to child protection outcomes through cash-based interventions. 2. Train child protection staff on cash-based interventions and provide technical support as needed. 3. Adjust data-collection tools for assessment and monitoring to capture the pre-existing and new child protection risks and benefits of the cash-based interventions for the protection of children of concern to UNHCR. 4. Include linkages between economic vulnerability and child protection risks in assessments and monitoring. 5. Consider households or individual children at risk when choosing the targeting approach and formulating eligibility criteria. 6. Work with the child protection focal points to <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I) establish referral pathways for cases of children at risk identified during programme implementation and II) receive referrals of individual cases identified by child protection for inclusion in cash based interventions. 7. Plan for exit strategies that include measures to mitigate the adverse effects on child protection when scaling down or ending cash-based interventions and/or when the child becomes an adult. This should include linkages with social safety nets. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adjust child protection situation monitoring questions/ tools (e.g. assessment, protection monitoring) to include a determination of the feasibility and appropriateness of including cash assistance within the child protection response. 2. Work with cash focal points to define the modalities of cash assistance for child protection cases, whether as part of a multipurpose grant or as a stand-alone specific child protection intervention. 3. Train cash focal points on child protection considerations relevant to cash assistance to enable them to integrate these considerations into cash-based interventions and identify cases of children at risk for referral to the child protection. Provide technical support as needed. 4. Work with child protection partners to establish criteria to identify children at risk. 5. Adjust Best Interests Procedure / case management tools to examine the use of cash assistance for child protection cases and monitor its impact. 6. In collaboration with cash focal points, establish referral pathways for individual cases identified through the Best Interests Procedure to benefit from cash assistance and to receive referrals of children at risk that are identified by cash focal points in the course of implementing cash-based interventions. 7. Plan for exit strategies that include measures to mitigate all adverse effects on child protection when scaling down or ending cash-based interventions, and/or when the child becomes an adult.



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