



CRS developed tablet-based electronic registration forms for efficient registration of beneficiaries by social workers. *Photo by CRS staff*

Ukraine

WINTER RESILIENCE FOR IDPS IN EASTERN UKRAINE CONFLICT

Disaster/conflict date: March 2014 - ongoing
Project timescale: October 2014 - September 2015 (6 months)
Affected population: 450,000 in November 2014, 1.3 million in July 2015
Target population: 3,100 households
Modality: Bank transfer
Value of cash grant: US\$300 per household
Project budget: US\$1,750,000



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RESPONSE ANALYSIS

Continued conflict in Eastern Ukraine during 2014 caused internal displacement of over 1.46 million people by September 2015, and another 1,123,800 fled to other countries, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Rapid assessments carried out by Catholic Relief Services found that the majority of internally displaced people, or IDPs, fled their homes with few belongings and faced limited employment opportunities or difficulty re-registering for pensions and other social payments; people from the hardest hit areas had exhausted financial coping mechanisms. Over half of the IDPs are women, with significant numbers of children, elderly and disabled people.

Based on identified needs and the local market context—as well as feasibility, protection and security, and beneficiary preferences—CRS chose a cash-based response.

Shelter needs

With winter temperatures dropping to an average low of -10°F, the immediate needs for IDPs were accessing adequate shelter; nonfood items for coping with the cold; and food and hygiene supplies. Social services departments and volunteers supported IDPs where they could, but needed supplemental assistance.

IDPs with some financial capacity rented accommodation in urban areas, but they needed a regular income to support housing costs through winter. Some families stayed in rural holiday cottages, many of which needed adaptations to be suitable for winter. Many households sought alternative winter-appropriate housing or

1.46 million

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE
BY SEPTEMBER 2015

required additional funds for rent, utilities, repairs or winter items. CRS assessments showed that approximately 25 percent of families reduced their expenses by sharing accommodation with other families, despite limited space. Other IDPs stayed with host families, but struggled to contribute to costs of utilities related to their presence in households through winter.

While many IDPs stayed with friends or family, others stayed with more random acquaintances or people they did not know. Opposing views on the conflict led to possible tensions within hosting communities; some IDPs also faced discrimination when searching for accommodation, with landlords refusing to rent to tenants whose passports showed registration data from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

Market context

CRS conducted market assessments that indicated nonfood items and rental markets could meet increased demand without further market disruption, although respondents reported increased rent in larger cities. Respondents also reported the demand for firewood exceeded the stock of seasoned timber. The interruption of coal supplies from within the conflict area was a concern for electrical generation and domestic heating.

PROGRAM STRATEGY

CRS developed a six-month winterization program designed to financially support vulnerable conflict-affected households. The program prioritized finding and ensuring winterized housing, and provided unconditional cash for the purchase of items needed to prepare for and endure winter.

The cash grant consisted of one-time cash transfers to vulnerable IDPs to support rent and utility payments, one-time cash transfers for the purchase of key winter commodities (including warm coats, clothes, heaters and blankets), and one-time cash transfers to help winterize living space. A small percentage of beneficiaries were eligible for all three types of assistance.

The program ensured that beneficiaries winterized their living space in compliance with the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum](#)

[Standards in Humanitarian Response](#), the Sphere Handbook:

- **Safe:** Resilient to multiple disasters including earthquakes, typhoons and landslides.
- **Adequate:** With good ventilation and drainage, of a good size and gender-sensitive with appropriate privacy.
- **Durable:** Materials are strong and durable enough to last 18 to 24 months.

The program used unconditional cash transfers to enable vulnerable households to identify and buy items according to their individual needs for winter, and to ensure rapid assistance before the worst of the winter season. Cash transfer flexibility also allowed families to negotiate directly with landlords and host families to make the best use of funds with limited administrative impediments.

Program goal and objectives

Conflict-affected people in Eastern Ukraine are able to live with safety and dignity:

- Conflict-affected households have access to safe and appropriate shelter.
- Conflict-affected households are able to cope with the winter conditions.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Partnership

CRS partnered with Caritas Ukraine, and jointly managed the project from Caritas' local Kharkiv and Slovyansk offices and satellite offices in Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhia. Caritas Ukraine planned and implemented the project, with CRS providing overall oversight, monitoring and support.

Beneficiary selection

CRS originally targeted 3,100 households, and conducted outreach to potential beneficiaries through posters in areas frequented by IDPs, collaboration with government offices, referrals from social services organizations and visits to communities hosting large numbers of IDPs outside of urban centers. The posters explained the program and provided the list of selection criteria. Caritas social workers met with and registered IDPs or host families who believed they met the criteria; the whole project team then worked together to select participants transparently based on vulnerability criteria using the demographic information collected.

Vulnerability criteria included single- or female-headed households, those with disabled or chronically ill members, pregnant or new mothers, three or more children, or no income sources. Two additional winter-specific criteria concerned the winterization of households' living spaces, and household assessments of the need for additional heating during the winter months.

All selected households received the unconditional winter commodities cash grant. The project targeted high-needs households for visits in which staff members conducted building conditions assessments; households could then be eligible for one or two supplemental cash grants to support shelter needs.

Beneficiary registration

CRS developed tablet-based electronic registration forms to enable efficient registration of beneficiaries by social workers across the target regions. The registration process consisted of two steps: (1) initial assessment of beneficiary household need and (2) collection of the documents from each beneficiary required by Ukrainian tax law to process and disburse cash grants via bank transfer.

Value of cash grant

CRS set the value of the unconditional cash transfer for winter commodities at US\$300

by identifying likely priority items (winter coats, room heater, fuel and blankets) through discussions with displaced households and by looking at current costs in local stores. The program also set the value of the shelter winterization kit at US\$300, based on the value of an illustrative package (one door, one window, plastic sheeting, and nails, screws and small tools) that would assist households to winterize one room, ensuring they had appropriate sheltered space protected from the environment.

Caritas Ukraine assessments showed that the average cost of a two-room apartment was US\$230 per month, plus US\$60 per month for utilities if they were on the government-controlled electricity grid. For those living in summer houses or outside of major cities, rent was lower but additional substantial fuel costs for heating were expected. CRS set the shelter-related subsidies cash transfer at US\$300 to help offset the cost of housing in conjunction with the winter commodities grant.

Cash distribution

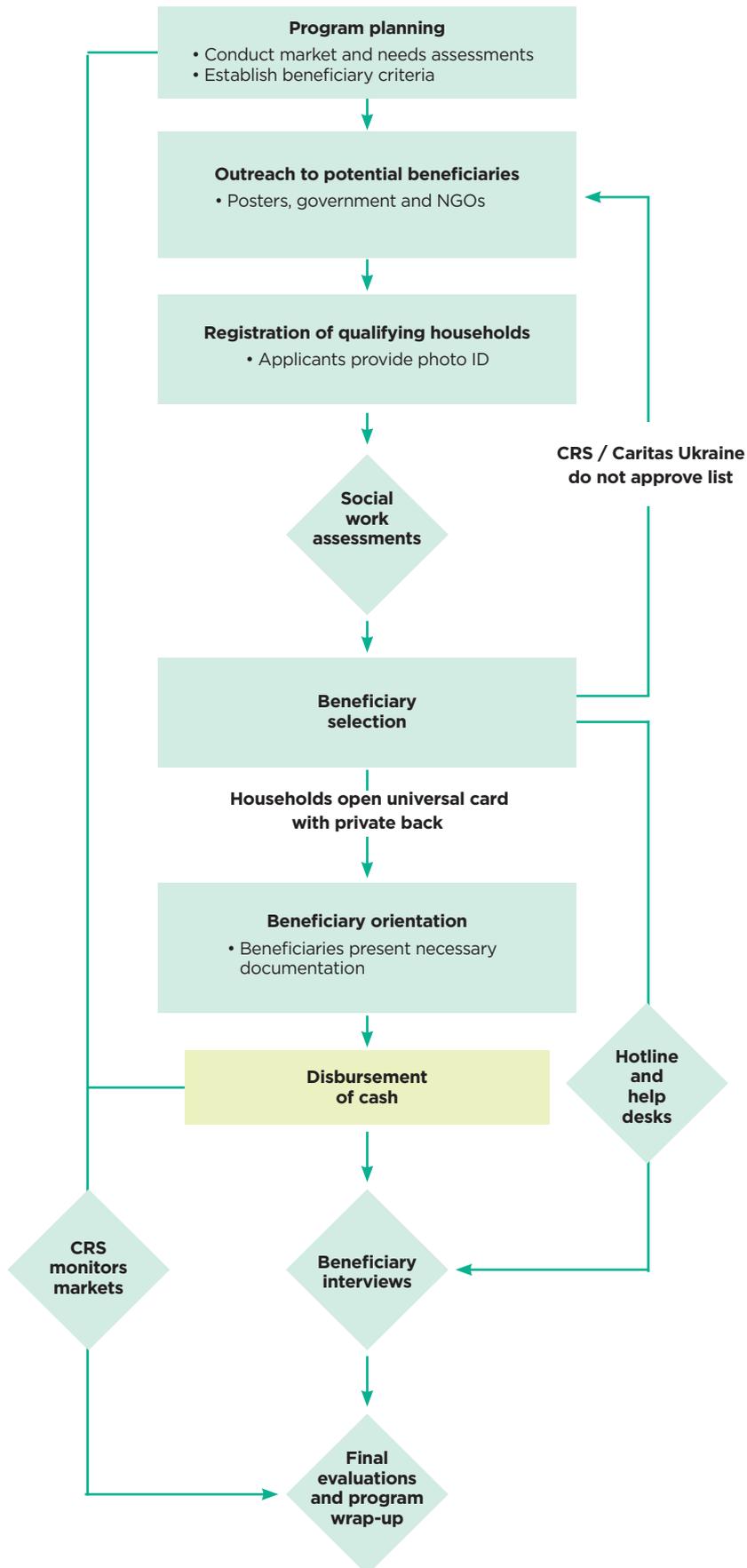
CRS distributed cash as one-time payments through bank transfers to beneficiaries; most potential beneficiaries had bank accounts and, if not, these were easy to open with proper documents. ATMs were readily available in targeted areas and were a common mechanism for accessing cash. Caritas Ukraine was already implementing programs using cash transfers to bank accounts that beneficiaries could access with locally available debit cards. This form of transfer helped avoid the stigma related to receiving handouts and ensured the privacy of beneficiaries.

Protection and security

The majority (75 percent) of beneficiaries registering were women, as adult women made up a very large portion of IDPs, and men, anecdotally, had difficulty asking for support. This encouraged greater control over resources by women and inclusive decision-making by both men and women in households. CRS solicited feedback from women and men separately to ensure the incorporation of women's assessments of winter needs into the project design, and both male and female team members conducted verification visits to ensure they captured the voices of women and men.

Process

The chart below illustrates the process of implementation.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION

CRS adapted field-tested surveys and real-time evaluations for this project. CRS used the following monitoring and accountability mechanisms:

- Used information and communications technology in the form of mobile devices for gathering data and to track information such as market prices, availability of goods, project indicators, beneficiary registration and information, and overall project progress.
- Regularly reviewed registration databases to check for duplication, in coordination with other actors working in or near target areas.
- Analyzed beneficiary feedback on a weekly basis. Beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries could access a regional office hotline, email and office help desks to ask questions and share feedback or complaints.
- Conducted regular monitoring visits and follow-up calls to households that received subsidies to ensure they had enough space that they were able to keep warm during the winter and were accessing funds for subsidies without a problem.
- Conducted post-use surveys with a sample of beneficiaries to understand how they prioritized the use of funds, how they spent the funds, and to monitor their satisfaction with support.
- Monitored local market conditions throughout the project to ensure that cash assistance by CRS and other actors was not negatively affecting prices. CRS used this data to examine the continued viability of the approach and make adjustments as necessary.
- Monitored the market throughout the project to ensure beneficiaries were paying market prices and to identify retail units.
- Conducted a household-level survey at the end of the project, disaggregated by sex, to assess the impact of cash transfers on individuals' winter preparedness.
- Completed two after-action reviews to reflect on the activities of the project and identify areas for improvement and adjustment—one after the pilot and one at project completion.
- Carried out an internal final evaluation to determine how well the project met indicators and achieved intended results, with a focus on the appropriateness of the response impact on target populations and agency accountability to beneficiaries.

RESULTS

In total, 3,212 families received cash grants for winter commodities, exceeding the original target of 3,100—of these families, 713 received grants to support rent and utilities, and 185 received grants to support the winterization of living space; 150 households received both.

CRS and Caritas support targeted the most vulnerable IDPs. Shelter-related cash grants amounted to US\$269,100 in cash support, and winter commodities cash grants amounted to US\$963,900 and directly affected 10,778 beneficiaries—6,902 beneficiaries were female, 3,462 were children and 1,039 were elderly. Most beneficiaries were IDPs, but 324 were host family members or other conflict-affected individuals.

Cash grants provided flexibility to meet individual needs for winter. During the feedback survey, 68 percent of respondents said they were generally prepared for winter conditions after receiving cash transfers, and 8 percent were fully prepared. Seventy-one percent of respondents had sufficient space for all family members in their dwelling, and 69 percent said their dwelling was prepared for winter conditions after receiving cash transfers. Almost all (98 percent) beneficiaries had been able to access their cash transfers and 96 percent were satisfied with the timeliness of the

cash grant distribution; 97 percent of beneficiaries knew how to report problems with the program via the regional office hotline.

Beneficiaries did not use cash grants exclusively to meet shelter needs. There was a wide variety of needs among the IDP population during the winter months; nearly 20 percent of respondents said they rarely or never had enough to eat, and approximately 20 percent said their living space was rarely or never warm enough after receiving a cash grant. Similarly, 30 percent said they had little or none of the warm clothing they needed. The ways beneficiaries spent cash transfers in conjunction with existing resources varied widely, with households making a diversity of purchases including clothing, blankets, heaters, medication, food, fuel, rent and utilities. Twenty percent of all cash distributed was spent on rent, 20 percent was spent on medicine, 18 percent was spent on food, 10 percent was spent on jackets and 7 percent was spent on boots. Utilities accounted for 7 percent of cash use, 3 percent for wood, 1 percent for electric heaters and 1 percent for blankets; beneficiaries spent the rest of the cash on other miscellaneous expenses or debt.

ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

| Advantages | Challenges and risks | Actions and recommendations |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Cash transfers provided beneficiaries with the flexibility to meet their individual needs for winter.</p> | <p>The possibility of beneficiaries using money to buy restricted items such as pharmaceuticals, alcohol, tobacco and firearms.</p> | <p>CRS and Caritas Ukraine oriented beneficiaries on the intended purpose of the cash grants and provided a short list of items the project did not support to discourage purchases of these items.</p> |
| | <p>Delayed cash transfers. The project had scheduled the majority of transfers to start in December 2014 but, due to the amount of documentation to verify manually, the project rescheduled transfers until January and February.</p> | <p>Most (96 percent) of beneficiaries said they were satisfied with the timeliness of cash distribution.</p> |
| <p>The program targeted the most vulnerable IDPs.</p> | <p>During the course of the original six-month project some IDP households returned to their homes or no longer required assistance, and new IDPs arrived or exhausted their resources and came forward for assistance.</p> | <p>CRS was flexible and used an evolving approach to continue assisting vulnerable households who chose to return while adding additional IDPs to the support structure. Some IDP households changed status during the project; CRS re-evaluated them for benefits.</p> |
| | <p>Many more families were eligible for assistance, but the project could not meet their needs.</p> | <p>The registration questionnaire and interview with the social worker were very important in helping to decide who to select for the grants.</p> |
| | <p>Selecting beneficiaries across four oblasts on a tight time frame proved to be an inefficient strategy.</p> | <p>Initial selection was conducted by the program manager in the later stages of the project, based on an algorithm, with final selections made by social workers in groups to review key aspect of client files.</p> |
| <p>Eighty percent of beneficiaries registering were women; this encouraged a greater degree of control over resources by women and inclusive decision making by both men and women in the household.</p> | <p>Providing cash grants to women had the potential to cause intra-household tension. One percent of households reported that receiving cash grants led to conflict within their households and less than 1 percent reported that receiving cash grants led to conflict in the communities where they resettled.</p> | <p>Both men and women were eligible to receive cash transfers on behalf of their households. Given concerns by men of registering out of fear of conscription, this approach was highly appropriate and acceptable by communities in general.</p> |

WHAT WE LEARNED

A cash-based response effectively met beneficiary needs. The IDP population had a wide variety of needs during the winter months. Although cash grants enabled beneficiaries to prioritize shelter needs, the ways beneficiaries spent cash transfers varied widely, with 46 percent of cash spent on non-shelter-related items.

The fluctuating exchange rate affected the value of the cash grant. The Ukrainian Hryvnia (UAH) lost 50 percent of its value during February but as the cost of living did not shift rapidly, CRS/Caritas maintained the cash grant size at 4,753 UAH (fixed at the beginning of the project) and used the additional liquidity to pay Ukrainian government taxes on charitable donations in the stead of beneficiaries and provided additional cash transfers with registration of beneficiaries recommencing in March. By March 31, CRS had expended only 90 percent of the original budget, despite having exceeded program targets for cash grants. Future programs should carefully monitor the effect of exchange rates on the real value of cash grants.

A baseline survey would provide more data about the effects of a cash grant. A baseline survey of beneficiary material conditions would have been beneficial in order to provide a more direct assessment of the change in conditions

for IDPs following the receipt of a cash grant. However, data collected at the end of the project provided insight into conditions during the final one to two months of winter.

Tax laws prevented the use of prepaid debit cards. Originally, the program planned to disburse cash using a Swift prepaid card, a U.S.-based debit card that could be used to withdraw cash from ATMs or be used anywhere Visa products were accepted. However, this option proved impossible due to Ukraine government tax regulations regarding charitable donations. National tax laws will impact the implementation of projects; future projects should fully understand them in order to select the most suitable method of cash distribution.

Follow-up visits and monitoring can ensure Sphere standards and quality. Staff conducted follow-up visits and calls for beneficiaries to ensure their housing met Sphere standards, and to ensure they were not having problems with the cash transfers. This method of monitoring can be useful to ensure that program quality objectives are met.