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PEOPLE ARE ON THE MOVE: CAN THE WORLD OF CVA KEEP UP? EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Analysis of the use of CVA in
the context of human mobility
in the Americas



2010. The Red Cross is preparing to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants ready to depart Honduras for Guatemala as part of a migrant caravan. ©Johannes Chinchilla/IFRC.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Globally, more people are displaced by conflict, violence, and natural disasters than ever before. This trend will continue to increase due to the rapid deterioration of highly populated regions because of climate change. Providing dignified assistance to people on the move is an imperative for CALP Network members today and will continue to be so in the future.

Cash and voucher assistance (CVA) with humanitarian objectives has been widely used in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) for several years. This modality of assistance is recognized as a dignified and feasible way to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people in LAC. Its use has grown in the region, specifically in terms of the use of multi-purpose cash transfers. However, CVA still faces significant challenges in terms of uptake when assessing its use to respond to people in situations of human mobility, including migrants, refugees, and displaced persons.

The reasons why there is still a reluctance to use CVA in settings with significant human mobility are multiple and complex. What is clear is that the fluidity of human mobility patterns, particularly evident in LAC, challenges the traditional structures of the humanitarian system. The use of cash transfers highlights these inconsistencies between systems and their use in practice, making CVA once again, fertile ground for innovation.

This study aims to highlight some of these challenges and opportunities, to inspire humanitarian actors to consider good practices and innovative ideas on the use of CVA to assist people in human mobility in LAC. This study is a first attempt at the topic. While it proposes a variety of routes for innovation, it does not cover the totality of issues to be discussed nor the depth that they deserve.

A NEW WAY OF UNDERSTANDING MOBILITY

One of the most important contributions of this study is an analytical framework that helps to understand human mobility. This framework positions human mobility on a spectrum where the ability to move (motility) is identified as a resource that people possess to varying degrees. This framework has allowed to move away from the rigid categorizations that are often used to label people, towards analyzing mobility from the point of view of the person who is moving.

Underpinning the application of this analytical framework is an understanding that movement does not generate vulnerability. Rather, vulnerability is generated when motility is combined with other triggers such as demographics, motivations, routes, friction, and host infrastructure. The framework allows for an appreciation of the vulnerability of people on the move across a spectrum of different intensities that change over time. It also allows us to see migration as something positive, which is of vital importance in the fight against climate change, and where CVA can and should play an important role. We can consider mobility as a capital that is distributed differentially. Safe movement is a privilege that some people in LAC do not enjoy.

Finally, mobility forms links with other types of capital (economic, for example) with which it can be exchanged. From this point of view, the fungibility of money should make CVA the ideal instrument for providing assistance.

KEY FINDINGS

Using the word “migrant” as a concept to cover all types of humanitarian vulnerabilities may be practical, but it does not allow for the specific design of interventions that use CVA. It is important to consider the specific profile of each person, their preferences, and the motility capital they possess in order to design interventions that are truly transformative.

The temporality of the needs of people on the move does not easily align with the traditional response structures of the humanitarian sector. The humanitarian system is used to operating in situations where there are well-defined flows of people both geographically and temporally. It is more complicated to apply traditionally used monitoring systems if the population is constantly on the move or if it is not established in places where humanitarian agencies are used to operating, such as camps.

Not all mobility contexts are conducive to the use of CVA. People on the move, especially those who do so in an unregulated manner, may not want to risk being registered to receive CVA in case it alerts local authorities to their irregular presence in the country. This is not to say that the use of CVA for these populations is inappropriate, but simply that greater care must be taken in determining eligibility requirements to avoid excluding the most vulnerable.

More creativity is needed to bring the use of CVA to scale for populations on the move. The irregular status of many migrants makes the use of CVA more complex than other traditional ways of providing assistance. This factor, together with the very high mobility of transit populations, government restrictions on the provision of CVA, and a conservative financial sector, requires humanitarian actors in LAC to be more creative than elsewhere in the world.

The movement of people has a political component that affects the ability of humanitarian agencies to use CVA to its full potential. One of the biggest obstacles in the region are regulatory frameworks. This makes the use of CVA less creative than it could be; it also impacts how and the ways in which cash can be used by the recipients.

CONCLUSION

It is inspiring to see the responsiveness and adaptability of agencies and donors currently supporting people on the move in LAC with CVA. In a region of the world where funds are not always available in the time and amounts needed, it is an achievement to have CVA programs that meet the basic needs of so many people in vulnerable situations in so many countries. It is this admirable adaptability and creativity of Latin American culture in the face of scarcity that motivates the following conclusion of this study.

In LAC, the vulnerability of people on the move is intimately linked to inequality. The ability to move safely is a privilege not enjoyed by everybody. This is important to CALP and its network because mobility is a capital that can, in turn, generate economic and social capital. Having low motility thus represents a new form of social inequity that is exacerbated in crisis situations.

To increase the use of CVA to assist people on the move, one approach could include a focus on the individual and move away from designing generalized programs (multi-purpose cash transfers) for one type of population alone (migrants). For CVA to truly meet people's needs and not just donors or implementing agencies' requirements, it is important to find ways to reach out at scale while respecting and considering the situation in which each person finds themselves.

Additionally, it is important to understand that the success of the strategy of assistance for people on the move depends on the capacity of different actors to create systemic change. It is important to act proactively to make the various financial systems along the migratory routes work for people on the move. It should be recognized that the humanitarian sector can influence the shape of the financial system by collectively requesting products or services for new segments or promoting the growth of new financial actors by creating joint projects.

Digital solutions can provide a variety of means to facilitate people's access to better quality CVA. There are encouraging examples in LAC, such as monitoring using digital tools or innovative solutions for identification. At the same time, these solutions will not remove the barriers faced by people with limited or no legal status, for whom being visible to the governments of transit or residence countries remains a risk.

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[Read the full study here.](#) If you need more information on the development of this study or on the use of cash and voucher assistance in human mobility contexts, contact Holly Welcome Radice, CALP Network's Regional Representative for the Americas, at holly.radice@calpnetwork.org.

The CALP Network (Cash Learning Partnership) is the global consortium of humanitarian actors involved in policy, practice and research for Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA).

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