



We Looked Back: Now Let's Move Forward Humanitarian CVA in the Americas

2018–2023

Executive Summary



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What this study is about?

This study is an exhaustive review of all the humanitarian cash and voucher assistance (CVA) evidence during 2018–2023. It does not yield a comprehensive analysis but rather a topline review. The methodology included a literature review of 203 pieces of evidence, 23 humanitarian response plans, nine key informant interviews and an online workshop with 56 people from a range of organizations.

Context

Between 2018 and 2023, the landscape of humanitarian aid transformed, particularly with the increased implementation of CVA in the Americas. Several pivotal events and strategic shifts influenced this trend, making CVA a preferred modality in responding to various crises throughout the region.

Overview of the humanitarian situation in the Americas 2018–2023

Political and social crises and human mobility: Latin America and the Caribbean witnessed the most significant rise in human mobility among all regions since 2010.¹ The population of migrants and refugees in this region nearly doubled from 8.3 million in 2010 to 16.3 million in 2022.

COVID-19 health emergency: Like in the rest of the world, this sanitary emergency overwhelmed healthcare systems, economies were disrupted, and food insecurity and poverty levels surged across the region.

Adaptive and shock-responsive social protection systems: Social protection, involving some form of CVA, is widespread throughout the region. As of June 2021, 273 non-contributory measures were implemented, of which 64% were new programs, showing a considerable increase in programs with CVA.

Economic volatility: Countries in the Americas experienced a strong post-pandemic recovery at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022. However, this progress was reversed due to supply chain tensions and the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on commodity and energy prices. These resulted in rampant inflation across the region and significant increases in the cost of living, including food, rent, energy and medication.

Climatic disasters: Several significant climate disasters occurred during the study period:

- Hurricane Dorian, causing massive devastation in the Bahamas in 2019.
- Hurricanes Eta and Iota wreaked havoc across Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Belize in 2020, causing extensive flooding and landslides.
- In 2021, Haiti was struck by a major earthquake in its southern region. This disaster claimed thousands of lives and displaced tens of thousands, further compounding the nation's ongoing challenges.
- Hurricane Fiona affected the Dominican Republic, Turks and Caicos, and Antigua in 2022.

Main Findings

Where is the evidence coming from? It mainly came from South American contexts (48%), followed by the Caribbean (18%) and Central America (12%). Thirty-four percent (34%) of the publications originated from Colombia, followed by Ecuador (12%), Guatemala (9%), Haiti (8%), Peru (8%) and Venezuela (5%).

Who speaks the loudest? Thirty-six percent (36%) of the publications were co-produced by the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations. Eleven percent (11%) were generated by technical working groups and platforms. In addition, 66% of the published reports were collaborations among various actors including REACH, CALP and various consortia. Only 1.6% were produced by local or national NGOs and 4% by governmental institutions.

CVA in Humanitarian Response Plans in the Americas (2018–2023): From 2019 to 2023, CVA evolved significantly within the Regional Refugee and Migrant Needs Analysis/ Response Plans. The integration of CVA was not uniform across the 18 Humanitarian Response Plans for Haiti, Colombia, Venezuela and Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras) that were analyzed. The Haiti response plans frequently and systematically mentioned CVA across various sectors. CVA varied widely in the Central American countries HRPs. In Colombia, the narrative on CVA aligned closely with that described in the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan. The lack of tracking CVA data makes it hard to fully understand how systematically CVA was planned to be used.

What was the most common evidence: Sector-specific CVA¹ accounted for approximately 28% of the evidence studied, followed by monitoring and evaluation² (14.7%) and social protection (12.5%). Other topics included coordination (7%), markets (7%), gender and inclusion (6%), MPCA (6%), digital payments (5%) and human mobility (5%). Approximately 15% (30 publications) of the resources reviewed referred to CVA in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic,

Who was the evidence about: CVA actors were, to a certain extent, able to shift how they deliver aid and how they communicate with people on the move. In the last few years, the focus on adapting CVA for children and youth—and for larger child protection outcomes—increased, and the evidence base is growing. However, the focus on inclusion of people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ communities, older people and ethnic minorities remains limited.³

Where was there little evidence: There was limited documentation available about the evolution of FSPs and digitalization trends in the region. Key informant interviews revealed that, while organizations often produce risk matrixes to inform their proposals, there were only a few examples in the region of collaboration on risk analysis⁴ and of sharing these exercises as part of coordination efforts. There was little to no evidence from local and national organizations available for this research, and limited information about locally-led responses with CVA.

1 See the sectors considered here: <https://www.calpnetwork.org/themes/sector-specific-cva/>

2 In the research database, monitoring and evaluation includes baseline and endline reports, impact evaluations, needs analysis, post-distribution mechanisms and evaluation reports.

3 On the back of this study, CALP plans to do a review of CVA practices with Afro-descendant and indigenous communities in the Americas to be released in 2025. <https://www.calpnetwork.org/research-paper/cva-practices-with-afro-descendant-and-indigenous-communities-in-the-americas/>

4 Examples from Colombia include a risk matrix produced during COVID-19: R4V Colombia Cash Working Group CCD. (2020). Matriz de riesgo para transferencias monetarias Covid-19 Colombia <https://www.r4v.info/sites/default/files/2021-06/Matriz%20Riesgos%20PTM%20Covid-19%20GTM%20Colombia%20%281%29.pdf>, and a joint workshop focusing on GBV risks in CVA: Cash Working Group Colombia GTM, R4V, UNFPA, GIFMM. (2023). Mitigación de los riesgos relacionados con la violencia basada en género (VBG) en los programas de transferencias monetarias en Colombia: Conclusiones de un taller conjunto sobre programas de transferencias monetarias y VBG <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/mitigacion-de-los-riesgos-relacionados-con-la-violencia-basada-en-genero-vbg-en-los-programas-de-transferencias-monetarias-en-colombia-conclusiones-de-un-taller-conjunto-sobre-programas-de-transferencias-monetarias-y-vbg>

Funding for CVA in the Americas: Between 2018 and 2023, the total BHA and ECHO funding transferred to recipients as CVA amounted to US\$1.28bn.⁵ Funding peaked in 2021 during the height of the COVID-19 crisis, and Eta and Iota hurricanes, reaching US\$353m—almost five times the 2018 level of funding. While the 2023 funding levels were below 2019, they were 129% higher than 2018.

The growth of humanitarian CVA in the Americas from 2018 to 2023 is clear. Since 2018, the CVA that reached crisis-affected people more than doubled—even when excluding the COVID-19, and Eta and Iota peak. The total volume disbursed in the Americas between 2018 and 2022 represents 4.1% of the total global CVA volume disbursed in the same period.⁶

What were enablers for the increase of humanitarian CVA during this period:

- A foundation of capacity related to CVA has been established in the region in numerous organizations across a dozen countries and territories.
- The political and social crises, especially in relation to human mobility, fueled the growth of the use of CVA modalities, in addition to climatic disasters and the global COVID-19 pandemic.
- Donors' growing openness. By 2018, many of the agreements made in the Grand Bargain Cash Workstream were moving ahead.
- A growth of CWGs during the period, topping at 12 country-level groups and one regionally focused for the countries served by the R4V platform.
- Adaptive social protection systems using humanitarian CVA also stood out, with examples from El Salvador, Honduras and the Dominican Republic, among other countries.
- Increased responses to human mobility using CVA. Actors produced varied pieces of evidence that looked at the implementation and use of CVA for people in transit and with different migration status.

Innovations on CVA coming out the other Americas: Some innovative approaches were clearly coming out of the Americas including linking CVA to social protection systems and shock-responsive social protection and CVA in gender-based violence response. Both are not unique to the region, but the level of evidence was significant. Unique to the Americas was guidance on rental market assessments and human mobility.

Looking forward: CVA in the Americas in the next five years

The growth of humanitarian CVA in the Americas is evident. No matter the challenges in the coming five years, actors will use the modalities for humanitarian action. Looking ahead for the next five years, this study identified some key points to consider that will shape humanitarian CVA.

Political landscape, legislation and policy environments: Increasing anti-migration policies and sentiments pose significant challenges for CVA and could impact funding allocations and program implementation. Lastly, in recent years, significant changes have unfolded across the Americas that are eroding civil society.

⁵ Figures shared by BHA include MPCA and sectoral CVA, such as food assistance. The amounts refer to actual amounts transferred to recipients, not overall CVA program costs.

⁶ Due to a lack of total CVA volume data for 2023, this calculation took into account only the 2018–2022 CVA figures, available here: <https://www.calpnetwork.org/web-read/the-state-of-the-worlds-cash-2023-chapter-2-cva-volume-and-growth/>

Funding outlook: The previous high level of funding during the pandemic is unlikely to return. With that, the potential to scale up operations, or even maintain levels of support using CVA, is in question. Concerns about future funding are linked to potential changes in the political and economic landscapes of both bilateral donors and those of governments in the Americas. Key informants and workshop participants highlighted the expanding opportunities to evolve programming to better meet the needs of crisis-affected populations and to adapt CVA modalities beyond emergency responses. Areas of focus moving ahead should include:

CVA for livelihoods: An increasing focus on livelihoods points to the sector's shift towards more sustainable, long-term support strategies, as displaced populations are settling in their host communities. Some actors are evolving to provide livelihood support, recognizing that beneficiaries often remain vulnerable, even after receiving humanitarian assistance.

Continue to drill down on linkages to social protection: There is growing emphasis on linking CVA with social protection systems to ensure broader and more sustainable impact.⁷

Human mobility in a broader sense: This includes thinking about CVA within the broader context of human mobility rather than being limited by international borders and supporting migrants throughout their journey rather than just at their destinations.

Preparedness and anticipatory action: There are many opportunities for anticipatory action and climate evidence generation in the region; areas that attract a lot of interest but remain untapped. Key informants outlined that it is essential to consider anticipatory action and preparedness measures, especially in the context of climate change.

Leveraging new technologies for CVA at scale: The next five years will offer great opportunities to enhance CVA effectiveness by leveraging technology and digital payment systems. Key informants highlighted such opportunities to rapidly expand and implement CVA at scale in new emergencies.

Locally-led CVA responses: Opportunities exist to transition the internationally dominated CVA response to local and national NGOs and civil society organizations; especially as pleas for more locally-led CVA responses grow louder.⁸ There are already situations where grassroots organizations are taking on leadership roles in CVA implementation⁹ but there is an overall gap in information when it comes to locally-led responses with little visibility of these initiatives.

Cash coordination: Communities of practice have been clear that they want a regionally mandated CVA coordination where actors can learn and exchange information.

Security risk management and restricted areas: While, logically, some of the evidence on how to mitigate security risks may be with closed audiences, it is critical to encourage sharing information between CVA implementers.

⁷ See the accompanying data matrix for more information.

⁸ See more here <https://www.calpnetwork.org/event/save-the-date-policy-dialogue/>

⁹ Workshop participants.

Embrace people-centered approaches through improved inclusivity: CVA actors in the region have started their journey towards more people-centered response, but more effort is required. Accessible feedback is crucial, as is soliciting people's feedback in the design and redesign of programs. Actors will need to go beyond collecting data, to demonstrating how they advocate for crisis-affected people's needs—that includes being clear when those needs and preferences cannot be met.

Generating learning on CVA in the Americas: How CVA knowledge is created and shared needs to be developed. One important action, while the UN and INGO dominate the CVA space, is to meaningfully co-create knowledge with national and local NGOs and to credit these actors in the process, or to support the organizations to generate and share their own learning.

Priority Actions

The Americas is a diverse region, which makes it challenging to give pointed recommendations that resonate with all actors. However, this study identified a series of priority actions for actors to consider, which will help address the general needs related to humanitarian CVA in the region, albeit of higher relevance in some contexts than others.

- Bridging the knowledge gap: Priorities for evidence generation
- Comprehensive tracking of CVA in regional humanitarian responses
- Sustaining and expanding CVA
- Advancing CVA for human mobility: From pilot programs to widespread practice
- Enhancing shock-responsive social protection and CVA integration
- Enhancing preparedness and anticipatory action
- Enhancing coordination and strategic planning for CVA
- Amplifying locally-led responses

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Cover Image:

Maicao, Colombia ©Fernanda Baumhardt, NORCAP CwC Expert, Meaningful Dialogue with Communities, CashCap, 2019

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

The CALP Network is the global consortium of humanitarian actors involved in policy, practice and research for cash and voucher assistance (CVA).

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i Migration Policy Institute. (2023, April). In a Dramatic Shift, the Americas Have Become a Leading Migration Destination (feature). Accessed 06 July 2024. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/latin-america-caribbean-immigration-shift>