

# TIPSHEET: CVA and Social Protection Systems

## Deep Dive: COVID-19 and CVA No4

Building on the [Covid-19 and CVA](#), the [Payments and Digital Data Management](#), [Door-to-Door Distributions](#) and [Group Distributions](#) tipsheets, this fourth guidance note offers a brief summary on how to approach anticipated or planned scale up in government-led efforts to combat the economic impacts of Covid-19 through the institutions of social protection. Often, social protection systems/social safety nets (SSNs) take the form of unconditional cash transfers, and may go through a period of unprecedented change and/or focus over the coming weeks and months. These may include expansions in beneficiary caseload to offset loss of income, increases in transfer value, the addition of complex triage and referral services, or some combination of the three.

Crucially, governments may require that aid agencies align with their own programme designs and specifications to ensure that service provision is consistent and properly regulated. We need to be ready if and when that does occur, especially if you envision operating at scale. The concepts and changes we outline below will have direct implications for how you design and deliver cash transfers. Examine each carefully and get ahead of it now if you expect significant government involvement.

Some of this has already begun, though not at great length in the countries where we maintain programming. See Ugo Gentilini's summary analysis [here](#), and his regularly updated blog [here](#). We expect the list of countries undertaking economic stimulus via institutions of social protection to grow in the coming weeks and months, and even if government systems are not able to expand efforts to promote consistency and coordination will be important. Either way, we need to be prepared.

This is a living document and subject to change and adaptation. We recommend frequent checks on the Digital Library and Hub COVID Info Center for the most up-to-date information. Since this guidance is generalized, we are ready to work with you to tailor advice. If you have questions or need support, please contact us:

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- Vlad Jovanovic (TSU): [vjovanovic@mercy Corps.org](mailto:vjovanovic@mercy Corps.org);
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As a final reminder, all team members must be sure to follow Mercy Corps' general COVID-19 guidance carefully, including: [Annex 11 Working in the Field During an Infectious Disease Outbreak](#). This is intended to keep you, other team members, and program participants safe and healthy.

## Things to Watch Out For

- **Governments administer cash transfers to stop the backslide into poverty, and these cash transfers often differ from the programmes we administer. The differences are neither huge nor insurmountable, however.** They range from targeting systems and selection criteria, payment providers, degree of conditionality, and monitoring frameworks. Some governments may require that we harmonise with some combination of these specifications, or outright adopt their programme design to the extent that this is possible to ensure consistency and uniform impact. **Whatever the change is that may be required**

of your programme, it underscores the importance of regular communication with the communities you serve. Be clear and transparent with them with any impending changes, and use all the communication tools at your disposal.

- **Outside of South America, most governments typically prefer unconditional cash transfers.** If you are currently administering a conditional or labelled cash transfer or a voucher programme, you may be asked to shift to unconditional and unrestricted cash transfers by local authorities. Donors will be aware of such policy shifts, but the communities you serve will not. **Don't worry; contact us to think through the pitfalls of such changes.**
- **The transfer values that governments use are often lower than or very different to the transfer values that aid agencies provide.** You may be asked to adapt or harmonise with government transfer values, or otherwise plan for a maximum cap on transfer values and schedules. This may be a departure from the normal course of programming, but will ensure that transfers are consistent and fair, and you will likely be able to serve more households as a result. If you have concerns; please reach out. We can help you explore all your options.
- **The way that governments target may also differ substantially from the community focused way you and your team typically conduct participant selection.** You may or may not be asked to adopt government approaches. This does present us with an opportunity, however:
  - If severe mobility restrictions come into effect and you were unable to prepare a pipeline of potential beneficiaries to assess remotely, government safety net recipients may provide a pool of households you can more easily verify. Because of a lack of money, many governments struggle to assist everyone they would like to. **This creates an unserved caseload, and an unmet need your team can support when you are otherwise unable to. There is precedent for this approach at MC.** Contact us to discuss how best to approach this, and to think through the risks and limitations of this approach.
  - If you work with households the government is unable to reach; **there are various ways to align targeting to promote consistency and help to inform the government's expansion. There is precedent for this approach too.** Reach out to us if you'd like to hear more.
- **Government systems may come to serve as primary coordination bodies in some locations, unless this was already the case, and you may be asked to work in areas where you previously haven't to support government efforts.** Talk to us about what this might mean, and to think through all the implications of changes in your area(s) of intervention.
- **To strengthen demand as much as possible, some governments may adopt a Universal Basic Income (UBI).** UBI's are effectively lump sum payments delivered universally to all households, or as many as a given government can afford. Though not every government will have the capacity to do this, expect more and more to adopt one-off, lump sum-type transfer programmes in the coming weeks and months. If you expect severe mobility restrictions, this approach might be an effective means for you to support as many people as possible and make the most of your budgets. Refer to our first Tipsheet [Covid-19 and CVA](#) for more details, or contact us directly.
- **Identify what FSP/payment provider/transfer mechanism(s) the government has prepared for SSN payments.** If a SSN does not exist, find out where any coordination discussions are being had regarding the potential of social protection transfers and/or whether INGO actors are engaged.