

Cash and Voucher Assistance and the Covid-19 Outbreak, Syria

Version: March 2020

This documents intents to provide guidance and advice on how to best adapt Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) programming during the current Covid-19 outbreak and specifically:

- 1) How to manage CVA during the outbreak
- 2) How to operate while reducing the risk of contamination

This document is a compilation of information from sources that currently are available and relevant to the Syrian context. This also means that this is a living document, and it will be revised and updated when necessary. Any advice, inputs and comments are warmly welcomed.

Markets

While the COVID-19 pandemic is most immediately a health crisis, it is quickly becoming evident that it will be closely followed by an acute detrimental effect it will have on the economy. People's income and livelihoods are under great pressure and any intervention should bear that in mind. The focus should be a market-based strategy that can support in the times where supply chains are under pressure, business are closed and households are struggling to cover their basic needs. How do we in the best way possible mitigate and minimize the acute effects while looking to support the basic economic structures allowing for a strong and feasible rebound when possible.¹ It is absolutely essential that what we do now should not worsen the situation in the long term.

Fundamental for any CVA activity is the need to understand the market – the system, the supply chain and the general capacity of vendors. Disrupted markets are not a reason to quickly assume that then in-kind is the only option. No market statuses are static and in times where markets are disrupted, practitioners should aim to understand what kind of markets support could stimulate market recovery².

Coordination

- Coordinate with relevant authorities and coordination bodies such as the health authorities and interagency coordination bodies;
- Contact donors to understand how flexible they are on programme changing, prioritizing etc.;
- Update the Cash Working Group of any CVA activity changes and initiatives;
- Ensure dissemination of preventive guidance and tools within the organisations.
- Any CVA start-up or expansion should be consulted with the CWG to avoid recipients duplication.

Programming

- In general, and when possible, introduce remote programming and/or shift modalities to minimize person-to-person contact. Concentrate on the core aspects of your programme and do those as best you can. Look for alternatives for those aspects of your programme, which are difficult to conduct remotely or with limited mobility and reduce or cancel non-critical activities;

¹ Markets in Crises (MiC) Statement on COVID-19 April 16, 2020

² Market Support Interventions in Humanitarian Context – A Tip Sheet, Sophie Martin Simpson and Helene Juillard, June 2020

- Diversification of assistance modalities
 - Consider shifting between modalities depending on supply chain and market conditions if a single modality could cause overcrowding in distribution and/or redemption sites;
 - Add new cash and/or voucher assistance outlets;
- If the programme includes multiple cycles of assistance, consider if it could be an opportunity to at one go reduced the number of distribution and instead increase the amount given;

Hygiene

- Covid-19 measures should be mainstreamed wherever possible.
- Ensure that all staff receive hygiene training/ awareness sessions on COVID-19;
- Key messages at each point of contact with recipients.
- Make sure that appropriate awareness and prevention guidance are available at each location as part of the CVA. Make available handwashing stations and/or hand sanitizer to staff and beneficiaries on those sites and ensure service providers follow this advice. If needed, make sure that masks are available;
- Consider providing short brief on basic hygiene and hand out WHO materials if available.

Field Sites and Crowds in General

- Reducing the numbers of mobilized populations. If possible, assign limited number of people to specific times;
- Ensure adequate space is available to keep a 1.5 - 2-meter distance between beneficiaries and between beneficiaries and staff;
- Monitor whether recipients of cash/vouchers are findings that HHs are uncomfortable to engage with staff.

Assessments and Data Collection

- Where possible, change to remote data collection. This could mean reducing focus group discussion, shifting to mobile assessments etc.;
- Include Covid-19 specific questions related to awareness and CVA. This can include concerns such as perceived risk at:
 - FSP
 - POS
 - Markets
 - Travel to markets
- Monitor beneficiary behavior:
 - Are people comfortable with being approached?
 - Are response rate is lower than usual?

Financial Service Provider

As the financial environment is changing, it is necessary to consider the following:

- What measures have the FSP taken for staff and for the CVA recipients?
- Will your FSP be able to fulfill the terms of the contract?
- Are there a potential inability to meet liquidity requirements at cash out points?
- Will your FSP ask for increased rates or invoke force majeure clauses?

- Is there a risk that the FSP or bank it is linked to will fail?
 - If so, how do you minimize cash held at the FSP?
- How quickly would you be able to move to a more robust (but potentially higher cost) FSP to maintain distribution ability?

Further information

- The CWG is collecting CVA information and sharing it in the [google drive](#) (this is the main Syria CWG information sharing portal)
- The CWG also have a folder on CVA in the [WoS dropbox](#)
- CaLP's working document on all the relevant [CVA documents](#)