

Onward Bound: Evaluating Cash and Voucher Assistance for Migrants on Sahel's Migration Trail

*Research and learnings from the Sahel
region*



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Methodology and objectives

This research – a collaboration between the British Red Cross and Samuel Hall - provides evidence on the opportunities and challenges to integrate cash and vouchers assistance (CVA) as a support modality in migration programming in the context of transit migration in the Sahel. While CVA has become increasingly common and popular among implementing agencies and donors, there is limited evidence about its effects and impact in migration programming and even less in transit migration contexts.

As a result, this study addresses a gap and analyses to what extent, and through which modality, the use of CVA might support safe transit and onward migration. This research looked at the range of current programming from the perspective of both practitioners and transit migrants in the Sahel, as well as the impact of such assistance on migration decisions and experiences. Based on the data collected, the research drew lessons from current experiences, both theoretical and practice-based, and generated recommendations to inform British Red Cross policy and programming and its approach to cash transfers for migrant populations.

<p>Mapping cash assistance</p> <p><i>Does cash assistance currently delivered in the Sahel meet the needs of migrants?</i></p>	<p>Assessing cash assistance</p> <p><i>Which cash modality and type are best fit for migrants in transit? What are the pros and cons of each modality from both migrants and practitioners' perspectives?</i></p>	<p>Understanding the impact</p> <p><i>Does cash assistance impact or influence migration decisions?</i></p>
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Key findings: 3 messages on CVA and transit migration

1. DESPITE LIMITED ACCESS TO CVA, TRANSIT MIGRANTS PREFER CVA VS. IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

In the studied locations, transit migrants face significant challenges in accessing assistance, including CVA. Only a small percentage (less than 20%) of respondents received any form of aid, with in-kind assistance being the most common. However, transit migrants expressed a strong preference for cash-based assistance (65%) due to its versatility and potential for addressing their needs, particularly in supporting livelihoods and self-sufficiency. Despite their preference, targeted cash assistance programmes for transit migrants are scarce, resulting in limited impact on their livelihoods. In-kind assistance, which is more prevalent, appears to have a greater effect, likely because of the predictability associated with food and non-food aid provided to registered individuals.

2. TAILORED CVA STRATEGIES CAN HELP ADDRESS CHALLENGES AND EMPOWER TRANSIT MIGRANTS BY MEETING THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS AND PREFERENCES

Using CVA for transit migrants presents challenges in identification, trust, safety, and delivery. Difficulties arise in identifying and reaching the target population due to high mobility, security concerns, lack of support from local authorities and communities, and limited trust from vulnerable migrants. Assessing the needs of at-risk individuals adds to the implementation challenges. Overall, practitioners recognize the efficiency of unrestricted cash compared to in-kind or restricted modalities, although its use in migration programming is limited.

Adapting delivery mechanisms to the context is crucial, as highlighted by practitioners who note the inflexibility in changing transfer modalities. Transit migrants indicate a preference for direct cash over mobile or bank transfers, driven by the perception of immediate usability. Preferences may vary based on location, vulnerability, transit reasons, and ease of accessing support.

3. CVA HAS A GREATER IMPACT ON MIGRATION EXPERIENCES THAN ON MIGRATION DECISIONS

Transit migrants' experiences defy simple categorizations and rational decision-making, highlighting the complex and non-linear impact of CVA and assistance on migration decisions. CVA had a positive impact on the majority of respondents' migration experience by meeting basic needs and improving transit conditions, especially for registered recipients. However, the impact on migration intentions was limited, particularly if the intention to migrate or stay was not already defined before receiving CVA. In terms of impact, the assistance received played a crucial role shaping both living

conditions and potential savings for future movement, underscoring the potential of CVA to facilitate safe and onward migration.



Recommendations

To fully harness the potential of Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) to address the diverse needs and preferences that arise for transit migrants, creating an enabling environment for programmes and collaboration along migration routes and borders is crucial. However, coordination and collaboration among agencies providing services along these routes pose many challenges at both policy and operational levels.

The proposed recommendations revolve around the need to address these challenges at both levels, and are guided by an overarching consideration, namely the need to move from a vision based on assistance provided by and within single countries (country-based) to a more holistic view that looks at the stages of the migratory journey and the specific needs of individuals across such stages (route¹-based).



Programming recommendations: applying a route-based approach to CVA in migration context

1. Plan around migrants' needs, preferences and movements

To effectively assist migrants, thorough contextual assessments are needed to understand their specific needs and the dynamics affecting their journey. This understanding informs the design of context-specific cash assistance programmes. The design of cash assistance will need to be differentiated based on migration profiles. Tailored programmes should be developed for long-term migrants², addressing their unique needs for legal advice, consistent cash assistance, and social inclusion. Involving migrants directly in the design and implementation of cash assistance, considering their preferences and context feasibility, is crucial. Mapping existing cash assistance programmes along the journey, in neighbouring countries where migrants plan to transit, will allow for more coordinated and tailored interventions along these routes, leveraging existing resources and adapting them to meet the needs of migrants.

2. Include protection considerations into programming and CVA design

To strengthen internal capacity and ensure staff competence and accountability, organizations and staff involved in CVA will require comprehensive training on the rights of migrants, on identifying and addressing protection issues, gender-specific concerns, and psychosocial risks, and operating in contexts of vulnerability without perpetuating abuse or power dynamics. It is crucial for all staff, both in the field and offices, to possess a baseline understanding of guiding principles, relevant legislation, referral pathways, to support the rights and mitigate the risks faced by CVA recipients across their migratory journey, and in specific communities.

3. Move towards integrated programming to overtake emergency assistance and unlock the potential for cash assistance to transit migrants

To meet the diverse and evolving needs of migrants, it is important to prioritize multi-sector assistance and offer informed choices through tailored "cash +" packages that go beyond CVA alone. This includes additional services like legal advice, livelihood support, and access to healthcare, empowering migrants to make informed decisions about their migration. Piloting different assistance modalities, integrating them with existing programmes, and aligning them with national social protection initiatives can enhance collaboration and effectiveness. Establishing a clear Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) framework that involves key stakeholders and regularly adapting it based on feedback and emerging needs is crucial for informed decision-making and programme improvement.

¹ The term "route" is used here in the sense of journey, i.e., it does not refer to migration routes but rather includes the nuanced experiences of individuals.

² Throughout the report, the distinction is made between long-term and short-term migrants on the distinction between "moving" and "non-moving" individuals in the context of transit migration. This distinction is reflected in the staggered scale between mobility and immobility developed by the CaLP network. For more information on the profile of transit migrants covered by this study and the CaLP scale, see Annex V.



Policy recommendations: CVA along the migration journey

Government (Central and Local)

Each government in the Sahel region will require legislation that allows transit migrants to access essential financial services and transfer money, while addressing discriminatory practices by banks. Governments action will also be needed to improve the infrastructure surrounding financial services, considering the limitations faced by migrants. Specifically, efforts should be made to enhance digital and banking services, establish partnerships with financial and telephony providers, and facilitate access to cell phones and mobile banking for non-status migrants. Additionally, raising awareness among migrants and local communities about financial literacy and the purpose of assistance programmes is essential.

International donors

International donors need to inform and raise awareness amongst their staff, government officials, and donors about the contributions that can assistance can make to supporting and protecting transit migrants, while addressing the various factors influencing migration decisions, emphasising that cash assistance is not the sole, nor a strong, determinant for these decisions. They can share research, case studies, and testimonials to highlight the multifaceted nature of migration and the support CVA can provide towards safe migration. Donors can use their role in humanitarian clusters to advocate for the integration of migration considerations within Cash Working Groups and the development of specific guidelines for migrant cash assistance. Collaboration with relevant stakeholders should be encouraged, ensuring coordination between cash assistance and migration initiatives. Regular assessment of the impact of these measures is crucial for effective assistance throughout migrants' journeys.

Humanitarian Clusters

Humanitarian clusters should prioritize the application of the do-no-harm principle, establishing mechanisms for enforcement and accountability among staff. This involves promoting awareness, providing training, developing guidelines and codes of conduct, implementing reporting systems, and monitoring compliance. Community involvement in the development of strategies and guidelines for cash assistance programmes targeting migrants is vital. Additionally, debunking assumptions and recognising migrants' autonomy is crucial. A nuanced understanding of migration should be promoted, acknowledging migrants' agency and capacity to make informed decisions based on their own circumstances. Strengthening agency is after all one of the greatest values of CVA programming, in transit migration as in other contexts.

Photo 1: Burkina Faso, CVA operation



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AMiRA	Action for Migrants: Route Based Assistance
BRC	British Red Cross
CaLP	Cash Learning Partnership
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CMR	Central Mediterranean Route
CPP©	Comprehensive Planning Process©
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CVA	Cash and Voucher Assistance
CWG	Cash Working Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EUTF	EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICLA	Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ICRC	International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
KII	Key Informant Interview
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MPC	Multipurpose Cash Transfer
NFI	Non-food Items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NS	National Societies
RCRC	Red Cross and Red Crescent
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
UCT	Unconditional Cash Transfer
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WCA	West and Central Africa
WFP	World Food Programme
WMR	Western Mediterranean Route

GLOSSARY³

Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)	“CVA refers to all programmes where cash transfers or vouchers for goods or services are directly provided to recipients. In the context of humanitarian assistance, the term is used to refer to the provision of cash transfers or vouchers given to individuals, household or community recipients; not to governments or other state actors. This excludes remittances and microfinance in humanitarian interventions (although microfinance and money transfer institutions may be used for the actual delivery of cash).”
Cash transfers	“Cash transfers refer to the provision of assistance in the form of money – either physical currency or e-cash – to recipients (individuals, households or communities). Cash transfers are, by definition, unrestricted in terms of use and distinct from restricted modalities including vouchers and in-kind assistance.”
Conditionality	Conditionality refers to prerequisite or qualifying conditions that a beneficiary must fulfil to receive a cash transfer or voucher, i.e., activities or obligations that must be fulfilled before receiving assistance. It is distinct from restriction which pertains only to how transfers are used. Conditionality can in principle be used with any kind of cash, voucher or other type of assistance, depending on its objectives and design”. ⁴
Mobile Money	“Mobile money uses mobile phones to access financial services such as payments, transfers, insurance, savings, and credit. It is a paperless version of a national currency that can be used to provide humanitarian e-cash payments.”
Multipurpose Cash Transfers (MPC)	“Multipurpose Cash Transfers (MPC) are transfers (either periodic or one-off) corresponding to the amount of money required to cover, fully or partially, a household’s basic and/or recovery needs. The term refers to cash transfers designed to address multiple needs, with the transfer value calculated accordingly. MPC transfer values are often indexed to expenditure gaps based on a Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB), or other monetized calculation of the amount required to cover basic needs. All MPC are unrestricted in terms of use as they can be spent as the recipient chooses. This concept may also be referred to as Multipurpose Cash Grants (MPG), or Multipurpose Cash Assistance (MPCA). “
National Societies	Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, or National Societies (NS), are the 192 national entities of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. They are composed of a network of community-based volunteers who provide on-the-ground support in the aftermath of humanitarian disasters. ⁵
Transit Migrants	Individuals in transit migration, i.e. in "a phase of experienced immobility in process of movement in a specific migratory direction" ⁶ with "aspirations of moving in a context of involuntary immobility". ⁷ Transit migrants have a non-linear experience of migration which includes dimension of time, space and interactions with communities.
Value for Money (VfM)	“VfM refers to the optimal use of resources to achieve the best outcomes for people affected by crisis and disaster.”
Vouchers	“A paper, token or e-voucher that can be exchanged for a set quantity or value of goods or services, denominated either as a cash value (e.g. \$15) or predetermined commodities (e.g. 5 kg maize) or specific services (e.g. milling of 5 kg of maize), or a combination of value and commodities. Vouchers are restricted by default, although the degree of restriction will vary based on the programme design and type of voucher. They are redeemable with preselected vendors or in ‘fairs’ created by the implementing agency. The terms vouchers, stamps, or coupons might be used interchangeably.”

³ Unless stated otherwise, all definitions have been taken from CaLP, 2021, Glossary of Terminology for Cash and Voucher Assistance.

⁴ CaLP, Working definition, 2017

⁵ IFRC, 2023, About National Societies.

⁶ Carling, 2002. Cited in Üstübici et al, 2022.

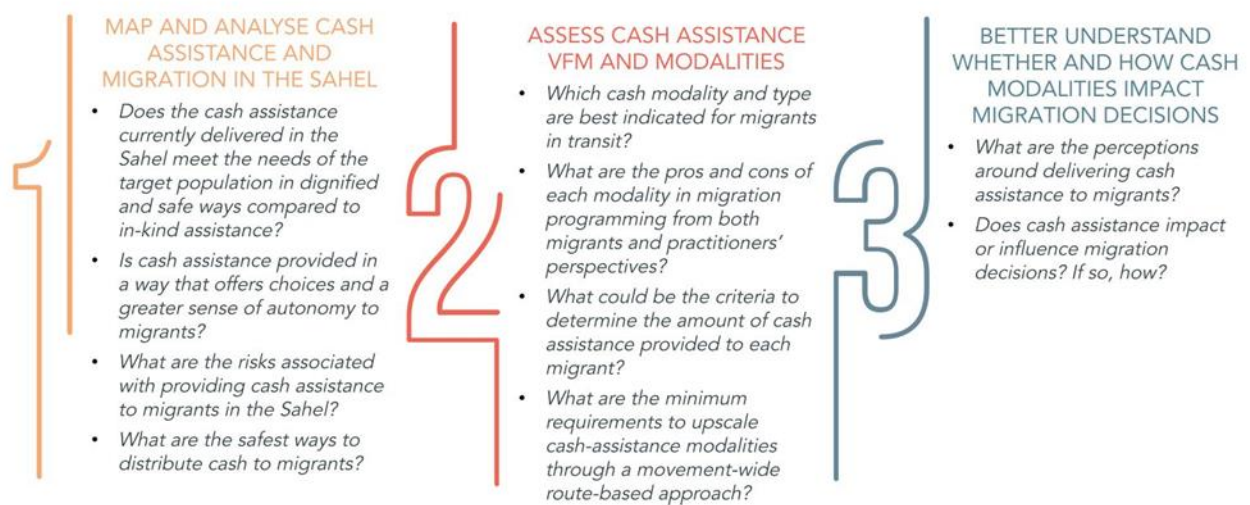
⁷ Schapendonk, 2012. Cited in Üstübici et al, 2022.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research framework and scope

Cash assistance has gained traction among humanitarian actors in recent years as it is understood to provide migrants with more autonomy in addressing their immediate needs. The growing interest in a direct cash-based type intervention can largely be accredited to case studies and research on migrant experiences and perspectives on different types of assistance modalities and the delivery of such. Against the backdrop of a comprehensive analysis on the preferences and experiences of transit migrants, understanding the challenges, benefits, and good practices remain paramount insofar as allowing humanitarian actors to assess the effectiveness, sustainability, and multifaceted components of direct cash assistance. With this overarching objective, Samuel Hall was commissioned by the British Red Cross to carry out research on cash assistance for transit migrants in the Sahel region. To this end, research was conducted in six locations spanning over three countries pertinent to the Sahel: Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania. More specifically, the researcher aimed at reaching three specific objectives through a set of research questions represented in figure 1.

Figure 1. Overview of key objectives and related research questions



1.1.1. Transit migration: a note on concepts and definition

In defining and addressing the concept of transit migration, it is essential to consider the historical and political connotations associated with this term, as well as the efforts of academics and practitioners⁸ in reviving the concept of transit migrants to capture the unique experience of being in an intermediate stage of migration.

This research takes a comprehensive approach to understanding migrants in transit, examining their experiences in relation to time, space and interaction. Recognising the non-linearity of migration, the study goes **beyond a simplistic view of migrants' journeys as a linear progression from departure to arrival**. Instead, it considers the motivations, aspirations, perceptions and capacities that influence migrants in transit during their migration process, through a **typological approach**. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of the profiles and needs of transit migrants, shedding light on their different experiences and circumstances.

This results in a definition of transit migrants that takes into account the non-linearity of migration and acknowledges the complex and diverse realities faced by these individuals on their journey. Such a definition distances itself from the vision of migration as origin and destination, and builds upon the notion of intention, introduced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)⁹ in a definition published as early as 1993 in an International Migration Bulletin.¹⁰ Drawing from this, we consider the **intention of continuing or changing one's movement as a defining characteristic of transit migration, regardless of status or transit duration**.

⁸ See Collyer M, de Haas H, 2012. Developing dynamic categorisations of transit migration: Categorisations of Transit Migration. Popul. Space Place 18, 468–481. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.635>

⁹ "United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was among the first who provided the earliest definition for transit migration describing it as "migration in one country with the intention of seeking the possibility there to emigrate to another country as the country of final destination" From Üstübici A et al, 2022. Comparative Experiences of Transit Migration Management, MIGNEX Background Paper. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.

¹⁰ UNECE, 1993. International Migration Bulletin n.3, cited in Üstübici A et al, 2022. Comparative Experiences of Transit Migration Management, MIGNEX Background Paper. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.

1.2. Methodology and limitations

This research conducted by Samuel Hall used a mixed methods approach – with both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools. Additional primary and secondary quantitative data were collected to address the gaps in the literature documentation.

In close coordination with the British Red Cross and the National Societies, Samuel Hall team conducted an in-person survey to transit migrants in the six locations mirrored, accompanied with a strong qualitative phase through Focus Group Discussions and Semi-Structured Interviews. Data was also collected from practitioners to map the types of assistance delivered to migrants; and the impact, effectiveness, and delivery modalities of CVA to migrants in the six locations. Key Informant Interviews, as well as an electronic survey, were implemented, as well as a stakeholder mapping in each of the three countries of focus.

Table 1. Overview of tools and reached samples

Tool	Target group	Final sample
Quantitative Tools		
E-survey	Practitioners	127 practitioners received the survey, 20 answers received
In-person survey	Transit migrants	401 in total (149 in Burkina Faso, 103 in Chad, 149 in Mauritania)
Qualitative Tools		
Stakeholder mapping	Practitioners	3, 1 per country
Key Informants Interviews (KIIs)	Practitioners	11 in total (country at regional)
Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs)	Transit migrants	24 in total (8 in each country)
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	Transit migrants and community members	12 (4 in each country)

1.2.1. Sampling strategy

Two main types of respondents were identified as the main target demographic for the study: a) those who manage and administer cash assistance (practitioners and experts involved in the field) and b) those who received cash assistance (transit migrants). Host community representatives were also interviewed as part of the FGDs to grant a more nuanced view of how cash assistance affects migrants and local communities alike.

Figure 2. The three data collection phases, targeting different demographic



The phases I and II, which included assessing the locations and mapping the stakeholders, were key to reach the target sample of transit migrants (phase III) through a three-level identification strategy:

- I. Identifying key locations and communities through administrative or geographical data
- II. Determining places within the study area with the support of Key Informants
- III. Mobilising local stakeholders and network to diversify the identification of transit migrants

The research team gave due attention to ensure that diversity (e.g., age, gender, disability, types of displacement, and nationality) was captured.

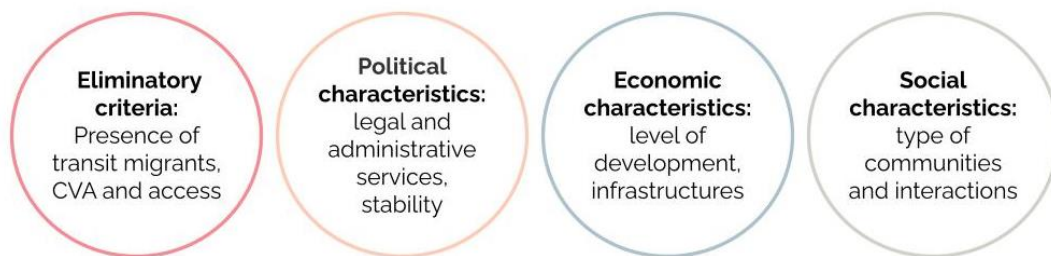
For the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and the Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs) with migrants, interviewees were identified through a snowball sampling approach. **The priority was given to survey respondents who indicated having received assistance during the quantitative phase.**

1.2.2. Locations selection

Location selection was a key element of the methodology, to facilitate the identification of transit migrants with different profiles and experience of migration. A location selection matrix was created by the research team to assess three to four locations per country based on a set of criteria represented below, which led to the selection of the following localities:

- Burkina Faso: Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou
- Chad: Abeche and Ati
- Mauritania: Nouadhibou and Nouakchott

Figure 3. Location selection criteria



1.2.3. Limitations

Despite a strong sampling strategy which allowed the field-based research teams to meet the target, identifying transit migrants remained challenging and impacted the representation of specific groups in the final sample. This is true for short-term migrants who, by essence, only stay in a location for brief periods of time. Moreover, the issue of trust and confidentiality caused hesitation for transit migrants to participate in the study, or provide clear information about their future intentions - especially those undocumented.

The low number of respondents who reported that they had received CVA (18%) constituted a limitation to pinpoint concrete examples of good practices. The migrants who had not received CVA, in turn, spoke of preferences instead of lived experiences with direct assistance interventions. Additionally, the lack of knowledge regarding the amount of cash that the respondents could potentially receive as beneficiaries of cash assistance may have coloured the perceptions when asked the question regarding preferences in terms of assistance modalities.

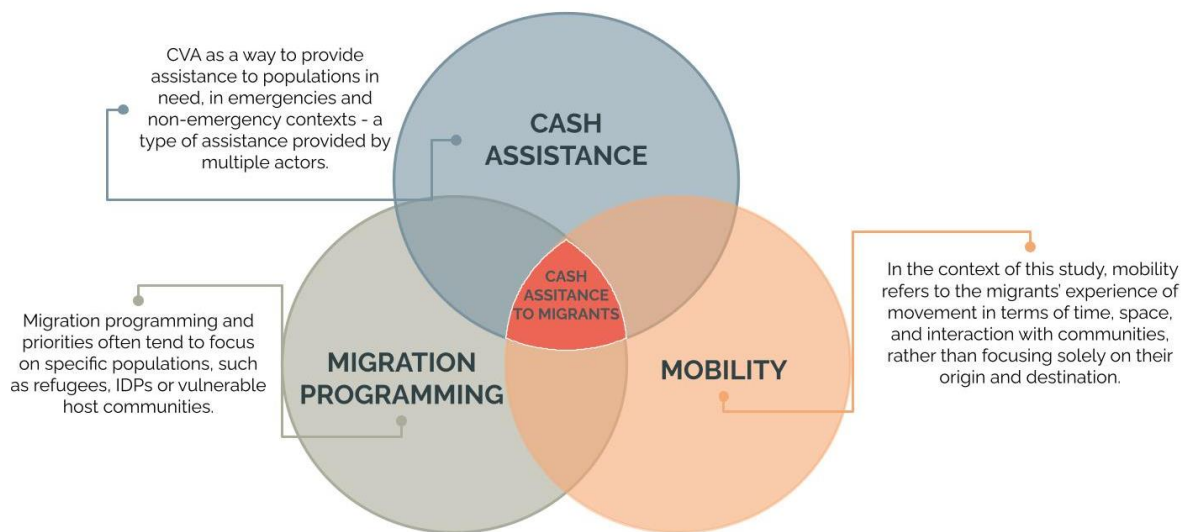
Representation of women in the survey, FGDs, and SSIs

In some locations, it proved difficult to ensure a strong gender representation that would reflect the in-situ transit migrant demographics. While in some locations, the smaller sampling size of female transit migrants reflected the demographic realities (Ati, Nouakchott), in others, the representation of women was lacking compared to the real numbers on the ground. Less availability - the overlap with the month of Ramadan was seen as a multiplying factor in Burkina Faso, for example; a lower presence in public spaces; and reluctance to participate, especially in Mauritania, impacted this representation. In the case of Bobo-Dioulasso, additionally, the research team couldn't reach a specific female demographic which is constituted of female night workers. Finally, in the case of Mauritania, the quantitative research team was only composed of male enumerators, which could have posed a challenge in terms of accessing female transit migrants.

1.3. Defining a conceptual framework for the research

The conceptual framework in which this research was carried out is characterised by the analysis of multiple levels, that in practice not necessarily intertwine with each other.

Figure 4. The three levels of analysis



Including mobility in the conceptual framework as a separate level from migration programming allows for a broader perspective on the subject. Indeed, as the mobility aspect is often neglected by programming in the context of migration, which tends to address the needs of targeted groups in a specific place or at a specific time, migrants in transit often fall outside the scope of these selection criteria and, as a result, their unique needs and challenges are not adequately addressed.

Box 1. Cash assistance: an overview

Cash assistance refers to the provision of cash transfers or vouchers to specifically targeted populations, according to predefined vulnerability criteria, as a form of humanitarian assistance. To include the different modalities, practitioners also use the term Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA). The use of cash transfers has become increasingly accepted, systematic and popular among implementing humanitarian and development agencies and donors to respond to basic needs in humanitarian and protracted crisis settings, leading to significant changes in the way aid is conceived and assistance provided.

Of the various types and modalities of cash assistance in humanitarian settings, three common approaches stand out:

- I. **Unconditional Cash Transfers (UCTs):** This modality provides cash directly to recipients without any conditions or restrictions. It offers flexibility and autonomy to beneficiaries, allowing them to determine how best to utilise the funds based on their unique needs and priorities. When cash is provided unconditionally and as direct cash payments, the terminology of 'multi-purpose' cash transfers (MPCs) can typically be used to indicate that the objective of the cash transfer is to cover multiple needs defined by the recipient.¹¹
- II. **Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs):** This approach entails providing cash assistance to individuals or households upon meeting specific conditions or fulfilling certain obligations. Examples include enrolling children in school, attending healthcare programmes, or participating in community work projects.
- III. **Voucher-Based Assistance:** Instead of cash, vouchers are distributed to beneficiaries, which can be redeemed for specific goods or services - this is also referred to as restrictive cash transfers as the use of the assistance received is limited to pre-defined goods or services.

In addition to these, we can also add mention to '**Cash plus**', which is a form of cash assistance that seeks to address the supposed shortcomings of cash-only interventions or provide complementary assistance in specific areas, such as cash + nutrition services. To do so, cash plus programmes provide cash alongside other components of assistance, which can act to induce behavioural changes or address supply-side constraints.¹²

References are also made to **multimodal or multipurpose cash programming**. This refers to the fact that cash assistance can be delivered through various mechanisms, including direct cash distribution, mobile money transfers, bank transfers, vouchers, and prepaid debit cards. Some programmes combine different modalities to maximise impact and meet diverse needs. For example, a combination of cash transfers and vouchers might be utilised to ensure both flexibility and targeted support. The selection of the appropriate modality and distribution mechanism depends on factors such as the context, objectives of the assistance programme, logistical considerations, and the preferences and capacities of beneficiaries. Cash assistance modalities offer a flexible and effective means of supporting individuals and communities in humanitarian settings, giving recipients more choices and autonomy and allowing them to meet their immediate needs and enhance their resilience.

¹¹ UNHCR, 2018, Multi-Purpose Cash and Sectoral Outcomes: A Review of Evidence and Learning

¹² Roelen K et al, 2017. How to Make 'Cash Plus' Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors, Innocenti Working Paper 2017-10, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence

1.4. Migration: context and key trends in the Sahel

Migration through the Sahel region is traditionally associated with routes towards Europe, although 70 to 80% of migration in WCA is intra-regional¹³. The migration towards Europe follows three main routes:

- The Central Mediterranean route (CMR), originally formed by three sub-routes (East, Central and West), converges in Libya; it presents the highest rate of mortality (IOM estimated that 82% of death on routes in the last decade was on the CMR)¹⁴, human rights violations, and smuggling¹⁵.
- The Western Mediterranean Route (WMR) originates in West and Central Africa (WCA) to reach the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla through Morocco. Although safer than the CMR, more controls have been implemented since 2018 reducing the success on this route.
- The Atlantic route to the Canary Islands, whose use has grown dramatically starting in 2020, is extremely deadly with an estimated 1 death for every 20 crossing¹⁶. Humanitarian assistance is lacking for both migrants aiming to cross and those returning after an attempt.

The three countries considered are countries of origin, transit and return, on these routes to Europe, but they are also such for intra-regional migration. A range of migration profiles - including agro-pastoralists, seasonal economic migrants, and forcibly displaced people impacted by volatile security contexts and conflicts as well as climate-related events - contribute to movements through the Sahel, distinct from those towards Europe. In this context, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania are also countries of permanent or temporary destination, whether due to changes in itinerary (intentional or involuntary) or to an initial intention of migrants.

Burkina Faso's high insecurity in the recent years due to attacks by Non-State Armed Groups targeting civilians and public services¹⁷ in conjunction with the military coup that transpired on January 2022 – the fourth in less than two years,¹⁸ has translated into the internal displacement of 1,719,332 individuals as of September 2022, primarily toward urban centres.¹⁹ Burkina Faso is also home to 33,530 refugees primarily from neighbouring Niger and Mali due to protracted conflict and political fragility.

Chad, in addition to the high number of returnees transiting through the country after attempting to cross through Libya, counts many migrants on their way to the Gulf. Moreover, it is a destination for seasonal migrants seeking to work in gold mines in the North of the country. Similarly with Mauritania, a significant part of migrants settles more permanently, as evidenced by the growth in population in cities such as Abeche.²⁰ Other types of migration are also present in the country, with over 90,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to local political turmoil²¹ and floods that struck the country in the summer of 2022, as well as more than 555,000 refugees as of June 2022 - mainly from Sudan, the Central African Republic,²² and Cameroon.²³

Mauritania is a destination for labour migrants²⁴ and host country to refugees: in December 2022, the UNHCR counted 106,545 refugees including more than 90,000 from Mali,²⁵ gathered mostly in Nouakchott and the Mbera camp outside of Bassikounou. They add to the high number of migrants who, after attempting to cross to the Canary Islands, return to Mauritania either temporarily (awaiting an opportunity to return to their countries of origin) or for a longer period of time.

1.5. Assisting transit migrants: what are the challenges?

Delivering cash assistance to migrants who are temporarily staying in a key migratory juncture requires a well calibrated and adapted approach. The literature reveals a number of challenges:

- **Difficulties to target and reach hidden or invisible groups:** The most vulnerable among transit migrants often have difficulties accessing assistance²⁶.

¹³ Hargrave K, Anderson K, 2021, AMiRA Programme. Migration Rapid Context Analysis

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ UNHCR, 2022a. Burkina Faso Operational Updates. Available at: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/3571>

¹⁸ ISS, 2022. "What caused the coup in Burkina Faso?".

¹⁹ UNHCR, 2022a

²⁰ Collyer M, de Haas H, 2012.

²¹ UN News, "UN rights chief deplors deadly use of force against protestors in Chad", Octobre 2022.

²² UNHCR, 2022b. The Price the World's Forcibly Displaced Could Pay.

²³ UNHCR, 2022c. Chad: Factsheet on refugees from Cameroon.

²⁴ Collyer M, de Haas H, 2012.

²⁵ UNHCR 2023. Mauritania Map: Situation of refugees and asylum-seekers as of 31st December 2022. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/map/mauritania/mauritania-map-situation-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-31-december-2022>

²⁶ British Red Cross, 2020, Atteindre les « invisibles »: Vulnérabilité et accessibilité le long des routes migratoires

- **Risks in accessing services:** Fear of reprisals and lack of administrative documents makes it particularly difficult to access and support transit migrants^{27,28}. Correctly understanding the risks faced by migrants when attempting to access services, as well as addressing gaps such as information asymmetry between practitioners and beneficiaries are both central components to programme and maintain CVA interventions.
- **Legal and operational barriers to assistance,** owing to a) constraints catalysed by the regulations in the country of implementation; b) donors' orientations; c) difficulties in accessing money transfer services such as banks; and d) perceptions of migration being either encouraged or discouraged²⁹.
- **Coordination challenges:** The small number of programmes having adopted a route-based approach to CVA revealed the challenges of providing a continuity of assistance for transit migrants, such as limited contextual understanding added to a difficult coordination between the different national teams³⁰.

As a first step to inform programmatic interventions, this research sets out to confirm the challenges identified in the literature and uncover additional evidence to be taken into account in the design of interventions for assisting transit migrants. Addressing structural and contextual constraints remains a key priority to deliver CVA to transit migrants in the Sahel.

Photo 2: Djiboutian Red Crescent, migrant-receiving support (food and water), May 2023, Aziz Goza / BRC



²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Hargrave K, Anderson K, 2021.

²⁹ IFRC and Croix Rouge du Niger, 2022. Cash and Voucher Assistance in migration contexts: voices of migrants in Niger

³⁰ Charlot C, Lamoure G, Malakooti A, Couasnon L, 2021. Final Evaluation of the Assistance to migrants: Route-based Approach (AMIRA) programme

2. Delivering cash assistance to migrants: findings from the field

2.1. Cash assistance and migration: mapping key actors and practices in the Sahel

This section provides an overview of the range, scope, and types of cash assistance provided to migrants, both at the regional level in the Sahel and at the national level for the three countries of the study, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania. The identification of key actors and cash assistance, modalities and impact within such contexts was informed by a stakeholder mapping and the experiences of experts and practitioners collected through a number of key informant interviews (KIIs) and an online survey.

Key findings:

- **PROGRAMMES:** According to qualitative data, while CVA is widely used in the region, there are few (or no) programmes delivering CVA to migrants and transit migrants. This was confirmed by the survey data, showing that transit migrants received very little CVA except for those migrants who fall under the UNHCR mandate.
- **IMPACT & USE:** In the majority of the cases detected, CVA is mainly used for basic needs and there is no available evidence of the impact on improving transit conditions and/or the decision to migrate.

Cash assistance is a common way of providing assistance in the Sahel region, with multiple actors involved in providing support³¹. However, this pertains to general assistance and not specifically for migrants or within migration programmes. According to the interviews conducted and the e-survey submitted to experts and practitioners in the field, most of the cash provided at the regional level is sector-specific, with a large part dedicated to food insecurity, with some organisations, such as the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, providing cash assistance also for basic needs and multiple purposes. Both the survey and the interviews revealed **either little information, or information that there are little programmes targeting migrants, especially those in transit in the Sahel**, and a lack of data on the amount of actual cash delivered to migrants at the regional level emerged³². The main programmes having delivered CVA to transit migrants at regional level since 2020, represented in the figure below, are the AMiRA Programme³³, and Asile et Mouvement Mixtes³⁴.



Some organisations are trying to build more knowledge in that and to get findings on how they can really deliver cash properly in some very sensitive sectors, and normally we try to have a blended approach, where you have cash and maybe other modality, which is classic.



Some forms of **route-based approach exists in the assistance to migrants**, mainly based on cross-country communication to monitor borders and report issues and flag potential security threats. However, it is very difficult to implement an actual route-based approach to assisting transit migrants, especially those without status, due to **issues in locating them and assessing their needs while on the move, as well as potential reluctance of migrants to register for assistance**, linked to perceptions that it may expose them to more risks.

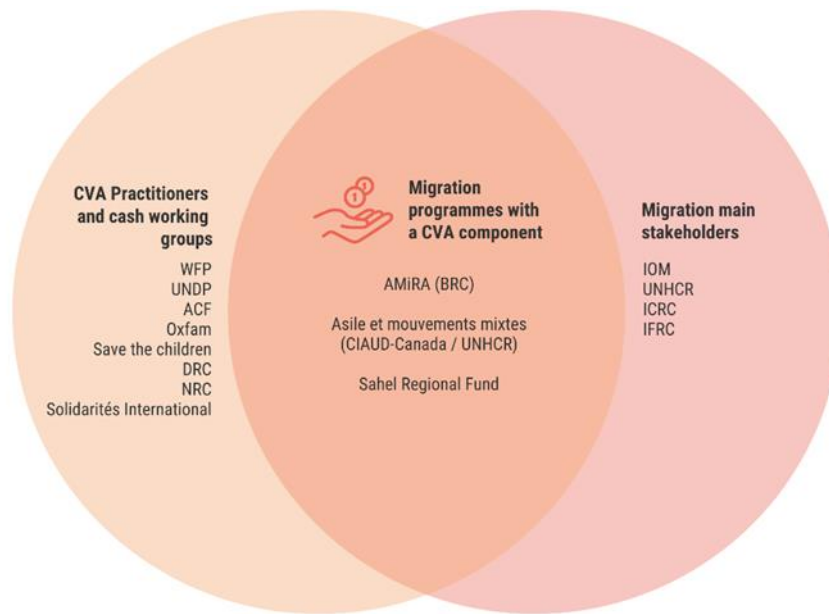
³¹ A full overview of the stakeholder mapped at regional and national level can be found in Annex I.

³² KII_WCA_1

³³ Charlot C, Lamoure G, Malakooti A, Couasnon L, 2021.

³⁴ This programme implemented by CIAUD Canada in several countries included Burkina Faso, targets migrants who fall under the UNHCR mandate as well as transit migrants' victims of traffic or presenting high levels of vulnerability. It implies border monitoring and is implemented in different countries of the region with limited follow-up

Figure 5. Overview of key practitioners and stakeholders working on of CVA and/or migration at regional level³⁵



Box 2. Cash Working Groups

A Cash Working Group (CWG) is a forum established to facilitate the coordination among different stakeholders on cash and voucher assistance (CVA) within a humanitarian response, either at the national or regional level, depending on the scope and scale of the response. The main function of the CWGs is to provide a technical platform to promote a collaborative approach to CVA for vulnerable populations across relevant sectors, as well as to facilitate coordination, promote and mutual learning among members and strategic planning of CVA, and guide the sharing and harmonisation of tools and guidelines, as the amount of support delivered.

Cash Working Groups are usually created as part of the response to a humanitarian crisis, such as floods, famine or conflict, and are not directly related to the response to population movement - hence a limited number of CWG members who deliver CVA to migrants. A CWG is active in Burkina Faso³⁶ and Chad.

Source: The Calp Network, <https://www.calpnetwork.org/community/cash-working-groups/>

2.1.1. Programmes and impact at country level

Burkina Faso

The actors involved in providing assistance to migrants include the Burkinabé Red Cross, IOM, UNHCR, and the government through its Ministries of Humanitarian Affairs and Social Affairs and the “Action Sociale” initiative. From interviews with practitioners, it emerged that many organisations indeed work through the government to deliver assistance to migrants, especially in locations where they don't have a presence on the field.

While the Burkinabé Red Cross Society is preparing a national strategy funded by the British Red Cross that targets transit migrants and returnees, including through CVA³⁷, data show that **only a few organisations are delivering CVA specifically to transit migrants**. In most cases, support is limited to assisting migrants’ short-term needs, such as paying communication cards and transportation bills, and distributing vouchers mostly for food and health. The importance of including activities for host communities affected by migration was marked as crucial by the majority of key respondents as in the implementation of CVA programmes for migrants in transit.

The following CVA for migrants’ programmes are implemented in Burkina Faso:

- The Croix Rouge du Burkina Faso, targets both migrants (70% of the target) and host communities (30%) - among which are classified returnees and IDPs, and provides vouchers for food or payment of bills for communications, housing, and health through its EUTF-funded programme.

³⁵ The Sahel Regional fund is a mechanism that provides funding to national and international NGOs working in four countries, namely Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Chad. It aims to provide integrated multi-sector assistance to people affected by conflict and insecurity, and the preferred modality for assistance is cash, even if not exclusively. See <https://www.sahelregionalfund.org/>

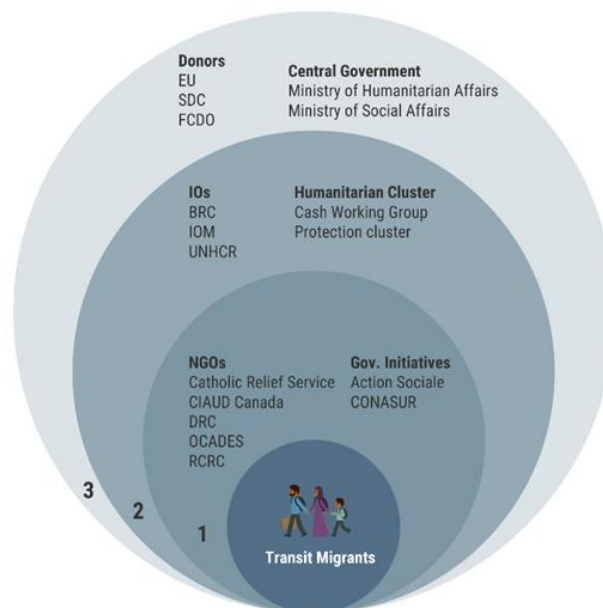
³⁶ Burkina Faso inter-agency cash working group, 2023. Tableau de bord bimensuel Septembre-Octobre 2022.

³⁷ KII_BF_1

- The Catholic Relief Service (CRS) delivers cash and in-kind assistance to both IDPs and host communities through a joint implementation with OCADES, the Burkinabé branch of Caritas.
- The Comité International pour l'Aide d'Urgence et le Développement (CIAUD) Canada, an implementing partner of UNHCR, registers, assists and refers migrants identified through the community, field staff, referrals and security forces. They registered more than 17,000 people through their programme in 2022, with a focus on migrants eligible for protection under UNHCR's mandate. CIAUD-Canada also registers migrants in transit with high vulnerabilities.

Looking more closely at the two locations of the study, Ouagadougou appears to receive relatively less aid through cash transfer than other regions, an information confirmed by the Cash Working Group (CWG) 2022 report and reflected in the CVA delivered to migrants. Of the 77 respondents of our survey in Ouagadougou, 22% said they had received, or were receiving, assistance - however, none mentioned receiving CVA. In the second location of the study, Babo-Dioulasso, out of 72 respondents, only 11% reported receiving assistance in the current location, including through cash for 3 respondents. The Croix Rouge du Burkina Faso delivers cash assistance to both cities.

Figure 6. Assistance to transit migrants, an ecosystem map of Burkina Faso



1) Actors in direct contact with migrants / social sector
 2) Actors of migration and CVA sectors at national level / humanitarian actors
 3) Actors of the policy level (decision-makers) / donors and central government

Chad

At the national level, **assistance to migrants in transit is very limited**. However, the cash working group is active and CVA is used by many actors (Oxfam, ACF, IRC, World Vision, Acted, WFP and UNICEF). IOM and UNHCR, use CVA as well. The qualitative data show that the UNHCR provides, albeit not on an ongoing basis, support to some refugees through lumpsum CVA, stipends and scholarships to refugee students.



Through the vulnerability study, we define health issues, food issues and accommodation issues, and then we turn to cash.



In Ati, one of the two study locations, assistance to transit migrants is mainly provided by the Red Cross of Chad, while organisations like Caritas and WFP programmes target registered vulnerable groups, including local communities and IDPs. In this location, of the 50 respondents surveyed, only 4% had received assistance in their current

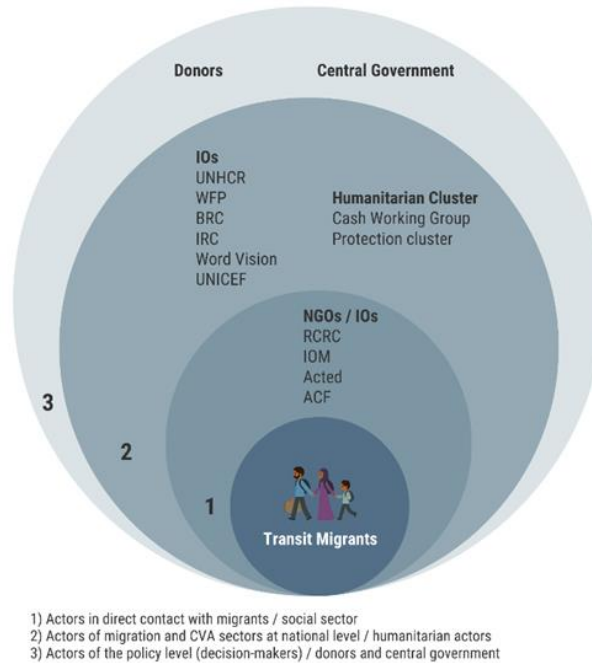
location, of which 2 indicated cash as the modality. In the second location of the study, Abeche, the data is slightly better, as of the 53 respondents, **34% had received assistance at their current location**. Of these, 12 respondents had received money, which was the most used modality.

The Red Cross of Chad recently implemented a migration project funded by the British Red Cross, which aimed to provide health and in-kind assistance, both food and non-food, to host families and migrants³⁸. No CVA modalities were included

³⁸ KII_BF_1

for this project, however the CRT lead advocacy actions targeting, on the one hand, local CVA implementers so that they include transit migrants as part of their target; and on the other hand, potential donors to include CVA in programmes targeting transit migrants. As part of the project, a database of migrants who have received assistance has also been created, but in most cases, follow-up is difficult due to the mobility of the individuals and limited project monitoring capacities.

Figure 7. Assistance to transit migrants, an ecosystem map of Chad



Mauritania

Looking at the national context of Mauritania, the Mauritanian government is involved in Working Groups on Cash and open to discussing the alignment within the social protection system between cash humanitarian assistance and social protection in general. Several government social programmes support the most vulnerable local population, including with cash transfers, with the support of the World Bank's Social Safety Net System project. The 'Registre Social' in Mauritania, a governmental entity, lists vulnerable households and both government agencies (such as Taazour, the General Delegation in charge of national solidarity and the fight against exclusion) and humanitarian actors can use this listing to provide assistance in a centralised manner, albeit predominantly for food security and nutrition objectives. The listing includes refugee households since 2021³⁹, however it is unlikely, and potentially unsafe, for cash assistance targeting transit migrants to be centralised by the government.

When it comes to cash assistance in Mauritania, a distinction has to be made between the two main target populations: the local population, affected by recurring shocks such as floods, droughts and food insecurity during lean seasons, and the refugee population, mainly related to the situation in Mali. The main actors delivering cash assistance to refugees are WFP, which provides cash, vouchers or in-kind food for food insecurity, UNHCR, which provides cash to cover services such as WASH or livelihood creation, and the government, which also provides regular food security or social protection cash transfers. Besides, donors as the European Union (EU) and the World Bank⁴⁰ are also present with projects that provide cash transfers to refugees and host communities. These are also joined by ACF, Oxfam, and Save the Children.



We also have in-kind distributions, both for local population and in the camp, but I would say it's 70% direct cash



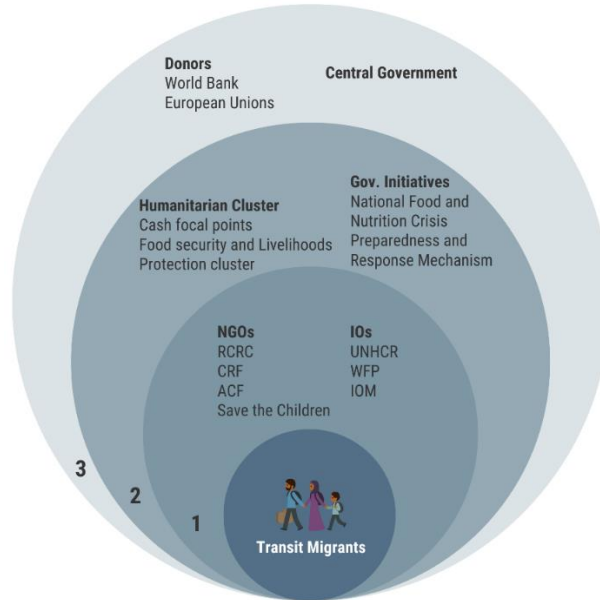
Assistance to migrants without status is mainly provided by UNHCR, IOM and the French Red Cross, but key informants were unclear whether there are inclusive of any CVA components. The Mauritanian Red Crescent has a support programme to build its institutional capacity for CVA and in 2022 implemented small CVA interventions in response to food insecurity

³⁹ UNHCR, WFP, 2022. Soutenir l'inclusion des réfugiés dans le registre social.

⁴⁰ World Bank. Mauritania. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/sahel-adaptive-social-protection-program-trust-fund/country-work/mauritania>

and targeting migrants⁴¹. Looking at the quantitative data, assistance results are consistent in both localities. Of the 75 respondents in Nouadhibou, 11% stated that they receive assistance in the current locality. Of these, 2 respondents mentioned cash. Similarly, in Nouakchott, out of 74 respondents, 12% receive assistance in their current location, including 7 who receive cash.

Figure 8. Assistance to transit migrants, an ecosystem map of Mauritania



- 1) Actors in direct contact with migrants / social sector
- 2) Actors of migration and CVA sectors at national level / humanitarian actors
- 3) Actors of the policy level (decision-makers) / donors and central government

⁴¹ Croissant Rouge Mauritanien & Croix Rouge Française, 2022. Projet « Fournir une assistance humanitaire intégrée aux migrants en situation de vulnérabilité dans les villes de Nouakchott et Nouadhibou »

2.2. Practitioners' take

This section reports the experiences of experts and practitioners with regards to design, uses, modalities and preferences for cash assistance provided to migrants, both at the regional level in the Sahel and at the national level for the three countries of the study. Specific attention was paid to identifying the main risks and obstacles faced by practitioners when designing and implementing cash assistance for migrants.

Key findings:

- **USE AND OPPORTUNITIES:** From the data collected, humanitarian actors prefer to work on cash rather than in-kind assistance, with a preference for unrestricted modalities. Interviewed practitioners consider unconditional and unrestricted cash to be more efficient in most situations. In general, the cash working groups in the three countries give priority to unconditional and unrestricted cash. However, based on the experience of interviewees and practitioners this does not seem to be the case when it comes to routine assistance provided for migrants. Even less so for migrants in transit. Although practitioners recognize the value of multipurpose cash transfers in adequately covering people's needs, these preferences may be limited by funding and operational implementation capacity, especially in the context of larger programs designed by UN agencies and provided by cooperation partners.
- **RISKS AND BARRIERS:** The provision of CVA to non-registered migrants, such as those in transit, is made difficult by a number of factors: including assessment (e.g., identification at locations, trust, perceived relevance by migrants), modalities (e.g., flexibility of modality for specific migrant needs and access or continuity), personal or organisational risk management and security, perception of dependence by national governments resulting in lack of support, and, in some cases, lack of trust from the most vulnerable migrants. Agencies also report limitations in accessing the most vulnerable people due to their lack of trust. For Mauritania and Burkina Faso, this difficulty was observed especially in the case of female transit migrants, including night workers.

2.2.1. Use and opportunities

The evidence regarding the comparative effectiveness of cash versus in-kind assistance has been well documented in the literature,^{42,43,44} as well as the humanitarian donors and actor's policies to favour cash over in-kind, with a growing preference towards multipurpose modalities.

In line with this, **agencies interviewed stated a clear preference for cash assistance over in-kind assistance** for several reasons.

- **Autonomy and choice:** One of the main reasons mentioned is that cash offers beneficiaries more autonomy, dignity, and choice. This means that people can make decisions about what they need most and have the flexibility to purchase items that suit their specific needs. In addition, cash is more efficient, as it avoids side costs such as storage and transport. **Cash also allows for more flexibility, which is particularly important when responding to diverse needs in emergency situations and continuous mobility, where needs can change rapidly.**
- **COVID-19 adaptations:** this preference, in some cases, stems from a forced use of cash assistance modalities due to the changed context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, however, ended up **proving effectiveness in supporting beneficiaries in a relevant way.** Learning from this positive experience led practitioners to prioritise CVA over in-kind after the lift of restrictions.

- **Contextual opportunities: the provision of cash assistance is highly dependent on the country context, modality and needs of the migrant groups.** In line with the literature, practitioners agreed that there is a need for more evidence on 'what works, for whom, and why.' There is



If we're talking about people that are moving we always need to think about the fact that they need the greatest flexibility possible, they need to cover their needs, people on the move we don't know exactly what needs they have, because they're moving and changing contexts.



a paucity of rigorous, randomised impact evaluations, which delineate the impact of aid from the underlying drivers of poverty. This is considered particularly challenging due to the very poor provision of adequate basic services; access to livelihoods; and education across the Sahel region. Furthermore, that CVA is predominantly provided for food security, nutrition, or social protection due to high levels of food insecure people in any one given year, now increasingly linked to climate impacts. This was reflected by the data, with some key informants having suggested that cash is more effective in areas such as food security, housing and transport reflecting challenges in addressing longer term poverty related problems.

⁴² World Bank, WFP, 2022. Cash and In-Kind Transfers in Humanitarian Settings. A Review of Evidence and Knowledge Gaps

⁴³ CALP. 2017. Cash or In-Kind? Why Not Both? Response Analysis Lessons from Multimodal Programming

⁴⁴ ICAI, 2017. The effects of DFID's cash transfer programmes on poverty and vulnerability: an impact review.

- **Integrated programming:** the provision of cash assistance researched appears to have limitations in delivering resilience outcomes, though practitioners have been in favour of adopting methods suggesting combining it with other programmes to strengthen the capacity of families and individuals in the long run. Reflecting limitations of short-term cash transfers from meeting anything than very basic needs.

- **Protection: the use of cash for protection can be an opportunity to provide support and link migrants to services.**

Practitioners agreed that it should be better oriented to do so. This

could include providing an

entry point or referral pathway for CVA recipients to access health care on their specific needs (e.g., mental health), but also to being referred to the right reporting mechanisms (e.g., in case of SGBV) and protection-oriented support (e.g., resettlement through UNHCR). Practitioners highlighted the need to design programmes with sufficient agility to support specific migrant vulnerabilities, while working closely with communities and local authorities to ensure that the provision of cash assistance does not create tensions in contexts of lower income countries with limited public resources. Finally, during the fieldwork cases of malpractices emerged, pointing to the urgent need for by both local and international organisations to carry out proper training and monitoring of staff on the field, to make sure that staff is well aware of vulnerabilities and protection needs and can not only assist recipients correctly, but also not re-produce power dynamics.

“

Yeah, I would definitely see it [cash assistance] as one of the main, most effective ways of helping people with the kind of thing they need, and given the diversity of needs they may have

”

Ultimately, the preference for cash assistance over in-kind assistance is determined by its flexibility, efficiency, and ability to provide beneficiaries with greater autonomy and dignity.

2.2.1.1. Modalities

This section draws an overview of the preferences and experiences of practitioners working with cash assistance in the region and countries of interest of the study. Two significant trends emerge:

- **Conditional vs. Unconditional:** both types of CVA were almost equally used, with the split being around 50/50. However, the survey found that unconditional CVA was seen as positive across the board, widely accepted and appreciated by practitioners as it offers flexibility and autonomy to beneficiaries⁴⁵.
- **Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance:** generally preferred over vouchers or restricted cash for migrants because it offers the opportunity to cover more of their needs flexibly⁴⁶. This mode is also considered advantageous because, albeit partially, it provides a way around the difficulties of assessing real needs of the recipient.

In terms of preferences and experiences on delivery methods, it was stressed that it strictly linked with the operating context and that it should depend on beneficiaries' preferences, including their mobility, access to services, phone network coverage, presence of microfinance institutions or banking and local market capacity. Access to markets with competitive prices is also important when providing on-going cash transfers.

Overall, the following delivery methods emerged:

- **Mobile and Bank Transfers:** Mobile and bank transfers are viable options for cash assistance, depending on financial inclusion and service availability. They are appreciated for the safety they provide to both practitioners and recipients, and the limited risks of embezzlement. It might not be an efficient value for money decision if providing one-time or short-term assistance however, as delivery costs are higher.
- **Paper Cash:** the e-survey submitted to practitioners found that, among the different types of CVA, **paper cash provision is cited as the most commonly used**, and agencies usually have full control over their delivery in exchange for pre-agreed (food) commodities.
- **Vouchers: key informants suggested that open vouchers for basic commodities are suitable for stable displaced populations in need of specific support.** Agencies do have established experience of providing food commodity vouchers, with agencies often supporting the market trader contracts to provide the needed commodities if delivering in a remote location, for example.

Context-specific factors will determine the form and modality of cash assistance best adapted to migrants in transit.

According to the practitioners interviewed, there is no “one size fits all” solution and the type and modality of cash assistance should be adapted to the country context and the profile of the beneficiaries. This is dependent on an organisation’s capacity to provide a range of CVA activities, as well as considerations of scale. Risks and barriers detailed

⁴⁵ Overall, these findings provide insights into the types of aid and services that are most commonly used and preferred by those working in Mauritania, as according to the data gathered, the majority of respondents work in Mauritania.

⁴⁶ KII_WCA_2

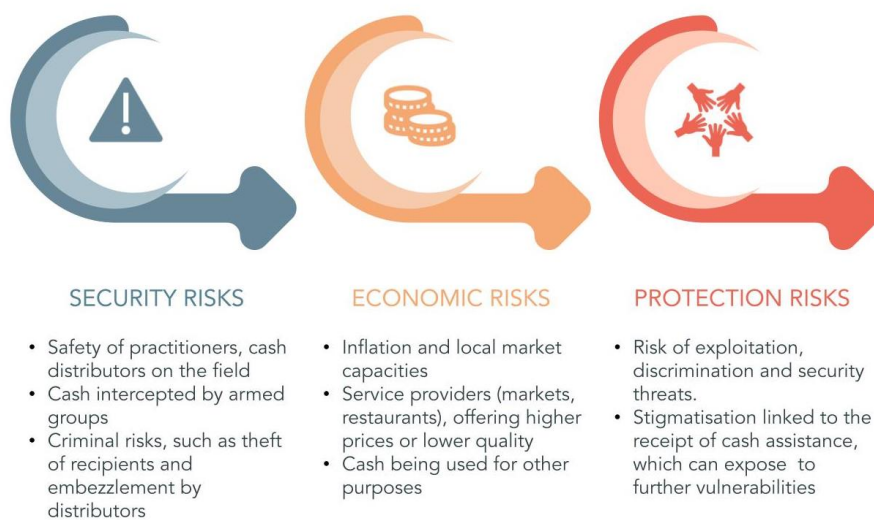
below, such as **safety, access to services and acceptance by local communities are key to the feasibility of CVA and should be assessed** and considered when designing programmes. It was also noted that both conditional and unconditional cash assistance can be applied, depending on the context, beneficiary profile and project objectives.

2.2.2. Risks and barriers

While cash assistance offers greater choice and autonomy for migrants compared to in-kind assistance, practitioners, and migrants themselves expressed concerns about the risks associated with cash distribution to migrants in the Sahel region. **This section provides a typology of risks and barriers** that the recommendations will then address, in order to inform future programming.

“ Each migrant has a different context, different situation, so I think we should really focus on the individual and not on the average ”

With regard to the risks identified, they can be grouped as follows:



Insecurity and conflict: The Sahel region is characterised by ongoing insecurity and conflict, which pose a significant risk to both the delivery and the effectiveness of cash assistance. Practitioners reported that cash distributions could be targeted by armed groups, and that the presence of weapons during distributions could create a sense of insecurity for recipients. Alternatively, cash can be considered as more discreet for beneficiaries though this has to be dependent on a local conflict analysis.

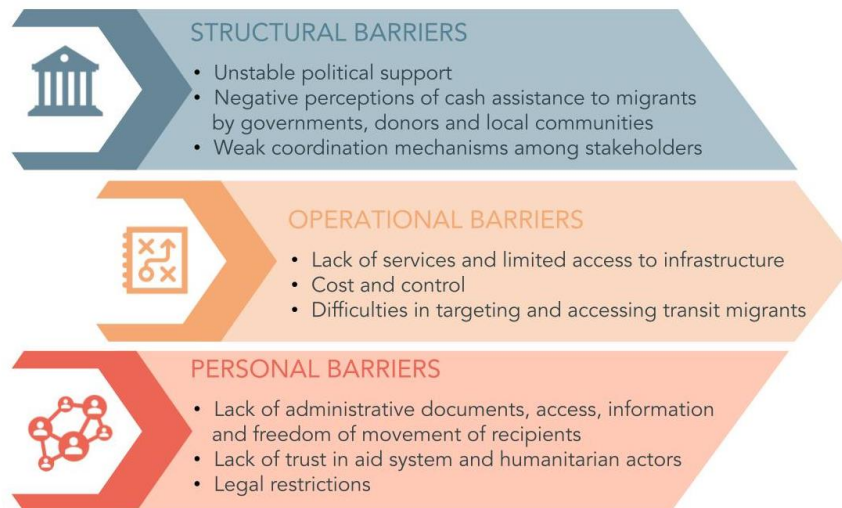
Local markets capacity: Practitioners have also identified limitations in capacity of local markets to respond to demand, particularly if market chains are disrupted in conflict affected or remote areas with a risk of inflation. In the case of vouchers, potential risks were mentioned by practitioners with regards to the lack of transparency or honesty of providers who might give less quality or increase prices due to having market monopoly.

Use of cash: There are also several risks associated with the use of cash assistance, especially unconditional and unrestricted CVA, including the possibility of the cash being used for other purposes - practitioners fear cash being used by migrants to continue their journey, including through financing smugglers.

Protection concerns: CVA programmes can contribute to increased visibility of the target population, and thus potentially exposing people to new risks.⁴⁷ In the context of migration specifically, and thus when targeting vulnerable populations as transit migrants, practitioners therefore stressed the importance of ensuring that beneficiaries have access to support in ways that do not expose them and avoid them being labelled as vulnerable by local communities.

In terms of common barriers emerged, they can be organised across the following levels:

⁴⁷ KII_WCA_3_Donor



Unstable political support: In the Sahel region specifically, political considerations such as fear of encouraging migration and security concerns must be taken into account. Because of this, it recurred across several interviews the mention of governments' bans on using CVA across the region, including the recent one issued in Burkina Faso due to concerns on non-state armed actors but also other cases in Cameroon, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁴⁸ Moreover, the use of cash assistance is a factor in perceptions around humanitarian assistance for immediate needs. Supporting linkages with national systems, such as social protection systems, can be considered a potential strategy to provide consistent and predictable assistance through established national frameworks. However, this would entail an integrated and long-term strategy, which is significantly less realistic in unstable areas, where social protection systems are still insufficient to adequately support vulnerable groups and thus unable to include migrants in transit or those with irregular status. Here, humanitarian assistance becomes critical to complement existing systems and provide support to those excluded from them.

“Distributing cash for migrants is not very well perceived by the governments of specific countries, as they are considering that giving cash to migrants is like kind of supporting migration and supporting migrants not to hit back, while they're trying with their policies to push back the migrants to migrate [...]

Weak coordination at the operational level: Humanitarian organisations, governments, and local communities work with different types of project funding which does not always enable alignment and coordination. An additional complication is the need to work with authorities at the national and sub-national levels and community leaders to ensure transparency at all stages, sharing information and resources, as well as working closely with local actors to identify and address the specific needs of migrants in the region. The importance for donors and international organisations to work with authorities, and not in isolation, was also highlighted, together with the need to align cash programming to national programming, when feasible based on a risk analysis and when that does not go against humanitarian principles. This emphasis on alignment underscores the aspiration for longer-term consistent funding rather than solely focusing on shorter-term aid objectives. Moreover, it emerged that while cash working groups provide strategies and guidance for CVA programming at country-level in line with national policies, such efforts target host communities, or migrants in protracted emergencies rather than transit migrants.

Lack of cash delivery services and infrastructure: According to FGDs, limited delivery services or infrastructure act as a barrier to providing cash more systematically and safely. This includes, for example, the absence of a local SIM card, weak telephone network, or the low coverage of banks and microfinance institutions. Practitioners mentioned access barriers, such as the lack of infrastructure and transportation networks, which can make it difficult to deliver cash to remote areas, and equally food commodities. Moreover, practitioners reported that there is a need for greater financial education and support to ensure that migrants understand why they are receiving cash and can make informed decisions about how to use it.

Barriers in reaching transit migrants in need of support services: One of the primary obstacles reported is the lack of documentation and difficulty in accessing transit migrants, making it challenging to support them effectively. When migrant populations are highly mobile, it is challenging to identify those who might be most in need of assistance. Particularly if not a longer-term migrant who is registered. Equally, migrants might travel within countries and across borders during the agricultural season to find short-term labour, even if illegally. According to the British Red Cross, the

⁴⁸ KII_WCA_1

lack of information and legal freedom of movement of recipients, is often coupled with a lack of trust in humanitarian actors as migrants fear being identified by authorities if they get in touch with NGOs, and thus repressed or deported.⁴⁹ Demonstrating how complex it is to establish programmes to target migrants who try to operate under an official radar in fear of reprisal.

Lack of cooperation across sectors: In order to properly target transit migrants, it is necessary that cash and migration interventions are aligned, which, according to the information shared by practitioners, is not always the case when looking at the Sahel region, where a disjunction between migration programming and cash assistance emerges, stemming from several factors. First, the **challenge of coordination and cooperation between actors involved** in addressing specific migration challenges. Efforts to improve conditions for migrants in transit and respond to their primary needs through the provision of cash assistance, as part of a humanitarian response, often lack communication or cooperation between them. Secondly, **cash assistance providers may have limited awareness and understanding of the specific circumstances and vulnerabilities of different profiles** and risks they encounter may not be fully recognised or taken into account during the design and implementation of cash assistance programmes. Third, there are **regulatory and operational challenges at the national level that might hinder the integration of cash assistance into migration responses**. Legal frameworks, funding mechanisms and institutional structures do not always align effectively, creating barriers to collaboration between migration actors involved in cash assistance.

“

It's a bit contradictory, even with the donors, we would like to support migrants, to just make sure that they survive, and they keep their dignity [...] And at the same time, we have policies around pushing back some of these people and trying to not give them proper care.

”

⁴⁹ CaLP, 2020. “Supporting the linkages between humanitarian cash and voucher assistance and national social protection systems: Tip sheet for Cash Working Groups (CWG) and Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups (ICCG).” Cash Learning Partnership, London.

2.2.2.1. Opportunities and challenges at country level

Burkina Faso

Among the above-mentioned risks, **cash being for purposes other than the objectives of the assistance project**, is particularly prominent in Burkina Faso.⁵⁰ Key informants agree that this is a particularly sensitive point, especially because of governmental concerns about cash being used to finance illegal activities or armed groups in areas where there is limited access to monitor. Because of this, **vouchers were indicated by interviewees as safer**, but it cannot meet all needs - combined modalities, where one gives cash for food and pays the bill for transport, for example, are applied by practitioners in this context.

Considering the changing context, especially from a security perspective, **needs evolve quickly and a real time data assessment prior to each project is both challenging and necessary**. Similarly, in a context of inflation, practitioners were very attentive to the importance of taking into account and monitoring the availability of markets, taking care that money injected as part of aid programmes does not end up affecting prices. In this regard, the important coordination work done by the CWGs in adjusting the amounts given to the MEB and inflation was emphasised - however this harmonisation effort does not take into account the specific needs of transit migrants. On the same lines, in their interviews, some key informants expressed concern about the continuing unstable situation and the lack of (renewed) political support for humanitarian actions. Among the factors contributing to this appears to be the lack of a national CVA law or policy framework, as a result of which individual **assistance projects and programmes have to be submitted and authorised by national and local authorities on a case-by-case basis, without any assurance of continuity**. And this often generates frustration and further uncertainty for long-term planning. On this, one of the key informants actually stated that prior to recent developments, including the 2022 coup, coordination between the government and humanitarian actors was pretty smooth and implemented through the governmental coordination mechanism CONASUR.⁵¹

In terms of modalities, **mobile transfers are more feasible in the Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso than in other studied localities**, as they present a good coverage of both mobile networks and withdrawal points. This was confirmed by the survey results, as they are the localities where respondents had the highest preference for mobile transfers.

Chad

Challenges faced by migrants include **language barriers, lack of accommodation**, as many of the host families are themselves experiencing poverty and vulnerability, and in some instances **unfair treatment by the police**. They increase the difficulty to access transit migrants to deliver assistance, including cash assistance, as they are voluntarily or not invisibilised as a consequence of these factors. As assistance, and especially CVA through direct cash, **increases the visibility** of those at risk and thus facilitates their identification by people who may have bad intentions and take advantage of them, practitioners need to implement mitigation measures. The extremely difficult socio-economic situation in Chad certainly plays into and increases such risks, as well as issues the (negative) perceptions around cash assistance being delivered to certain populations.

In terms of barriers, **the distribution modalities certainly pose a major challenge**. Although direct cash provision increases visibility and other risks - including the risk of theft, as the poor banking coverage forces distributors to travel long distances to reach the target groups, there are limited alternative options in Chad outside of main cities due to poor infrastructure and inter-connectivity with financial service providers. The distribution through microfinance providers can minimise contact and the risks, with the condition that the system is appropriately monitored for fiducial risk; mobile transfers also provide a flexible option, but coverage can be patchy.

Mauritania

Overall, the practitioners interviewed in Mauritania confirmed many of the concerns and barriers also encountered in other countries and at the regional level. Among the specificities in Mauritania, key informants and migrants pointed to the **difficulty of relying on service providers for the use of vouchers** - as they depend on local suppliers who might adopt unfair practices such as changing prices or quality to take advantage of people.

Similarly, to Chad, **the coverage of bank and mobile networks is limited to large cities**, however the Mauritanian Red Crescent currently indicates **an interest in turning from direct cash to transfers through microfinance service providers**. The use of digital transfers and mobile banking is growing and efforts are being made to include them in the programming, as they are considered safer as they reduce risks compared to direct cash or vouchers. However, the areas which present

“

We know that this cash can be used for something else, which is not in the objectives we defined at the start. This is the downside of any modality. The problem is that as the Red Cross, we have a neutral position with regard to migration, neither discouraging nor encouraging further mobility of people through food assistance. But this use of cash often allows people to have resources to continue their journey.

”

⁵⁰ KII_BF_1

⁵¹ UN Spider. Burkinabe Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (CONASUR). Available at: <https://www.un-spider.org/burkinabe-council-emergency-relief-and-rehabilitation-conasur>

the highest security risks - remote areas - are the ones with lesser coverage for bank or mobile transfers. Moreover, transfers might not be as adapted to transit migrants as they require documentation, including to access local phone numbers and sim cards.

Finally, key informants agree that the biggest challenge lies in **accountability to those affected**, and in making sure that those assisted have a voice and agency in how they receive and spend the assistance they receive.⁵²

“

To make sure that the people we serve have a voice and have a way to reach back to us and give us feedback if they have complaints, if they have questions about the assistance they are receiving [...] We have a system to give feedback but it's not as effective as it should be

”

Photo 3: Burkina Faso CVA operation



⁵² KII_MAU_2

2.3. Transit migrants' perspective

2.3.1. Identified profiles needs

This section presents key elements of the profiles of transit migrants who participated in the in-person survey, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews in the 6 locations of the study. The objective of this part is to contextualise their preferences in terms of type and modalities of assistance - more details on the typology of research participants is available in the Annex. The part also highlights the specific needs of transit migrants and sub-groups, which can inform the design of CVA and its integration in migration programmes.

Key findings:

- **TRANSIT DURATION AND INTENDED ROUTES:** Both quantitative and qualitative data collected with transit migrants indicate counter-intuitive information when it comes to transit duration and routes. 60% of respondents had been in the location of transit for over a year. Although the sampling strategy might have influenced this, it clearly points to the fact that transit migrants are not all short-term, which translates in terms of needs. While most are economic migrants, 44% were forcibly displaced within the region from previous crises, and the majority of respondents do not intend to continue towards Europe. Unclear intentions, willingness to stay temporarily, continue migrating within the region, or return, represented the majority in both Burkina Faso and Chad.
- **SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INCLUSION:**⁵³ Relations with local communities are overall good, with differences in access to services, social and economic inclusions between locations. There is a sense of solidarity with both local foreign communities and host communities, with less positive results in Nouakchott only. Access to livelihoods is pointed out as a systematic challenge - and criteria for migrants' intentions as well.
- **PROTECTION CONCERNS:** With the high percentage of forced displacements, multiplicity displacements, the limited access to services in several locations, gender-based violence, and other forms of violence faced in the country of origin, along the journey, or in the location of transit, transit migrants often present particular protection needs. This includes potential traumas as well as high levels of vulnerability, particularly for women, which should be taken into consideration for assistance to transit migrants in the region, cash-based or otherwise.

2.3.1.1. Respondents' profiles

Delving into the lives and experiences of migrants we interviewed in transit in Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania, we discovered two key facts.

First, existing categories proved inadequate to capture their experiences. These categories turned out to be too rigid and unable to encompass the different reasons, difficulties and aspirations that shaped their journeys. Transit migrants are a much more complex category, whose decisions and intentions are not rational only but depend on time, space, and intangible factors. Migrants' stories go beyond what these categories can describe, highlighting the urgent need for a better understanding of their unique situations and needs.

While most respondents (59%) do not fall under the categories of refugee, returnee, IDP or asylum seeker, they are still more represented than expected. **More surprisingly, 44% of respondents indicated having been forcibly displaced.** Respondents express the lack of opportunity, search for a better life, and violence and conflict as the main reasons for their displacement - mentioned by respectively 50%, 45%, and 38% of respondents.

When looking at the experience of time of transit migrants, we notice that **only 14% of respondents have been in their transit location for less than a month, and 26% between a month and a year. 60% of respondents have been in transit for more than a year.** These results, especially collected in a high season of migration which implies a more important number of short-term transit migrants than in other seasons, challenge the perception of transit migrants as staying in a location for a few days or weeks. **More importantly, it nuances the line between "on the move" and "not on the move" individuals**, which is also reflected in the literature - the CaLP network recently developed a scale of staged between mobility and immobility.⁵⁴ In the case of transit migrants, it shows how complex the categorisation is, as it includes realities of people passing through a city for two days as well as temporarily settling for several years, whether this stay was intended or not. The majority of respondents have unclear intentions when it comes to their transit duration and migration decisions, including destinations.

Secondly, we realised the importance of paying special attention to specific subgroups within the migrant population in transit. These were distinct groups of individuals who faced unique challenges and vulnerabilities. In a context where 44% of respondents were forcibly displaced, aligned with the violent crisis in the region, the risk of violence is even higher for vulnerable groups, especially women, members of the LGBTQI+ community seeking safety, SGBV victims, and people with

⁵³ Social inclusion refers here to the frequency and quality of interactions with members of at least one local community (host or foreign). It was assessed by quantitative and qualitative participants' expression of trust and solidarity with local communities; mentions of interactions; and feeling of inclusion. Migrants were considered as economically included if they had access to markets and other services, livelihood opportunities (including self-employment), equal quality and prices for goods and services, and capacity to meet their needs - assessed through the survey and Focus Group Discussions.

⁵⁴ CaLP, 2022. Systemic Framework on Human Mobility and Vulnerability. Available at: <https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Figure-1-English-version.pdf>

mental disabilities struggling to access essential services. Each of these groups faces their own set of risks and needs tailored support to ensure their safety and well-being while in transit and in the temporary location.

Box 2. Zoom in on IDPs

Among the 401 survey respondents, 61 individuals (15.2%) were internally displaced people (IDPs), with the highest concentration in Nouadhibou (54.1%), followed by Ouagadougou (24.6%), Abeche (11.5%), and Bobo-Dioulasso (8.2%). IDPs face specific challenges due to their forced displacement and inability to return home, leading to increased vulnerability and limited access to documentation and resources. The study revealed that 18% of IDPs experienced discrimination, with 90% having restricted access to at least one service, particularly housing (67%) and drinking water (64%), and facing difficulties in accessing livelihood opportunities. Semi-structured interviews highlighted the struggles of IDPs, especially those from rural areas, in finding income-generating activities, sometimes resorting to begging and relying on community support. In Burkina Faso, assistance to IDPs is primarily concentrated in crisis-affected areas, leaving those outside these areas and camps largely unsupported. Of the surveyed IDPs, 29.5% received assistance, predominantly in kind rather than through cash or vouchers. While 55.7% of IDPs preferred direct cash assistance, the overall preference among all respondents was 65.6%. The disparity in preferences may be attributed to IDPs' unique experiences and needs, but the small sample size limits conclusive interpretations.

2.3.1.2. Transit conditions and needs

Both survey results and qualitative data collection showed that the conditions of transit impact migrants' needs - more specifically, poor conditions of transit lead transit migrants to have various needs which in-kind assistance and restrictive modalities can hardly cover. Transit conditions vary strongly between locations. In Abeche and Nouadhibou, 89% and 88% of survey respondents indicated having limited access to drinking water; 58% of respondents in Abeche, and up to 92% in Nouadhibou, have limited access to housing. Not only does this point to the most basic needs being unmet by transit migrants in these two locations - more generally, it shows that migrants' needs might be difficult to respond through in-kind assistance.

The difficult access to markets in some locations impacts the feasibility of cash assistance modalities for transit migrants. In Abeche, 15% of respondents have to walk more than one hour to access the closest market, meaning that access to transfer service points would be difficult, and that side costs might be higher for CVA recipients to cover the cost of transportation.

“ I intend to return, because I didn't find what I was looking for: a job that would allow me to cover my needs and send part of the money to my children and parents who stayed behind. ”

Finally, the need to access livelihoods is reflected upon by the SSIs and even more in the FGDs, as **central in their intention and in the reasons behind participants' migration decisions** in many cases - but also as one of the interests they see in cash assistance⁵⁵.

The positive relationships with local communities which both quantitative and qualitative reveal, is a good lever and opportunity for practitioners to assist transit migrants. In Ati, for instance, the RCRC together with community leaders facilitates a network of host families which help ensure that short-term transit migrants have access to housing, food, and basic hygiene.

In the same time, **community relations are also a stake for the distribution of CVA** in two main ways:

1. CVA can modify the relationship between transit migrants and community members if not done in a transparent way, which takes into account the local dynamics;
2. Migrants tend to distribute CVA within the migrant and local communities, which participants mostly consider positively, but in some cases reduce the impact CVA can have on recipients.

Moreover, **the relatively good relationship between migrants and host communities should be contextualised** as it aligns with a regional sense of cohesion within the ECOWAS region, and cannot be generalised to other regions such as North Africa where, on the contrary, transit migrants originating from West and Central Africa are not only socially and economically excluded, but also face racist violence and structural discriminations.

⁵⁵ SSI_CH8_F_Abeche

Gender-specific needs

In terms of gender-specific needs and preferences, the research has revealed some quantitative and qualitative differences with regards to both experience of transit migration and cash assistance.⁵⁶

Quantitative differences indicate that fewer women travel alone, and a higher percentage, even if small, of women are in their first migration. In some cases, women feel less safe than men in transit locations. Overall, 74.73% reported feeling safe in the current location of transit, compared to 82.8% of men.

“ On the road, we have issues around protection, for example, young girls being raped or being proposed some favors in exchange of sexual acts. It's correlated and we have a lot of issues around protection. ”

Looking at preferences expressed, **more women prefer in-kind than men, but the numbers are still low.** The finding is reflected also in the qualitative data, as both SSIs and FGDs confirmed that women see more advantages in in-kind assistance. **However, they still prefer cash to in-kind.** This finding is slightly at odds with the literature, whereby women prefer in-kind to cash assistance, especially to meet the household's need in terms of food and avoid money being spent elsewhere - as they perceive that CVA has

higher chances of being used by a male head of household and not controlled by the female to manage food consumption. Likely due to the levels of poverty and high vulnerability, women tended to make a preference for in-kind rather than cash as this gave the feeling of control. The difference of our survey's results may be justified by the hypothesis that the women surveyed have greater access to mobile transfers and cash. It is also possible that drawing from the results of previous studies pointing out women's concerns on the use of CVA by the male head of household, CVA practitioners have paid more attention to CVA use within the household and thus increased women's preferences for this type of assistance.

Qualitative differences highlight primary needs and family needs as more important to women. In Burkina Faso, migrant women who participated in the research emphasised the need for income-generating activities, including as part of the cash use. However, household dynamics can be a challenge for assistance other than CVA to women, especially regarding livelihoods, as the husband might disapprove of their activity.

In Mauritania, several cases of women present higher exposure to gender-based violence⁵⁷ (sexual exploitation, mental health, pregnancy, trafficking, etc.) while not receiving more assistance.

A focus on protection needs and concerns

In addition to transit migrants' basic needs and the challenges they face in accessing them, the research showed concerning high levels of protection needs. These needs include psychosocial and mental health care to respond to potentially traumatic events in the country of origin and during the transit - but also life-saving assistance for transit migrants who are still facing further violence in the location of transit - this is particularly true for gender-based violence targeting women and the LGBTQIA+ community. While some CVA modalities and in-kind assistance can hardly respond to such needs, other forms such as multi-purpose cash transfers, or cash +, could be included in response programmes.

“ If there is a psychosocial support in a given location and the individual starts opening up about their experience, and then they continue their journey with no complementary support, you may do more harm than good. ”

Nevertheless, using CVA to respond to psychosocial needs of transit migrants presents some risks, due to their mobility and thus lack of continuity in the assistance as it is currently provided.

Additionally, the data collected reveal a number of protection risks related to the provision of cash assistance to migrants in particular, including the risk of exploitation, discrimination, and security threats - as well as a risk of stigmatisation linked to the receipt of cash assistance, which can put migrants at risk. Moreover, some of the transit migrants voiced fears of being stopped by police or other security forces, especially those who wished to migrate further.

2.3.2. Cash Assistance: Experience, use and impact on migrants' decisions

Against the multiplicity of transit migrants' need, this section focuses on how to assist them through CVA in a manner which is efficient and safe. Considering that the majority of respondents stated that they had never received CVA, this chapter indicates what preferences mean in terms of appropriate modalities and impact, through a triangulation of

⁵⁶ KII_1_WCA_BRC

⁵⁷ KII_1_WCA_BRC

quantitative and qualitative data with previous literature on the topic, such as a study conducted by the IFCR in Niger on CVA in migration contexts⁵⁸.

Key findings:

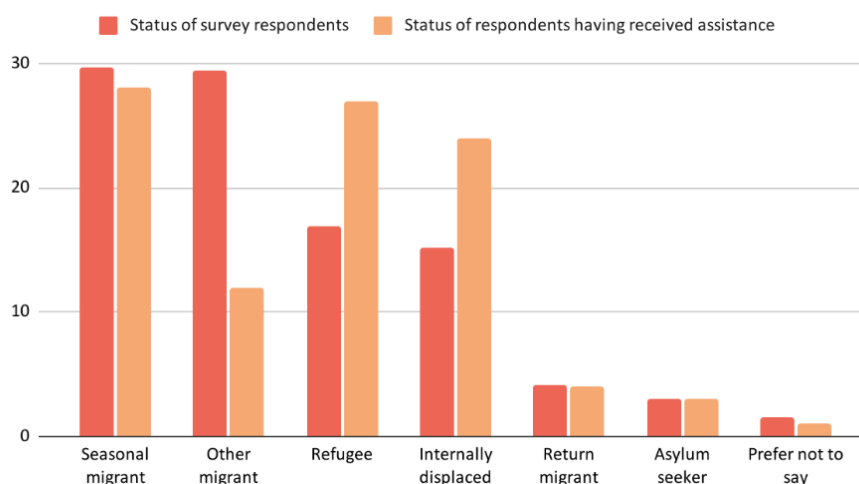
- **ACCESS TO CVA:** Less than 20% of survey respondents have received assistance of any kind. Among those who have, the main cohort of beneficiaries received in-kind assistance, with CVA being the second most provided service. Most of the respondents who were receiving CVA were doing so in the location of the interviews, with a large majority being individuals with a status (especially refugees and IDPs).
- **PREFERRED TYPE OF ASSISTANCE:** The majority of the respondents reported that they would prefer cash-based assistance over any other type of assistance, noting that this modality would provide them with more autonomy in terms of addressing their needs. However, the lack of actual experiences in receiving CVA alludes to the potentiality of misconceptions surrounding the frequency and amount that would hypothetically be provided, which could in turn help explain the number of migrants preferring cash assistance.
- **PREFERRED DISTRIBUTION MODALITIES:** Although mobile and bank transfers are perceived as safer, most respondents prefer direct cash which can be attributed to the difficult access to transfer services for undocumented migrants and/or in remote locations. Preferences vary based on locations, level of vulnerability, and causes and duration of transit.
- **IMPACT:** The impact of experienced CVA on migrants' needs proved to be limited, but overall positive; evidence tends to show a better impact of in-kind assistance, which might be related to the amounts and frequency of CVA distributed for registered beneficiaries, but also to the highly unstable context whereas conflict, high inflation and other external shock might make in-kind assistance perceived as more stable. Qualitative data points to an interest of transit migrants for CVA supporting sustainable livelihoods. The impact in migration proves to be non-linear, as CVA may have a limited impact on intention in the case of this intention being unclearly defined only.

2.3.2.1. A typology of cash migrants has access to

By and large, the majority (80%) of respondents interviewed in Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania had reportedly not received any form of assistance during their migratory journeys. For those who received assistance in their current location, this was overwhelmingly in key migration hotspots such as Abeche (34%) in Chad and Ouagadougou (22%) in Burkina Faso.

The main cohort of beneficiaries across the three countries received in-kind assistance (e.g., medical and food items) with cash assistance as the second most provided modality, followed by other types of assistance such as shelter, ICLA, and education. In almost all cases, the migrants found access to the assistance services in the location where they were interviewed, which could indicate that the presence of services incentivises migrants to stay for longer periods of time - but this might also be related to the fact that the majority of respondents were only displaced once. Migrants who fall under the UNHCR mandate, especially IDPs and refugees, are over-represented among the respondents who received assistance in comparison to the overall survey respondents (see chart 5), which indicates that a large majority of assistance programmes target migrants who fall under the UNHCR protection mandate.

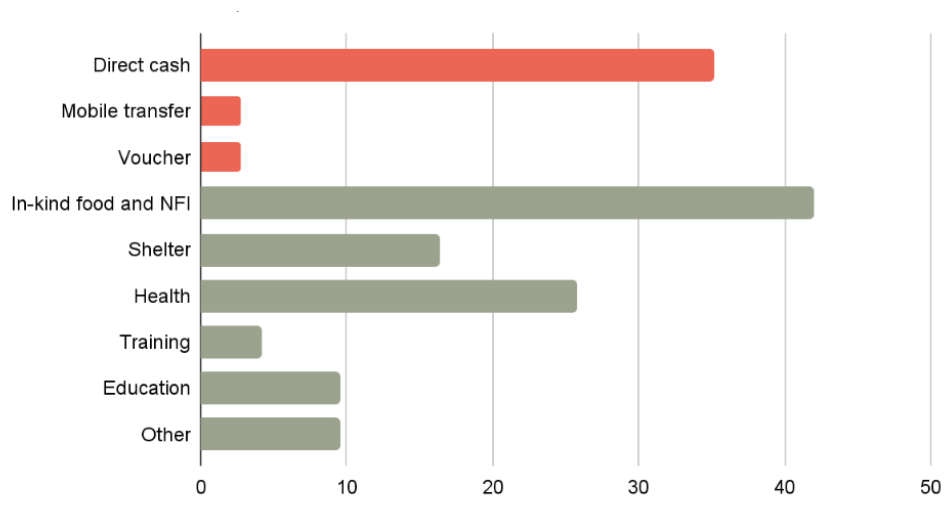
Chart 1. Status of respondents in the overall survey vs. having received assistance



⁵⁸ IFCR and Croix Rouge du Niger, 2022

More specifically, of the interviewed beneficiaries, 42% received in-kind food and NFI, 35% received direct cash assistance, 19% received medical treatment, 12% received shelter, 9,5% received education, 2,7% received vouchers, and 2,7% of the respondents received mobile transfers. Interestingly, only 33,8% of the respondents stated that they had been consulted on the type of assistance preferred, with a staunch 48% indicating that they were not consulted at all.

Chart 2. Type of assistance received by survey respondents (among those who received assistance)



Zooming in on the type of CVA migrants have access to, the vast majority received direct cash, with few exceptions of mobile and bank transfers. This can be attributed to:

- Transit migrants lacking the necessary documentation in order to access cash assistance provided through mobile or bank transfers unless being officially registered for assistance.
- Mobile transfers being a relatively recent modality, and bank coverage and network being poor, leading many actors to still rely upon direct cash
- Respondents indicating having receiving CVA when this was actually community / individual support (according to SSIs) for which transfers are not a used modality

The 26 respondents from the qualitative cohort having received CVA (vs 31 who had received in-kind assistance), commented that **they typically would use the cash assistance to cover immediate needs, including food, rent, health items, and other NFIs, adding that they would like the cash assistance to accommodate for more sustainable solutions such as helping them start a small business.** This sentiment echoes the general desire to find work for transit migrants, as they are often intent on working temporarily in order to save up and continue their journey, or more permanently to become financially independent or support family members at home.

2.3.2.2. Preferences along the migration cycle

Table 2. Comparison of the preferred assistance type and modalities between practitioners and transit migrants

	Practitioners' perceptions	Migrants' perceptions
In-kind vs cash	Cash is overall preferred because of its cost-efficiency and coverage of multiple needs. However, it is rarely incorporated into migration programming.	Migrants largely prefer cash over in-kind, because of the freedom it provides them to respond to their needs and invest in sustainable livelihoods, as well as the sense of normality in the use of the assistance ⁵⁹ .
Non-restrictive vs restrictive CVA	Practitioners prefer unconditional and non-restrictive CVA, but for transit migrants, they show concerns that cash might be used for other purposes and encourage further migration, including through smuggling.	Voucher is the least preferred CVA delivery modality, as it does not present the advantages that migrants see in cash - namely, the freedom to use it as they need. Respondents show a preference for in-kind

⁵⁹ ODI, 2015, State of evidence on humanitarian cash transfers Background Note for the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Cash Transfers

	However, vouchers are seen as presenting challenges and risks, especially related to service providers and side costs.	over vouchers.
Direct cash transfers (in-hand)	Direct cash transfer is the most used modality for the few programmes delivering CVA to transit migrants, however cash working groups and CVA practitioners avoid using this mode of delivery because of the greater risks it presents for both practitioners and recipients.	Although migrants see risks in direct cash transfers, such as increased visibility, reduced safety, and fear of embezzlement by distributors, it is overwhelmingly preferred. Considered as the most practical modality, some migrants would prefer safer modalities after several months spent in the same location.
Mobile and bank transfers	This modality was mostly developed in the most recent years and practitioners prefer it although relationships with service providers are not always easy, especially when only few options exist.	Mobile transfers are seen as having the most advantages by transit migrants; however, they cannot easily access it due to poor service coverage, lack of documentation to access telephone and sim cards, and unequal access to distributors. Bank transfers are not preferred.

In contrast with the literature, respondents express a clear preference for cash assistance. Several studies in other contexts have either more balanced results, or lean towards a preference for in-kind assistance.⁶⁰ However, this study is not the only evidence that the preference for in-kind expressed in previous research needs to be nuanced - several KIIs refer to beneficiaries selling items they had received, below their actual value, in order to address their actual needs. We propose to zoom on four contextual and one programmatic factor impacting the relevance of cash vs in-kind assistance:

- **Environment:** Transit migrants who participated in this study are staying in an urban or semi-urban context.

This means that they have better access to markets - indeed, previous research conducted by Samuel Hall in Niger identified the proximity with markets as a key factor impacting the effectiveness of CVA due to greater choice and multiplicity of market actors.⁶¹ Moreover, except in Abeche and Nouakchott, respondents did not face higher prices, which might explain that a higher number prefer cash compared to studies in different contexts.



It [in-kind assistance] does not empower, it does not teach, it does not educate. [...] Because the vital needs are directly linked to the responsibility of the individual himself as a person. If someone else comes and does this for you, there is a question of dignity. It means you are in extreme poverty. And in that, there is an indignity that emerges.



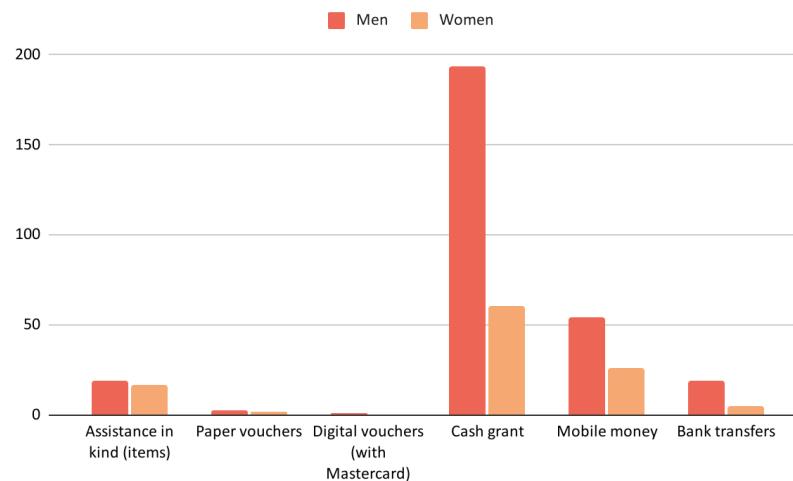
- **Vulnerability:** The qualitative data show that the level of vulnerability and type of emergency has an impact on preferences, on two levels. First, in situations of emergency, in-kind can prove to have a stronger impact as it enables recipients to receive emergency assistance in a quick manner. For instance, respondents with health conditions reported preferring health assistance to cash. Second, the perception of dignity seems to evolve with the level of vulnerability. Migrants interviewed in Burkina Faso voiced that in-kind assistance could be more socially acceptable for situations of extreme poverty - which is what in-kind assistance is perceived to be ameliorating - but might affect dignity.⁶² However, this needs to be nuanced by the cultural roots of the perception around dignity. Focus group discussions gave a space for discussion on the matter, with several respondents pointing to any kind of assistance as positively impacting dignity as it allows the individual to meet their needs; others opposed CVA, as a way to increase the dignity and role of the person, to in-kind; while some participants see any type of temporary support as setback of dignity.
- **Gender:** As mentioned when discussing gender-based needs, a higher number of women see advantages in in-kind assistance, although the majority express a preference for cash. The guarantee that in-kind provides that needs will be met explains this. However, the research pointed to a higher number of women preferring cash than in previous studies.

⁶⁰ IFRC and Croix Rouge du Niger, 2022

⁶¹ Samuel Hall, 2022. Evidence of impact research study: cash and voucher assistance in Niger.

⁶² FGD1_Ouagadougou_6_M_Burkina Faso

Chart 3. Gender differences in preferred modality when on the move



- Financial literacy:** According to the literature⁶³, **the lack of financial literacy might explain why certain cohorts of people state a preference for in-kind assistance**⁶⁴. Although not to be considered as a direct driver, financial management literacy certainly plays an important role, especially for the impact it can have on the way recipients decide to spend the cash they receive, and how to invest such resources for short- or longer-term choices. In focus group discussions, participants' concern of cash misuse shows a level of awareness of the stakes of financial management and so does the expressed interest to invest cash received from assistance in income-generating activities to better their situations.
- A programmatic factor: the value of assistance.** **The amount and regularity of cash received highly impacts the preferences** - both for people who have, or have not, received assistance. Both quantitative and qualitative data shows that freedom and ability to address their needs, that cash provides, are the main reasons behind the preference for this type of assistance. Thus, if cash is not provided in a way that meets at least one of these elements, the same result may not apply. Thus, in the survey, in-kind assistance was reported to have the most positive impact by respondents who had received assistance, as it enabled them to meet primary needs such as shelter, medical assistance, and food, while the limited amount of money received under cash assistance schemes had less impact. The qualitative data goes in the same direction; most participants were interested in cash to invest in income-generating activities, which the amounts defined by cash working groups for multipurpose cash assistance often would not be enough to do.

The little experience of assistance respondents had, may have hindered their ability to formulate an informed preference considering all factors, including amount and frequency of assistance, delivery modalities, and impact of their answers on the assistance they may or may not receive. This being said, **the data showed little difference in the modality preferences between respondents who had received assistance, and those who had not** - reinforcing the results of the survey despite the lack of assistance experience of most respondents.

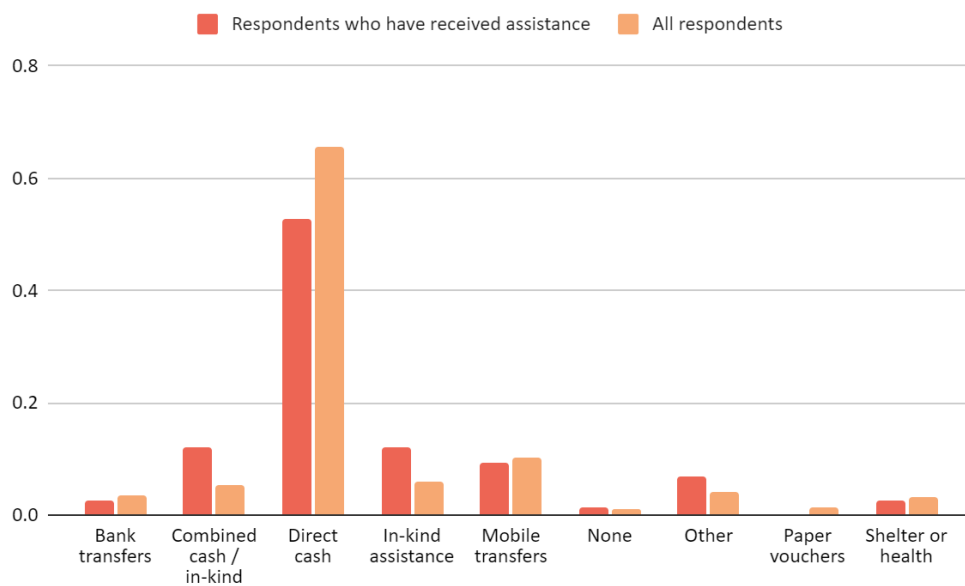
“ We may have to leave at any time, so [direct] cash allows us to be ready at all times and not have to worry about withdrawals or other problems when we want to leave ”

Finally, in reasoning about preferences, one should not forget **that cash is indeed a way of providing assistance, but also a good and a need in itself**. Transit migrants, like anyone, and regardless of their status, need cash to increase their well-being. Moreover, in a sample where 45.1% migrated because they were looking for a better life, and 50.6% chose their transit location for its better economic opportunities, looking at cash as a need in itself is essential to understand why the preference is so overwhelming.

⁶³ IFRC and Croix Rouge du Niger, 2022. Cash and Voucher Assistance in migration contexts: voices of migrants in Niger

⁶⁴ Ibid

Chart 4. Preferred type of assistance of survey respondents depending on their experience of CVA



Modality preference: balancing practicality and security

Addressing the matter of delivery options, we find a contradiction between what participants define as the safest modality, vs what modality they prefer. The collected data displays a clear preference for direct cash distribution (64% when on the move, and 67% when not on the move); however, 10.8% of the respondents feel unsafe when receiving cash due to theft, violence, exploitation, or stigmatisation as a consequence of the migrant's peers not having access to the same type of support. Some participants in the qualitative research confirmed this, stating that mobile transfers, depending on the context, could provide more safety. It is less clear if the perceived risk would differ between male and female respondents, especially if transit migrants. The response rates were low regarding the potential risks for cash assistance beneficiaries, but the qualitative data collection coincides with it, with the risks of theft, stigmatisation, as well as embezzlement, being pointed out as risks of direct cash distribution by SSI and FGD participants. Yet, direct cash distribution is largely preferred.⁶⁵

The thin balance between the practicality, including accessibility, of distribution modalities on the one hand, and security on the other hand, is context specific. It varies based on the location and duration of transit. More specifically, the differences in preferences per country stands out: in Burkina Faso, 43% of the respondents prefer direct cash assistance while 20,8% prefer mobile transfers. In Chad, 79,6% prefer cash assistance with only 3,9% preferring mobile transfers, alluding to a lack of infrastructure to accommodate mobile-based cash transfers and to the fact that there are more short-term transit migrants compared to the other countries of the sample. In the case of Mauritania, 78,5% reported that they prefer cash assistance while only 4% prefer mobile transfers, similar to the findings in Chad.⁶⁶

The data show that the longer the migrant has stayed in a given location, the more likely it is that they would prefer mobile or bank transfers as they become settled (see table 3). Such figures might suggest that when people are - or feel - more integrated and once they have overcome the need for in-kind assistance, they can afford to invest and diversify their options, beyond meeting basic needs but with a wider variety in terms of investment and long-term vision.

Respondents who had spent more than two months in displacement showed double the interest in mobile transfers compared to those who had stayed for less than two months. The increase in interest for a mobile transfer modality confirms how the balance of practicality vs security impacts preferences of delivery modalities. Indeed, migrants who were recently displaced can face more difficulties to access mobile services as they may not have SIM cards or the necessary documents or status. For them, the difficult access to certain modalities overpasses the lack of security pointed out in direct cash distribution. On the contrary, those who have spent more than two months in displacement may possess the logistics needed to make use of a transfer-based modality, providing them with more safety when being assisted. Moreover, short-term transit migrants express that direct cash envelopes fit their conditions of travel better as they could

⁶⁵ FGD4_Ati_F_Tchad

⁶⁶ FGD1_Abeche_F_Tchad

leave at any moment.⁶⁷ Overall, it remains clear that bank and mobile transfers are best designed for long-term transit migrants rather than migrants who are displaced or in transit for shorter periods.

Table 3. Preferred assistance modality when on the move: short, medium, and long-term displacement

	DISPLACED FOR LESS THAN 2 MONTHS	DISPLACED FOR 2 MONTHS TO 1 YEAR	DISPLACED FOR MORE THAN A YEAR
CASH GRANT	74.65% = 53	64.44% = 58	59.83% = 143
IN-KIND ASSISTANCE	11.27% = 8	8.89% = 8	8.37% = 20
MOBILE MONEY	9.86% = 7	21.11% = 19	22.59% = 54
BANK TRANSFERS	4.23% = 3	5.56% = 5	6.69% = 16
PAPER VOUCHERS	0.00%	0.00%	2.09% = 5
DIGITAL VOUCHERS	0.00%	0.00%	0.42% = 1
TOTAL	100.00% = 71	100.00% = 90	100.00% = 239

As both quantitative and qualitative data point out, **the practicality of direct cash seems to have a bigger influence on the choice of modality compared to the risks it presents.** While mobile or bank transfers may provide the beneficiary with another layer of protection, the issues of infrastructure, documentation, and service efficiency, remain.

2.3.3. Cash assistance: Impact on migrants' conditions and decisions

When looking into the influence of cash assistance on migration decisions, the findings demonstrated that migration decisions among transit migrants are complex and multifaceted. While economic factors play a role, migrants' intentions and decisions are also shaped by temporal, spatial, and intangible elements. Cash assistance, while an important factor, interacts with these diverse influences in complex ways, underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of migration dynamics in the region.

Impact on self-reliance and livelihoods

Overall, findings from the literature review and the quantitative and qualitative data collection both point to the fact that **cash assistance is effective in responding to the primary needs of migrants and refugees, while conclusions regarding the impact on livelihoods and self-reliance slightly differ.** While the relevant literature indicates a minimal impact on self-reliance and integration into the local market,⁶⁸ the research findings indicate a mixed impact on livelihoods, with a significant proportion of recipients experiencing a positive impact.

The research findings indicate that a significant proportion of recipients surveyed experienced a positive impact on their livelihoods due to cash assistance.

Looking at the quantitative data gathered, it is worth noting that 38% of the recipients reported a limited positive impact, i.e., they were able to cover basic needs, while 11% reported a larger improvement of their situation beyond basic needs. 51.4% of the recipients experienced no impact on their livelihoods, and none have reported a negative impact. However, it is worth noting that as most respondents had not received assistance, only 37 individuals responded to this question. It is less clear if projects had been intended to support livelihood objectives, or if the person's circumstances had changed to enable some element of savings CVA which contributed to improved resilience in time. Further exploration of the variables between perceived improved resilience would be beneficial.

“

I prefer to be paid in cash even if I think that the quickest and most reliable way is the bank because when you have already transferred the money you only go to get the money, and with [direct] cash you don't know if the money given to you is really in full or if it [the amount] has been cut down

”

Furthermore, the research findings suggest that **the amount of cash assistance received can affect the impact on both livelihoods and self-reliance.** The data collected show that there is a large gap in terms of the amount of cash assistance received by beneficiaries, the amount of which can vary significantly from one context to another, leading to a different outcome in terms of the recipient's ability to meet their needs. While 22% received enough cash to meet all their needs,

⁶⁷ SSI_CH1_F_Ati

⁶⁸ See for instance the study conducted by the IFRC and the Niger Red Cross on CVA in migration contexts, which showed that CVA is used by migrants to fulfil their basic needs of food, clothing, health, and shelter. However, the study also suggests that the impact of CVA on the local market and migrants' self-reliance is minimal. Similarly, a study by Samuel Hall for UNHCR evaluated the impact of cash assistance on refugees in prolonged stay in Jordan. The research concluded that while cash assistance enables refugees to meet their primary needs, it does not increase or decrease their likelihood of having an income from work.

11% had only enough for immediate relief, and a significant proportion of recipients, 40%, barely had enough to purchase some goods and 27% were not able to meet their needs at all.

Additionally, transit migrants staying for longer periods of time in their transit locations (above one year tend to be economically better and more integrated, suggesting a correlation between money needs and length of stay. If confirmed on a larger scale, these results would point towards the need to consider differentiated targeting of interventions based on length of stay as a proxy for local integration.

When comparing⁶⁹ the responses of both forcibly displaced and non-forcibly displaced registered persons, there emerges consensus that in-kind assistance has the greatest impact on covering consistent basic needs and to some extent livelihoods. This goes in slight contrast to the literature,^{70,71} whereby in general people affected by disasters often prefer cash to other forms of aid. Given that cash is used in emergency and non-emergency contexts to help migrants meet their needs, when analysing the correlation between impact and the type of displacement (forced vs. non-forced), the literature^{72,73} has shown that one of the contextual factors affecting CVA outcomes is whether assistance is provided in a context of a sudden crisis or slow-onset event. However, evidence still needs to be strengthened on the impact of different modalities depending on the level of emergency.

What is curious to notice here is the difference in answers between forcibly displaced people as compared to non-forcibly displaced. 22% of forcibly-displaced respondents find cash as having the most positive impact on livelihoods, vs 37% for non-forcibly displaced. On the contrary, 28 % expressed that other types of assistance (i.e., health, shelter, legal) were more impactful, while only 11% of non- forcibly displaced respondents thought so. This suggests that forcibly displaced persons may have higher and/or more urgent needs that may more practically cover through NGOs delivering in-kind goods than on their own through the use of CVAs.

“ If they give me 200,000 or 300,000, I will go and do a job that is much better. I'll go [...] and open a kiosk to put [clothes] inside to sell. If you do it like that, you will see that one day it will increase, it will become [more] money, it will become a lot. ”

As the sample size is limited, it is difficult to draw conclusions from this, but it might point to higher needs that go beyond in-kind and cash alone, e.g., health and protection. This finding may also be influenced by people who are covered through development, or lean season food security programmes in the Sahel region than those targeted with humanitarian budget lines.

Table 4. Type of assistance received and impact on livelihoods: forcibly vs. non-forcibly displaced

	FORCIBLY DISPLACED	NOT FORCIBLY DISPLACED
IN-KIND ASSISTANCE	47.22%	47.37%
CASH GRANT	22.22%	36.84%
MOBILE MONEY	2.78%	2.63%
PAPER VOUCHERS	0.00%	2.63%
OTHER	27.78%	10.53%
TOTAL	100.00%	100.00%

Impact on community relations

Focus group discussions participants shared experiences and concerns regarding the impact of assistance on social relations, rather among migrants; with local foreign communities; and with host communities - from the perspective of migrants and local community participants. **In Burkina Faso and in Chad, assistance is perceived as positive for social cohesion**, for several reasons:

- I. Assistance helps migrants be economically included and reduce the burden on local communities;⁷⁴ and in some cases host populations are directly or indirectly covered by aid flows into locations.

⁶⁹ Please note that the same reflections on the non-indicity of the data presented in table 4. also apply for table 5.

⁷⁰ ODI, 2015

⁷¹ Berg, M., H. Mattinen and G. Pattugalan, 2013. Examining protection and gender in cash and voucher transfers. Case Studies of the WFP and UNHCR assistance.

⁷² Jeong, D., Trako, I. 2022. Cash and In-Kind Transfers in Humanitarian Settings: A Review of Evidence and Knowledge Gaps. Policy Research Working Paper;10026. World Bank, Washington, DC.

⁷³ World Bank, WFP, 2022.

⁷⁴ FGD_CH1_F_Abeche

- II. Assistance is usually shared thus increases social relations, as well as positively impacts others such as improved labour markets;
- III. Assistance provides spin off local market positive impacts.

It is interesting to note that these remarks are common between all four locations; and rely not only on perception, but on experiences of both community members and migrants in regard to assistance benefitting the area delivered by either UN agencies, NGOs, community or religious initiatives, or individuals. When it comes to sharing assistance, the positive impact should be nuanced as several migrant participants - but not all - say they would prefer a more 'discreet' mode of distribution to manage the assistance received at household level, including intra-household relations.



If it can change my life so much the better, I will stay without continuing to migrate. [then] work, invest in trade and also help my parents. However, if the help you get is limited to food, and doesn't allow you to trade, I think it's better to continue with migration.



On this point, a reflection on the visibility of the assistance modalities is necessary. While the practitioners interviewed repeatedly emphasised the concern about making sure that the distribution of assistance (both in-kind and cash) can increase the visibility of the individuals receiving it and thus potentially increase exposure to vulnerabilities. On the other hand, however, it has to be said that assistance through cash, especially when it takes place through mobile transfers, is by far the most invisible mode of assistance, as it is easily concealed compared to material goods such as

grain sacks or shelters. This has two main implications: a) cash assistance gives more freedom and security to the recipient, who can decide to keep the money for him/herself and not be stigmatised as poor or be harassed; and b) this also means that one is less likely to voluntarily share and redistribute assistance. In this regard, the literature shows that money transfers can therefore impact social cohesion by eroding community sharing systems⁷⁵

Looking at the data, one participant in Abeche mentions managing expectations from his friends when refusing to share all the assistance he received. In Ati, where 74% of respondents stay with host families, FGD participants mention that assistance, either to host families or to transit migrants, will help both their transit conditions and the relationship. Overall, assistance is seen in both countries as a tool for inclusion for both short-term and long-term transits. Thus, participants express sharing assistance as both a positive aspect as it increases their social relations and dignified social role, and a negative aspect since it limits their freedom in managing the expenditure and impact on their household. Less visible modalities are appreciated as it gives recipients the freedom to choose how much of the assistance, they are willing to share, however there is a risk that the positive social impact will be reduced.



If we had the opportunity to start income-generating activities, we could exchange a lot. They [the host community] could need our services. Currently we're more seen as vulnerable beggars. We are not considered



In Mauritania, the trend is different. FGD participants

express concerns over the impact on social relations. In Nouakchott, a respondent points to the host community being less supportive since he has a refugee card, and another participant says she faces jealousy since assistance helped us start a business. This is in a context when Nouakchott is, according to the survey, the location in which social relations are the least positive - regardless of assistance. In Nouadhibou, the major concern is related to the modality of distribution. Respondents in this location pointed out a lack of transparency in the process and criteria for the selection of recipients, which can lead to rifts or frustration among migrants. It demonstrates the importance of agencies clearly communicating around assistance, and better involving the target group as well as local communities in the design and delivery of assistance.

Overall, the results obtained in terms of transit conditions (housing system and access to services and livelihoods) suggest that **in each of the study communities, a real migration ecosystem has been set up along two interdependent dimensions:**

- I. **socially:** through interactions and crossovers in certain neighbourhoods of the study communities, which constitute "migration estuaries"⁷⁶ where migrants in transit can obtain resources, contacts, information from networks structured by often informal local actors (temporary job placement) and more formalized institutions (health services, transportation, etc.).
- II. **economically:** through the existence of local migration economies based on the different functions of stay and transit (housing, health, work, transport, food, financial services, and remittances).

These two dimensions allow for the transit of migrants who pass through the community for short periods of time, as well as the longer-term integration of those who wish to stay or do not have the possibility of continuing their journey. Through assistance, but even more so through economic inclusion and access to employment, the presence of migrants can

⁷⁵ University of Arizona, 2006. Phase II Monitoring and Evaluation Project for the Tanout Cash Distribution Project.

⁷⁶ Landau, L. B., 2014. Conviviality, Rights, and Conflict in Africa's Urban Estuaries. *Politics & Society*, 42(3), 359–380.

therefore have a positive effect on the local economy (in the neighbourhoods directly involved in transit migration or 'estuaries') by being re-injected into the market. Other exogenous factors (such as political narratives or the recurrence of crises - health, security, inflationary - at the time of the study) can explain the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of the absorption-integration function of the socioeconomic ecosystem often informally put in place in each of the study communities. Finally, the development, particularly through assistance, of bridges between institutional actors (such as the British Red Cross) and informal actors can help prevent this informal economy from falling prey to trafficking networks, while ensuring better protection for transit migrants.

Box 3. The potential impact of CVA on local markets

Both in-kind and cash can have a positive impact on local communities through the redistribution and injection into the local market, although cash makes this easier and more efficient than trade or resell of food commodities. Both forms of assistance seem to contribute to the local market or economy, depending on the scale of the programme budgets and duration of interventions. There is value in exploring the value for money between cash and in-kind for longer term programming, determining over-head costs and improved impacts on households. However, this may be more challenging for short term emergency assistance, especially if targeting transit migrants and protection related cases.

Impact on migration decisions

Regarding the research question of whether and how cash assistance impacts or influences migration decisions, the evidence gathered is not sufficient enough to establish a direct correlation between cash assistance and migration decisions of people who received it. This calls for a critical rethinking of the terms of the question itself. The impact of assistance on migrants' intentions seems indeed limited and does not go in one direction, which means that it neither affirms nor denies that CVA provided to migrants in transit can lead to further migration or return, but also to settlement. More fundamentally, it seems important to explore and focus the research question itself, which seems more related to a reading in terms of push-pull factors. However, our fieldwork in the different communities shows that the individual decisions of migrants are not guided by rational choices and strictly economic motives. It is not, in other words, because an individual has a certain amount of money and crosses a certain economic threshold that he or she will make the decision to leave and take the next step, to go to Europe or to return to their country of origin because there are a number of variables (e.g., age, gender, levels of debt, preferred countries of destination, safety of movement, local acceptance levels, access to assistance etc). On the other hand, what emerged from our conversations with transit migrants is that longer-term migrants, i.e., those who intend to stay in the location of transit, require cash (vs. in-kind) in order to stabilize their integration and thus - very directly - to be able to contribute to the socio-economic life of the communities in which they are trying to find their place.

Quantitative data indicated that for 46% of respondents there was no impact on their migration experience. On the other hand, 49% reported a positive impact of the assistance they received on their experience of migration, which they explain by a better access to services, a better life, access to basic needs including food and health, and greater dignity during their stay. For 5.4% of respondents, on the other hand, the impact was negative, in the sense that the money received was spent entirely on accessing the market and meeting emergency needs, without experiencing any impact on the migration experience. The survey does not indicate any impact on migration intentions.

On the other hand, qualitative data show a more nuanced picture, whereby **cash assistance can have an impact on intentions if it is sufficient to change the person's economic situation, meaning if it is consistent and high enough to first tackle all urgent and basic needs. Though the research found no examples where this was the case.** A few FGD and SSI participants indicate that they would use cash for further migration or return. Overall, the evidence points to CVA, and assistance in general, potentially influencing the decision only when intention is not strongly defined, in pushing towards either staying, continuing, or returning - it does not push towards one direction only. **For respondents who have clear intentions, assistance may allow them to realise this intention but not change it.**⁷⁷

Different positions also emerge from the interviews conducted with practitioners and key informants in the CVA sector in the three study countries. Among the interviewees there are those who state that cash can be an incentive,⁷⁸ but there is no evidence to prove the potential impact of cash assistance on the migration decisions of individual recipients. Others do not believe that CVA can encourage migration because the level of basic needs in the region is very high and the sums provided are not sufficient to have a real impact on intentions.

⁷⁷ SSI_CH2_M_Ati

⁷⁸ KII_WCA_2

Looking at the literature, **very few studies have focused on the impact of cash assistance on migrants and there is no direct evidence of the impact and influence of cash assistance on migration decision-making**, including migrants' intentions and decisions to migrate. However, some available resources on the drivers of migration can be used as food for thought and provide insight into the data collected and the conclusions to be drawn regarding the drivers of migration and their interaction with cash assistance interventions. Of particular relevance is Black et al.'s critical research⁷⁹ on migration drivers, conducted in the context of the MIGCHOICE project⁸⁰ which proposes a 'future-oriented approach' to understanding migration drivers, in contrast to the idea that migration decisions are based on 'a moment (or stages) of choice'. According to the authors, to understand migration choices it is necessary to consider the future, made up of both aspirations and uncertainty. In particular, the elements of uncertainty and potentiality emerge clearly from the data collected on transit migrants' profiles, which paint a nonlinear picture in terms of time and trajectories, in contrast to common representations and definitions of transit. For instance, 59.1% answered that they do not know how long they will remain in their current location, suggesting that intention is not a defined element, but rather a variable that changes according to different circumstances, and their intertwining, including experience, time, and sometimes even the type of assistance received.

“

I personally disagree with this statement. [...] Especially when we talk about humanitarian assistance [...]. in this case I think the person has already decided to move because of several different reasons, so I don't really think that humanitarian assistance is pushing the person to travel. I think it's just assisting the basic needs, this is the purpose of humanitarian assistance

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Photo 4: Niger, Moustapha Diallo / IFRC, July 2022. With support from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners, the Niger Red Cross is providing cash assistance to those who are most severely impacted to help them meet their basic needs.



⁷⁹ Czaika, M., Reinprecht, C., 2022. Migration Drivers: Why Do People Migrate?. In: Scholten, P. (eds) Introduction to Migration Studies. IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92377-8_3

⁸⁰ The project is part of the SSSII (Safety, Support and Solutions in the Central Mediterranean Route Phase II) and it aims at finding out to what extent development interventions affect people's migration aspirations, decisions and movement in Senegal, Guinea and Gambia.

Box 4. The role of information in migration decisions

The role of information and access to information in migrants' decision making is essential⁸¹ and can be added to the discussion of the impact of assistance.

While the data does not show a direct correlation in terms of influence between information on the availability of assistance and migrants' decision to choose a particular destination, what does emerge is the fact that, instead, expectations about quality of life and access to services at the transit point or final destination can significantly influence their migration trajectories and intentions. Qualitative data reveals cases of transit migrants feeling disillusioned when they find themselves in a locality where their needs cannot be met or when they face difficulties during their migration attempts.⁸²

Looking at the quantitative data gathered, in terms of factors influencing the choice of transit location, economic considerations ranked first, with 51% of respondents citing it as a determining factor and 9% of migrants mentioned receiving recommendations from relatives or friends as a factor in their decision. While information on access to assistance has only a minimal impact, with about 2% of respondents mentioning it as a factor, it does exist.

In addition, what emerged from this research is that the information migrants look for is not about their situation in transit but about the next steps of their journey. In this regard, findings point to several gaps in information that migrants seek during their journey:

- **Network Gap:** Migrants may lack access to reliable networks or social connections in their current location, which limits their access to accurate and relevant information about available resources and assistance in the transit location and regarding the next destination.
- **Situational Gap:** Migrants may face uncertainties and lack information about the specific conditions they will encounter in the location of transit, such as the risk of being stuck or the (non-) availability of assistance.
- **Programming Gap:** There may be gaps in the design and implementation of assistance programmes, which can result in insufficient information reaching migrants or inadequate support being provided. This programming gap highlights the need for tailored and effective communication strategies to ensure that migrants have access to relevant and timely information about available assistance options, which was also pointed out by interviewed practitioners.

By addressing these gaps and providing migrants with the necessary information, programmes can enable them to make more informed choices about whether to stay or continue their migration journey. Such an approach would further empower transit migrants and respect their agency, allowing them to have greater control over their own paths and decisions.

⁸¹ Czaika, M., Reinprecht, C. (2022)

⁸² SSI_CH5_F_Abeche

3. Moving forward: a route-based approach for cash assistance in migration contexts

3.1. Conclusions and lessons learned

The study reveals that there are few, if any, programmes providing cash and voucher assistance (CVA) to transit migrants in the Sahel region: less than 20% of those surveyed had received assistance of any kind. Furthermore, when CVAs are provided, they are mainly used for basic needs, and there is no evidence of their impact on the medium- or long-term improvement of livelihoods and/or the decision to migrate. **The study identifies several factors that influence individual migration decisions, with assistance being the least influential or 'decisive' factor.**

Key findings include:

- I. **The study reveals that the duration of transit stays is often longer than generally thought, with the majority of respondents staying in one place for more than a year.** This challenges the idea that transit migrants are fast movers and highlights the complexity of categorising migrants between mobility and immobility. Furthermore, the uncertainty of transit duration and changing intentions of migrants once their travel has commenced complicates the representation of transit migrants, highlighting the non-linear nature of time and trajectories in transit migration and calling for nuanced definitions and programmatic responses that address the diverse needs and intentions of transit migrants. The mobility experiences of transit migrants are different from the perspectives that national governments or international institutions (UNHCR, IOM) have about it. In particular, the variables of space and time condition the experiences and decisions of transit migrants; whereas the institutional actors perceive space as an (abstract) network and time as a (linear) reality.
- II. **Economic motives are only one variable among many in understanding (or even anticipating) migration decisions or intentions.** The rational choice theory that often prevails to account for migration decisions presents an incomplete and impoverished picture of mobility experiences and decisions. A more comprehensive ecosystem perspective is needed to understand both the connection of transit migrants to their environment and the multi-variant nature of their decision-making processes. The same reasoning applies to assistance preferences (direct cash, CVA, in-kind, etc.) which are often based on variables related to the mobility experience: time spent on the road, perceived integration within the host community, and traumas experienced.
- III. **Protection considerations affect the experiences, agency, and decisions of migrants, especially women.** The lack of feedback and reporting mechanisms exacerbates the problem, pushing migrants further into hiding and rendering them invisible. For newcomers and women, the risks of forced labour, sexual exploitation and all forms of abuse and violence are thus aggravated by the absence of information networks (or knowledge of existing networks) concerning risks, legal advice, health, and training.
- IV. **CVA is often overlooked or considered secondary to in-kind assistance when it comes to supporting migrants. By contrast, research suggests that cash assistance remains the preferred type of assistance for most migrants and humanitarian support practitioners.** This is somewhat unsurprising, as CVA suffers from a negative bias in that it is a technology associated with some complexity and potentially confidentiality or data protection issues. Only the use of CVA can validate its relevance, but the sampling was too limited to draw any conclusions. Nevertheless, it is desirable to include CVAs in a broader mix of assistance modalities, because of the autonomy they provide to recipients and the cost-effectiveness they allow. A further constraint is often the very low level of CVA provided which only meets some very basic needs. When and where provided, **cash assistance serves primarily to ease living conditions in the transit city.**

Before delving into recommendations, three key lessons learned for policy and programme design can be drawn from the research findings:

- I. While there is a growing interest in utilising cash assistance, **there are still significant knowledge gaps and challenges to be addressed.** Further research is needed to improve the understanding of both transit migrants' needs and challenges across the routes in the Sahel, what might be the most relevant ways to make contact with vulnerable migrants, and what impact and implications cash assistance can have in such contexts. This might also entail the embracing of innovative methods and tools from other disciplines, reconsidering outreach activities, and considering new design approaches, to pilot new activities and measure their actual impact on the well-being and protection of migrants. In particular, attention is needed to ensure do-not-harm approaches and protection centred programme design, as opposed to output-based objectives of aid provision only.
- II. **The two realms of cash assistance and migration programming are still strongly disconnected.** Before getting to the heart of the programmatic matter, it is essential to explore collaboration and alignment between cash assistance and migration **programming and policies** by defining a shared agenda and involving donors in

supporting these initiatives. This can be further facilitated by creating spaces for knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and co-planning between policy-makers, practitioners and stakeholders to further consider when integration into broader programmes might be appropriate and when stand-alone migrant focused projects are essential to reach very vulnerable migrants.

- III. Any use of cash assistance for transit migrants requires a collaborative effort from both national and international actors, who generally have prejudices on these issues or internal corporate reporting constraints to administer flexible and unconditional cash. This research shows that the use of CVA (cash, mobile or bank transfers, vouchers) is both:
- aligned with the needs and demands of migrants, particularly (but not only) those who have resided in communities for a longer period as cash is more likely to enable them to transform subsistence into sustainable integration;
 - unlikely to significantly influence the migration choices made by migrants. However, national, and international political narratives, often driven by populism and xenophobia, can stigmatise CVA for transit migrants. These narratives present two arguments that oppose the evidence: 1) CVA directly funds irregular migrants' journey to Europe, and 2) CVA indirectly finances smugglers or even traffickers. To address this risk, it is crucial to employ clear arguments supported by evidence, pilot projects, and proactive educational communication, to anticipate criticism at the local, national, or international levels.

3.2. Recommendations

Many actors (NGOs, UN agencies) are not equipped to develop cross-border and regional programmes. It is therefore essential to tackle these obstacles to exploit the full potential of CVA by creating the necessary conditions for programmes and collaboration along migration routes and borders. This includes the need to:

Identify and mitigate the political and security risks associated with the implementation of CVA, including security issues, lack of support from local authorities and communities, and difficulties in identifying people at risk and assessing their needs.

Place CVA strategies and programmes within a deliberately transnational and regional logic, which has political, legal, and logistical implications, and requirements in terms of coordination (information, needs assessments, selection criteria) and collaboration (implementation, monitoring of recipients).

Overcome logistical and infrastructural obstacles to the effective provision of CVAs to migrants, such as lack of access to financial services, limited identification and registration systems, protection risks and concerns, lack of awareness and trust on the part of the most vulnerable.

Based on the findings of the study, the recommendations are aimed at addressing these challenges at both the policy and operational levels. At the policy level, it is essential to establish frameworks for action and coordination by developing guidelines and strategies that take into account the specific needs of migrants in transit. At the operational level, the focus should be on designing and implementing CVAs that are gender-sensitive and adapted to the needs and profiles of migrants in transit. At the programmatic level, this means building flexibility into the design so that assistance can be adapted or modified.

3.2.1. Programming recommendations: Applying a route-based approach to cash assistance in migration context

These recommendations refer to practitioners, and are intended to serve as a guide in applying a **route-based approach** to cash assistance for transit migrants. Recommendations centre on how stakeholders can accompany migrants and support them for greater flexibility, autonomy, and dignity in situations where they might otherwise feel stuck, immobile, and hopeless. The following three sets of recommendations can be considered across the different stages of programme design and implementation:

Plan around migrants needs, preferences and movements

1. Conduct thorough contextual assessments to understand the specific needs of migrants at regional, country, and local levels, and develop context-specific approaches to cash assistance when used in programmes. To design and implement effective programmes, it is crucial that proper needs and context assessments are carried out to understand the actual needs on the ground and inform programming activities, to ensure that migrants have access to support in ways that do not expose them to risks. Subsequently, two recommendations emerge as part of this:

- Support clear and simple communications within the communities and with authorities when high numbers of people face poverty as part of conflict sensitivity
 - Determine a value (in terms of amounts of money delivered) of assistance substantial enough to bring better outcomes in terms of impact on the lives of recipients.
2. Differentiate CVA design based on migration profiles and programme outcomes: Programmes and modalities should be differentiated according to the level of mobility of individuals, and complemented with other sources of support when needed. Determining the feasibility of advocacy for longer term support to migrants by host governments and donors will be pursued in parallel, such as policy for migrants to be supported through shock responsive social protection systems.
 3. Distinguish between tailored assistance for long-term and short-term migrants and needs that can be met through CVA: Long-term migrants have different needs that require tailored programmes. Such programmes should include legal advice, more consistent cash assistance, and other activities that address social and economic relationship and inclusion needs, alongside access to basic services.
 4. Involve migrants in the design and implementation of cash assistance through participatory approaches: The modality of cash assistance (e.g. cash in hand, mobile money, bank transfer) should depend on beneficiaries' preferences and context feasibility, taking into account mobility patterns and the local context, especially in terms of access to services, such phone coverage, the presence of microfinance institutions or banking and local market capacity. A specific assessment of the needs of different beneficiary profiles and locations is crucial when deciding on the cash assistance and delivery mechanisms.
 5. Map intra-regional migration routes and existing CVA in programmes in neighbouring countries, including the locations where migrants tend to gather or pass through. This knowledge enables stakeholders to tailor interventions based on the needs and challenges encountered along these routes, as well as on possible synergies with existing programmes to support migrants along their journeys. This will avoid creating isolated and fragmented interventions.

Include protection considerations into programming and CVA design

6. Build internal capacity and develop clear guidance for the staff to strengthen legal knowledge, knowledge of protection issues and staff commitment and accountability: The challenge is to train the staff of organisations involved in CVA provision, both in the field and in offices, on the specific rights of migrants, on gender-specific issues, on how to identify and address protection issues, on psychosocial risks and do-no-harm, and on how to operate in contexts of extreme vulnerability and need, without reproducing abusive behaviours and power dynamics. Across all transnational migratory routes, whether countries or communities, it is important to ensure that all staff have a minimum standard knowledge of all the principles and guidelines that direct the British Red Cross's action, as well as of current legislation, rights or risks to which assistance recipients are exposed.

Move towards integrated programming to overtake emergency assistance and unlock the potential for cash assistance to transit migrants

7. Consider multi-sector assistance calculated to cover needs being addressed: CVA modalities alone are often unable to address the multifaceted range of needs of migrants in transit, which often change very quickly depending on context and circumstances. It is therefore important for migrants to make informed choices based on their profiles, needs and preferences and to change the type of assistance according to the season, political and security situation. One option is to provide 'cash +' activity packages tailored to the type of migrant and in collaboration with other services, and which can also provide legal advice, livelihoods, access to health, and empower the recipient to make an informed decision about their migration, stay or return.
 - Pilot upscaled programmes proposing different modalities as options, including cash and in-kind, is recommended, especially in urban contexts which are more appropriate to multimodal assistance.
8. Avoid working in isolation: In order to increase political support and buy-in of the authorities involved, CVA should be better aligned with national social protection programming, when it is appropriate, adds value and does not interfere with humanitarian principles. To facilitate collaboration, synergies should be created by trying to use the same data collection and monitoring tools, as well as creating inter-agency information sharing mechanisms that do not put people at risk (observe data sharing and data protection regulations and standards)
 - Create synergies with existing programmes and leverage tools and resources already in place, building within the existing system to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of cash

assistance initiatives. Integrating CVA to migrants as part of the scope of the cash working group is a tool to foster such synergies and coordination.

9. Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework and use findings to inform decision-making: A clear M&E framework should be established that outlines the objectives, indicators, data collection methods, data analysis, and reporting requirements for the programme including CVA information. This will ensure that all stakeholders understand the purpose and expected outcomes of the programme, and that there is a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating progress. A participatory approach should be applied, whereby all key stakeholders are actively involved in the development of the M&E framework, including programme beneficiaries, local communities, and relevant government agencies. This will ensure that the M&E system is contextually appropriate, relevant, and responsive to the needs of the target population. Finally, regularly review and adjust the M&E framework based on feedback from stakeholders, changes in the context, and emerging needs.

3.2.2. Policy recommendations: CVA along the migration journey

These recommendations refer to policy- and decision-makers, with the ambition of steering them towards building a policy agenda that can unite cash and migrant assistance.

Government (Central and Local):

- Adopt legislation that enables transit migrants to access essential financial services and transfer modalities, while tackling discriminatory practices, such as differential treatment or profiling by banks, which can exacerbate their vulnerabilities.
- Improve infrastructure and access to services, taking into account the constraints of transit migrants: At both governmental and municipal level, an effort must be made to improve infrastructure and networks to enable migrants to use digital and banking services. At the same time, organisations delivering CVAs should strive to create or strengthen partnerships with financial service providers, but also with telephony providers, in order to increase access to cell phones and promote mobile banking modes, and to provide solutions enabling non-status migrants to access financial services and SIM cards.
- Raise awareness among migrants to help them make informed decisions about how to invest and spend their money sustainably (financial literacy). Advice is also given on what migrants can do if they change their minds and wish to return to their country of origin. With the help of local authorities, implementing organisations should also strive to raise awareness and understanding among local communities of the purpose and rationale of assistance programmes.

International donors:

- Raise awareness among INGO staff, as well as government officials and donors, that cash assistance does not determine migration decisions. This involves educating and informing INGO staff, government officials, and donors about the complex factors that contribute to migration decision, highlighting that while financial considerations may be one aspect, they are not the sole, nor a strong, determinant of whether individuals decide to migrate. Awareness-raising efforts can include sharing research findings, case studies, and testimonials that illustrate the multifaceted nature of migration decisions.
- Advocate for the integration of a migration component within Cash Working Groups and the development of specific CVA guidelines for migrants. This entails recognizing the unique challenges faced by migrants and ensuring their inclusion in existing cash assistance programmes. Collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including INGOs, government agencies, and donors, to incorporate migration considerations into programme design, implementation, and monitoring. Additionally, work towards better coordination between cash assistance and migration initiatives by promoting information-sharing, fostering partnerships, and facilitating collaboration platforms. Regularly assess the impact of these measures to ensure that migrant populations receive targeted and effective assistance throughout their migration journeys.

Humanitarian Clusters:

- Promote the application of the do-no-harm principle by emphasising its importance, establishing robust enforcement mechanisms, and holding humanitarian staff accountable for adherence. This involves promoting awareness and training, developing clear guidelines and codes of conduct, implementing reporting mechanisms, providing capacity-building opportunities, and monitoring compliance. Regular assessment of the impact ensures continuous improvement. By prioritising ethical practices and responsible engagement with migrants, this recommendation aims to protect their well-being and rights within humanitarian operations.
- Include the community in the development of strategies and guidelines for CVA targeting migrants. Foster community participation and engagement to ensure the effectiveness of cash assistance programmes. Community involvement in the assistance target groups and consultation with community leaders who

support migrants in transit to design delivery arrangements should be planned as an integral part of the CVA. When needed, activities for host communities affected by migration should also be included to help address the economic situation in the host country for instance if they are affected by high unemployment and inflation.

- Debunk assumptions and recognize migrants' autonomy. Challenge assumptions that: 1) either treat migrants as dependent and easily swayed by monetary incentives; 2) or relying solely on the assumption that individuals always make rational choices based on self-interest, whereas many variables, temporalities and effects come into play in the decisions that accompany the migratory journey. By contrast, it is recommended to promote a more nuanced understanding of migration as a complex phenomenon influenced by a wide range of social, economic, political, and personal factors. This includes acknowledging the agency and capacity of migrants to make informed decisions based on their own needs, aspirations, and circumstances.

3.2.3. Red Cross Red Crescent Movement

Regarding the operation and programming of the Movement, several recommendations emerged from the research, that go beyond those directly related to cash and voucher assistance (CVA). It is important to note that these recommendations, although not directly related to CVA programming, were developed with the vision of contributing to the adoption of a holistic approach that recognizes the broader needs and challenges faced by migrants.

1. Assess the characteristics and dynamics of the feminization of transit migration in each country and *en route* (cross-border and in transit) to understand the risks associated with women in particular, and develop targeted gender-sensitive programmes via cash. Using the CVA as an entry point can create an incentive for complementary targeted assistance. This could include: 1) developing non-stigmatizing and more specifically female access to information on risks, rights, health, and psychosocial assistance. 2) supporting migrant women and girls who have experienced sexual violence, trafficking in persons, modern slavery, or exploitation by local employers; 3) facilitating access to sexual and reproductive health services and support for pregnant and breastfeeding women. The CVA's role here would be complementary, to reinforce efficiency and coverage in terms of rights and protection.
2. Consider multimodal money transfers as an option for improving beneficiary-centric responses as well as actual migrant action. We have observed some interesting trends in terms of preferences - depending on migratory profiles, type of community, length of stay and of course the type of shocks, stress factors or vulnerability. But it is also true that preferences can evolve, and that more than one response modality, between cash, vouchers, and in-kind benefits, can constitute an optimal response. Of course, multimodal assistance can be extremely costly, given 1) the costs of storing in-kind products (particularly food); 2) the expense, logistics and technical complexity of change; and 3) the need for a "large-scale" multimodal approach to increase overall cost-effectiveness. It is therefore recommended to test this "change" modality in an urban context, where logistical constraints are generally lower, in order to derive elements for a possible generalization or scaling-up.
3. Build on the existing networks to foster cross-border coordination and programming: Further leverage the existing network present in many places and countries, to apply the route-based approach, and create aligned/shared mechanisms for identifying, assisting, and monitoring migrants across borders. Here, it is recommended to go beyond national and siloed approach to adopt: 1) a regional and multi-country approach, with 2) innovative partnerships (INGOs, CSOs, NNGOs, private sector in relevant health, protection, and innovation sectors).
4. Strengthen mental health support component: Considering the Movement's already traditionally health-oriented focus, it is suggested that support activities in the area of mental health should be deepened and strengthened, especially in migratory contexts, where trauma from experiences during the journey can be multiple and complex. Assessing these needs requires a focus on both contextual dynamics and migrants, journeys, and communities, to understand the nature of polytraumatic episodes and favour a case management approach – as much as possible. However, it is essential to recognize that interventions that are ad hoc in nature and not followed up over the long term are of course limited in the treatment of complex traumas. It all depends on how long migrants stay in one place, and on their willingness to take part in sessions. As the interviews with mental health specialists highlighted, superficial treatment without follow-up can do more harm than good. A minimal approach, with no real desire to cure, but with diagnostic and listening facilities, may well be better suited to transit migration.

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