

UN Common Cash Statement (UNCCS)

Questions & Answers





WHAT IS THE UN COMMON CASH STATEMENT (UNCCS)?

The UN Common Cash Statement was launched in December 2018 by the four principals of UNICEF, OCHA, UNHCR and WFP to collaborate on cash and voucher assistance, using common cash systems wherever possible. Recognizing that cash represents a significant reform in the humanitarian sector, it aims to better assist affected populations in a principled and dignified manner with an intention to improve complementarities, synergies and accountabilities among UN agencies and other organizations. The UNCCS signatories recognize the primary role of governments in supporting vulnerable populations and aims to build on and utilize existing national social protection systems, where feasible and relevant. The UNCCS focuses on all types of cash and voucher transfers, including multi-purpose and sector specific.



WHAT ARE THE UNCCS SIGNATORIES' COMMITMENTS?

The UNCCS signatories' commitments are organized around three pillars: 1. Collaborative procurement of financial services; 2. Data interoperability and systems development/adjustment; and 3. Harmonized programming for cash assistance. Within these pillars the UNCCS makes the following commitments:

- Provide and deliver cash through common systems that avoid unnecessary parallel payment systems and duplication of efforts and payments to beneficiaries.
- Join efforts to collaborate on procurement and contracting of financial services, including leveraging existing contracts with either one of the three operational agencies in emergencies.
- Harmonize data management through interoperable systems and data sharing agreements that ensure data protection to achieve common assistance tracking and access to beneficiary identification, avoiding duplication of assistance.
- Conduct jointly or coordinate existing cash feasibility assessments, programme design, targeting approaches, monitoring, feedback mechanisms and communication with beneficiaries and communities.
- Ensure a people-centred approach, meeting the needs and preferences of beneficiaries.
- Engage with other international, national and local cash actors that bring complementary operational expertise to design programmes and support the primary role of governments.

3 HOW DOES THE UNCCS SIGNATORIES' COLLABORATION FIT INTO EXISTING COORDINATION MECHANISMS, SUCH AS WITH CASH WORKING GROUPS (CWGS)?

UNCCS signatories are active members of Cash Working Groups (CWGs) at country, regional and global levels. The interagency collaboration provides opportunities for reducing duplications and maximizing synergies among members of the CWGs. The collaboration provides opportunities for establishment of systems linked to beneficiaries, payments and monitoring that can be beneficial to the humanitarian response overall. Additionally, CWGs provide a platform to convey information around the UNCCS and an entry point for further collaboration, such as around joint needs assessments. UNCCS is thus, not a cash coordination structure, but rather focuses on operational collaboration that enhances and builds on existing structures. Discussions and engagement with the Red Crescent/ Red Cross Movement, other UN agencies, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs (e.g. the CCD – Collaborative Cash Delivery) and governments are ongoing at different levels.

4 WHO IS INCLUDED IN THE UNCCS?

The UNCCS signatories consist of the four UN organizations, and is inclusive and open to engagement with other operational international, national and local stakeholders, organizations and governments. The intention is to establish systems, processes and approaches that will benefit vulnerable populations by supporting all interested agencies and organizations in the response. This is already taking place in a number of countries with collaboration established amongst agencies, such as in Bangladesh (IOM), Yemen (FAO and IOM), Jordan (seven UN agencies + UNDP, 24 INGOs, one local NGO and eight municipalities), and in Lebanon (three INGOs, two local NGOs).

5 WHY WAS THE UNCCS LAUNCHED?

In recent years, UN agencies and other organizations scaled up the use of cash and vouchers as a modality to deliver assistance in response to humanitarian crises. The UNCCS builds on the Grand Bargain commitment to Increase the Use and Coordination of Cash-based Programming and collaborative approaches that have emerged in such operations as Lebanon and Jordan, as well as non-refugee settings such as Somalia. The UNCCS recognizes that increased collective sharing of analysis, programme design and assistance delivery can be more cost efficient and lead to better outcomes for beneficiaries.

6 WHAT IS THE ADDED VALUE OF UNCCS?

The UNCCS signatories' approach starts from the cash recipient and aims to reduce the duplication of processes necessary to deliver better cash assistance to them. It reinforces the dialogue between key UN operational agencies on efficiency and effectiveness by building on, maximizing, streamlining, learning and adapting each agency's existing processes on cash assistance to achieve greater results together. By doing so, it also aims for value for money by avoiding overlapping agency specific delivery systems, promoting collaboration and harnessing exchanges of information to better draw on the comparative advantage and mandate of each agency.

UNCCS focus countries

The seven UNCCS focus countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ecuador, Niger and Yemen. They were selected based on identified collaboration opportunities among the three operational agencies', including feasible and/ or existing cash and voucher assistance, commitment to collaborate, and the potential for scale of cash assistance.

7 WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE IN THE FOCUS COUNTRIES?

There is no one size-fits-all or a single UNCCS implementation blueprint. Collaboration looks and will be different from context to context. The UNCCS implementation will be achieved when opportunities for efficiency and effectiveness through collaboration on cash assistance are collectively identified, prioritized and implemented in country operations. The choice on which pillars of the UNCCS are implemented in focus countries will be dictated by operational realities on the ground.

Joint Procurement in Ecuador: Following the release of the Guidance for Collaborative Procurement for Humanitarian Cash Transfers, in February 2020 WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF launched a joint procurement for a cash delivery platform designed to be accessible to any agency or organization needing to transfer cash in Ecuador. This will harmonize processes and tools facilitating future joint procurements.

Collaborative design and piggybacking in CAR: Due to the recurring nature of the displacement crisis across the country, Financial Service Providers (FSPs) are limited and UNCCS agencies signatories rely on implementing partners to deliver. UNCCS and partners in CAR are currently working on a joint pro-programme design to be implemented in Kaga Bandoro while piggybacking on existing FSP contracts and data interoperability discussions are ongoing, calling for an even stronger inclusion of partners, currently happening under the leadership of the CWG.

8 WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNCCS?

Each agency has allocated a UNCCS lead at the global level to a global Task Team. There are two global workstreams: i) data/systems interoperability; and ii) collaborative joint procurement, where technical experts from each agency work to prepare guidance and advance on its workplan. A Technical Field Support Roving Team is being established to support focus countries. At country level, the offices drive the identification and implementation of collaborative opportunities, with full engagement of management, technical and operational staff.

Progress achieved on the UNCCS implementation at global level:

- UNICEF/ WFP/ UNHCR Data Sharing Agreement
- Minimum Core Data Set for Assistance of Vulnerable Populations
- Inter-agency cash assistance tracking data hub/ system on-going
- UNICEF developing internal beneficiary management information system (MIS) system in-teroperable with other signatories' systems
- Increasing interoperability solutions between WFP SCOPE/ UNHCR PRIMES systems
- CashAssist collaboration between UNICEF/ UNHCR on co-development of a payment module
- UNICEF and WFP work on feasibility of a joint registration application for non-refugee contexts
- Increased technical agencies' capacity committed to field support and implementation
- Joint Guidance on Collaborative Procurement of Financial Services
- Register of contracts with FSPs
- Joint tenders and piggybacking on each other's contracts with FSPs
- Common cash transfer mechanisms in 25+ countries
- Enhanced understanding of each agencies' processes and rules

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WHAT IS THE ROLE OF OCHA IN THE UNCCS?

OCHA supports coordination of the discussions around the design, implementation and contextualization of the UNCCS. OCHA supports linkages between the UNCCS and parts of the humanitarian coordination architecture, notably Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups and Cash Working Groups (CWGs), ensuring that the UNCCS signatories' operational collaboration builds on existing mechanisms and activities in-country. OCHA keeps the Humanitarian Coordinator informed of the objectives and activities of the UNCCS and how these contribute to the overall humanitarian response.

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WHAT IS THE UNCCS TECHNICAL FIELD SUPPORT ROVING TEAM?

The operational UN agencies agreed to assign dedicated technical resources and staff capacities to deploy to the seven focus countries to support the implementation of UNCCS activities. Building on expertise in data interoperability, payment solutions and cash, the team complements existing technical expertise, where needed, to support country offices in the definition, design and implementation of the UNCCS.





WHAT IS THE EXPECTED UNCCS TIMELINE?

The UNCCS planning and implementation commenced in early 2019. Collaboration is a process and timing of different elements will vary depending on the opportunities and implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated agency collaboration, in particular on joint procurement and contracting of financial services and joint frontloading of payments but delayed field technical support missions. UNCCS objectives including collaboration supported by interoperability, common delivery mechanisms and joint programming are expected to be in place in the focus countries by 2021.

Common transfer mechanisms and systems interoperability in Bangladesh:

WFP, IOM and UNICEF are using the same transfer mechanism for e-vouchers. In addition, UNHCR is piggybacking on WFP's contract with a FSP. Agencies are also piloting interoperability between WFP SCOPE and UNHCR PRIMES through the access and transfer of biometrics solutions developed at the global level as part of the interoperability workstream. A joint analysis has been conducted on existing PDM data between four agencies with a view to harmonize future PDMs, and work is on-going on the harmonization of the MEB.

Progress achieved on the UNCCS in the focus countries:

- Country specific action plans
- Harmonized transfer mechanisms in six focus countries as well as additional eighteen countries
- Systems interoperability WFP SCOPE and UNHCR PRIMES piloting in one country
- Systems interoperability mapping on-going in three countries
- Harmonization (feasibility, targeting, post distribution monitoring (PDM) etc.) in three countries beyond focus countries
- Joint procurement of FSPs in two countries, piggybacking of contracts in five countries
- Engagement with Cash Working Groups to ensure alignment with overall response priorities and to identify opportunities for



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES IN TERMS OF IMPLEMENTATION?

Collaboration is ambitious and requires resources. The main challenges include (1) dedicated capacity and technical expertise (e.g. right people, right place, right time), (2) incentives in operations as all agencies at technical, operational and management levels need to see the benefit that working collaboratively can bring, (3) operational considerations (such as cash feasibility, limited overlap in populations/ geography, neutrality of systems, ensuring data protection and integrity across complex systems and processes), (4) controls, fee and assurance frameworks to ensure that each agency's maximizing on each other's strengths and areas of expertise/ mandates and (5) donor coordination including

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