

REVIEW

CASH VOUCHERS FOR MIGRANTS

Pilot Project



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Introduction

The increasing scale of migration and displacement around the world presents unique challenges for humanitarian organizations, particularly in meeting the diverse and urgent needs of people on the move. In response, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (RCRCM) has recognized the importance of adapting its humanitarian approaches to effectively support migrants and displaced populations, with a particular focus on Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA).

Since February 2022, the Red Cross of Montenegro (RCM) was part of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) Emergency Appeal for Ukraine and Impacted Countries Crisis. As part of this Emergency Appeal, CVA was the preferred modality to provide integrated assistance for displaced people, in the short term to meet their basic needs and in the mid and longer term, to support sectoral outcomes in shelter and livelihoods. The Ukraine response, which represents the IFRC's largest commitment to CVA to date, highlights how CVA can be a transformative tool in humanitarian operations, particularly when responding to displacement crises.

Based on the RCM's extensive experience with CVA interventions and study on "[The Use of Cash and Vouchers to Assist Migrants in Transit in Montenegro - Feasibility Assessment and Analysis Report](#)", the IFRC recommended that the RCM pilot CVA within the Global Route-Based Migration Programme (GRBMP), prompting the RCM to take a proactive step by piloting a project aimed at exploring and testing the effectiveness of voucher assistance in supporting migrants in transit. The RCM is the first National Society in the Balkan region to pioneer the use of voucher assistance for migrants in transit. This significant step reflects the RCM's commitment to innovating and adapting its humanitarian approach to better meet the needs of migrants and displaced populations in the region.

This report reviews the implementation and outcomes of this pilot project, drawing on data from Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) with the RCM's staff. Through these insights, the report evaluates the effectiveness of voucher assistance in responding to migration crisis, the challenges faced during implementation and the successes achieved. By reflecting on the lessons learned, this report aims to contribute to the development of future strategies for integrating CVA into migration-related humanitarian interventions.

Migrant Profiles



In this context, the term “migrants in transit” refers to people who have left their usual places of residence and have expressed an intention to seek asylum. However, this definition is broad and does not exclude asylum seekers or those granted protection who are also residing in reception centres in Montenegro. Most migrants in Montenegro aim to continue their journey towards the European Union (EU) spending only a short time in the country. Migrants typically enter from Albania, then head north toward Bosnia and Herzegovina or eastward to Serbia, as they seek to reach the Schengen area. During their brief stay, they frequently require immediate access to basic needs such as food and hygiene items. CVA is essential in addressing these needs, offering flexibility for migrants to meet their specific requirements. By providing financial support, CVA not only helps cover urgent necessities but also promotes dignity by enabling migrants to maintain a sense of autonomy during their transit.

Voucher Assistance



The RCM piloted a voucher assistance project for migrants in transit during November 2024. The aim was to distribute a total of 100 vouchers, each valued at EUR 50, to migrants residing in the Centre for the Reception Centre for Migrants and Asylum Seekers in Božaj. Migrants were able to use these vouchers without the requirement of an identification document, ensuring greater accessibility and flexibility for those in need. The vouchers were redeemable for food and non-food items at any Voli market in Montenegro until the end of November 2024, with the exception of alcohol and tobacco products, which were not eligible for purchase.

Procurement Process



In the beginning of 2024, RCM’s efforts were focused on exploring the possibilities for the modalities of cash assistance. The initial approach was to trial the use of bank cards with one of the banks that had expressed interest. However, it was later determined that this option was not feasible due to profitability concerns.

Another option considered was to use ONBE and SkPAY cards, however, after careful consideration, the IFRC was advised not to pursue this approach as it was deemed to be too complicated and may have introduced additional challenges. The last option considered was cash, however, RCM quickly decided against this approach due to sensitivity issues and the lack of an adequate monitoring system.

As a result, the final option of using vouchers was pursued as RCM already had experience with this method and established relationships with suppliers in Montenegro who had previously been involved in the CVA for displaced people from Ukraine.

All of these considerations and delays led to the procurement process starting later than anticipated, with the contract eventually being awarded to Voli market. The RCM had previously worked with Voli market, which is the only retailer with a presence within 3 kilometers of all key locations, including Božaj, Spuž, Nikšić and Rožaje. Additionally, Voli markets are located in Podgorica, Tuzi, Nikšić, Pljevlja and Rožaje, ensuring convenient access across these regions.

Voucher Distribution

At the entrance to the Reception Centre for Migrants and Asylum Seekers in Božaj, and upon the issuance of an attestation formally expressing the intention to apply for asylum, vouchers were distributed to migrants by field staff, who provided detailed explanations on how to use them. An interpreter was present to facilitate clear communication and ensure full understanding. The vouchers provided to migrants included their full name, the attestation number and the voucher number. All migrants were already familiar with the voucher system, as they had used it in other transit countries. As a result, no additional questions or clarifications were raised by the migrants.

The information was disseminated through a dedicated website specifically created for this pilot project. Migrants with internet access, irrespective of their phone type, were able to access the site by scanning a QR code, which was printed on a paper and displayed next to the sign-in sheet and voucher collection area. Following the verbal dissemination of information, field staff and interpreters advised beneficiaries to scan or photograph the code, ensuring they have access to details about the voucher and the locations where it can be redeemed. Flyers were not utilized, as the project had a short duration, leaving no time for the preparation and distribution of printed materials. As a result, word of mouth became the most widespread method of communication.

Since the Reception Centre for Migrants and Asylum Seekers in Božaj does not allow the intake of food, and given that the residents were migrants in transit, all migrants who received vouchers used them upon exiting the Reception Centre. Therefore, they did not return to the Reception Centre afterward.

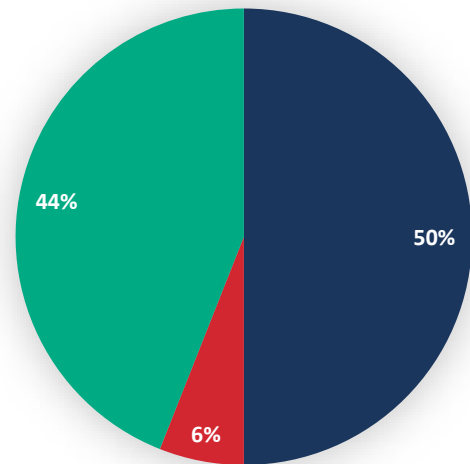


PDM

The PDM survey was designed to collect feedback from the voucher recipients, since migrants were likely to lose contact with the RCM after leaving the Reception Centre. As such, migrants were invited to complete a survey after utilizing the voucher. The completion of the PDM was entirely voluntary and depended on the migrants' willingness to participate within a given timeframe. A total of 22 individuals participated in the online survey regarding voucher usage, which was completed through the KoboToolbox.

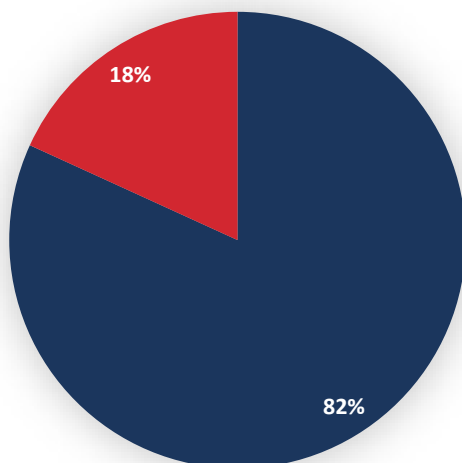
A total of 56 vouchers were distributed, out of which only 6 have not been used. Although the original plan was to distribute 100 vouchers, delays in the procurement process extended the timeline, and the distribution only began on 23 November.

This left only 7 days to distribute all the vouchers, resulting in a reduced number being distributed within the available time frame. The remaining unused vouchers were returned to the supplier, Voli market.



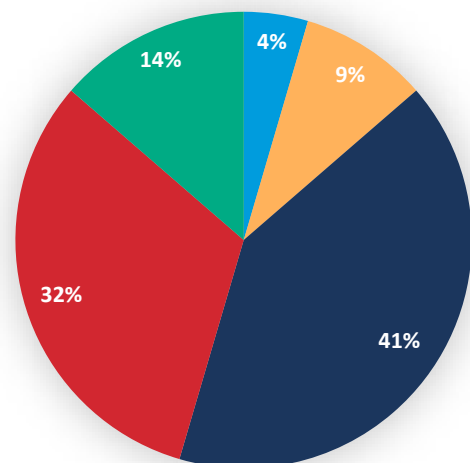
■ Vouchers used ■ Vouchers not used ■ Vouchers not distributed

A total of 82% men and 18% women received vouchers.



■ Male ■ Female

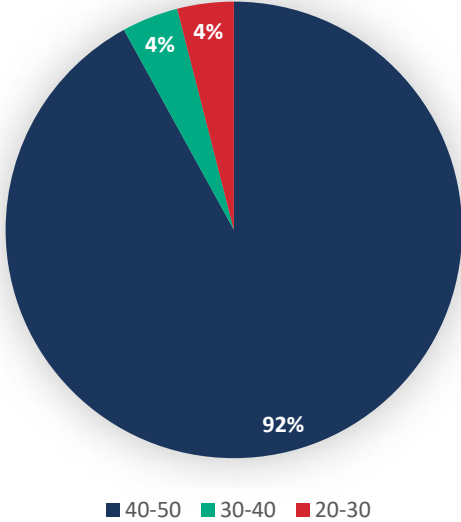
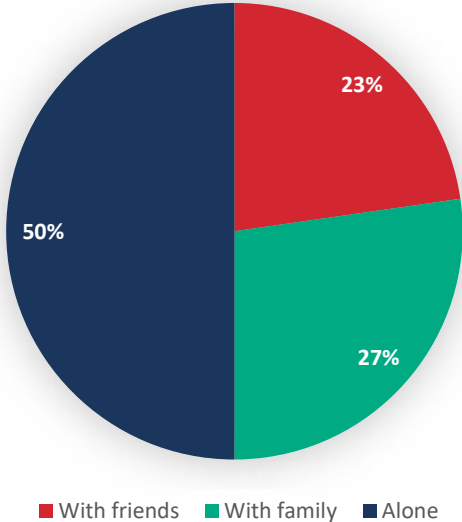
The age structure of the voucher recipients was as follows: 41% were aged 30 to 39, 32% were aged 18 to 29, 14% were under 18, 9% were aged 40 to 49, and 4% were aged 50 and above.



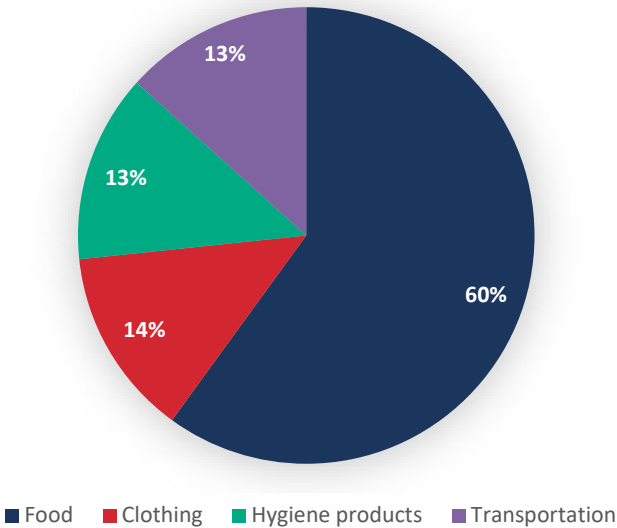
■ 50+ ■ 40-49 ■ 30-39 ■ 18-29 ■ Under 18

Among those who received vouchers, 50% travelled alone, 27% travelled with family, and 23% travelled with friends.

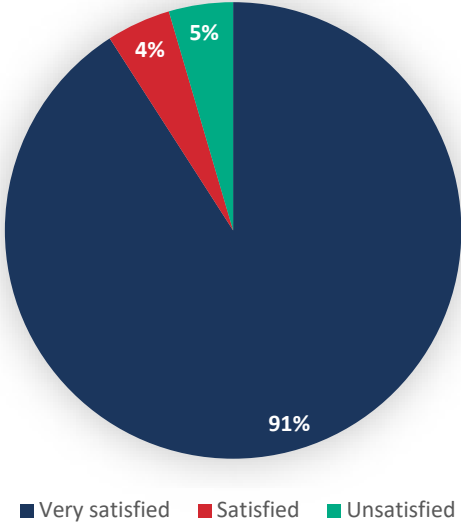
A total of 4% of vouchers were used in the value range of EUR 20 to EUR 30, 4% in the range of EUR 30 to EUR 40, and 92% vouchers were used in the range of EUR 40 to EUR 50. No vouchers were redeemed for amounts below EUR 20.



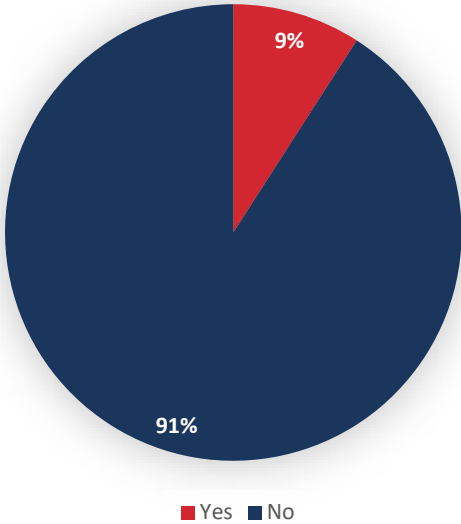
The responses indicated that food was the most pressing need, with 60% of voucher recipients highlighting it. Clothing and hygiene products were also mentioned, indicating that, while these were recognized as important, they were not viewed with the same urgency as food. Some recipients mentioned that they had used vouchers for transportation, even though the vouchers had originally been intended only for purchases at Voli market. It appeared that, in practice, migrants had found a way to use the vouchers for transportation or to exchange them for cash to cover travel expenses.



The majority of voucher recipients were satisfied, with 91% reporting being 'Very Satisfied', 4% 'Satisfied' and 5% 'Unsatisfied'.



In terms of challenges, 91% voucher recipients reported that they did not encounter any problems. While other 9% who mentioned facing some issues did not specify the nature of the problems.



Recommendations

Enhance Communication Channels

While word of mouth was the most widespread method, it is recommended to explore additional communication methods for future initiatives, such as printed flyers in migrants' native languages. This would help ensure clearer communication and mitigate the spread of misinformation, which can sometimes arise through word of mouth.

Voucher Restrictions

Although the sale of alcohol and cigarettes was prohibited, it is recommended that future vouchers explicitly state these restrictions. This would ensure that cashiers are unable to process such products if they are presented, preventing any potential issues. It is also recommended to include the RCM emblem on the vouchers.

Strengthen Internal Coordination

To ensure effective coordination and consistent information sharing, it is recommended to enhance coordination and communication between RCM staff at the Spuž and Božaj Reception Centres. The absence of the voucher assistance pilot project at the Spuž centre led to the spread of misinformation among migrants, who were unclear about the availability of vouchers. Improved internal communication would help prevent such misunderstandings in the future and contribute to a more transparent and efficient distribution process, while maintaining the credibility of the RCM.

Monitoring System

As this was a small pilot project, no comprehensive monitoring system was in place, apart from the PDM questionnaire and the list of distributed vouchers. If the project is expanded in the future to include more recipients, it is recommended to implement a more robust monitoring system, such as a dedicated application to effectively track, manage and oversee the voucher distribution process. This would enhance efficiency, transparency and data accuracy as the project expands. Furthermore, the use of vouchers for transportation, despite being intended solely for purchases at Voli Market, highlights a potential for misuse. This issue arises from the reliance on physical vouchers and a fully implemented digital system could help prevent such misuse by effectively monitoring and restricting voucher usage.

Additionally, implementing voucher assistance through a digital system would require further investment in the development of the infrastructure to ensure its effectiveness. This also raises concerns about the feasibility of implementing the project through such a system, as the recipients, being migrants, lack the necessary identification documents for registration or internet connection. Additionally, the voucher assistance process can be time-consuming and challenging, especially for migrants in transit, who tend not to stay long in the country, particularly during the verification and eligibility confirmation stages.



Conclusion

Despite certain challenges, the cash vouchers pilot project successfully addressed the immediate needs of migrants, including both food and non-food items (NFI), while also preserving their dignity and autonomy. By enabling migrants to independently purchase essential goods, the project promoted self-reliance, built confidence and encouraged positive interactions with local communities, fostering a more respectful and humane environment.

To ensure the effective implementation of future voucher projects, it is essential to explore and collaborate with other National Societies that are leaders in CVA. This collaboration will facilitate the integration of monitoring and other key components, enabling the exchange of best practices and optimizing the project's overall impact. Such an approach will enhance the project's effectiveness and contribute to a sustainable, long-term solution for addressing the needs of migrants.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

HUMANITY

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

IMPARTIALITY

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

NEUTRALITY

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

INDEPENDENCE

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

VOLUNTARY SERVICE

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

UNITY

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

UNIVERSALITY

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.