



CASE STUDY

CASH AND VOUCHER ASSISTANCE (CVA) FOR PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

Bulgarian Red Cross

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INTRODUCTION

One of the main assistance modalities used to support people through the Emergency Appeal for Ukraine and Impacted Countries was cash and voucher assistance (CVA). The Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC) provided more than CHF 4,740,174 through this modality, representing 32% of all International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) funds allocated to BRC.

Type of CVA	Amount (CHF)
Winter Support Grants 2022/2023	2,910,440.00
Vulnerable Host Community 2023	649,870.00
Winter Support Grants 2023/2024	330,825.00
Winter Support Grants 2024/2025	415,525.00
Cash for Protection	35,000.00
Cash for Health	362,439.00
Education Vouchers	17,100.00
Testing CVA distribution mechanisms	18,975.00
Total	4,740,174.00

The BRC identified the following three CVA programmes as successful examples of targeted CVA activities. Developed with the support of the BRC's protection, gender and inclusion (PGI) focal point, these programmes aimed to address the needs of children and people with disabilities.



Winter Support Grants 2023/2024

As the international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine approached its second winter, the BRC began designing a programme aimed at providing targeted support to help households cope with the additional costs associated with winter heating and clothing.

According to a needs assessment conducted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in August 2023, 26.4% of displaced people from Ukraine arriving in Bulgaria were identified as people with disabilities. Based on these findings and in coordination with the Cash Working Group in Bulgaria, the BRC decided to target the winter support programme towards Ukrainian households with at least one member living with a disability.

Eligibility

The main eligibility criterion for the programme was the presence of a person with a disability within the household. To confirm eligibility, the individual was required to provide a copy of an officially issued disability document, which was subsequently verified by BRC social workers. The disability document could be issued either by the Ukrainian or Bulgarian state authorities. The majority of applicants submitted documents issued by the Ukrainian authorities during the application process.

The following additional criteria were also used to identify and select the most vulnerable households:

- Households with at least one specific medical condition.
- Individuals or couples aged 60 years without any other adult family members.
- Pregnant women.
- Single caregivers with one or more dependents.
- Households with more than four people.

Registration process

The CVA programme used [AccessRC](#) as the main tool for households to register for support, which was further supported by the Greenline helpline and four Ukrainian speaking operators. Additional support for the registration process was also available through the regional branches for people who were unable to navigate the self-registration process.

Cash distribution

A total of 1,139 households with at least one member living with a disability received a one-time cash grant. The assistance was accessed either through a direct bank transfer or, if preferred, through cash pick up at a MoneyGram office.

The value of the one-time cash grant was set at CHF 256, aligned with the “heating assistance” provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of Bulgaria to vulnerable individuals within the host community.



Cash for Protection

In May 2024, the Refugee and Migration Unit (RMU) of the BRC launched the Cash for Protection programme, financial assistance initiative aimed at supporting refugees and migrants in the most vulnerable situations (96% displaced people from Ukraine, 3% third country nationals and 1% host community) residing in Bulgaria.

Eligibility

The Cash for Protection programme was designed to provide immediate cash assistance to affected people, in particular those in the following situations:

- Households including one or more members with a disability, serious illness or diagnosed mental health condition.
- Survivors of gender-based or other forms of violence.
- Survivors of human trafficking.
- Other vulnerabilities.

Registration process

People in need could request support through any of the 28 BRC regional branches, national headquarters (HQ), the Community Centre in Sofia and Refugee Reception Centres in Haskovo and Harmanli where the BRC maintains a presence. In addition to this, partner organisations and other non-governmental organisation (NGOs) in Bulgaria were also able to refer cases to the RMU for their review.

Individuals applying to Cash for Protection programme were required to fill out a needs assessment questionnaire at the branch locations, outlining their situation, request for support and existing vulnerabilities. The submissions were then reviewed by BRC social workers and who generally conducted an interview to gain a better understanding of the applicant's circumstances and challenges.

Cash distribution

A total of 88 households (354 people) received cash grants amounting to CHF 34,797 between May 2024 and October 2025. Cash grants were calculated on a case-by-case basis. Grant amounts were determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the intended use of the funds, household size and other forms of support provided by the BRC.

- 20 cash grants have been provided to vulnerable households managing people with a disability or severe injury/illness such as spinal surgery and people undergoing cancer treatment.
- 10 cash grants provided to single mothers with multiple dependants who were requesting support to leave their existing living arrangements due to safety and security concerns.
- 5 cash grants have been provided to households with older people facing imminent loss of accommodation.

- 39 cash grants provided to vulnerable households to address issues related to the need for emergency accommodation.
- 14 cash grants have been provided to vulnerable households seeking assistance to ensure their children could continue to access schooling in Bulgaria.

Findings

Information collected through email correspondence with the BRC CVA administration address, the Greenline helpline and focus group discussions (FGDs) highlighted several key findings related to both the Winter Support Grants 2023/2024 and Cash for Protection programmes.

- The Cash for Protection programme allowed the National Society to provide timely support to people in the most vulnerable situations. The chosen modality of support also covered a wide array of needs in different sectors (health, accommodation, livelihoods).
- AccessRC proved to be an effective and accessible platform for self-registration, allowing people to upload the required documentation remotely and improving their ability to receive support without the need to visit a Red Cross branch in person. The platform enabled potential recipients to register from anywhere in Bulgaria and connect with a centralized call centre for additional support, while the BRC's network of 28 regional branches ensured in person assistance was available whenever needed.
- The Greenline helpline, staffed by four Ukrainian speaking operators, proved essential in supporting people who experienced challenges registering through AccessRC, particularly by enabling communication and guidance in their own language.



Education vouchers

To support the integration of Ukrainian children into schools, the BRC introduced education vouchers to assist families with the purchase of school supplies.

Selection process

In order to apply for this type of support, families were required to provide documentation confirming that their child or children were enrolled in a school in Bulgaria at the time of submitting their application through the regional branches. A BRC social worker then conducted a household visit and completed a vulnerability assessment form, which was reviewed by the RMU programme manager for approval.

Voucher distribution

For the implementation of this support, the BRC partnered with a national school supplies company in Bulgaria. The vouchers were distributed through the regional branches and redeemable across all retail locations, while the BRC received monthly reports detailing the items purchased by each recipient using the provided vouchers. With support from the IFRC Emergency Appeal for Ukraine and Impacted Countries, the BRC's RMU provided a total of 180 education vouchers, valued each at CHF 95 in 2024 and 2025.

Findings

This assistance was generally provided as part of a suite of other actions that BRC was able to provide such as Bulgarian language classes (for children and adults), translation services for children to apply for school admission, group therapy activities and cultural events aimed at helping children adapt to their new living context in Bulgaria.

The vouchers proved to be an efficient way of alleviating the financial burden that school supplies represent for the newcomers and most vulnerable families. By helping to cover these costs, the education vouchers supported children's access to education and full participation in school activities.

Challenges

The Cash for Protection programme did not apply narrowly defined vulnerability criteria and was not targeted at specific groups. As a result, any individual or household could apply for support by describing their situation and level of vulnerability in the application form. This broad approach created challenges for the implementation team in prioritising the most vulnerable cases. The situation was further complicated by irregular funding flows, diverse types of assistance requests, a wide range of beneficiary needs and a rolling application process. This required continuous internal review and approval by social workers and the Director of the RMU to ensure timely response to identified needs.

Regarding the education voucher component, the selected supplier offered a broad range of products including school materials as well as books, toys and art supplies. Although the supplier was chosen due to its extensive store coverage across Bulgaria, the availability of non-education items created challenges in ensuring that vouchers were used consistently for education-related purchases.

In relation to the AccessRC platform, while it significantly improved accessibility and enabled households with a person with a disability to self-register remotely and reduce the need for travel to BRC branches, some challenges were observed. In particular, certain older recipients with disabled family members experienced difficulties navigating the

digital registration process, indicating that additional support was needed to ensure full inclusiveness.

Recommendations

It is recommended to establish a dedicated working group responsible for the weekly review of Cash for Protection applications and for supporting the selection process. This would help reduce pressure on individual staff members, allow applications to continue being received on a rolling basis and create space for the group to adapt selection criteria in line with emerging needs and available funding.

While the AccessRC has proven to be an effective tool for improving accessibility and enabling remote registration, it should be used in combination with traditional in person application methods. Staff and volunteers at branch level should be fully trained in how the platform functions and in the potential challenges applicants may face. In addition, beneficiaries should be given the option to apply in person or to receive telephone support from staff who can complete the application on their behalf through AccessRC. Future programming could further benefit from integrating AccessRC as a first step for submitting requests for assistance, combined with follow up in person assessments conducted through the regional branch network to ensure accuracy, inclusiveness and proper verification of needs.

When providing voucher-based assistance to address specific needs, such as education materials, it is recommended to work closely with service providers to ensure that vouchers are restricted to their intended purpose.