

Middle East and North Africa

Cash and Voucher Assistance

Peer-to-Peer exchange Program

By the MENA Cash Center of Excellence





Middle East and North Africa

Contents

Acknowledgments	4
Definition of Terms	
MENA Cash Center of Excellence	(
Key Objectives	6
Collaborative Efforts	
Impact and Reach	
Overview of the MENA CVA Peer-to-Peer Exchange Program	
Peer-to-Peer exchange program 2024	8
Summary:	
Host National Society	(
Iranian Red Crescent Society	
Guest National Societies:	10
Lebanese Red Cross	10
Syrian Arab Red Crescent	1
Iraqi Red Crescent Society	1
Peer-to-Peer Exchange Methodology	1
Peer-to-Peer Exchange schedule:	12
General Schedule of the MENA CVA Exchange program:	13
DAY 1- More about CVA in MENA:	13
Day 1 Details:	13
Day 2- Digging Deeper into CVA:	14
Day 2 Details:	14
Day 3- A Field Visit Day:	1
Day 3 Details:	10
Day 4- A Final Talk:	1
Day 4 details:	1
Main Discussion Topics:	18





Middle East and North Africa

Participants Expectations:	
Solving our Problems Together Workshop:	19
Challenges Identified Across Regions:	21
Mitigation Measures:	23
Challenges Faced in the MENA CVA P2P Exchange Program:	24
Achievements of the MENA CCoE P2P Exchange Program:	25
Conclusion:	28





Middle East and North Africa

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Middle East and North Africa

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Definition of Terms

CCoE: Cash Center of Excellence

SARC: Syrian Arab Rec Crescent

LRC: Lebanese Red Cross

IRCS: Iraqi Red Crescent Society

IRCS: Iranian Red Crescent Society

NS: National Society

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

CVA: Cash and Voucher Assistance.

CVAP: cash and voucher assessment preparedness

DM: Disaster Management

INGOs: International nongovernmental Organizations

IFRC: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies







MENA Cash Center of Excellence

The MENA Cash Center of Excellence (CCoE) was established in 2021 as a regional resource, with the vision to support Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) strengthening of National Societies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Hosted by the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) and under the umbrella of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the CCoE focuses on various key areas to enhance CVA practices and capacity within the region.

MENA CCOE key Objectives

Knowledge Management and Learning: By facilitating knowledge sharing, the CCoE promotes learning and evidence-based practices in cash programming.

Advocacy on CVA: The MENA Cash Center of excellence advocates for the importance of cash assistance as an effective means to address humanitarian needs, promoting its use within the region.

Support in CVA Technical Strengthening: The CCoE aims to support in enhancing the technical capacity of National Societies in the MENA region by tackling the lessons learned from NSs interventions to effectively implement CVA programs.

Technical Content Contextualization: The MENA CCoE aims to Align CVA materials and resources (including guidance, tools, and training content/packages) to the MENA context. CCoE also aims to Translate CVA materials and resources (including guidance, tools, and training content/packages).



Middle East and North Africa

Collaborative Efforts

The MENA Cash Center of Excellence collaborates with partners such as the British Red Cross and the Movement's Cash Hub to ensure comprehensive support for CVA initiatives in the MENA region. By aligning its activities with strategic priorities outlined in IFRC's Strategy 2030 and Agenda for Renewal, the CCoE plays a crucial role in advancing cash programming within humanitarian contexts.

Impact and Reach

Through its initiatives and programs like the mentoring program and CVA peer-to-peer exchanges, the CCoE contributes significantly to building a more skilled network of CVA practitioners across the movement NSs in MENA region. The MENA Cash Center of Excellence stands as an essential center for advancing cash programming expertise, knowledge sharing and capacity building within the MENA region, ultimately strengthening humanitarian responses through effective cash and voucher assistance initiatives.

Overview of the MENA CVA Peer-to-Peer Exchange Program

The MENA Cash Center of Excellence (CCoE) Peer-to-Peer Exchange Program is a collaborative initiative aimed at exchange the cash and voucher assistance (CVA) skills and knowledge of National Society staff in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The program, coordinated by the MENA Cash Centre of Excellence, involves hosting exchange visits where professionals from MENA National Societies come together to expand their expertise. During these exchanges, CVA practitioners engage in sharing experiences, challenges, best practices, and learning based on the Movement's CVA competency framework. The program is structured to provide insights into host national society cash experience and programming, address concerns and questions



Middle East and North Africa

from guest national societies, and focus on topics of priority in the MENA region related to cash and youcher assistance

Through interactive sessions and workshops, participants enhance their capacity to implement effective CVA programs by learning from each other's experiences and gaining practical insights into cash programming strategies.

Overall, the MENA CCoE Peer-to-Peer Exchange Program provide to the NSs CVA practitioners a dynamic space for professionals to exchange knowledge, enhance skills, peer learning, and collectively work towards improving cash assistance initiatives in humanitarian contexts across the region, and in CVA within the MENA region.

Peer-to-Peer exchange program 2024

This year, The MENA CCoE aimed to organize its third MENA CVA Peer-to-Peer exchange program.

This report aims to provide an overview of the recent CVA Peer-to-Peer exchange program that brought together CVA practitioners from across four MENA National Societies.

By delving into the key objectives, activities, outcomes, and impact of the exchange, this report seeks to highlight the value and significance of peer learning in enhancing skills, promoting innovation, and driving excellence within the industry. Through this exploration, we aim to highlight the power of collaborative learning and the transformative potential of peer-to-peer exchanges in advancing professional development and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.





Middle East and North Africa

Summary:

The third MENA CVA Peer-to-Peer exchange program was organized in Tehran in collaboration with the Iranian Red Crescent Society. The Peer-to-Peer Exchange Program served as space for interactive discussions & learning, knowledge sharing, and skill development among participants.

Program Title: MENA Cash and Voucher Assistance Third Peer-to-Peer Exchange Program

Host National Society: Iranian Red Crescent Society

Guest national Societies:

- Lebanese Red Cross
- Syrian Arab red Crescent
- Iraqi Red Crescent society.

Program Date: March 3, 2024, until March 6, 2024

Program Duration: 4 Days

Host National Society

Iranian Red Crescent Society

The Iranian Red Crescent Society has been actively involved in humanitarian efforts, including receiving international humanitarian contributions through a financial channel opened with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. This initiative allows for the transfer of aids like medicine, food parcels, and relief items to support the Society's humanitarian response efforts. Additionally, the Iranian Red Crescent Society has faced challenges in receiving cash



Middle East and North Africa

donations due to sanctions, highlighting the importance of financial channels for humanitarian assistance. Despite all the challenges, the Iranian Red Crescent Society has been involved in providing cash and voucher assistance to disaster-affected families as an effective and transparent way of delivering humanitarian aid. This approach ensures that individuals have the freedom, dignity, and independence to make decisions regarding their recovery process. The Society's work in cash and voucher assistance focuses on empowering individuals to address a wide range of needs, including rent, food, education, healthcare costs, and other essential requirements. Additionally, the Iranian Red Crescent Society collaborates with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to enhance its capacity in delivering cash assistance, aiming to reach more people promptly and support communities in their recovery with dignity. Based on its extensive experience, Iranian Red crescent has been selected as a Host National society for the Third MENA CVA peer-to-Peer exchange program to share its valuable experience.

Guest National Societies:

Lebanese Red Cross

The Lebanese Red Cross has been working on providing cash and voucher assistance to support families affected by crises, such as the Beirut Port Explosion in August 2020. The LRC's response includes providing direct financial support to at least 10,000 families, with aid tailored to meet their basic needs and assisting in urgent repairs for damaged homes. LRC conducts door-to-door assessments to identify vulnerable families based on specific selection criteria, ensuring that the aid reaches those most in need. This approach of providing direct financial assistance allows for a dignified response that empowers individuals to prioritize their needs and supports the local economy by avoiding disruptions caused by in-kind aid. The Lebanese Red Cross was a Host National Society in the first round of Peer-to-Peer in 2022.



Middle East and North Africa

Syrian Arab Red Crescent

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) has been actively involved in providing cash assistance to affected individuals by distributing food, household items, shelter support, and cash aid. This initiative aims to support those impacted by crises, ensuring they receive essential assistance to meet their basic needs and facilitate their recovery process. The SARC's efforts in delivering cash assistance play a crucial role in addressing the humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent was a Host National society in the second round of Peer-to-Peer in 2023.

Iraqi Red Crescent Society

The Iraqi Red Crescent Society has been actively involved in providing cash assistance to vulnerable and affected groups in Iraq, especially in response to the social and economic challenges faced by the country. In 2022, the Red Crescent distributed cash grants to over 6,000 impacted and vulnerable families as part of its livelihood initiative. This initiative aimed to increase the resilience of the most vulnerable and affected groups in Iraq, addressing issues such as poverty, displacement, lack of services, and economic fragility. Iraqi Red Crescent participated as a guest National Society as well in the first peer-to-Peer exchange program organized with the Lebanese Red Cross.

Peer-to-Peer Exchange Methodology

The Peer-to-Peer exchange program was facilitated through a face-to-face program.

A Face-to-Face gathering for the MENA CVA practitioners aims to:





Middle East and North Africa

- Building Strong Relationships: Face-to-face interactions foster stronger relationships among the CVA practitioners, leading to enhanced trust, loyalty, and collaboration among them.
- Effective Communication: In-person meetings, lead to clearer and more effective communication compared to virtual interactions
- Interactive Learning: Having a Face-to-Face exchange program enables lively group discussions, hands-on activities, and real-time feedback, promoting deeper thinking, new perspectives, and skill development through peer-to-peer engagement.

Peer-to-Peer Exchange schedule:

The development of the MENA Cash Centre of Excellence's (CCoE) peer-to-peer schedule was conducted using a collaborative participatory approach, which involved engaging relevant stakeholders in the process to ensure that their perspectives and needs were considered. By utilizing this approach, the CCoE aimed to foster a collaborative and inclusive environment that encouraged the exchange of ideas and best practices among peers. The schedule also focused on the Cash and Voucher Assistance technical framework to ensure a consistent and competency-based approach. This framework serves as a comprehensive guide to reflect the specific cash and voucher assistance (CVA) areas for technical expertise. CVA technical competencies reflect the specific CVA areas technical expertise required for a surge response and do not replicate competencies already included in the Rapid Response core competencies.



General Schedule of the MENA CVA Exchange program:

DAY 1- More about CVA in MENA:

Session
Opening and Welcome
MENA CCoE Introduction-COP
Peer-to-Peer Exchange Program Overview
Let's Connect Workshop & Expectations
Coffee Break
Delving into CVA in MENA NSs
Lunch Break
Discussion-Reflection-Evaluation

Day 1 Details:

1- Opening and Welcome

Objective: Set the tone for the workshop, IFRC and Iranian Red Crescent welcomed participants, and the MENA CCoE provided an overview of the agenda.

2- MENA CCoE Introduction-COP

Objective: Introduce the MENA CCoE and CoP and their role across the MENA region.

3- Peer-to-Peer Exchange Program Overview

Objective: Provide an overview of the P-2-P.

4- Let's Connect Workshop & Expectations

Objective: Create a platform for participants to connect and establish expectations.

5- Delving into CVA in MENA NSs

Objective: Explore the context of cash and voucher assistance program within MENA NSs, and identify key challenges and opportunities. A guiding document was shared with all national societies to set a clear base for developing their presentations.





Day 2- Digging Deeper into CVA:

Session
Objectives of the Day
IRCS Presentations
Coffee Break
Solving Our Problems together (Challenges and Solutions)
Lunch Break
Discussion-Reflection-Evaluation

Day 2 Details:

1- Iran Red Crescent Presentations

Objective: a Space for the host national society to present its Ns, organogram, CVA projects, challenges, and plan.

2- Solving our Problems Together

Objective: Facilitate a collaborative problem-solving session where participants can collectively address challenges and share solutions related to cash and voucher assistance. The importance of a problem-solving workshop lies in its ability to bring together individuals or groups to address specific challenges, identify root causes, and develop effective solutions. The Problem-solving workshop provided a structured environment for collaboration, communication, and critical thinking, enabling participants to exert control over their environment and seize opportunities for improvement.



Day 3- A Field Visit Day:

Session
Gathering
Heading to Relief Rescue Organization
Arrival to Relief Rescue Organization
Coffee Break
Visit to Emergency Operation Center
Lunch Break
Heading to IRCS HQ
Meeting IRCS Leadership

Field visits play a crucial role in understanding the national society by providing firsthand experiences and interactions with various stakeholders and communities. This visit offered a unique opportunity for members to gain insights into the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of the national society. Here are key points highlighting the importance of the field visit in understanding the national society:

- Direct Engagement
- Contextual Understanding
- Insight into Local Realities

Promotion of Empathy and Tolerance: Field visits contribute to the development of empathy and tolerance among visitors by exposing them to diverse perspectives, cultures, and challenges within the national society.

Educational Value: Field visits serve as valuable educational experiences, offering participants the opportunity to learn about history, heritage, and social issues in a practical and immersive manner



Middle East and North Africa

Day 3 Details:

A field visit to various Red Crescent sectors in Iran was organized with the aim of providing participants with direct understanding into the diverse humanitarian activities undertaken by the organization across different sectors. This immersive experience allowed participants to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges, successes, and impact of Red Crescent initiatives in Iran.

- 1- Preparation and Schedule: Prior to the field visit, thorough planning was conducted to ensure a comprehensive tour that covered a range of sectors and activities. The program included visits to sectors such as healthcare, and disaster response.
- 2- Field Visit Highlights: Participants visited Red Crescent facilities in Relief and Rescue organization where they were introduced to the helicopter services, warehousing, and the Operation Room. They had the opportunity to interact with Iranian Red Crescent staff and volunteers and learn about the challenges and innovations in the Iranian Red Crescent work.



Day 4- A Final Talk:

Session
Objectives of the Day
IRCS Presentation
LRC Presentation
Final Ceremony with Leadership
Coffee Break
Leveraging our Strengths/Improving our Weaknesses
Lunch Break
Share Forward + Expectations

Day 4 details:

1- IRCS Presentation:

Presentation by representatives from the Iranian Red Crescent Society highlighting some CVA activities, and impact in Iran.

2- LRC Presentation:

Presentation by representatives from the Lebanese Red Cross introducing a new SP that they will soon work with which is Million Bridges.

3- Final Ceremony with Leadership:

Closing ceremony with remarks from leadership representatives of IRCS and MENA CCoE, acknowledging participants' contributions and achievements during the event.

4- Leveraging our Strengths/Improving our Weaknesses:

Interactive session focused on identifying organizational strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities for improvement and growth.

5- Share Forward + Expectations:

Sharing session where participants reflect on key takeaways from the workshop and articulate their expectations for future collaboration and engagement.





Middle East and North Africa

Participants set two specific goals or action items they commit to pursuing based on their learnings and discussions during the workshop.

Main Discussion Topics:

Participants Expectations:

The Expectations Workshop aimed to provide participants with an opportunity to articulate their expectations for the workshop, align goals, and foster a shared understanding of desired outcomes. This session sets the tone for productive engagement and collaboration throughout the workshop.

- 1- Know more about the Interventions already done by National Societies
- 2- Going deep into discussions about FSP what do National societies do in CVA
- 3- Know more about the implementations by using CVA
- 4- Know more about the challenges and how they face and solve it
- 5- Get Informative tools from other participating National Societies
- 6- Get introduced to delivery mechanisms used by participating national Societies
- 7- Know more about the challenges faced by other MENA national societies
- 8- Some mitigation measures taken by different MENA NSs to address different challenges faced
 - 9- Get familiar with CVA processes



Middle East and North Africa

Leveraging our Strengths & Improving our weaknesses

This Workshop was designed to bring together the professionals from National Societies in the MENA region to share experiences, best practices and lessons learned from CVA programming. This interactive workshop fostered a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in cash and voucher assistance (CVA) initiatives. The workshop was structured around facilitated peer engagement, where participants were divided into 2 groups to create discussion. This facilitated effective knowledge exchange and skill development among participants. Additionally, the workshop fostered confidence and commitment among peers, ensuring a supportive environment for learning and collaboration.

Each NS was asked to list the whole CVA project process, including the major actions in each project's steps with the most commonly used tools. (Be able to establish and distribute the toolkit. Next, identify the main obstacles facing CVA initiatives at various levels, categorize them into three categories: organizational, contextual, and operational, to identify the common challenges and determine the recommendations and solutions in two groups.



Middle East and North Africa

The Table below sums up the discussion topics that were tackled during the workshop:

	Assessment	Project Plan	Implementation	Monitoring	Partnerships
Iraqi Red Crescent	Kobo	*Excel for Duplication *Questionnaire for Verification		*PDM	
Lebanese Red Cross	*Market Assessment Tool *Focus Group *Discussion *Key Informative Interviews *LVCs	*Targeting Population *Budgeting *Log frame *Plan of Action *FSP Agreement *Transfer Value + Specific payments *MSNA Assessment *Scoring tool *Selection tool *MEI Assessment	*Distribution process defers according to project *Cash for Livelihoods: *Information Session *Business plan *Training for volunteers	*PDM *End lines	*Interagency meetings *Cash working groups
Syrian Arab Red Crescent	*Needs Assessment: *Focus group discussion *RAM *FSP Assessment *Analysis of all data report	*Targeting criteria *Log frame *Proposal *Baseline survey *End line survey *Verification *survey	*Training for Volunteers *Distribution Plan	*PDM *End line (survey or focus group discussion) *Lessons Learned	*Report *Financial Report
Iranian Red Crescent	Areas Affected Damage Severity of the disaster	Needs Assessment to be continued Resources Available	Gathering & Selection Transfer of money Needed is defined Distribution	Re-assessment of needs Reporting	Partnerships coordination implemented in every phase





Solving our Problems Together Workshop:

Overview:

The Challenges workshop aimed to identify key challenges faced by CVA practitioners working with MENA National Societies. Participants from Lebanese Red Cross, Iraqi Red Crescent, Syrian Arab Red Crescent, and Iran Red Crescent society brainstormed challenges and mitigation strategies through group collaboration and discussion. The workshop provided a platform for participants to share experiences, insights, and innovative solutions to address common obstacles faced in their national Societies.

Challenges Identified Across Regions:

1- Bureaucracy:

- Heavy bureaucratic processes leading to delays and inefficiencies in CVA related operations.
- One person holding multiple responsibilities, slowing down decision-making.
- Lack of clear communication channels internally and externally.

2- Absence of CVA Unit/Department/Sector:

 International affairs or other entities taking the lead on cash and voucher assistance (CVA), resulting in fragmented approaches.
 Lack of dedicated CVA unit or department within the organization, affecting coordination and implementation.

3- Monitoring:

- Limited monitoring activities, primarily relying on phone call monitoring without clear standard operating procedures (SOPs).
- Lack of systematic monitoring processes, leading to subjective assessments and insufficient data for decision-making.





Middle East and North Africa

4- Sanctions:

- Delays in fund disbursement and project implementation due to sanctions affecting financial transactions and exchange rates.
- Significant loss of budget value due to fluctuations in exchange rates and limited access to financial services.

5- Inflation:

- Volatile economic conditions leading to rapid inflation and fluctuations in exchange rates.
- Challenges in maintaining the value of transferred funds and ensuring equitable distribution to beneficiaries.

6- Financial Service Providers (FSP):

- Limited options for FSPs due to sanctions and banking system issues, leading to liquidity issues and fraud concerns.
- Dependency on a single FSP, affecting the reliability and efficiency of financial transactions.

7- Staff Turnover:

- High turnover rates among staff and volunteers, affecting institutional memory and continuity of operations.
- Challenges in recruitment, and capacity building due to instability and insecurity in the region.

8- Lack & Decrease in Funds





Middle East and North Africa

Mitigation Measures:

- 1- Identify Clearly The Needs Through Evidence
- 2- initiating Creative Ideas & Proposals Through A People Centered Approach
- 3- Value Based Reporting And Impact Evaluation
- 4- Risk Management and Advocacy:
- Implement risk management strategies to mitigate the impact of sanctions and inflation.
- Advocate for policy changes and diplomatic interventions to address bureaucratic challenges and financial constraints.
- 5- Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing:
- Conduct training needs assessments and provide shadowing opportunities to enhance staff capacity and skills.
- Facilitate knowledge sharing and transfer among staff and volunteers to address turnover issues and foster institutional resilience.
- 6- Financial Solutions and Creative CVA Proposals Design:
- Develop clear SOPs and streamline processes to reduce bureaucracy and accelerate decision-making.
- Improve proposal development and reporting processes to attract funding and demonstrate impact effectively.
- Dollarization
- 7- Partnerships and Outreach:
- Expand partnerships with NGOs and other stakeholders to diversify funding sources and increase project reach.
- Enhance outreach efforts to engage new partners and stakeholders in collaborative initiatives addressing common challenges.





Middle East and North Africa

Addressing the identified CVA challenges in the region requires a multifaceted approach, combining advocacy, capacity building, financial management, and partnership development. By implementing the proposed mitigation measures, organizations can enhance their resilience, effectiveness, and sustainability in delivering humanitarian assistance in challenging environments.

Challenges Faced in the MENA CVA P2P Exchange Program:

1- Selection Process for Host and Guest National Societies:

The intricate task of determining which National Societies would assume the roles of Hosts or Guests posed a challenge, requiring a meticulous assessment of their specific needs and capabilities to ensure effective participation in the program.

2- Coordination of Availability among Four National Societies:

Given the intricate nature of the MENA region and the ongoing commitments of all participants, scheduling a fixed date for the Peer-to-Peer exchange program spanning four consecutive working days presented a notable challenge for the CCoE.

3- Administrative Procedures and Visa Logistics:

Navigating the complex administrative procedures and visa requirements in the MENA region proved challenging in assembling participants from four different countries in a single location, such as Tehran.

4- Adaptation of Program Schedule:

Adjusting the program schedule proved challenging due to the interactive nature of the Peer-to-Peer exchange format, where spontaneous discussions



Middle East and North Africa

and extensive sharing of experiences made it difficult to adhere strictly to predefined session times.

5- Translation Challenges:

Technical obstacles within translation services, including connectivity issues, delayed smooth communication among participants, affecting the smooth communication and execution of program activities.

Achievements of the MENA CCoE P2P Exchange Program:

- 1- Successful Convening of Four National Societies: The program effectively brought together representatives from four national societies in a MENA country, facilitating collaboration and knowledge exchange among participants from diverse regions.
- 2- In-Depth Discussions on CVA from NSs perspectives: Cash focal points from MENA countries actively engaged in discussions centered on cash projects within their nations, exploring the implementation of various modalities in different contexts. These conversations led to the recognition of shared challenges across national societies, with valuable insights and solutions shared to address these common issues.
- 3- Exchange of Experiences and Global Cash Trends: Participants and technical advisors shared their experiences from working in diverse contexts and delved into discussions on emerging global cash trends, enriching their understanding of best practices and innovative approaches in cash programming.



Middle East and North Africa

- 4- Interactive Visits and Dialogues: Participants had the opportunity to visit Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) Departments, participating in open discussions on relevant topics deemed valuable to their National Societies, deepening their understanding of operational challenges and opportunities.
- 5- Strengthened CVA Connections: The program bolstered connections and communication among cash focal individuals in the MENA region, establishing a more streamlined communication network and fostering collaboration among participants.
- 6- Insights for Program Enhancement: Participants gained valuable perspectives on areas for improvement within their own cash programs in their respective national societies, enabling them to implement enhancements and optimize their cash assistance initiatives effectively.



Way Forward:

After the successful completion of the MENA CVA Peer-to-Peer Exchange Program, participants from the participating national societies should took the following steps to ensure the effective implementation of the knowledge and insights gained during the program:

- 1- Set Objectives: Each National society set at least two specific objectives for their Cash and Voucher assistance work, building upon the lessons learned and best practices shared during the exchange program.
 - a. Lebanese Red Cross:
 - i. Strengthening the Cash and Voucher Assistance for Livelihoods
 - ii. Develop National society CVA SOPs
 - iii. Carry on the CVAP Assessment
 - b Iranian Red Crescent
 - i. Develop SOPs
 - ii. Create a CVA Unit
 - c. Iraqi Red Crescent:
 - i. Capacity Building: Carry on PECT Training
 - ii. Expand options through mobile money as FSP
 - d. Syrian Arab Red Crescent:
 - i. Standard operating procedures in CVA
 - ii. Cash Mobile Transfer delivery mechanism
- 2- Establish Collaboration Mechanisms: To foster ongoing collaboration and knowledge sharing, national societies established communication and engagement with their peers from other national societies. This could include virtual meetings, working groups, or knowledge-sharing platforms, enabling



Middle East and North Africa

participants to continue learning from one another and building upon the relationships established during the exchange program.

Conclusion:

The MENA CCoE Peer-to-Peer Exchange Program for Cash and Voucher Assistance has been a resounding success, bringing together representatives from four national societies in the MENA region to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and enhance capacity in cash programming.

Through in-depth discussions, interactive visits, and the exchange of experiences, participants have not only identified common challenges and best practices but have also laid the foundation for ongoing collaboration and learning.

As we reflect on the outcomes of this program, it is evident that the MENA CCoE Peer-to-Peer Exchange has not only enriched the skills and knowledge of participants but has also established a platform for continuous learning, collaboration, and innovation in cash and youcher assistance.

Moving forward, it is imperative to build upon these successes, leverage the established networks, and continue to drive positive change in cash programming across the MENA region. The commitment, engagement, and dedication of all participants have been instrumental in the success of this program, and it is through such collaborative efforts that we can collectively strive towards more effective, efficient, and impactful cash and voucher assistance interventions in the MENA region.



Middle East and North Africa









