



Syrian Arab Red Crescent Evaluation of the 2023 Earthquake and 2023–2024 Winterisation Cash Assistance Responses

Inside the Report

1	Executive summary	01
2	Context: SARC Earthquake and Winterization Response 2023 - 2024	03
3	Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Response	05
4	Timeless, Scale, and Accountability	23
5	Recommendations	32
6	One Movement Approach for Cash Coordination	36
7	Annexes	40
8	Glossary	52

Executive summary

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) provided cash assistance to 204,635 people in response to the devastating earthquake that struck in February 2023. In addition, they assisted 122,525 vulnerable people to prepare for the winter ('winterisation'), covering both people in the earthquake-affected areas and vulnerable households in other rural areas. Together, these responses made up one of the largest cash operations that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) has implemented and contributed to SARC's position as the main actor delivering cash assistance in Syria.¹

SARC conducted an evaluation to assess the impact of the assistance on households, which included a desk review, post-distribution surveys, focus group discussions and one-to-one discussions with cash recipients, focus groups with SARC volunteers, interviews with key stakeholders. The evaluation demonstrates that the assistance reduced the burden on households of supporting their members and enhanced their overall wellbeing. Cash assistance helped reduce the use of damaging coping strategies like taking children out of school, halting medical treatment, and increasing debt. Households were more able to meet food needs, access housing and afford education, and there was a general increase in access to health care and medicines. Including a wellbeing approach in the evaluation allowed a more holistic and deeper understanding of people's life and priorities.

Through this evaluation exercise, SARC aimed to document the impact of the assistance and learn how to increase the impact of cash assistance in future programmes.

Key findings

- 1. In people's words cash assistance restored their dignity and alleviated the pressure of providing for families** for several months. The assistance improved the overall wellbeing of all family members, and helped prevent damaging coping strategies such as taking children out of school or resorting to less nutritious food options like using palm oil to feed children. People preferred receiving cash over other forms of assistance, and favour one larger instalment instead of monthly payments. This preference allowed them to plan their finances more effectively, offered a sense of security, and enabled significant investments in livelihoods or health care.
- 2. The operation's scale represents a significant achievement.** It was the largest cash operation in Syria that targeted Syrian nationals, and one of the largest within the Movement. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent played a crucial role as the initial responder following the earthquake. Between May 2023 and June 2024, SARC assisted 40,927 households (equivalent to 204,635 people), and this assistance programme is ongoing. Additionally, the winterisation programme provided aid to 24,505 households (equivalent to 122,525 people). SARC's prior presence in the affected areas, community knowledge, volunteer network, and access were essential for an effective response, enabling them to bridge gaps left by other organisations with limited access or funding.

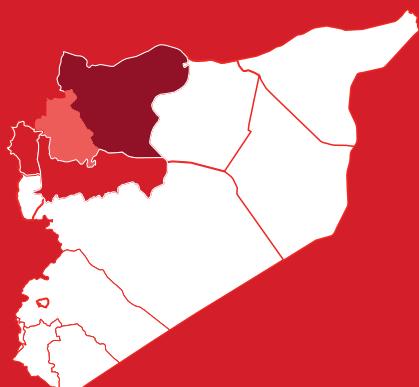
- 3. The timeliness of the response was significantly influenced by external factors and the emergency management approach.** The first effective cash distribution occurred in Hama on 23 May, just over three months after the earthquake. Coordination among humanitarian actors proved challenging, leading to the implementation of a new coordination system, the Ops Rooms, at the local level, which affected the pace of the response. Assistance couldn't begin until Ops Rooms were operational, and registration of affected populations depended on prior house damage assessments by civil engineers. SARC were only allocated geographical areas or lists of affected individuals for registration after this assessment had been carried out. However, once SARC had the beneficiary lists approved, it took an average of 34 days to distribute assistance. This is slower than the regular winterisation programme, which had an approval time of 13 days, offering a goal for improvement for future emergency operations in line with the Movement's ambitions for cash assistance.
- 4. Learnings from this evaluation indicate that there is scope for a more people-centred approach for cash assistance as a progress from existing feedback mechanisms.** SARC pioneered implementing a feedback mechanism and advocated for other organisations to start their own. People trust SARC, even if they aren't aware of the specific feedback mechanisms; they know they can approach the office for information and assistance. However, increased involvement of communities and information sharing are recommended to maintain the acceptance and trust SARC has built up and reduce social tensions in a context of increased needs and reduced humanitarian funding.
- 5. Inflation has adversely affected people's ability to meet their needs.** Those assisted earlier in 2023 expressed higher satisfaction with the assistance. The transfer value remained unchanged, but rising prices made it challenging for households assisted in late 2023 and early 2024 to meet their needs as **purchasing power** was significantly reduced. This situation requires a coordinated response by humanitarian actors and national stakeholders as it will influence any future actions. SARC could play a key role advocating for this coordination to happen since it understands community needs and the impact of assistance.
- 6. SARC's leadership support at national and branch level, together with their capacity and previous experience, significantly facilitated cash assistance.** Externally, SARC played a crucial role at both the national and governorate levels, advocating for the acceptance and integration of cash assistance within the earthquake operation. The ongoing **Cash Preparedness Programme**, aligned with broader Preparedness for Effective Response and National Society Development plans, offers an opportunity to strengthen SARC's technical capacity for cash assistance and requires leadership support to adjust systems to enhance speed, scale, and accountability in emergencies.
- 7. The One Movement Approach for cash coordination** proved effective. While SARC led the earthquake response, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IFRC) provided membership coordination, and in-country Partner National Societies (PNS) managed the technical working group. The structure capitalised on the existing collaboration between SARC and PNS across sectors. While SARC remained central to decision-making, this approach prevented duplication of effort. British Red Cross assumed the role of cash coordination lead, allowing the SARC Cash and Vouchers Assistance (CVA) Unit to focus on implementation, with a positive impact on the response speed.

CONTEXT

SARC Earthquake and Winterisation Responses 2023–2024

On 6 February 2023, a series of earthquakes struck the border between southern Turkey and northern Syria. The two strongest earthquakes measured magnitudes of 7.8 and 7.5, accompanied by over 9,000 aftershocks. While the quake was felt throughout Syria, the most significant impact occurred in the Governorates of Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, Homs, and Latakia. These earthquakes exacerbated existing needs, affecting approximately 8.8 million people, displacing hundreds of thousands, and causing damage to over 390,000 homes, 2,149 schools, and 241 health facilities. Tragically, the disaster resulted in the loss of over 5,900 lives and left more than 12,800 people injured, as reported by health sector authorities and the Ministry of Health.

Cash Transfer Programming Earthquake response



Between April 2023 and May 2024, **SARC assisted more than 40,927 households, or the equivalent of 204,635 people, with cash assistance.** The assistance was 'multipurpose', meaning recipients could spend it as they chose.

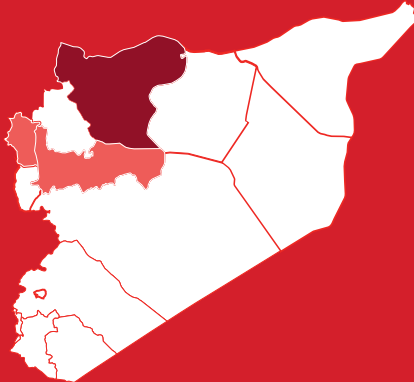
The assistance was agreed by the National Cash Working group and consisted of a one-off cash transfer to cover three months' needs. The value of the transfer was based on the 'minimum expenditure basket', (MEB) – a calculation of what a household requires in order to meet basic needs and its average cost – and stands at 1,050,000 SYP per month (USD 84 aprox).

Expenditure type	% of MEB	MED (SYP)
Food	65.13%	683,247
Hygiene	9.49%	99,55
Communication	0.87%	9,127
Energy	2.99%	31,367
Transport	6.74%	70,706
Health	4.53%	47,522
Clothing	4.53%	41,647
Housing & utilities	4.53%	37,032
Education	2.27%	23,813
Social events	0.48%	5,035
TOTAL	100%	1,049,052

All transfers were made through the Al Fouad remittance company, with whom SARC have a long-term service agreement. Local offices for cash distribution continued working despite the earthquake, and Al Fouad has extensive coverage throughout the affected areas.

For partners without their own agreements with financial service providers (FSPs), SARC’s CVA unit facilitated the transfer through Al Fouad. If partners had an existing contract with another FSP, SARC’s CVA unit provided the anonymous beneficiary data (using unique identifiers) directly to that FSP to facilitate the cash transfer using a tripartite agreement between SARC, the partner and the FSP.

Winterisation assistance 2023/2024



The goal of this project is to help vulnerable families affected by the earthquake meet their needs (clothing, fuel for heating, health, and other basic needs) during the winter season 2023-2024.

1. Families whose homes were destroyed were given a code black through the operating room.
2. Families who were issued evacuation orders and were given code red through the operating room.
3. Families who have a member with special needs.
4. Families who suffer from one of the following vulnerabilities (loss of a breadwinner, the elderly, chronic diseases, children under five years old).

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent’s winterisation project aims to support vulnerable households to meet their specific winter needs (e.g., fuel, winter clothes, and shoes) by providing multipurpose cash assistance during the coldest months of the year. **The total number of people assisted is 24,505 households, equivalent of 122,525 people.**

For the 2023/2024 period, the programme had two components:

- Winterisation Earthquake Response: implemented in the earthquake affected areas.
- Winterisation Regular: supported vulnerable households in rural areas.

The assistance consisted of 3,000,000 SYP (USD 238 approx.) transferred in one instalment. The value was defined by SARC through a market assessment conducted in September 2023 following the recommendations from the Shelter Cluster in Syria winter package and aligned with other actors’ assistance for similar purposes.

	Earthquake Response	Winterisation Response
Programme Objective	Earthquake affected families are provided with unconditional, multipurpose cash grants to address their basic needs in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake (emergency response).	To support vulnerable households to meet their specific winter needs
Households reached	40,927	24,505
Amount provided	3,150,000 SYP	3,000,000 SYP
Number of instalments	1	1
Delivery method	Remittance company Al Fouad	Remittance company Al Fouad

For more details on SARC cash assistance please refer to Annexes in this document.

3

Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Responses

Key questions



- To what extent was the project successful in achieving the identified outcomes?
- How relevant was the programme from the perspective of the recipients? What impact did it have on their wellbeing?
- To what extent are the projects' achievements sustainable beyond the life of the projects?
- How appropriate was the project design (selection criteria, targeting, services, conditionality, partnerships, coordination, etc.) with regard to the objectives they intended to achieve?

Key findings

- 1. Households' and individuals' common priorities included food, medicines and health services, housing, and education.** However their reported basic needs depend on their personal situations and whether they live in urban or rural areas. The diverse ways people have used the cash assistance reinforce the goal of multipurpose cash assistance, which allowed them the freedom to prioritise according to their needs.
- 2. People preferred cash assistance over other forms of aid** because it gave them autonomy in deciding how to use the funds. When asked about their priorities if they were to receive assistance again, people would prefer a larger amount that would allow them to invest in their livelihoods, or a combination of cash with basic needs in kind so they could use the cash to invest in livelihoods. Recipients also expressed a preference for a single instalment rather than multiple smaller ones. A lump sum allowed better financial planning, provided a sense of security, and enabled strategic decisions and investments in house reconstruction or debt repayment.
- 3. People said that cash assistance restored their dignity,** alleviated the burden of providing for their families for a few months, and positively affected the wellbeing of all family members. The assistance also played a crucial role in preventing damaging coping mechanisms, such as withdrawing children from school or accumulating irreversible debts. Additionally, it reversed negative food-related coping strategies, like resorting to palm oil for feeding children or using garbage and animal waste as fuel for cooking.

4. While everyone expressed gratitude to SARC for the assistance, the evaluation found that satisfaction levels were higher among those who received aid earlier in 2023. High inflation² led to significant price increases later in the year, while the transfer value remained unchanged. As a result, **the purchasing power of households assisted in late 2023 or early 2024 was reduced.**
5. **An essential priority for individuals was using the assistance to cancel debts.** Being able to pay off debts was felt as dignifying. Households incur debts through buying necessities like food and medicines, which puts a lot of pressure on households. For those whose homes were damaged by the earthquake, expenses related to repairs and rent further pushed people into significant debt.
6. The **winterisation assistance** for earthquake-affected populations was delivered between February and March 2024, later than the regular winterisation provided in December/January, mainly due to changes in the Ops Room system (this emergency management mechanisms and impact on the response are explained in the next section of this report). Not an objective of the programme, yet the assistance arrived on time for Ramadan and Eid celebrations, and this was enormously appreciated by recipients.
7. **The project's goal of supporting basic needs was appropriate,** although complementary shelter and recovery assistance are also necessary. Increased community engagement and accountability (CEA), especially after the initial emergency moments when more capacity was available, would have benefitted people's understanding the objectives of the assistance. Using community engagement to define winterisation assistance selection criteria could have led to a more accurate targeting. The focus group participants and key stakeholders pointed out that programmes should have been flexible to adapt over time to account for inflation and take into consideration household size.



Imagine not having money in your pockets for months, you must lower your head any time you go out as you walk next to people you owe money. And then suddenly you have money in your pocket, you can pay your debts, and feel a person again. It gave us dignity.”

Female focus group participant

We have no debts; we have recovered dignity.”

Female, PLWD group interviewee

We had lost hope and then cash assistance came and restored our hope. There is something good in life again.”

Male focus group participant

My children always ask me why I am sad. I am worried because we don't have money for our needs. When assistance arrived, they saw me smile and we were all happy.”

Female focus group participant

This Ramadan was like kissing God. I felt the richest person in the world because I could take care of my children.”

Male focus group participant



The assistance alleviated people’s pressure to provide for their families and improved their wellbeing. Households were better able to meet food needs and there was a general increase in access to health as they prioritised treatments they could not otherwise have afforded. Some recipients were able to plan for their future and invest in livelihood-related initiatives. Paying off debts also restored their dignity and confidence. Wellbeing analysis provided a holistic overview of the impact of the assistance by linking material conditions to other aspects that allow a better understanding of people’s life and priorities.



Cash assistance came like a drop of water in dry land.”

Male focus group participant

Cash is good as it gave you liberty to buy whatever you needed.”

Female focus group participant

The assistance was good, but it is just assistance, and it is not enough for all we need.”

Male focus group participant



How people used the cash

People have a large variety of needs and priorities depending on their personal situation, whether they live in urban or rural areas, and which governorate they live in³.

Main priorities mentioned	Priorities recipients used the assistance for
Food, medicines and health services, accommodation/shelter, livelihoods, education, electricity, fuel, and water.	Food, medicines and health services including surgery, house repairs and rent, debt, education, winter clothes and shoes for children. Mentioned, but less common, household items and appliances, investment in livelihoods.

The way people used the money was influenced by their personal circumstances but also by the reason for the assistance (earthquake or winterisation) and the moment when they received the assistance. In general, children and children’s wellbeing were the main priority for all recipients, and an important part of the assistance was used to support their needs.

Food was mentioned as a priority by all focus group participants and interviewees. The distribution of food parcels in Syria has seen a significant decrease, most people no longer receive any form of assistance, leaving them to cover the gap themselves. This has increased households’ expenditure on food. A large part of the debt people have is with grocery shops. The assistance made it possible for recipients to access better quality and more diverse food, including meat, vegetables, and special food for infants like milk powder. People mentioned that the assistance enabled them to afford better food for about two to three months.



My children were dreaming of chicken. With the cash I bought chicken and wood, I made fire, gave my children a hot bath and we all had chicken.”

Female focus group participant





Housing expenses, either rent or repairs, were listed second. People whose houses have been damaged by the earthquake prioritised repairs so they could remain in or return to their home, as they could not afford rent. The assistance was intended for basic needs, which this includes some housing related expenses, but the amount provided was not enough to repair severely damaged houses. In some cases, where apartment buildings had been damaged, and all the residents received cash assistance, neighbours coordinated and invested in repairing communal areas. However, the cost of making good major structural damage was too high and they hope for specific assistance from the Government. Other housing-related expenses included items like batteries to ensure longer hours of electricity. In two cases, women mentioned buying manual washing machines.

Home repairs and facilities are a top priority also for individuals in rural areas, notably for displaced people who are returning to their original homes. Electricity is especially important where they have no electricity, and in a few cases, people invested in solar panels. They also bought doors and windows to protect themselves from weather conditions and safer houses.

Winter-specific items, like winter clothes and shoes, especially for children, blankets and mattresses, were also mentioned.



Medicines and health services are a significant financial burden for families and account for a large part of their debts. The assistance helped people access health care and treatments. This was critical for households with members who have disabilities or chronic illnesses and require regular medications and hygiene products. Several families said they had prioritised surgery they had been waiting for long time, especially for children and members with disabilities. People also said they had accessed better quality specialist health services, such as being able to visit specialists in Damascus and obtaining special care to children with disabilities.



Debt is an important stressor for households, and they have prioritised paying debts with the assistance. In some cases, up to 80% of the assistance was used to pay debts. Many people reported having debts for the first time due to the earthquake because they lost their homes and had to rent a house or execute major repairs. One of the households interviewed shared a story that is representative of many people's situations. The family lost their house in the earthquake and the sole breadwinner was injured trying to rescue his neighbour. His new disability situation means he is not able to continue his previous job as a driver. Inevitably they had to borrow money, it was the first time for them to have debts and that felt very shameful for them.



We had a large debt with the bakery. The day I received the money I went there with the children; I paid the debt and bought all the bread we wanted to eat.”

Female focus group participant



Despite all those we interviewed saying they priority is **livelihoods**, only some were able to use part of the money for income generation activities. For most people, there was not enough money left over after covering basic needs to invest in livelihoods. Those that received two payments, earthquake assistance and then winterisation support, were more likely to invest in livelihoods.



We need employment opportunities; we want to live with dignity and not looking for assistance.”

Female focus group participant



Education is a priority for all families, and they all spent some of the cash on school materials and fees to enable children to continue or resume education. In rural areas, access to basic education and school items were the main priorities; in urban areas people prioritised all levels, basic, high school and university.

In general, all focus group participants cited children and their wellbeing as their main priority, and an important part of the assistance was used to support their needs.



We need children to go to school, to have a better future and take care of us when we are old.”

Male focus group participant



Differences between groups



Women especially appreciated being able to afford food and having fuel and gas for cooking instead of having to searching for wood or use waste to make fire, as it is faster and more hygienic. Some women bought manual washing machines, which was especially important for those caring for people living with disabilities. One woman mentioned repairing the house being important as a damaged house can be unsafe for women.



Households with members living with disabilities valued being able to use the assistance to access better quality health services and specialist education. Hygiene items like diapers for children and adults were mentioned constantly as important. In all groups, people mentioned using the money to access treatments they had postponed for a long time, especially for children.



Rural people prefer to travel to larger towns and cities to buy what they need, because everything is more expensive in small shops in rural areas.



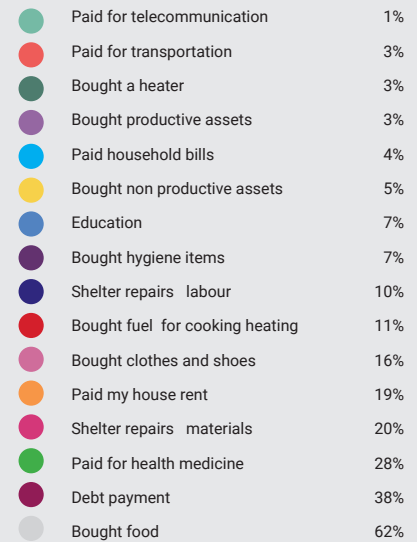
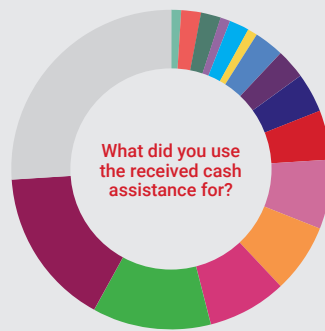
Urban people, especially in Latakia, invested more in higher education including university.

[For more details on SARC cash assistance please refer to Annexes in this document.](#)

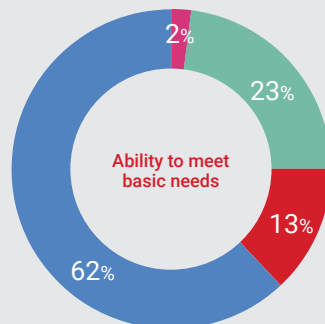
Post distribution monitoring⁴

Basic needs

A survey conducted following distribution of the cash collected similar data regarding recipients' basic needs priorities being of food, debt, health and medicines and housing-related needs.



Post-distribution reports show that 23% of recipients were able to cover most of their basic needs, 62% covered some, while only 2% were able to cover all their needs. For 13%, the cash covered none of their basic needs.



Impact on people's wellbeing⁵ and communities

Wellbeing, or living well, encompasses people's physical, social, and mental conditions, the fulfilment of their basic needs and capabilities, and the opportunities and resources they can access. This section explores mental health, choice and social relations, and complements the previous aspects focused on material needs, physical health, and people's priorities and capacity to meet those.

Wellbeing Domains	 1. Material conditions	 2. Health	 3. Safety & Security	 4. Social relations	 5. Freedom of choice and action
Encompasses	A person’s material conditions, including their ability to meet basic needs for food, work, housing, and shelter	Physical health, mental health, access to health services	Personal safety, safe access to resources, protection from or in times of disasters, safety of housing/ shelter, safety at work, and safety from environmental hazards	Social cohesion, mutual respect, ability to provide and receive help, involvement in the community	Opportunities to do and be what they want as per their values, equal rights for women and girls, equal access to education, ability to choose occupation or lifestyle, time and space for recreation

Source: BRC & ICRC wellbeing guidance

The wellbeing concept and questions were contextualised with support from the SARC team to ensure they are culturally appropriate and accepted by participants. Questions for both men and women were formulated as inquiring about people’s feelings and pressure to provide for their families, impact on households’ internal and community relations, and people’s capacity to make other life decisions beyond covering basic needs.



Before the assistance I was always sad, now I smile again.”

FGD participant

I used the money to pay six months’ rent. Now I feel good and with peace of mind.”

FGD participant

Before the assistance I thought I would spend all Ramadan crying, then assistance came, and we could afford food and drinks to celebrate. It was like a gift from God.”

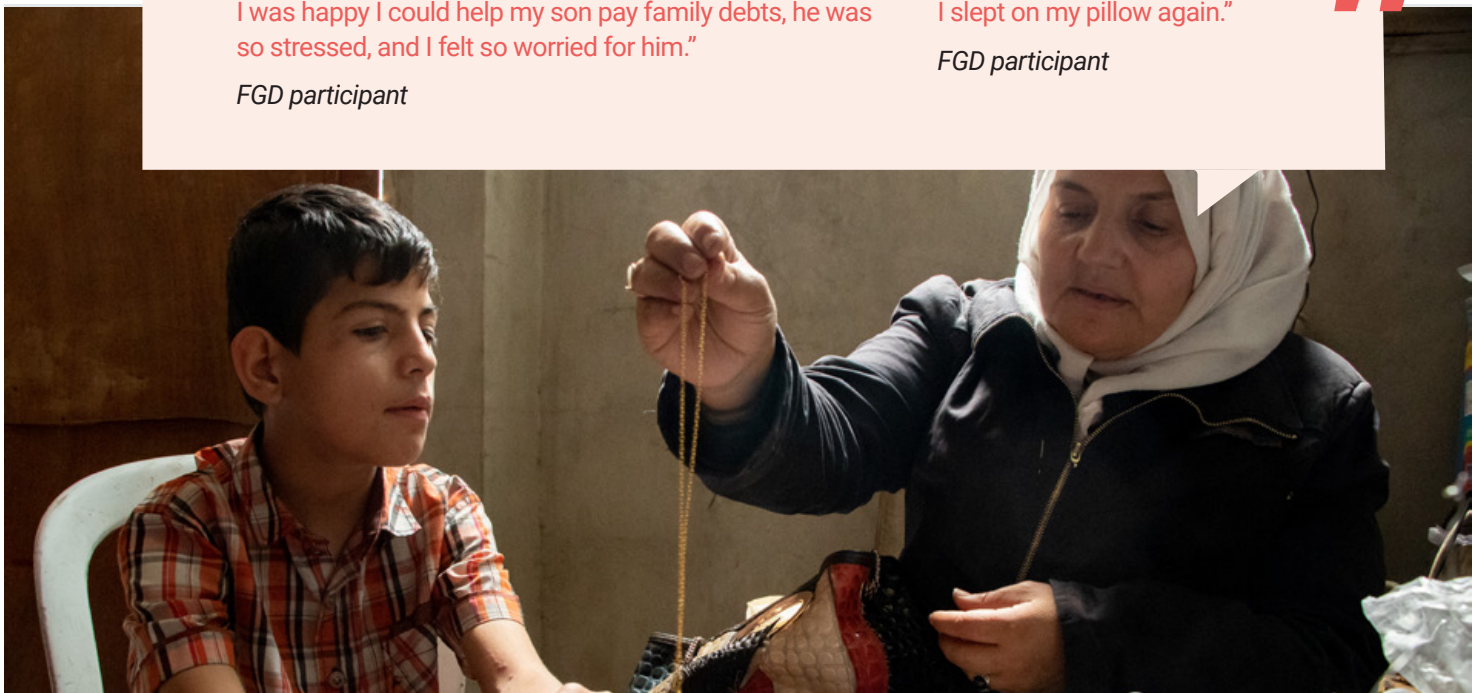
PLWD KI

I was happy I could help my son pay family debts, he was so stressed, and I felt so worried for him.”

FGD participant

I slept on my pillow again.”

FGD participant





Mental health

Cash assistance was perceived as a stress reliever for the entire family. It enabled them to cover their needs, reduced pressure and made them feel positive and motivated about the future. A common message was that all family members felt happy when they received the assistance.

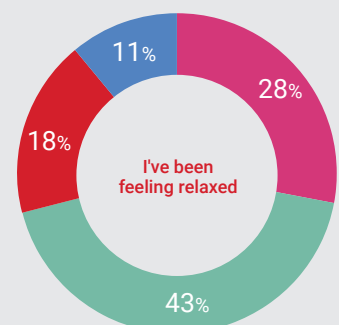
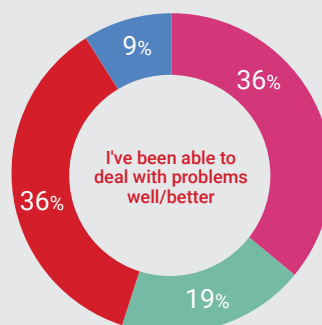
Impacts of the assistance reported by focus group participants include:

- Increased feelings of happiness and positivity.
- Motivation for the future.
- Reduced pressure to provide for the family.
- People expressed feeling more relaxed and positive about life.
- Relief that they would have food, at least for some time.
- Feelings of dignity and self-respect after paying off debts.
- Reduced stress and pressure because they could afford medical treatments and health care that were previously unattainable.
- Parents shared children’s happiness when they could buy them new clothes and shoes.
- School items (notebooks, pen, school bags, etc.) motivated children to attend school.
- Parents felt satisfied when they could keep children in school.
- They could buy items perceived as more permanent (a carpet, a door, lighting, etc.) beyond just food.

Findings from post-distribution monitoring⁶

Wellbeing: The post-distribution survey included questions about wellbeing after receiving the assistance, although there is no baseline information for comparison.

- **55%** of interviewed reported feeling they could deal better with problems.
- **46%** reported feeling good about themselves all or most of the time.
- **48%** of people reported feeling relaxed all or most of the time.





Household's relations



We were a family again. I could buy some sweets for my children and a gift for my wife, and we felt special.”

FGD participant

We could sit together, share drinks (coffee and tea) and talk as a family about how we will use the money.”

Focus group participant

I did not receive anyone at home for long time because I was ashamed that I couldn't offer anyone tea. Now I can receive guests, I can invite them to drink.”

Focus group participant

We had smiles again in our house.”

Focus group participant



Cash assistance has reduced the stress and that has improved family relationships.

Men and women recognise they sometimes have different priorities, but they solved their differences quickly as basic needs were priorities for everyone. No major incidents were reported. In the case of those whose houses had been heavily affected by the earthquake, all members agreed the priority was repairing the house.

Ramadan and Eid celebrations were an important source of happiness for people. For some of them, it had been up to five years since they last celebrated or bought new clothes for children for Eid. For adults, being able to buy clothes, sweets and gifts for their children was a great source of happiness. Children were happy and so parents were happy too.

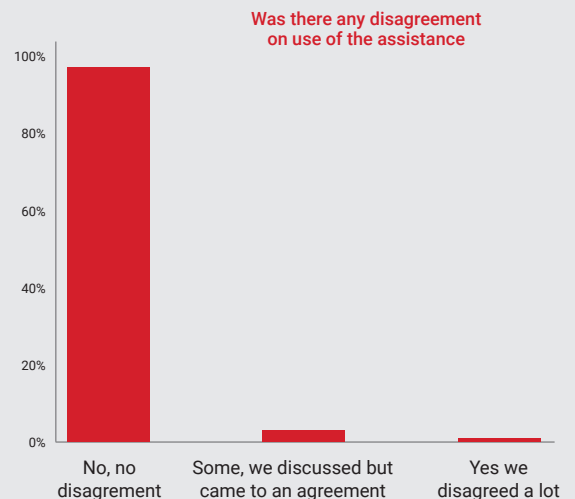
There were some cases of tensions and even relationship breakdown when relatives asked people who had received cash assistance to share their money and they refused. But there are also examples of people sharing cash to help family members.

Findings from post-distribution monitoring

Households' decision making

More than 60% of people answering the survey said that decisions on the use of money were made jointly between the man and woman head of the household. 96% said they had no disagreements while 3 % had some but resolved them and 1% of respondents affirms disagreed a lot.

Who in your household decides what to do



Personal decisions and use of the assistance beyond basic needs

People prefer cash to other forms of assistance as it allows them to make their own decisions about what they need. Because the cash was intended to support basic needs and respond to the emergency, the amount was not significant enough to lead to give them space to plan and make significant life decisions. Nevertheless, people were able to make some decisions and take actions they couldn't before and have a sustained impact such as accessing health care, education and for some people, investing in livelihoods.

When asked about life decisions, participants in the focus groups talked about livelihoods, education, and medical treatments and surgery. Examples include:

- Paying school fees for a child with special education needs.
- Supporting children's education. A representative example is the woman who said she convinced her son to continue studying because the assistance provided enough money to cover the family's basic needs for some time.
- Asking for credit to complement the assistance and start an income generating activity with the objective to save money and buy a house in the future.

Community relations

Some stress and tensions were mentioned in communities where not everyone received cash assistance. Lack of clear information on who was targeted for assistance, why they were targeted and when assistance would arrive were the main reason for tensions. As the timing of payments for earthquake assistance depended on house damage assessments, and different organisation were responsible for these in different areas, sometimes adjacent, people were confused about the process and what to expect. Not being able to explain to others why they had received assistance created a rift between recipients and non-recipients.

However, what was more commonly shared was solidarity. People constantly expressed their concerns for people in need who had not received assistance and called for them to be assisted.

In earthquake-affected areas where all neighbours were assisted, the situation was good and even improved. In some cases, people who lived in apartment buildings planned together for repairs. But this was not always the case, and when people did not have the same priorities, differences arose among neighbours.

More generally, for a few communities, the economic situation improved slightly as hundreds of people paid their debts and could afford to buy more items, thus injecting more cash into the local economy.



Other impacts of the assistance and sustainability beyond the life of the projects

Provided as humanitarian assistance, the cash response was not intended to support resilience; however, it had positive long-lasting impacts through enabling people to access health services and treatments, enabling children to continue education, enabling livelihood investments, and boosting local markets.



Markets

Initially, the evaluation included a market impact assessment, but this was later dropped since early scoping showed that the assistance had no impact on prices and product availability, for several reasons.

Markets in Syria's earthquake affected areas were functional and not significantly affected. Priority was given to urban areas where markets systems include a large variety of vendors, especially for basic products, who are not limited to one marketplace but spread throughout the area. Moreover, people are accustomed to traveling to buy what they need where prices are more favourable and are not restricted to one area. Furthermore, the cash assistance was delivered over a long period from April 2023 up to June 2024, meaning there was not one huge injection of money at the same time in the same area.

All respondents and focus group participants agreed that inflation, not the cash assistance, was the reason for the price increases. Regarding availability of products, only medicines were a concern due to not always being available, but again, this was seen to be influenced by health policies and not the cash assistance.

Two unrelated charity actions influenced prices. In-kind distribution of food during Ramadan caused food item prices to drop. The opposite happened when food parcels stopped, and prices went up.

While no negative impacts were identified, a few positive impacts were highlighted:

- Markets were refreshed as people had money and could buy more products, leading to a perception of increased economic activity in the area.
- As people paid their debts, vendors were able to restock, so more products were available to buy.
- Paying debts restored vendors' trust in their customers, and people feel that they will be able to access credit again in the future if they need to.

However, the situation is a bit different in rural areas where people get credits from local vendors but when they have resources they prefer buying in urban areas as prices are lower in cities. This means they paid their debts locally but they travelled to urban markets to purchase goods with the assistance.



[There were] no negative impacts. Vendors were happy because we paid our debts, and they recovered their money. And we regained their trust."

Focus group participant





Livelihoods

The assistance was not aimed at developing livelihoods, but those who could prioritised income generation activities as they wanted to be independent of humanitarian assistance.

Those who received both earthquake and winterisation assistance, and people with a better previous situation, were more likely to invest in livelihoods. This was also the case for households that also received assistance from different organisations, allowing them to prioritise cash for livelihoods-related purposes. The poorer the people, the less capacity they had for saving and investment, as they needed all the cash to pay debts and cover basic needs.

Livelihoods activities started with the cash assistance included:

- Agriculture-related activities: buying goats to sell milk; raising chickens for consumption and sale; buying seeds for farming.
- Trade: selling handcrafts such as traditional headbands and bracelets; buying and selling makeup and hygiene products; buying a cart to sell vegetables; opening a shop together with a neighbour; buying a popcorn machine and selling popcorn.
- Services provision: Buying tools to start an electronic repair business. Sewing was mentioned several times, although it is limited due to lack of electricity and not always a feasible option. Some women bought sewing machines, and one managed to repair one she already had.
- Other: Saving part of the assistance with the hope of accessing credit to complement it for livelihood activities.

However, most households continue to have unmet needs and require longer-term support to build resilience.

Opportunity for wider impact in case of future assistance

When asked for recommendations on how to design higher impact programmes, people recommended we continue to provide cash and, if possible, provide complementary assistance as well. This is so they don't need to spend the cash on basic needs but can use it to invest in livelihoods.

This could be done using 'Cash Plus', or complementary programming, where different modalities and/or activities are combined to more effectively meet people's needs. Cash is the core activity, but it is complemented by additional support. Types of complementary assistance mentioned were medicines and health care, food and hygiene kits, and livelihoods assets.



Project design appropriateness

The project design was led by SARC HQ, with input from branches, which provided information about cash feasibility. SARC worked in close coordination with other humanitarian actors. Targeting and selection for earthquake assistance were informed by the Government response, and the Cash Working Group (CWG)'s instructions on transfer value and instalments were followed for the earthquake, while Shelter and Relief sectors guidance informed winterisation assistance.

Targeting, registration and selection criteria; deduplication; Protection, Gender and Inclusion

- **Targeting for earthquake assistance:** Following the Government's decision that all people with damaged homes would be assisted, people were referred directly by Ops Rooms. Families presented the certificate of evaluation by the engineers that demonstrated shelter damage. There were two eligibility criteria: people must have partially or completely lost their home due to the earthquake and must not be receiving any other assistance. At a later stage, to solve disputes around who was to be assisted, the Ops Room instructed humanitarian actors to assist both homeowners and renters.
 - It was perceived as positive since all people were assisted.
 - However, not all households have the same level of vulnerability and capacity to recover, but they all received the same assistance and people feel priority must be given to those more in need.
- **Registration for earthquake assistance:** In Aleppo and Hama, people who had been evacuated were invited to register at the SARC office, and people's whose homes were coded orange and yellow for damage were registered by volunteers visiting their homes. This was possible because SARC was assigned geographical areas. In Latakia, the Ops Room shared lists which were not organised geographically, which complicated the logistics. To avoid delays and speed up the process, SARC opened registration points, and everyone was invited to register at the closest point.
 - People appreciated SARC visiting their houses for registration and the attention received from volunteers.
 - Consider alternatives solutions for people with mobility limitations, elderly or those that can't afford the cost of transportation to reach registration points/ offices.
- **Targeting for the winterisation assistance:** SARC's disaster management database was used to select the most vulnerable people for the regular winterisation assistance programme. For the earthquake winterisation programme, vulnerability criteria were applied to the existing database to select the most vulnerable people among the earthquake-affected population. For areas not covered by the available database, SARC asked official representatives of the municipality to provide lists of vulnerable people meeting the criteria. The vulnerability criteria used were very general, and participants in the evaluation felt that some vulnerable people were excluded.
 - The process was fast and provided a safety net as continued assistance to former beneficiaries.
 - Including socioeconomic criteria, updating the internal database, and developing a verification method could help reduce inclusion and exclusion errors.
- **Registration for the winterisation assistance:** People were selected from existing databases (see above) and therefore were already registered with SARC, so there was no need for a second registration.
 - It was positive that no additional registration was required, avoiding people's fatigue and the process was fast.

- **Selection criteria scoring system:** Initially, SARC developed a robust selection criterion scoring method to ensure the programme targeted the most vulnerable people. However, as the Government decided selection criteria for the earthquake programme, and general disaster management vulnerability criteria were applied for the Winterisation programme, so the scoring system was only used for the winterisation assistance for earthquake-affected populations.
 - The system could be used in the future to revise and update the database of vulnerable people.
 - It is recommended to develop a guidance and complement the scoring with a sample verification system.
- **Verification:** Verification was done by checking documents that certified people’s circumstances. For earthquake-affected individuals, verification involved the house damage certificate produced by the Ops Room engineers. For winterisation programmes, documents verified included the family book, which provided information about the civil status of the family and its members, and medical certificates that prove disabilities and chronic diseases and conditions.
 - Documents provide objective evidence of the conditions.
 - A sample in-house verification of households’ vulnerability could help with more accurate targeting. Many focus group participants requested setting up more accurate systems for targeting and verifying the vulnerability of the households.
- **De-duplication:** Deduplication was done by the Ops Room for the earthquake response and by SARC for the winterisation programme. Duplication of assistance from more than one organisation was more common in Latakia, where many organisations distributed assistance without coordination in the first months of the emergency but have left since. No duplication was reported in Aleppo or Hama. Only one household with a member with disabilities reported receiving regular assistance from other organisations and has been supported with emergency and winterisation. Partners expressed their interest in SARC leading deduplication for cash assistance for all actors in the future, as they do for the Relief sector.
 - It was good that a system like this was set up for the first time and could be standardised for the future.
 - More capacity is required for the organisation managing the system for a fast process.
- **Protection, Gender and Inclusion:** SARC’s vulnerability criteria included women-headed households and people living with disabilities and severe or chronic diseases as priority groups. To ensure women were not left out, they registered women as beneficiaries and gave households the option to choose who would collect the assistance, which could be another household member. This approach allowed also people with disabilities to register as beneficiaries and appoint another member of the household to collect the assistance.
 - The approach was seen as positive and was well accepted by the beneficiaries.
 - In future, the system must take into consideration the inclusion of other groups apart from women and people with disabilities, such as elderly people. Some people faced high travel costs to reach the remittance agency, for example if they had to hire a car.

Assistance: restrictions, transfer value and delivery mechanisms

- **Restrictions:** There were no restrictions on how people used the cash. This approach was seen as appropriate as people noted they have multiple and different priorities, and they appreciate the dignity of choice. Past experiences using vouchers proved less successful, as people exchanged them for things they didn't need. For in-kind food parcels, people would sell items to buy other things. Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance gave them the freedom to choose.
 - All recipients appreciated the flexibility of cash.
- **Transfer value:** The value of the cash assistance was agreed in the national CWG as the full minimum expenditure basket (MEB) to be paid monthly for three months to all households, regardless of size. The amount was based on the cost of the MEB in 2022 and was not updated. Most focus group participants and key informants reiterated that the amount should have been updated as inflation significantly escalated between May and December 2023, affecting the cost of living. It was also recommended that the amount be adapted based on household size. SARC has been advocating for an update of the amount. Although the transfer value covers only the MEB, current salaries in Syria are far below this, so the assistance value had to consider the socioeconomic context to avoid creating social conflict.
 - The amount was appropriate in the first months but not later in the 2023 and 2024.
 - A scalability system could be agreed among humanitarian actors to adapt the amount to the number of household members.
- **Instalments:** initially, three instalments were planned. SARC decided that one payment would have more impact, as a to mitigate for delays and inflation, and to allow people to plan their needs. People gave feedback that they preferred one instalment because it allowed them to plan to meet their needs.
 - Very positive since it allowed decision making and was more efficient.
- **Delivery mechanisms:** The remittance company Al Fouad has been the main FSP for this programme. People in Syria are familiar with remittances and the procedures to collect money as they can use this to receive both international and national money. Although most of the assistance has been delivered through Al Fouad as the FSP that has the contract with SARC, some partners used BEMO Bank and its partners (Al Fouad and Al Haram). However, the evaluation focused on Al Fouad as main partner.
 - The existing agreement with Al Fouad enabled speed.
 - It is recommendable give people more options for accessing assistance to ensure equal access.
- **Information on assistance distribution:** People were informed when to collect the assistance through text message (SMS). In some areas, connectivity was a problem, and people did not receive the message. When cases like these were detected, SARC would go to the area, gather people, and take them to the remittance company office to collect the assistance.
 - It was simple but generated certain uncertainties as information shared was limited.
 - Consider alternative options to ensure inclusion of those who are not literate or do not have access to phones and network.

- **Al Fouad:** The facts that SARC had an existing Memorandum of Understanding with Al Fouad, and that it holds more liquidity than banks, were the main reasons for its use. Once the payment order was made and lists shared with the FSP, Al Fouad would send an SMS to beneficiaries to inform them they could collect the money. At first, a coordinated and phased payment plan could have facilitated planning for SARC volunteers to be at distribution points to assist people and organise the distribution. SARC was only able to attend some offices when they were informed in time. Negative issues were reported, particularly at the beginning of the operation. Problems beneficiaries reported included crowded offices; long waits in poor weather conditions; distribution from different organisations on the same days causing confusion; employees not being prepared to attend to SARC beneficiaries; and some branches refusing to pay. The situation improved over time, more offices were opened, access improved, and employees were better prepared to attend to people. People would prefer to have more than one option for money collection. Some key informants recommended having different FSPs, depending on region.
 - Having one main FSP facilitated a harmonised approach and good coordination.
 - Future programmes should include negotiated conditions for SARC to allow them to provide appropriate support to recipients at distribution points.

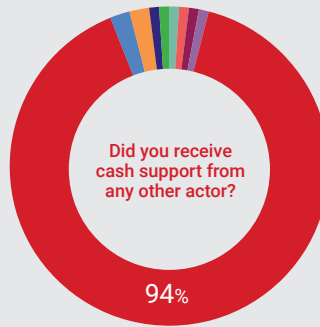
Coordination, data protection, CEA and risk management

- **Coordination:** SARC coordinated closely with the national CWG, contributed to the design of the response plan, and followed the agreement on the transfer value. At the regional level, SARC Cash coordinators are active members of the regional CWG. As a member of the Ops Room, SARC coordinated and provided support, especially with deduplication.
 - Coordination allowed a harmonised approach.
 - Cash actors should increase coordination efforts.
- **Data protection:** Initially, there were high concerns about sharing recipients' data with the Government and the FSP. However, this was not an issue for the earthquake-affected households as their homes were first assessed by government engineers. During the assessment, the engineers collected national IDs and families gave consent to share their data with relevant stakeholders. For assistance delivered through third party agreement via partners' FSPs, SARC produces an anonymised coded list of beneficiaries, and no personal data is shared.
 - No data protection issues have been reported.
 - Establish standard procedures for future responses.
- **Community engagement and accountability:** Face-to-face interactions and a hotline were available for feedback. The hotline created for the earthquake response has become the general hotline for all SARC programmes. More could have been done to improve communication and information sharing about the programme's objectives and assistance delivery. There was no community participation in the design of programme, definition of selection criteria, or verification of households. However, there was good communication with beneficiaries as SARC monitored assistance delivery and ensured people collected the assistance or received support if needed.
 - People trust and identify SARC as an accessible organisation.
 - Provide alternative communication channels and engagement during all phases of the programme cycle.
- **Risk management:** A very good and detailed **risk analysis** was conducted as part of the project design but not disseminated or used. Many of the improvements identified through the evaluation had already been considered in the risk analysis.
 - Standardise the use of risk analysis and its use.

Programme design and implementation: findings from the post-distribution monitoring (PDM)

Duplication:

94% of respondents have not received any other support.



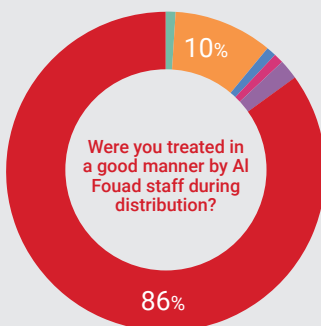
- Government of Syria unit
- International NGO
- Local group community based organization_or similar
- National_NGO
- No did not receive cash from another actor
- Other
- Religious group in my community
- UN organization
- UN organization International NGO

Perception of inclusion/exclusion errors.

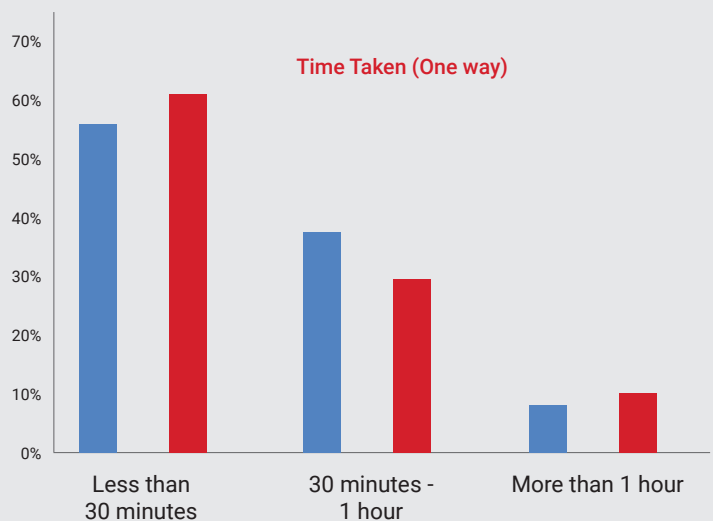


- Yes a lot
- Don't know
- Not at all
- Not really
- No answer
- Yes a few

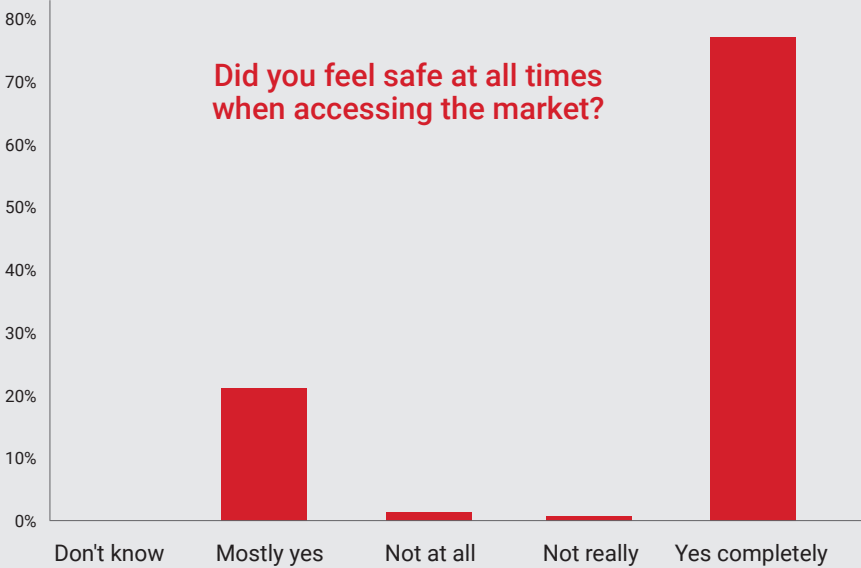
Distribution experience:



- Don't know
- Mostly yes
- No answer
- Not at all
- Not really
- Yes completely

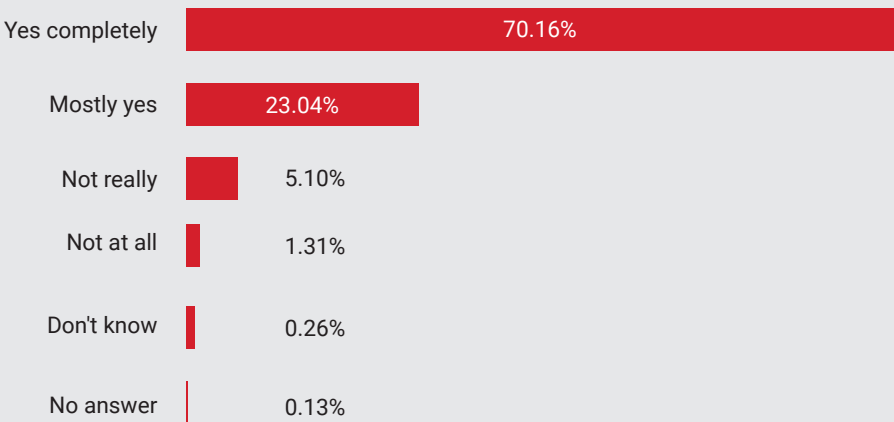


Questions regarding security at distribution and when accessing basic needs



Distribution experience:

90% of beneficiaries (disaggregated by sex, age, and disability) reporting that humanitarian assistance is delivered in a safe, accessible and participatory manner





Timeless, Scale and Accountability



Key questions

- To what extent was timely, scalable, and accountable cash assistance operationalised in this response?
- What were the most relevant enabling factors for timeliness, scale, and accountability?
- What were the main barriers to timeliness, scale and accountability?

Key findings

- 1. Timeliness:** The earthquake response timelines were heavily influenced by external factors, as explained below. The first cash assistance was delivered in May, three months after the earthquake, which is average for most emergencies but late considering it was intended for basic needs in the aftermath of the earthquake. Internally, it took 34 days on average from the confirmation of beneficiary lists to the payment order being sent to the FSP. This was much shorter for regular winterisation assistance, averaging 13 days for internal approval, demonstrating that quicker cash responses are possible with adapted internal procedures and standard operating procedures (SoPs) to support efficiency.
- 2. Scale:** The scale is a major success of this operation. SARC assisted 40,927 households, or 204,635 people, between May 2023 and June 2024, and the programme continues. The winterisation programme aided 24,505 households⁷. This is the largest cash operation in Syria for Syrian nationals⁸ and one of the largest in the Movement. In response to the Earthquake impact, SARC was assigned 90% of the geographical areas to be assisted compared with just 10% for all other organisations combined.
- 3. Accountability:** There are opportunities for enhancement to move from feedback and complaints mechanisms to a people-centred approach where affected communities are part of the whole process. Despite feedback mechanisms being in place, communication with the affected population needs more investment. Communities do not fully understand the programme's objectives and selection criteria, and most are not aware of the feedback mechanisms or their right to information. Better community engagement can reduce tensions caused by targeting in the communities, an issue mentioned by all participants.

7 SARC provides cash assistance through other programmes in addition to the earthquake and winterisation programmes and has assisted more than 166,100 households in 2023 and 2024.

8 When all multipurpose cash assistance at national level is added up, SARC has the largest number of beneficiaries, followed by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), who provide cash assistance to Palestinians in Syria. <https://response.reliefweb.int/syria/cash-working-group>

4. **Key enabling factors:** SARC’s experience with cash assistance, human resources capacity and dedication, support from SARC HQ and affected branches, external advocacy with government institutions to accept the use of cash, available funding and technical support from Movement partners, and an FSP agreement in place prior to the earthquake that avoided a tendering process, were all key enabling factors.
5. **Barriers:** External factors, such as not having access to the affected population for registration until the Ops Room system was set up and they assigned areas to SARC, heavily influenced timeliness. Other barriers included the initial lack of acceptance of cash assistance by the authorities, limited capacity and decision-making of the national CWG, and the delayed decision on the transfer value. Internal factors influencing were the lack of SoPs for rapid onset emergencies, initial limited volunteer capacity to support registration, and rigorous internal approval rules.

Timeliness

Analysing timeliness in the Syrian earthquake context is complex due to the disaster management system in the country and the delays in the setup. SARC had to wait to be assigned a geographical area by the local Ops Room. Barriers to timeliness are explained in the next section.

SARC started registration in shelters immediately after the earthquake but could not use the lists because Ops Room had not been set up. In Aleppo and Hama, registration started in March. In Latakia, SARC received the first list to register in June.

The first payment was made on 23rd May in Hama, slightly more than three months from the onset of the emergency. Although this is an average time for emergencies, it is far from the 14 days that the Movement aims for NS at level 2 of cash readiness⁹. SARC has demonstrated with the winterisation programme that it can deliver faster. The programme has been implemented gradually as SARC was assigned new areas to assist and continues into 2024.

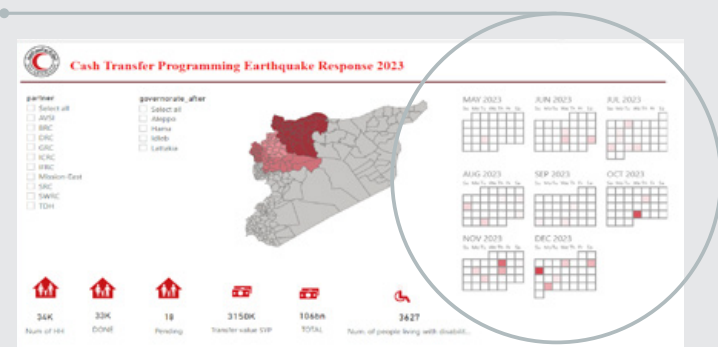


You can't go faster than Ops Room."

Key Informant



Distribution calendar available at SARC Cash Transfer Programming Earthquake Dashboard page



From recipients' point of view, the assistance was timely, because they need help any time. However, due to inflation, the assistance was worth much less for those assisted later.

From key informants' point of view, the response was timely because all resources were made available to support the response and all what could have been done it was. SARC's initial focus was on life-saving activities (mainly search and rescue, setting up communal centres and distribution of non-food items)¹⁰. People were assisted with food and other items in the first months of the emergency while the cash assistance response was set up.

For the regular winterisation programme, the assistance was paid between December and January in line with objectives. For earthquake winterisation, payments were made between February and April due to changes in the management of the emergency programme (see below). Winterisation was perceived as timely by recipients, even the late earthquake winterisation payments supported people through Ramadan, which was greatly appreciated.

Specific delays happened in 2024 due to changes in the emergency system. The Ops Room were closed, and the High Relief Committee (HRC) took over responsibility, but the Central Bank was not informed and did not accept the stamp from HRC. All payments were on hold between January until April 2024.

Scale

Scale is the most successful aspect of the earthquake response. SARC assisted **40,927 households (HHs) between May 2023 and June 2024**¹¹. This is the largest earthquake response in Syria and one of the largest in the Movement. The programme objective was 50,000 HHs. For winterisation, SARC assisted 25,000 HHs. In total, the earthquake and winterisation programmes assisted **204,635 people**.

SARC played a key role filling the gaps as they took over other organisations' caseload and implemented where another organisation couldn't. Access to hard-to-reach areas put more pressure on SARC as they took on areas other organisations couldn't reach or lacked funding to cover.

Coverage by June 2024

The SARC response covered the largest percentage of the affected population, compared with other stakeholders. In Hama, 15% of all affected HHs were assisted by SARC alone, the rest was covered by all other humanitarian actors together. In Aleppo, SARC was assigned 95% of the geographical area and assisted 10% of all affected population. In Latakia, SARC assisted 32% of affected households.

	Hama	Aleppo	Latakia
# HHs earthquake affected	48,000	241,675	40,000
# HH's assisted by SARC	6,986 15% of affected population	23,922 10% of affected population	12,690 32% of affected population
The total sum # HHs assisted by ALL other humanitarian actors	12,000 25% of affected population assisted	69,018 28.5% of affected population assisted	33,000 82.5% of affected population assisted

As the impact evaluation by the technical engineers continues, SARC continues to assist new people in these new areas and will continue while funding is available.

Accountability

SARC set up a hotline from early stages plus face-to-face feedback management. SARC volunteers received basic CEA training, and an FAQ on the earthquake cash assistance programme was developed.

Elaborate feedback and complaints mechanisms were set up. Feedback and complaints were analysed and resolved by the team at the branch level if they related to the programme, sent to the team responsible if they were about another SARC programme, or delegated to the CEA team for any sensitive non-programmatic issue. Information is compiled through the system, but no report on the feedback mechanism was available. A CEA dashboard reflecting the analysis of the information was planned but not available for analysis at the time of the evaluation.

If we look at the PDM survey from January 2024, 4.71% of respondents have presented a complaint, of which 52.78% received a response. Among those, 42.11% were very satisfied, 47.37% satisfied, and 10.53% dissatisfied. However, there is no explanation for what happened with the 47% that did not receive a response, nor do we know how long it took for people to get their answers.

Some of the focus group participants were informed about the hotline, but the majority did not know or could not remember if they had been informed at the time of registration. Some could show pieces of paper with the hotline number they were given, but it was not identified as being from SARC or what programme it related to.

There is very good acceptance of SARC, and people trust SARC. Participants in the evaluation explained that even if they didn't know about any feedback mechanism, they know they can come to SARC and receive an answer if they have any complaints.

However, information shared was limited. People were not clear about the objectives of the assistance or the targeting and selection criteria, especially for winterisation.

SARC teams admitted they were worried about sharing information on the cash assistance programme for the first two weeks as they were afraid of not being able to manage an avalanche of people asking support. But once they saw this did not happen, they informed people about the programme at the time of registration.

No communication followed between the registration and delivery of the cash, up to two months in some cases, leaving people not knowing if they would receive the assistance they had registered for. Regional teams reported that most of the complaints were about delays in assistance delivery. Initially, SARC sent an SMS before the FSP contacted the recipients, but this caused confusion, as people thought they could collect the money on receiving the message from SARC and were frustrated when the FSP explained they should wait for other messages from the FSP. So, they stopped sending messages.

Recipients were informed by an SMS from Al Fouad (the FSP) when they could collect their money. This message contained no information on SARC, the amount, or the timing to collect the money. Al Fouad does not allow information from organisations to be placed on walls or any place in the offices.

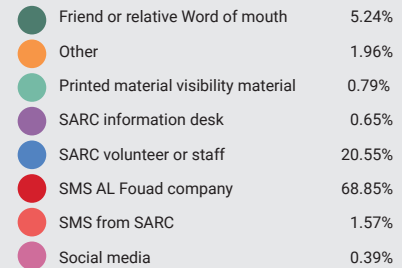
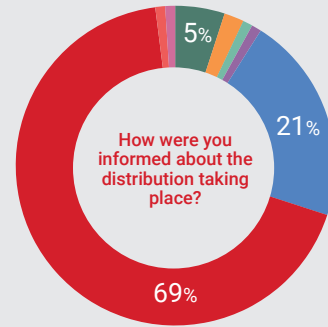
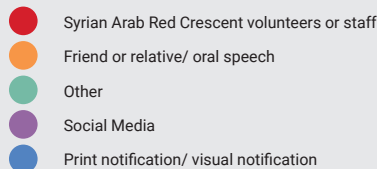
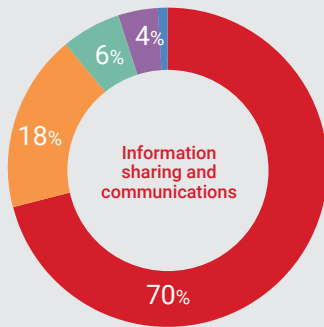
Once the payment order was sent, reconciliation and monitoring were constant. Weekly reminders were sent to people if it was detected that they had not collected the money. Direct calls and follow up were implemented when the deadline to collect the money was short to make sure people wouldn't miss it. In December 2023, SARC called all beneficiaries of that period, volunteers making calls at midnight as the only time people would have electricity and could charge their phones.

Regional teams said that SARC received plenty of queries regarding other organisations. Initially, only SARC had a hotline and had to ask CWG and the HRC to mandate other organisations to set up their own feedback mechanisms.

Data collection tools used for registration were sent from SARC HQ using standard international emergency assessment questions and were not adapted to the context. This caused some people to refuse to answer and even get upset. Despite this being raised by the local teams, it took some time to adapt them.

Accountability: findings from the PDM survey

PDM results on information sharing and communication



What were the main *enabling factors* for timeliness, scale, and accountability?

Analysis of the enabling factors provides evidence of the impact of the cash preparedness process that SARC initiated in 2018. Enabling factors relate to Leadership Commitment (Area 1); Processes, Systems and Tools (Area 2); Financial and Human Resources and Capacities (Area 3); Community Engagement and Accountability, Coordination and Partnership (Area 4) and Test, Learn and Improve (Area 5)¹².

Factors that positively influenced the response are internal to SARC and the Movement.

- **Funding available**

The SARC CVA Unit, with support from partners, secured over USD 20 million to cover 50,000 HHs with multipurpose cash assistance for three months, only four months into the response. Additional funding was secured later to plan for longer-term programming with cash components (livelihoods, health).

- **SARC HQ and branch management leadership, acceptance and support for cash assistance**

SARC leadership was key in influencing the acceptance of cash by the authorities at national and local levels, leading advocacy at the Humanitarian Country Team and High Relief Committee. SARC suggested the creation of the Ops Room immediately.

Internally, the quick development of a response plan, and trust in the CVA Unit's capacity and experience, made senior management supportive of using cash. This also influenced the Finance Department to give priority to the cash response. Branch management support was identified as a key enabler by the regional teams.

- **Previous SARC cash assistance experience, HR capacity and dedication**

Previous SARC experience using cash was key to identifying cash as a feasible option and the most appropriate response modality. Well prepared, capable SARC branch CVA coordinators could easily gather the minimum information required to determine cash feasibility and inform HQ, as well as identify the human and logistical resources needed to implement the response. Regional CVA coordinators coordinated with disaster management and mobilised volunteers, provided key information to their management for decision making and representation at the Ops Room level, and represented SARC in the regional CWG.

- **Branches' capacity and previous experience in the affected areas**

External key informants shared their perception that SARC was more efficient in implementing the programme than other organisations due to the presence in the affected areas, knowledge of the communities, volunteers' network, and access.

One of SARC's strengths is the capacity of the branches, and branch management leadership and support for cash were key. With long-term experience and well-prepared human resources, branches demonstrated the capacity to deliver good quality and timely programmes at scale. In addition to the staff, very dedicated volunteers, with support from cash coordinators, worked hard to support all aspects of programme delivery. All senior management had a good understanding of cash, recognised the opportunities, and were supportive of scaling up cash assistance. For instance, in Latakia, the Governing board appointed a focal point among its members for cash assistance.

- **FSP agreement in place**

SARC already had an agreement with Al Fouad. The agreement was in line with IFRC procedures and standards, and thus could be used by all partners. Having an agreement in place avoided the need to start a tendering process when the emergency happened.

- **Movement cash coordination and technical support**

Immediately in the emergency, SARC and IFRC decided to set up a coordination system based on partner national societies' in-country expertise rather than relying on surge capacity. British Red Cross (BRC) was entrusted with the coordination of the Cash Working Group. BRC staff in country, including an embedded CashCap¹³ delegate, adapted their workplan and priorities and focused on supporting the CVA Unit. BRC requested additional support, and a global surge delegate from the Danish Red Cross was deployed until May to support the emergency. In June, BRC recruited a long-term cash assistance delegate and took over tasks related to cash preparedness while the CashCap delegate continued with the earthquake response.

Please see dedicated section in the report for more detailed information on Movement Cash Coordination.



What were the main **barriers** to timeliness, scale, and accountability?

Some obstacles have been identified, both internal and external. All of them influenced timeliness and accountability.

External

- **The 2023 earthquake was the first large-scale natural disaster emergency that the Government of Syria had to manage in decades, and new coordination mechanisms had to be established.**

Limited experience among national disaster management authorities in managing large-scale natural disasters affecting multiple governorates led to delays in national strategic and operational direction, affecting the timing of SARC's operational strategy.

The Government made efforts to quickly establish additional coordination bodies at the governorate level to minimise duplication and enhance coordination, however the process led to significant delays and introduced an extra layer of cross-checking and approval procedures.

- **Ops Rooms were set up to answer the need for coordination, but as a new system, they also caused delays.**

The Government established a new coordination mechanism, the OpsRoom to take on coordination in the affected governorates to mitigate the unsuccessful coordination attempts of humanitarian actors. As a new system, they needed time to establish procedures, causing delays.

Some organisations' attempts to deliver fast responses caused more reservations about using cash, and delays. For instance, UNICEF and UNHCR quickly started cash distributions before agreement had been reached within the CWG on transfer value or targeting criteria, using vulnerability criteria instead of criteria based on earthquake impact. This complicated coordination and raised more concerns about the appropriateness of cash, leading the government to temporarily pause cash assistance in early May. SARC's intervention was key to unblocking this situation.

- **The process of assessing house damage and validating registered beneficiaries by the Ops Rooms was slower than expected.**

After attempts to delegate deduplication to humanitarian actors without success, due to disputes over data protection, the Ministry of Local Administration stated that the Operations Rooms were the responsible entity for deduplicating the lists of targeted HHs.

On request from Ops Rooms, the Central Bank of Syria issued a circular to Financial Service Providers on 10 April saying they must include a stamp from the Ops Rooms for any cash transaction using the 'earthquake preferential exchange rate'.¹⁴

The established process was as follows:

1. Ops Room prioritised geographical areas for damage assessment based on the severity of the impact.
2. Engineers visited each building and assigned a colour code: black, red, orange or yellow. Black and red coded houses had to be evacuated.
3. Ops Room assigned a map with designated areas to each humanitarian actor, including SARC, for assistance.
4. SARC registered each house. Black and red coded houses, being evacuated, were registered at the SARC office or registration point, while orange and yellow coded houses would be registered by volunteers.
5. Lists of registered beneficiaries were verified and cleaned by SARC before sending to the Ops Room for deduplication.
6. Ops Room deduplicated the lists against other organisations and provided the final stamp of approval.
7. Once stamped by the Ops Room, SARC issued the payment order and shared the lists with the FSP.

This process, set up to avoid duplication and ensure coordination, proved time-consuming.

- **SARC invested time mediating between affected people and Ops Rooms to solve problems.**

Registration presented many challenges, such as mismatched maps, incorrect building coding, new renters living in damaged houses, households with more than one family, households with more than one head but several families in polygamic structures, people with foreign citizenship, people without identity documents because they had lost them or never been registered¹⁵. These issues put pressure on volunteers as they had to deal with people's frustrations on top of the stress of the emergency.

SARC's Legal Department provided assistance and advice to regularise situations when legal documents were missing, and CVA teams worked with Ops Rooms to correct mistakes in building classifications.

- **Access** to some areas proved to be complicated, even for SARC, due to the security context, long distances, and scattered beneficiaries sometimes up to 120km away from main city in some governorates.
- **Cash coordination at the national level was limited and at times completely stopped.**

It took over a month, until 26 March, to approve and share a guidance document on recommended transfer values, priority household profiles, recommended frequency and duration of cash assistance, and information on reporting.

Some organisations did not coordinate at all and started distributing cash assistance as part of regular programmes, using different selection criteria and different transfer value. This generated opposition from other humanitarian actors, mistrust from authorities, and had a great impact on the overall response. In effect, the entire earthquake response was implemented without proper coordination among humanitarian partners at the national level, leaving cash actors to coordinate at the community level to avoid overlapping.



Internal

- **Competition for resources and capacity** in the emergency phase. SARC had to deal with assistance coming from partners, including items that had not been requested, and in-kind relief assistance from non-Movement organisations. This was highlighted by all key informants as very time-consuming and more support from IFRC in coordinating items and surge roles that SARC had not requested would have been helpful.
- **Need to scale up human resources and logistics capacity** to support registration, verification, and community engagement activities. Before the earthquake struck, CVA unit branch coordinators were in place in Hama and Aleppo and already planned in Latakia, but they had limited volunteer capacity. The scale of the emergency required a rapid increase in human resources and logistics. By the time of the evaluation, branch CVA coordinators managed teams of more than 20 volunteers in Hama and Latakia and over 60 in Aleppo, most of whom were new to SARC. Additionally, there was not enough IT equipment for registration. For instance, due to sanctions, new laptops could not be imported, only arriving in April 2024.
- **Interdepartmental coordination** at the beginning of the emergency proved time-consuming. Lack of SoPs and experience in similar situations led to task duplication between the Disaster Management Department and CVA teams, especially regarding registration and verification of lists. It took a bit of time and discussions before deciding that registration would be led by CVA teams at branch level. However, at the first the CVA teams were very dependent on Disaster Management volunteer capacity for registration, and in the first months of the response, priority of resource allocation was given to delivery of in-kind assistance and rescue activities.
- **Rigorous internal approval procedures for procurement and finance** made the average time 34 days to approve and send the payment order to the FSP once the registration of an area had ended. This was reduced to less than 20 days for about 13 of the statements (lists) but was longer for others. It is important highlighting that for the regular winterisation programme, the process takes about 13 days, demonstrating that it is possible to deliver cash faster. The average 34 days includes both HQ and branch level signature processes. SARC recognised the sign-off processes as a barrier to timely fund distribution. By October the timeliness had improved, and measures were put in place to speed up the processes such as correcting names and ID numbers of families already verified, which can now be done via email sent directly to the FSP.
- **Funding availability in country and deadlines for usage made the process complicated.** Some Movement partners had very strict deadlines from their donors on the use of funds, putting pressure on SARC to implement and avoid losing resources. This was coordinated through the Movement CWG but generated intense work and follow-up efforts from the teams. On the other hand, funding was not always available in country and put pressure on the Finance Department to find solutions to avoid interruptions to the programme.
- **Missing information on the templates used for data collection and registration caused delays.** Tools for registration did not include some personal information like the family book number, and so were different from what the Ops Rooms were using. This generated additional work for the teams as information had to be added manually before sharing with Ops Rooms for deduplication. Tools were updated to add family numbers later.

5 Recommendations

Key questions

- How can current blockers to scale, timeliness and accountability be addressed?
- What practical actions can be included in SARC cash preparedness plans?



According to key informants, the earthquake response made cash more feasible in Syria, changing opinions and dissipating concerns about misuse. The humanitarian future looks more favourable towards cash than any other form of assistance. SARC can now build on the gains of the earthquake response to enhance its capacity to implement cash at scale in emergencies and to support all sectors.

In December 2023, SARC conducted a new CVA Capacity self-assessment and following that, a plan of action for cash preparedness was drafted that includes document learning and continuous improvement. The evaluation of earthquake and winterisation programmes, provides the opportunity to complement that workplan and identify priorities to enhance SARC cash capacity.

- **Revise the plan of action for cash preparedness** in the light of this evaluation findings to integrate recommendations and commit to specific outputs for 2024 and 2025. As part of the National Society Development process, the cash preparedness plan of action must also align and coordinate with other activities, especially SARC's Preparedness for Effective Response process and CEA institutionalisation plans.

Recommendations presented here are aligned with the Cash preparedness (CVAP) Areas to facilitate inclusion in existing workplans.



CVAP Area 1. Leadership commitment

- **Define the role of the Cash Unit, both at HQ and branch level.** Recent changes in the CVA Unit and its place in the SARC structure present an opportunity to revise the role and responsibilities of the CVA Unit in line with current experience of implementing cash assistance and taking into consideration the future of the humanitarian situation in Syria and opportunities for increase used of cash. This will define what specific human, and logistical capacities are required to implement cash assistance at scale and in a timely and accountable manner.
- **Increase the role of the branches as part of the CVA unit,** promoting their lead in programme design and active role in capacity building as receptors and as experts supporting each other. Experienced branches could provide peer-to-peer support for new branches to start using cash.
- Request management support to **adapt internal approval processes** to enable timely cash responses. This process has been completed for in-kind assistance before and the response time has been reduced. The regular winterisation programme also demonstrates that response timing can be shorter. As the use of cash increases, , appropriate procedures could help speed up emergency responses.



CVAP Area 2. Processes, systems and tools

- **Develop SoPs for emergencies and for sectoral use of cash, together with the other departments.** The evaluation observed limited understanding of the CVA Unit’s role and responsibilities among other departments. Since there is an increased role for cash assistance in emergency responses, and increased sectoral interest, developing the SoPs in a participatory manner is urgent and important. **Mainstream cash** as a modality to be used by all programmes, with technical support from the CVA Unit.
- Prepare to include **referrals to other SARC services**. The evaluation observed the value of linking people with other SARC services. Preparing volunteers and staff to share information and guide people towards the programmes that can support them better is a respectful way to engage with people.
- Programme flexibility and context adaptation require having agreements signed with more than one financial service provider. This would give people a choice, help with liquidity issues, and facilitate negotiation of better service conditions. A mapping of available FSPs is advised. Moreover, SARC could explore innovative options to be piloted with new partners. For instance, taking a proactive approach instead of adapting to what exists, using Movement experience to identify and propose new solutions to FSPs in country to be piloted.
- In addition, the current agreement with **Al Fouad** should be revised to include changes that would avoid the negative impact identified in this evaluation in future responses. This could include a coordinated distribution plan, information displayed at distribution points, a dedicated desk for SARC beneficiaries, and use of mobile units to serve remote communities.
- Conduct an assessment of **systems and equipment needed** for data collection and processing and provide what teams need to deliver their work.
- Use the [Cash in Emergencies Toolkit](#) to adapt and contextualise tools and avoid duplication of efforts.



CVAP Area 3. Financial and human resources and capacities

- **Develop capacities** through a well-coordinated training programme that can be inspired by the Cash Hub Cash Practitioners Development Programme to build sustainable capacity adapted to the context and operational needs. As well as CVA unit staff, this training must be provided to staff in departments that would benefit from knowledge of cash assistance, especially Disaster Management and Support Services.
- Support **volunteers’** onboarding process and activity delivery to fulfil duty of care when they work under pressure and in risky areas, including ensuring they have logistical, protection and psychosocial support. Continue investing in capacity building to motivate them and increase retention. Cash assistance, CEA and information management training requested.
- **Support partner resources mobilisation** by providing information about and the programmes and their impact. An annual communication strategy could be developed to ensure appropriate data is collected and disseminated; this process should include partners to define common objectives.



CVAP Area 4. Community engagement and accountability, coordination and partnership

- Evolve **from using feedback and complaints mechanisms towards implementing a full people-centred approach for cash assistance**¹⁶. CEA is everybody's responsibility. A people centred approach for cash is the same as for any other type of assistance and means designing and delivering aid assistance based on people's needs. While there is no agreed definition of what 'people-centred' programming means in the humanitarian sector, at the minimum it involves:
 - Ensuring that affected populations are actively engaged and participate in design decisions
 - Seeking and acting on recipients' opinions, preferences, priorities and feedback.
- Establish a process for **feedback management** that provides analysis and regular information on the complaints and their status. This must include a complaints log, where all complaints are recorded, categorised according to urgency and severity criteria, and includes the response given. A dashboard or similar visual tool could help summarize data analysis.
- **Initiate an internal technical CWG** to create a network of peer-to-peer support for branches and experience exchange. Movement partners supporting cash assistance and with technical capacity in country can also participate and provide technical assistance.
- **Provide spaces for information sharing with external partners** that support cash operations or work through SARC to deliver assistance. This can be part of the internal CWG or alternative spaces as appropriate.
- **Continue capacity building for internal and external advocacy**. External humanitarian diplomacy for cash assistance is still required in country and with donors. Internally, now that cash is recognised as the most effective assistance modality and preferred by beneficiaries, promote cash assistance efficiency and advocate for cash as a more efficient and faster solution for other programmes. Conduct a cost-efficiency analysis, including indicators as part of the programmes to ensure information is collected.



CVAP Area 5. Test, learn and improve

- **Reporting** has improved thanks to the CVA dashboards and would benefit from being complemented with narrative information. Project design should include monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning activities, and impact indicators should be SMART and accompanied by regular reporting. An analysis of the earthquake and winterisation responses shows delays in implementing monitoring activities like the post-distribution survey, and it would be difficult to analyse impact since indicators are not timebound or lack a baseline. Partner National Societies would also appreciate more information and clarity on the delivery process.
- Document good evidence of progress and impact to promote **visibility** of SARC as a Cash Assistance Champion. Materials for advocacy are important for partners and resource mobilisation. Current material is limited and focuses on the delivery of activities rather than the impact of cash. Work with the Communications Department to identify what needs to be documented and disseminated, and plan for it from the programme design phase to ensure information is collected and disseminated.
- This evaluation has set up a new way of working, looking to learn and adapt. This must continue. All pilots and new initiatives must be reviewed, and findings documented, and recommendations must be integrated into plans of action. When needed, external evaluation should be considered.

What role and potential future opportunities are there for the National Society to lead/influence cash assistance in the country?

The CWG in Syria is transitioning into the new IASC model for cash coordination. The CWG reports to the Inter-Sector Coordination Group and is chaired by OCHA as non-programmatic lead and two full-time co-chairs with technical expertise. Defined Terms of Reference specify the profiles of group chairs. At governorate level, subnational working groups exist, and will follow the same transition process but with autonomy to decide the profile required for the leads, responding to contextual needs.

SARC is an active member of both national and regional CWG although has never been a candidate for a co-chair role before.

After the earthquake response, as the main cash actor in Syria, SARC is well placed to provide guidance and leadership. However, SARC's areas of interventions cover many different sectors, and as an auxiliary to the government, SARC has a different role from other humanitarian actors, with both assistance and regulation responsibilities. It is recommended that an analysis be conducted of the implications and responsibilities of such a role to enable informed decisions to be made.

Since OCHA is the organisation that has taken the non-programmatic lead role in the CWG, SARC could apply for the technical co-lead of the group. This requires high-level technical competence, which can be challenging due to staff rotation. National roles also require full-time dedication.

Regional coordination could provide the space for gradual progress towards taking the lead role and a better understanding of what is required. Regional coordinators are active members of the CWG, and have the capacity and experience required locally.





One Movement Approach for Cash Coordination

Key questions

- What enablers have facilitated the Movement’s coordination approach?
- What are the comparative advantages of this model, and how could it be replicated?



Key findings

1. The approach enabled SARC to focus on operationalising the response strategy and assistance delivery, resulting in increased response speed and positively affecting assistance recipients.
2. Early planning and close monitoring of deadlines and partners’ needs and obligations to donors allowed for deadlines to be met in a timely manner and with quality, resulting in high satisfaction from both partners and donors. BRC took on the responsibility of meeting partners’ needs regarding funding implementation, reporting and information sharing, relieving SARC of this responsibility.
3. This model of coordination has been recognised by all key informants as a successful strategy that could be replicated in other contexts when conditions are conducive.

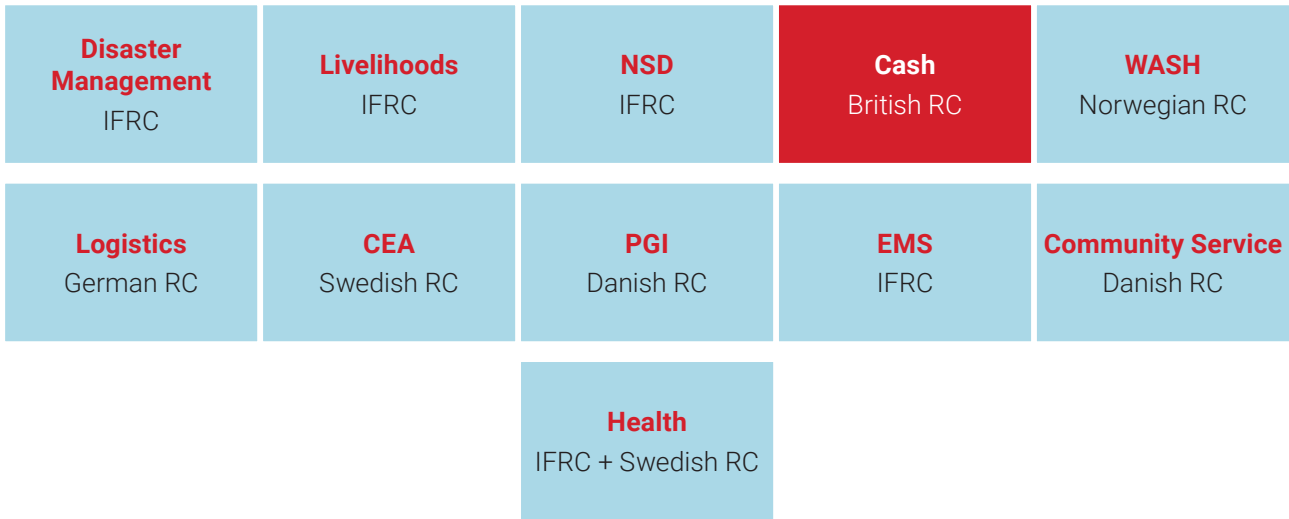
SARC took the role of convener for all aspects of the response, including coordinating the Movement’s collective response in accordance with its operational plans and capacity, as per Movement Coordination for Collective Impact Agreement, the Seville Agreement 2.0. On IFRC’s side, in line with the Agenda for Renewal¹⁷, IFRC embraced its role in National Society development and leveraging the capacities of the entire IFRC network to establish a common coordination structure.¹⁸

While SARC led the earthquake response, IFRC provided membership coordination, and in-country Partner National Societies (PNS) took the leadership of each technical working group. The structure leveraged the established collaboration between SARC and PNS in different areas.

17 To implement the Strategy 2030, the IFRC Secretariat developed the Agenda for Renewal that provides for more focus on delivering on its core mandate: 1) Coordination across member National Societies, ensuring an IFRC-wide-approach, 2) Representation of the membership internationally and regionally including through joint humanitarian diplomacy and 3) National Society development.

18 IFRC GO - Emergency

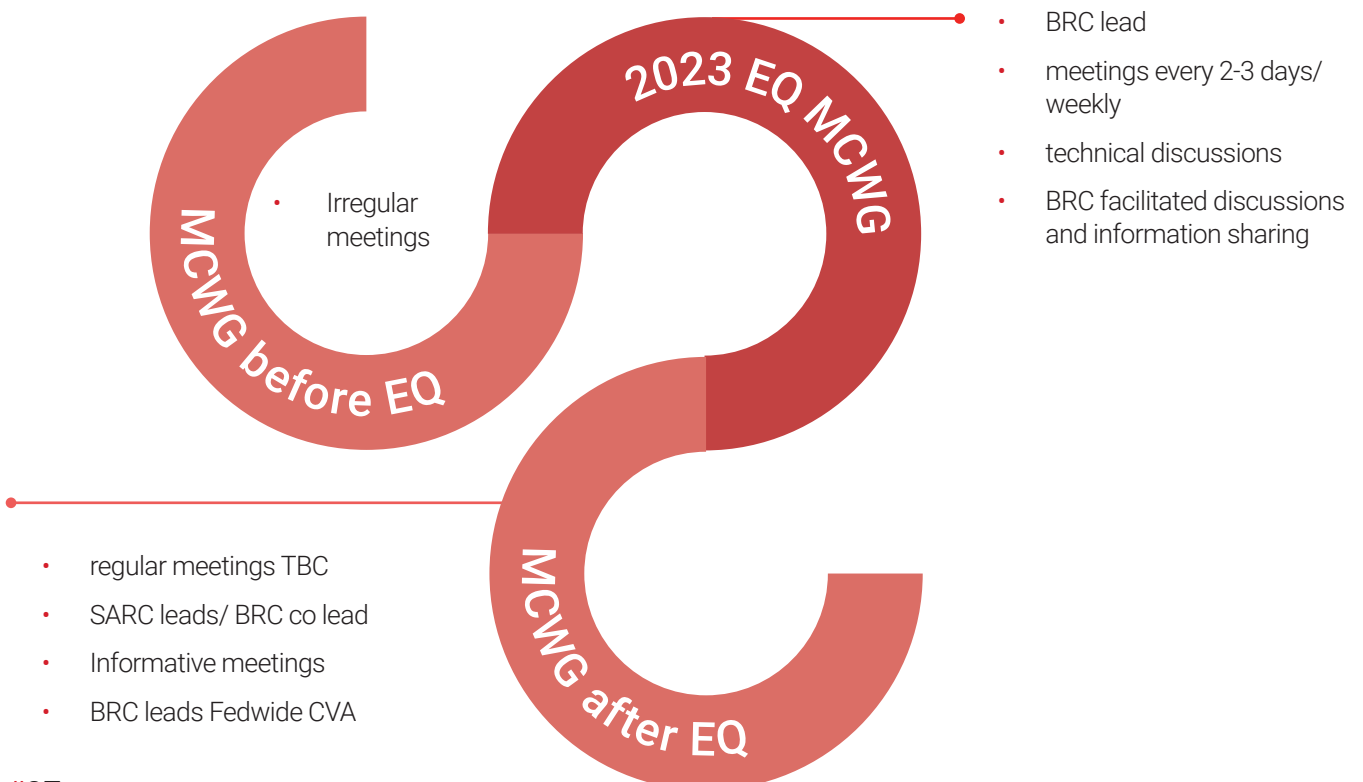
SARC and IFRC-wide coordination structure



For the **Movement Cash Working Group (MCWG)**, the British Red Cross (BRC) was entrusted with the lead role, assisting SARC through the emergency phase of the response. BRC has been a partner of SARC for the past 20 years and, since 2019, BRC has been the lead supporter of SARC’s cash preparedness work. At the time of the earthquake, BRC had a presence in-country and mobilised additional technical cash assistance capacity to support SARC’s response.

Prior to the earthquake, there was existing coordination for cash assistance, which intensified during the emergency. First weekly, then monthly coordination meetings were held until November 2023, covering both technical and informative discussions based on operational needs. In March 2024, the Movement resumed cash coordination activities under SARC’s leadership, focusing on general coordination rather than earthquake-specific matters. BRC continues to co-lead the group, providing support to SARC as required.

Movement Cash Working Group process through the emergency



Enablers

- Clear, quickly defined coordination approach between SARC and IFRC. IFRC’s immediate decision to apply the principles of the Agenda of Renewal gave the membership a framework to apply the One Movement Approach for coordination.
- The existence of technical working groups prior to the earthquake facilitated a quick designation of the lead and implementation of the approach.
- SARC’s trust in BRC, built on long-standing, well-established relationships, and previous collaborative efforts, made it a natural choice to assign BRC the lead coordination role.
- From PNS perspective, good confident relations and trust in the capacities of BRC facilitated the acceptance of BRC’s leadership role.
- BRC’s in-country presence and dedicated staff enabled it to quickly take on the lead role. BRC’s good knowledge of the NS, the CVA Unit and the context enabled fast decision making around cash priorities and an organised workplan.
- BRC’s capacity to provide dedicated technical and coordinationsupport first through its Country Manager and later with support from the CashCap delegate was also key. The strong technical capacity of the group leads was in an advisory role to SARC and partners.
- The approach reduced the burden on SARC and avoided duplication of effort. While maintaining SARC at the centre of all decision making, this approach prevented them being overwhelmed by managing multiple partners expectations and requirements. BRC assumed this role, allowing SARC to focus on implementation.
- The group developed quickly a concept note that allowed for a coordinated response plan and established one approach for the response. This document, adapted as more information was available, enabled a harmonised response from the beginning and maintained it. The document helped partners engage with donors and mobilise resources as they could share the strategy at very early stages.
- Thanks to coordination efforts, partners met their reporting deadlines and funding implementation deadlines. With many partners in country, each had different expectations and deadlines from donors, putting pressure on the operation timeline. BRC, as group lead, organised partners’ requirements for funding spending deadlines and worked with SARC CVA Unit and Finance to allocate funding to the operation, prioritising those with shorter deadlines.
- Allowing SARC to focus all human resources and capacity on the cash response implementation increased the speed of the response, positively impacting the experience of the affected population.
- While BRC’s intermediary role protected SARC’s space, partners highly appreciated that information was shared openly and in a transparent manner. Initially, group discussions were more technical as new challenges arose, and the group sought solutions together. As the operation evolved, the meetings took on a more informative character.
- The coordination facilitated information sharing and monitoring of all reporting requirements and deadlines. The group lead processed information shared by SARC and helped use the CVA unit dashboard information to meet deadlines.
- The coordination space provided opportunities for increased synergy between PNS and more coordination with other departments in SARC.
- Although fewer partners supported winterisation cash assistance, the group still provided a useful space for coordination.



Not a system given success, but context based because of the maturity of people at the table, SARC, PNS and IFRC trusted BRC”

Key Informant



With cash we saw that something was happening, and assistance reached beneficiaries. Now all our projects include a cash component.”

Key Informant



Recommendations for SARC

- Revise the group Terms of Reference for the new context of long-term coordination. With fewer partners supporting cash assistance activities, update the frequency and type of information to be shared. Include earthquake experience and group functioning in an annex to provide guidance and quick adaptation in case of a future rapid onset crisis.
- Develop a short narrative report that explains activities and partners' contributions to complement the quantitative information in the dashboard and facilitate reporting.
- Include visibility of impact in the reports. The coordination group should aim to identify communication materials and dissemination strategies planned together with SARC's Communications teams from the beginning of any operation.
- The new plan of action for SARC cash preparedness recommends a technical MCWG. However, not all partners have technical capacity in country and may not contribute to technical discussions. A mix of SARC CVA coordinators, Movement cash experts in country and external partners might be more relevant to contribute to technical discussions.

Recommendations for other contexts

The One Movement Approach for cash coordination presents an opportunity for a coordinated cash response, reducing pressure from partners and National Societies (NS) in times of emergency while helping meet partners requirements.

Some minimum conditions are required.

- Pre-crisis coordination structures in country is key.
- The group lead must have a good understanding of the NS and the context, as well as partners' needs, to effectively play an intermediary role and protect all parties' interests.
- Additional technical capacity is required, either new or relocated in country, but ensure someone is fully dedicated to coordination.
- The Movement CVA coordination lead can assist NS in attending external national and regional CVA coordination working groups.



Annexes

Annex 1: Terms of Reference	43
Annex 2: Evaluation Methodology	45
Annex 3: SARC Earthquake and Winterisation Cash Assistance in Numbers	48
Annex 4: OCHA MPCA in Syria, SARC Response	49
Annex 5: Summary of basic needs information from Focus Group Discussion	50
Annex 6: Community Engagement in Cash and Voucher Assistance through the Programme Cycle	51
Annex 7: Wellbeing Framework	52
Annex 8: Movement CVA Operational Readiness levels	53
Annex 9: Cash Preparedness Areas	38

Annex 1. Terms of Reference

SARC CVA Evaluation 2023- ToR

Evaluation Scope:

Geographical coverage: SARC HQ (Damascus) and the implementing branches in the targeted governorates. Aleppo, Hama and Latakia.

Projects to be covered: Earthquake and winterisation.

Stakeholders: SARC, BRC and other peer NS implementing cash projects in addition to local communities enrolled in projects being assessed, market actors and financial institutions.

Duration: 4-6 weeks

Timeframe: Jan-February 2024

Location: Aleppo, Hama, Latakia

Evaluation objectives and key evaluation questions:

1. Understand operational challenges and their impacts on timeliness, scale, and accountability.
 - To what extent was timely, scalable, and accountable CVA operationalised in this response?
 - How appropriate was the project design (pillars, selection criteria, targeting, services, conditionality, partnerships, coordination, etc.) with regards to the objectives it intended to achieve?
2. Analyse the effectiveness and efficiency of the response.
 - To what extent was the project successful in achieving the identified outcomes?
 - How relevant was the programme from the perspective of the recipients?
 - What major factors contributed to/ or hindered management efficiency and achievement of project outputs?
 - To what the extent are the projects' achievements (outcomes and results) sustainable beyond the life of the CVA projects?
3. Formulate recommendations for the CVAP process to improve the ongoing CVA responses and inform future responses.
 - What needs to be included, scaled, and stopped in the CVAP process, and how?
 - What elements/factors/features of the cash response constituted an added value that can be replicated in future responses/programmes?
4. Document lessons learned and good practices regarding the "One Movement" operational model used in the response.
 - What have been the enablers that facilitated the Movement coordination approach, its comparative advantages and how this could be replicated.
 - How can these lessons learned, and good practices be shared to positively influence future programming and Movement coordination?
5. Gather insights on challenges and opportunities for the Movement in the new IASC coordination model.
 - What role and potential future opportunities are there for the NS to lead/influence cash assistance in country?
 - What can be learned for future collaborations with CashCap?

Users and Uses:

BRC/SARC

- Follow an evidence-based approach to analyse the effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability aspects of project implementation.
- Assess operational capacity of SARC to implement cash and voucher programming, identifying best practices and areas in need of capacity building.
- Produce viable recommendations that could improve similar projects implemented by BRC and SARC in the future.

Cash Centre of Excellence and other peer NS

- Disseminate lessons learned with the rest of the RC Movement, with the peer NSs in the region through the Cash Centre of Excellence and the Middle East and North Africa Cash Community of Practice and globally through the Cash Hub.
- Provide evidence on the quality implementation of CVA project implemented by SARC as a fundraising tool for other partners.

Evaluation Methodology

The methodology for this review would be mixed. Both quantitative and qualitative methods will be included as follows:



Annex 2.

Evaluation methodology

Findings in this report come from the analysis of data sourced through documents review, key informants' interviews information aggregated and combined with data gathered through Focus Group Discussions and triangulated with findings from the PDM surveys.

Desk Review

The desk review was used to gather information for reporting against identified indicators and to triangulate information gathered through FGDs, key informant interviews, and PDM surveys.

Documents:

- SARC and IFRC project proposals (including log frames and Emergency Appeal)
- CVA dashboard
- PDM data
- Earthquake monitoring visits reports
- SARC CVAP self-assessment preliminary findings report.
- Meeting minutes from coordination meetings
- CashCap evaluation
- External agencies strategies and CWG dashboard

Focus Group Discussions

SARC selected the participants to ensure gender balance and geographical representation of rural and urban population and facilitated their travel to the branches to attend. These FGDs were prepared in advanced to be conducted in Arabic with support from two members of SARC HQ with translation in English to ensure evaluator engagement and more important that there were no barriers for participants. Local staff and volunteers did not attend the discussions to avoid influencing participants opinions.

- A total of **12 focus groups** discussion were conducted, 4 in each governorate.
- The total number of participants was: **49 men and 64 women**.
- FGD were reorganised separate for men and women and representing both urban and rural areas. Urban groups represented people that have received earthquake assistance, while rural represented winterisation.
- **SARC Volunteers:** in each branch a FGD was organised to understand the experience of the volunteers, their views on the programmes and recommendations.

Home based households' interviews

To ensure an inclusive approach and enable active participation of people living with disabilities, home-based interviews were organised in each governorate. A total of nine interviews were conducted with people living with disabilities, three in each governorate.

Key Informant Interviews

The purpose of these key informant interviews was to provide a space for targeted reflection from key stakeholders on the evaluation questions.

SARC Head Quarters in Damascus	Secretary General Head of Disaster Management Head of Finance Department Earthquake Finance Officer Head of PSSD Department CEA team CVA Unit
SARC Hama Branch	Branch President Branch Manager DM Coordinator CVA Coordinator CVA Volunteers
SARC Aleppo Branch	Branch President Branch Manager DM Coordinator CVA Coordinator CVA Officers CVA Volunteers
SARC Latakia	Branch President Governing board CVA Focal point Branch Manager DM Coordinator CVA Coordinator CVA Volunteers
RCRC Movement members	IFRC, Deputy Country Manager ICRC CVA British Red Cross Swiss Red Cross German Red Cross
CashCap	CashCap delegate in Syria 2023
External Partners	AVSI Syria Terre des Hommes Italia – Syria Mission East
CWG	UN agencies in national CWG and regional CWG Humanitarian Affairs Officer- Cash focal point (Homs and Hama) Humanitarian Affairs Officer- Cash focal point (Costal area) Humanitarian Affairs Officer- Cash focal point (Aleppo)

Limitations

- Additional documents that could be consulted have been referred during key informants' interviews but not available, limiting secondary data review.
- Not having logistics in the field to hold group meetings, Focus Group Discussions were organised for people to come to SARC offices. Mitigation measures to allow a better understanding of the context were applied and field visits were organised for field observation and interviews with PLWD were at home to make possible a direct experience of communities' reality.
- Due to festivities Movement and external partners were not available during the in-country visit and were organised later remotely. This increased the timeline for the evaluation.

Annex 3.

SARC Earthquake and winterisation cash assistance in numbers

Governorate	Earthquake # HHs	Earthquake #people	Winterisation Earthquake # HHs	Winterisation Earthquake # people	Winterisation regular # HHs	Winterisation regular # people
Hama	6,478	32,390	2,219	11,095	2,000	10,000
Aleppo	23,832	119,160	6,697	33,485	2,000	10,000
Latakia	10,496	52,480	2,220	11,100	2,433	12,165
Idleb	121	605	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	40,927	204,635	11,136	55,680	6,433	32,165

Annex 4.

OCHA MPCA in Syria, SARC response Syria: Cash Working Group | ReliefWeb Response

Syrian Arab Republic

Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (HCT Coordinated Response)

Reset
 January - December 2023

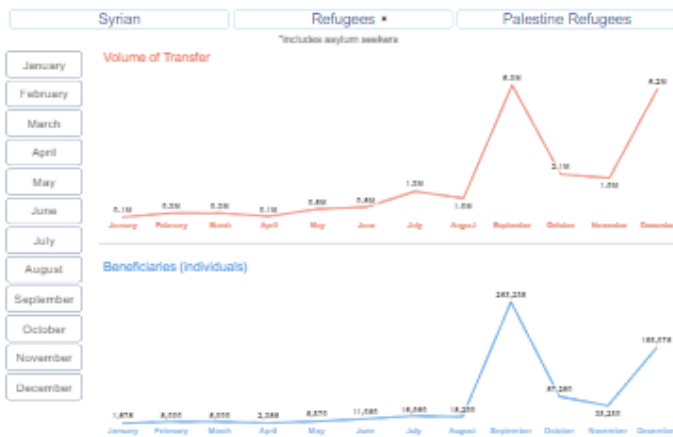
Key figures



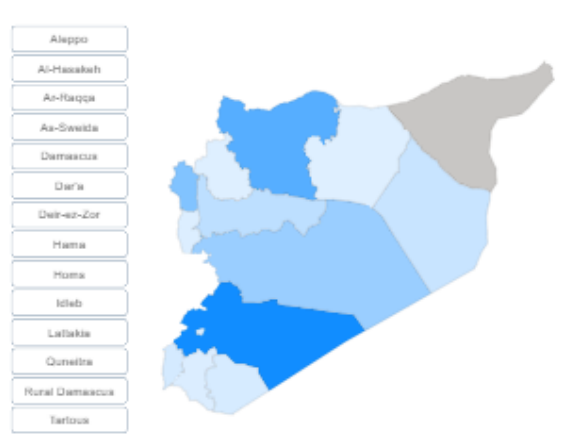
Programme Organizations and Partners by Type



Volume of Transfer and Estimated Number of Beneficiaries by Month

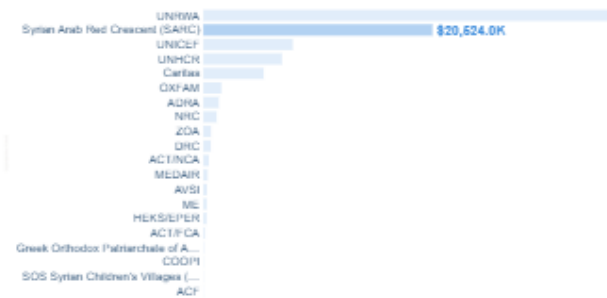


Beneficiaries (individuals) by Governorate



Volume of Transfer and Total Beneficiaries by Programme Organization

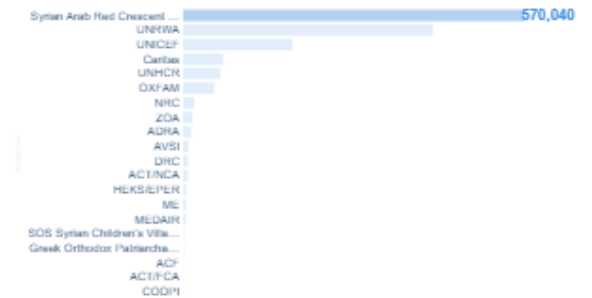
Volume of Transfer by Programme Organization



Select Organization Type



Beneficiaries by Programme Organization



Transfer Volume by Financial Service Provider by Governorate in (\$USD)

Governorate	Al Fuaid	Al Haram, Bemo	Bemo
Aleppo	\$3,331.9K	\$3,077.2K	\$86.2K
Al-Raqqa	\$78.0K		
As-Sweida	\$244.4K		
Damascus	\$136.4K		
Da'ra	\$150.0K		
Deir-ez-Zor	\$556.6K		
Hama	\$1,863.5K		
Homs	\$1,719.6K		
Idlib	\$98.9K		
Latakia	\$4,079.3K		
Quneitra	\$290.9K		
Rural Damascus	\$4,689.6K		
Tartous	\$121.4K		

Transfer Volume by Financial Service Provider (FSP) in (\$USD)



Annex 5.

Summary of basic needs information from Focus Group Discussions

Food. The need for food and medicines are the primary factors driving people into debt. Households can't afford the cost of diverse, nutritious food; and specialised items like powdered milk for infants are beyond what many can afford, while such items are not included in any food parcels.¹⁹ The distribution of food parcels has seen a significant decrease, and in some instances, has been replaced with cash for relief.²⁰ However, most people no longer receive any form of assistance, leaving them to cover the gap themselves. Examples were given of families not being able to feed their children anything but hummus and falafel, households that can only afford meat once a month or who have not had meat for months, and families in debt for bread. As the situation is getting worse, costs of even basic foods are becoming prohibitive for the families.



Medicine and health services. Medicines represent a significant financial burden for families, especially those with members who have disabilities or chronic illnesses. For these households, the need for medications and hygiene products is even more critical. Specialised health services and medications are costly and limited, and while treatments are provided free of charge, tests and medications are not. The need for psychosocial support, particularly for children traumatised by the earthquake, was also highlighted. In some rural areas, nutritional issues are becoming increasingly apparent and significant, particularly affecting children and pregnant women. There have also been reports of waterborne diseases and a need for clean water.



Shelter. For households affected by the earthquake, the priority is housing, which includes both home repairs and rent payments. Since the assistance was for basic needs, the amount was decided based on the 2022 MEB and didn't take into consideration the level of damage to the houses. Some individuals reported going into debt to cover repair costs or rent after being evacuated. Particularly in cities, rents have increased rapidly following the earthquake. Many families are left with no option but to stay in their damaged homes, despite the risks, as they cannot afford the cost of repairs or rent. Home repairs and facilities are also a top priority for individuals in rural areas, especially for displaced people who are returning to their original homes.



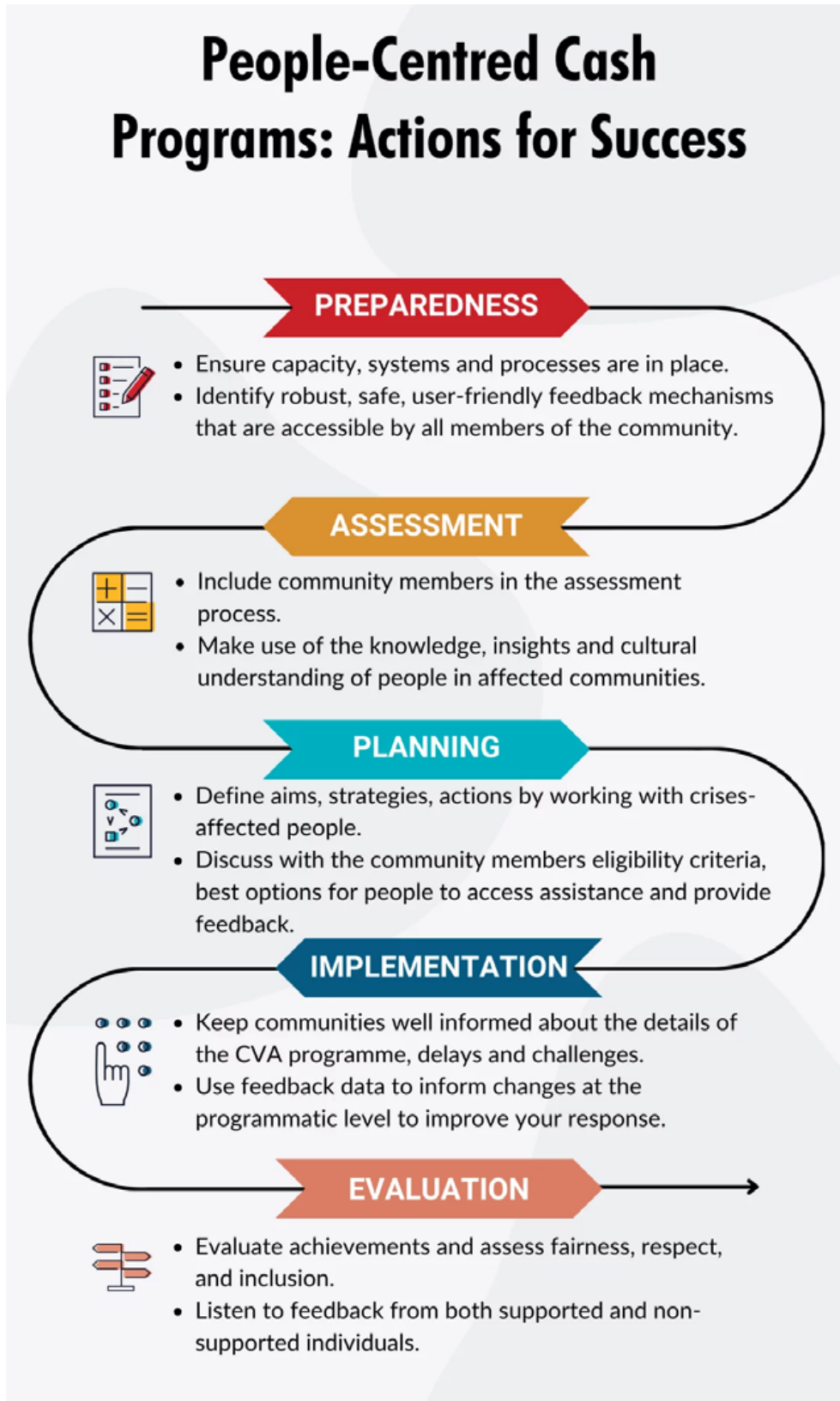
Livelihoods. Employment, self-employment, and livelihoods projects have been identified as a priority for all. While women also place importance on livelihoods, when asked about their primary concerns, women typically prioritise food and health care for their family members. As women are the family carers, and hold the responsibility for family members with disabilities, they expressed a need for support in home-based activities such as sewing and running retail shops.



Education has been a common priority. There is high concern among parents who can't keep their children in school. In poorer households, children as young as 12 leave school to work or beg and contribute to the household income. Examples were given of young girls dropping out of school to work as an indicator of the severity of the situation because young girls did not work outside the house before. While in rural areas support is requested for access to basic education and school items; in urban areas priority goes from basic education to high school and university. Supporting children to start, continue, or restart university is a particular concern, especially in Latakia.

Annex 6.

Community Engagement in Cash and Voucher Assistance through the programme cycle



Annex 7. Wellbeing framework

The British Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross developed and piloted a contextually appropriate guidance for measuring the contribution of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) to wellbeing.



Diagram 1: Universal wellbeing dimensions and domains 1






Wellbeing Domains	1. Material conditions	2. Health	3. Safety & Security	4. Social relations	5. Freedom of choice and action
Details (can include more)	The material conditions of a person, ability to meet basic needs, having enough food, assets, work, housing, shelter.	Physical health, mental health, access to health services	Personal safety, safe access to resources, protection from or in times of disasters, safety of housing/ shelter, safety at the workplace/ job, environmental hazard.	Social cohesion, mutual respect, ability to provide/ receive help, involvement in the community	Opportunities to achieve what a person values doing and being, equal rights for women and girls, equal access to education, ability to choose occupation or lifestyle, recreational time & space

Annex 8.

Movement CVA Operational Readiness levels²¹

The Movement CVA Operational Readiness Indicators measure the ability, likelihood, timeliness, accountability and scale of CVA delivery and are intended to demonstrate how their organisational capacity results in scalable, timely and accountable CVA.

SARC readiness in the programmes evaluated

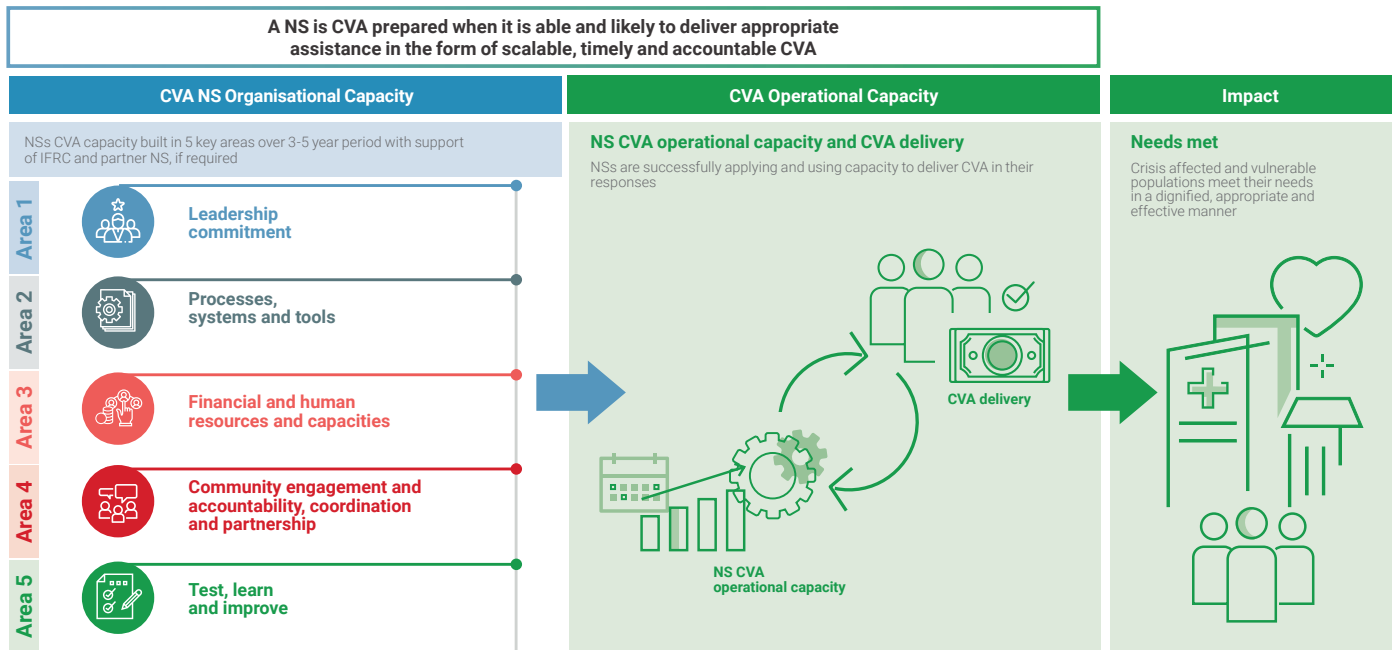
Indicator	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 3+	SARC Level
 # days from disaster to CVA delivery (only for emergency responses and approved early action)	 20 days	 14 days	 7 days	 2 days	Level 1
 # of people supported with CVA	 0-200 people	 201-1000 people	 1,001 – 10,000 people	 Over 10,001 people	Level 3+
 # of CVA with key CEA/AAP activities	 No or 1 activity	 2 activities	 3 activities	 3 activities	Level 2

Annex 9.

Cash Preparedness Areas

Extract from Guidance for Mainstreaming Cash and Voucher Assistance Cash Preparedness for Effective Response – Chapter 1: CVAP Areas

Figure 1: Measuring CVA organisational and operational capacity in the theory of change



Glossary

BRC	British Red Cross
CEA	Community Engagement and Accountability
CVA	Cash and Voucher Assistance
CVAP	Cash and Voucher Preparedness
CWG	Cash Working Group
DM	Disaster Management
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSP	Financial Service Provider
HH	Households
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
MCWG	Movement Cash Working Group
MEB	Minimum Expenditure Basket
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MPCA	Multipurpose cash assistance
NS	National society
OCHA	(United Nations) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
PLWD	People Living with Disabilities
PNS	Partner national societies
RCRC	Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SMS	Short Message Service
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SYP	Syrian Pound
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USD	United States Dollar
UN	United Nations
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene



This evaluation was commissioned by SARC to the Cash Hub and conducted between April and May 2024 by Andra Gulei, as lead evaluator, with support from Mazan Shikim, Rama Muzayen and Farah Ghadri in SARC CVA Unit. The success of this evaluation was possible thanks to the collaboration of all SARC departments and branches staff and volunteers, with special appreciations to Moussa Jammal -CVA coordinator in Hama, Rasha Malahfji- CVA coordinator in Aleppo, and Haidar Kinj- CVA coordinator Latakia.