

Community Engagement and Accountability in Cash and Voucher Assistance: A Best Practice Example from Ukraine

This case study documents how community engagement and accountability approaches were integrated into the Ukraine Red Cross Society's (URCS) Prykhystok programme, and the benefits this delivered.

Introduction

The Prykhystok Programme, implemented jointly by the Ukraine Red Cross Society (URCS) and Ukraine's Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories (MinRe), provides support to people hosting internally displaced people (IDPs) from occupied or frontline areas in their homes, by offering financial assistance to help cover increased or additional utility bills.

Starting in April 2022, the programme seeks to provide indirect support to up to 350,000 internally displaced people living in around 120,000 hosting households across Ukraine. By offering financial support, the programme has encouraged solidarity by enabling potential hosts to offer space in their homes to displaced people at a time when demand for accommodation from displaced people is high, and when increasing utility costs have been identified as one of the barriers reducing homeowners' willingness to host displaced people.

This case study documents how Community Engagement and Accountability approaches and activities including focus group discussions (FGDs), post distribution monitoring (PDM), feedback management, and information campaigns were integrated into the Prykhystok Programme to enhance quality and impact.



Community Participation in Monitoring Activities

Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) surveys and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were included in the programme to help ensure the voices of people involved - both hosts in receipt of Prykhystok Programme financial support, and displaced people living in their homes – were heard and used to inform programme adaptation and next steps. The PDM captured hosts' feedback and perceptions, while internally displaced people were reached through FGDs.

Post-distribution monitoring surveys helped URCS better understand the profile of hosting families, their living conditions, and the impact and relevance of the financial assistance being offered, as well as recommendations for improving the programme. Initially two modalities were used for PDM surveys to capture the views of hosts: firstly, an online survey launched via an SMS to hosts; and secondly through telephone surveys carried out by the URCS Call Centre. A comparative analysis was carried out to understand if results were different depending on the method used, and also to identify the most timely



and efficient way of gathering feedback from the hosts. Results of both exercises were very similar and as a result the recommendation was to use online surveys to be able to collect feedback in a timely manner and at scale, covering the whole country.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) sought to listen to and learn from the experiences of displaced people whose hosts had been accessing URCS financial assistance under the Prykhystok Programme. To better



understand the programme's benefits and shortcomings, as well as to identify additional needs and protection concerns, focus group participants were drawn from a broad cross section of the displaced people involved.

Discussions were also a chance for URCS to share information about the programme and other services provided in the area, promote existing feedback channels, and answer any questions people might have.

The FGDs provided an opportunity to understand if people participating were well informed about the programme generally, including if they knew how to reach out to URCS to share feedback, ask questions, or register complaints.

From both PDM and FGD exercises, lessons learnt were captured and recommendations compiled to inform adaptation and development of the programme.

Participation of people being hosted in these monitoring exercises also helped to identify and prevent unintended negative consequences of the programme, as well as providing an additional opportunity for participants to report, or for URCS to identify, actions which could constitute exploitation or abuse. The URCS CVA team also closely monitors reports from the protection cluster, IOM DTM and UNHCR assessment reports to triangulate information and understand if additional evidence exists from other organizations on protection risks faced by the people being hosted.



Led by the URCS CVA team, a *Prykhystok - One Year Later Lessons Learned* workshop was conducted with participation of URCS teams engaged in the implementation of the programme (CEA, PMER, IM, Comms, Information Centre and other programmatic and support services); IFRC in-country and regional delegates, and National Societies with presence in-country that were supporting the programme. During this workshop, the team presented the trajectory and growth of the Prykhystok programme to date, including challenges and progress around a number of areas, such as strategic, operational and technical issues; legal frameworks and data protection limitations; the URCS cash platform and the integration of feedback tools; implementation and opportunities for integration with other URCS programmes and services; and advocacy opportunities. Evidence based learning from the feedback received from hosts and people being hosted was used to support the discussions, recommendations and identify improvements. Key findings from this workshop relating to CEA suggest four main recommendations for the Prykhystok Programme.



1. The need for clear information to be shared systematically and consistently with both hosts and internally displaced people being hosted. While evidence from hosts' feedback indicated high levels of satisfaction (94 percent) with the information received, many of those being hosted that participated in the focus groups felt they had little knowledge of the programme and its processes; additional efforts are needed to improve sharing information about the Prykhystok programme with people being hosted so they understand the support that hosts can access.
2. As a high number of hosts and those being hosted live together sharing accommodation, one of the recommendations was to share information about Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support and other protection services available; as well as tips and guidance to help people living together to avoid or defuse tensions, with these shared through preferred channels including face-to-face, print, and on-line.
3. The need for more responsive handling of feedback, in particular closing the loop and informing people of actions taken in response to their feedback, and the streamlining of how feedback reports are shared internally between teams and acted upon.
4. To enable quicker and more accurate responses to people's questions, it was recommended that URCS Information Centre colleagues be granted limited access to view people's payment status in the URCS Platform. For various reasons, delays with payments have been a recurring issue. URCS plans for a chatbot to be able to automatically update people about their payment status have been delayed, so enabling Call Centre operators to access this information is a viable alternative.

Recommendations came as the programme was transitioning from one government ministry to another, which provided an excellent opportunity to capture, highlight, and incorporate these key adaptations into the programme's standard ways of working.

Feedback and Complaints System

URCS receives and responds to feedback via multiple channels, including the Information Centre's call centre (direct phone calls), emails, social media, and official letters.

Enquiries relating to cash assistance received through URCS' feedback channels are documented and - unless direct referral is required - shared with counterparts working in Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) through regular reports.



To help fully understand the feedback and questions being received related to the Prykhystok Programme, and to ensure a concrete operational response to issues arising, a recommendation was made for the Information Centre to present detailed CVA related feedback in the internal Cash Working Group.

The CVA team supported the Information Centre with key messages linked to different aspects of Prykhystok that were used by the Call Centre and shared through social media, including awareness messages related to fraudulent websites and links to receive support.

One of the key priorities identified was to ensure a timely response to people providing feedback, and for the Information Centre and Feedback Manager to be regularly provided with the most up-to-date information about all programmes, including Prykhystok, to ensure accurate, reliable, and consistent responses to people’s enquiries.

Updated project details, including eligibility criteria, value of grants, duration etc. are shared with the URCS CEA team each month and updated whenever changes are made to ensure Call Centre operators and the Feedback Manager are well informed and able to give timely, accurate responses to any feedback received.

Information Dissemination

Due to delays in Prykhystok payments and to provide clear and transparent information, URCS and the Ministry for Communities Territorial and Infrastructure Development prepared a joint communication campaign in February 2023. The main purpose was to provide timely information about programme implementation, promote Government Ministry and URCS feedback channels, and to address rumours/misinformation and provide critical information linked to payment delays and the likely causes. A poster was developed by URCS comms in collaboration with the Ministry and shared widely with local social protection offices and URCS branches, as well as being posted on the URCS website and social media channels to amplify its dissemination.



Prykhystok ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ (FAQs) were continuously updated to ensure information was accurate and consistent, and shared with relevant government and ministry partners for dissemination as well as via URCS social media and with URCS staff and volunteers, including with operators at the Call Centre.

As well as being an opportunity to listen to people affected by the conflict, Focus Group Discussions provided a chance to share information both verbally and physically through

pecially designed URCS leaflets with information about the Prykhystok programme, as well as about



additional services provided by URCS, Government departments and other humanitarian actors available in the local area including relevant contact details. Prykhystok information materials were also shared with URCS branches, local government social services offices, and village councils for further distribution to people in their communities.

While financial assistance itself primarily targeted hosts and indirectly supported internally displaced people who were being hosted, the need to share information about the programme with people being hosted was also recognised – enabling them to understand the eligibility criteria and limitations of the programme, for example that cash assistance is only available to those hosting people displaced from frontline areas or occupied territories.

In collaboration with the Protection Gender and Inclusion (PGI) specialist, a list was compiled of available protection services in areas where the focus groups were held, including details of safe and confidential complaints and feedback mechanisms.

To ensure inclusive access to information regardless of location, age, gender, disability, and access to technology or digital literacy, both digital and in-person methods were used for sharing information, including preferred channels of communication, such as Telegram, Viber, face-to-face etc.



Lessons learned

- Consultations with both recipients and non-recipients of financial support via PDM surveys and/or Focus Group Discussions are crucial; talking to people that are indirectly supported (hosted IDPs), as well as those accessing direct support (hosts), was found to be vital in understanding people's perceptions of the assistance, whether eligibility criteria were widely understood and accepted, and to identify additional needs and priorities.
- Keeping Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) sheets regularly updated with the latest programme information and sharing these with the Information Centre and other volunteers and staff in a timely fashion – including making them available online – is critical to the functioning of an effective feedback system. The upkeep of a “5Ws” table tracking who is doing what, where, when and for whom, beyond the initial emergency phase of a response was also found to be a critical element in enabling this to happen.
- It is important for the URCS's feedback mechanism, and other recipients of feedback and questions - including regional and local URCS branches, government counterparts, Movement partners, and other humanitarian agencies - to record, compile, analyse and identify feedback trends, to better understand and identify key areas and actions for improvement.
- Integrating CEA approaches into Cash and Voucher Assistance alongside other crosscutting areas is crucial, including Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) and Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS). This helps ensure people can be referred to and access the specialist support they might need, as well as supporting the principle of “do no harm”.



Recommendations

The integration of Community Engagement and Accountability in Cash and Voucher Assistance is an important approach for the URCS, helping ensure the participation and engagement of communities, as well as meeting donor requirements, and aligning with the strategic objectives of the 2022-2025 URCS One Plan. Based on learning from Prykhystok, to effectively mainstream CEA in CVA activities, recommendations include:

- Continuous engagement with the Information Centre to ensure operators have the information they need to be able to respond swiftly and effectively to enquiries, and to complete the feedback loop.
- Advocacy to enable URCS Information Centre operators to have limited access to view people's payment status so they can provide quicker and more accurate responses to applicants' questions, and for progress on the development of a chatbot solution that can provide the relevant information automatically.
- Regular PDM surveys and FGDs to proactively reach out to affected people to understand their perceptions of the assistance being provided and gather feedback to inform and adjust URCS activities.
- Lessons learnt workshops to be conducted with key stakeholders - including relevant partner government ministries, URCS staff and volunteers, and community members who are both directly and indirectly supported by the assistance - to discuss challenges and best practices, as well as to reflect on key lessons. Recommendations from these workshops should be used to inform changes in programming, and to support the development of case studies demonstrating identified best practices and highlighting the use of feedback.
- Commitment from programme implementers and decision makers to prioritise people-centred, flexible, and adaptable approaches, that ensure programmes adapt and change in response to feedback received.
- Collaboration and engagement with key departments, such as Humanitarian Diplomacy, to assist with advocacy with relevant government and ministry counterparts to enable adjustments to be made to programmes based on evidence collected through community feedback.
- Continuous close engagement with PGI counterparts and other programmatic departments to identify appropriate referral pathways in specific locations and programmes (shelter, MHPSS, etc).

Contact information

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