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Capability Statement

Group Cash Transfers by Welthungerhilfe and Partners in Ukraine and beyond

The Challenge

The first and last responders to every crisis are the communities and survivors themselves. Yet, despite the increasing momentum gained by the localization agenda in recent years, the current international humanitarian system still struggles to meaningfully implement truly people-centered and locally led interventions – that is, communities are not always put at the center of humanitarian and development responses. In fact, top-down approaches still predominantly inform the way in which humanitarian assistance is provided, whereby crisis-affected communities have little or no say in the decisions directly affecting their lives.

This 'conventional' approach to humanitarian assistance tends to view affected populations as passive recipients rather than active agents of change. As a result, humanitarian assistance too often does not meet people's most important needs. [1]

Moreover, needs assessments, procurement, and logistics take time, delaying the delivery of lifesaving assistance and impacting its overall effectiveness.

However, several approaches prioritizing locally owned humanitarian interventions do exist, aiming to ensure that such assistance is timely and that it addresses communities' most pressing needs. Among these, **Group Cash Transfers** (GCT), alongside other forms of cash-based assistance, enable communities to implement initiatives according to their own priorities, precisely by supporting communities own initiatives. By making money directly accessible to first responders and community-groups in crisis-affected areas, the GCT approach leverages communities' resilience.

Welthungerhilfe's Strategic Approach

In its Strategy as well as its Humanitarian Action Focus, Welthungerhilfe (WHH) committed to a paradigm shift towards a humanitarian system that is people-centered, locally led and more localized. Therefore, WHH and partners continuously explore innovative methods and approaches in working with communities to ensure that they have influence and agency over situations affecting them. In doing so, WHH acknowledges crisis-affected populations as equal agents of change.

Recognizing communities' knowledge and experience, WHH ensures that its work not only respects their priorities and decisions but also builds on their own efforts. One of the ways in which we do that is through Group Cash Transfers. Ideally, they are embedded in the **Supporting Community-Led Crisis Response** (sclr) approach, which WHH is exploring as well.

[1] Ground Truth Solutions, What Crisis Affected Communities Need from a Humanitarian Reset, 2025.

Supporting Community-Led Crisis Response (sclr)

Sclr is an approach used to support mutual aid. It aims to strengthen and/or complement communities' capacities and means to respond to emergencies and crises as well as reducing vulnerability to future crises. Sclr aims to be transformational by avoiding existing disempowering structural practices using several processes and tools to foster community collaboration; and maximize local ownership, responsiveness, and connectivity, while minimizing the risks of doing harm. The approach prioritizes open dialogue to reach co-created solutions and a shared vision that promotes innovation and deeper commitment to achieving desired common outcomes and wider change. This is achieved with tools that can be used by affected communities, including appreciative inquiry, locally informed risk mitigation, and experiential learning [...] (Local to Global Protection & CALP Network).

Group Cash Transfers

Group Cash Transfer (GCT) is [...] a mode of assistance that provides resources in the form of cash to selected community groups. These groups may be self-organized and pre-existing before the crisis or formed in response to it, with the aim of implementing projects that benefit either a sub-section of the community or the community as a whole. GCTs should try to be as locally led as possible, with local actors leading the design, implementation and monitoring of responses [...] (Local to Global Protection & CALP Network).

Results & Key Interventions

As part of its Joint Emergency Response Ukraine (JERU) together with Concern Worldwide, WHH started a Group Cash Transfer pilot project in Ukraine in October 2023. In partnership with the Relief Coordination Centre (RCC), a Ukraine-based initiative, more than 30 community groups in six administrative units (hromadas) across Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia received grants worth EUR 2000 each.

After project locations had been selected by RCC based on their proximity to the frontline, information about the GCT opportunity was shared and initial meetings were held with interested groups. Groups had to fill in a short application form which was subsequently reviewed and scored according to set criteria, such as the urgency and the relevance of the problem they would solve. Selected groups signed Grant Contracts and received a cash transfer within 2-3 weeks. The projects were mostly implemented over a period of two months, after which the groups submitted impact reports and received a certificate of completion.

Two types of community groups participated in this pilot project:

1. **evacuation groups**, and
2. (non-registered) **community-based organizations** (CBOs).

Evacuation groups were typically formed in response to urgent needs emerging in 2022, often organized by community leaders or local volunteers, rallying friends, family and neighbors.
CBOs brought together people from within a community with a shared commitment to responding to their community's needs, for example teachers working at the same school. While group sizes ranged from 2 to 25 members, all groups reported having collaborative decision-making processes.

The cash transfer was made to the personal bank account of a designated member of each group. In addition to the financial assistance, RCC provided non-financial support during the project implementation phase, for example in the form of capacity building or support with logistical and operational challenges such as procurement decisions.

A special kind of community solution:

In Chkalovska hromada of Kharkivska oblast, a community with limited state funding heavily affected by landmine contamination, local social workers face mounting challenges. With an influx of internally displaced persons adding to the population, the demand for social services increased substantially. For each social worker, this meant covering larger distances to reach individuals under their care, often traveling between remote homes with few transport options.

To address this issue, a project was initiated to equip three dedicated social workers with electric bicycles, along with essential accessories. The electric bicycles allow the social workers to navigate the widespread areas quickly and safely, ensuring that elderly residents, people with disabilities, and vulnerable families receive the care they need in a timely manner. This initiative has not only improved the social workers' ability to respond to community needs but has also strengthened the connection between vulnerable residents and the support services they rely on.

Empowered by the grant, most of the projects by CBOs focused on water supply in their community. Procuring items to drill wells, install pumps, and lay pipes, many projects addressed severe water shortages. Other projects by CBOs rehabilitated bomb shelters and educational spaces, repaired cultural centers and created safe spaces for children. For the evacuation groups, the main objective was the safe evacuation of individuals from dangerous areas, specifically older people, children, and people with disabilities in immediate danger due to active combat.

Across the board, the 31 initiatives yielded impressive results, benefiting a significant number of community members. In Shevchenkove hromada, a broken village water well was repaired, serving 1500 people. In Mykhailo-Lukasheve hromada, an educational space in the only shelter of the community was rehabilitated, supporting the learning of 500 children. The evacuation groups helped thousands of at-risk individuals in conflict zones. Moreover, feedback from the groups highlighted that their initiatives significantly strengthened community cohesion, encouraged collaboration, and fostered trust in their communities. A key insight from the GCT pilot phase was that communities benefitted from structured support in identifying their priorities and preparing grant applications. Accordingly, in the most recent round, JERU and its partners engaged local facilitators to liaise with community groups, assist them in articulating needs, and guide them through the application process. The facilitators were selected by implementing partners based on their strong local connections and ability to effectively engage the community.

After the successful pilot, JERU invested further in scaling up GCT activities and adjusted the set-up of the GCT response based on the experience and feedback from the pilot phase. The maximum value of the grant per group was increased to EUR 5000. Thanks to the funding of the German Federal Foreign Office, more than 100 groups have been supported until today. JERU is also expanding GCT implementation to other regions of Ukraine, further enhancing its partner network and outreach.

Working with a new mode of assistance, there have obviously been various questions about the concept and its implementation: how to access GCT; who receives information about GCT opportunities and how; to what extent participating groups represent those most in need from within their communities; to what extent presented needs are 'basic needs' in the sense of the humanitarian understanding and donor mandate; and how to deal with equipment (e.g., laptops, projector) that groups require for short-term activities. Future GCT initiatives will therefore even more carefully balance the community-led aspect of GCT and (current) project requirements. WHH will continue to advocate for enhanced community-led humanitarian responses.

Overall, the CBOs and evacuation groups expressed a high level of satisfaction with the Group Cash Transfer mode of assistance by WHH and partners. According to them, the key success factors with this approach are the bottom-up nature of community empowerment, the timeliness and flexibility of funding, the light reporting requirements, and the transparency of the process.

Building on the groundwork and success of its GCT initiatives, JERU has now moved to using sclr. Additional initiatives integrating GCT components by WHH are being explored in the contexts of Syria, Gaza/oPt, Myanmar and Sudan.

Networks & Resources

- For more information on GCT by JERU, please contact Artem Roshchepa (artem.roshchepa@whh.de), JERU CVA Coordinator and member of the Community-Led Initiatives CoP under the CWG Ukraine.
- For more information on CVA: CALP Network.
- For more information on sclr: Local to Global Protection.
- For distinguishing sclr and GCT: How can we Distinguish a 'supporting community led response' from a Group Cash Transfer? – Local to Global Protection & CALP Network
- For more information on localization at Welthungerhilfe: Localization (external link) or Localization (internal link).

Contacts

- **Artem Roshchepa**, JERU CVA Coordinator Ukraine artem.roshchepa@whh.de
- **Markus Diemon**, Advisor Cash & Voucher Assistance markus.diemon@whh.de
- **Katharina Hamed**, Advisor Humanitarian Preparedness and Learning katharina.hamed@whh.de
- **People-Centered Locally Led Humanitarian Action Task Force** Mailing List PCLLHA@welthungerhilfe.de

Find more info on the Welthungerhilfe website

https://www.welthungerhilfe.org/what-we-do/countries/ukraine

Evacuating people from frontline areas is dangerous, urgent work and many of those making it possible are local volunteer groups.
Through a simple Group Cash Transfer model, these teams can quickly access what they need most: fuel, vehicle repairs, or essential evacuation equipment.
Over the past year, together with our partner Координаційний гуманітарний центр, we supported 68 volunteer initiatives under a project funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.