

ADVANCING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL PROTECTION IN THE RESPONSE TO THE SYRIAN CRISIS

Note on Strategic Opportunities, Challenges, and Way Forward¹

WHY SHOULD THE RESPONSE TO THE SYRIAN CRISIS FEATURE AND INVEST IN SOCIAL PROTECTION?

Social protection strongly features in the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan! cutting across various sectors and various humanitarian and resilience-development interventions ranging from in-kind food aid, unconditional and conditional cash transfers, school feeding programs, child and family protection support services, to active labour market programs and policy initiatives that promote access to paid work and social security.

Delivering on global commitments...

- Providing social protection access to all, including for groups traditionally marginalized and discriminated against by national will be key to fulfilling the pledge of **the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs to leave no-one behind and reach the furthest behind**. The **Addis Ababa Action Agenda** calls for Member States to provide “strong international support” and to “explore coherent funding modalities to mobilize additional resources” for social protection.
- The international community has agreed on important global commitments to strengthen the delivery of social protection services in protracted crises, humanitarian and fragility contexts. These include **the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain (2016) as well as the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants (2016)**. These also include **ILO’s “Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (N°205)**.
- The recent International Conference on Social Protection in Contexts of Fragility and Forced Displacement held in Brussels (September 2017) reiterated the need to promote joint humanitarian and development action for collective outcomes, strengthen national social protection capacity and systems; and ensure adequate financing and a coherent funding architecture.

At the heart of these commitments lies the call for partners to work across the ‘development-humanitarian nexus’ with a vision of creating sustainable response mechanisms and enhanced prospects of decent and resilient livelihoods for crisis-affected men, women, youth and children among refugees, internally displaced populations and host communities alike.

New Opportunities

- For various reasons, social protection services to refugees have been mainly provided through parallel humanitarian systems. **However, there is a variety of ways in which the humanitarian and development responses can spur transformative changes in the delivery of social protection services for the benefit of all. And there is great potential for partners to further build on these synergies.**
- Formal national social protection systems in Syria and neighboring countries were limited in their adequacy before the crisis and were not equipped to respond to shocks, let alone a shock of such a

¹ *This short note reflects on an ongoing initiative of the Regional UNDG working group on Social Protection. The Group, co-chaired by ILO and UNDP Group, was established in March 2016 and is bringing together regional experts from ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, WFP, UNHCR, UNFPA, WHO, UNV, UNODC, ESCWA, IOM to share knowledge, think and work together on the development of effective and inclusive social protection systems, including floors, in the Arab region, as a key pathway for reducing vulnerabilities and building resilience to shocks and stresses, reducing poverty and achieving the SDGs. The Group has thus started to look at the response to the Syria crisis – specifically the 3RP- from a social protection lens and is currently developing a comprehensive brief on the topic. The brief aims to contribute to a new vision for the response to social protection needs of Syrian displaced populations and vulnerable host communities. This vision should be aligned with the global commitments to ‘leave no one behind’ and to harness synergies between humanitarian and development action (and financing) in strengthening capacities to deliver social protection services that can preserve human capital and build resilience of both communities in a sustainable manner. [This note sheds lights on initial findings and recommendations emerging from this work.](#)*

magnitude. In recent years, some countries embarked on serious efforts to reduce or lifting subsidies in addition to reforming their cash assistance programs. **This also presents partners with a huge opportunity to leverage their cumulative experience, technical capacities and knowledge to work with national governments in the transfer of know-how to assist with ongoing reforms and strengthening of national systems.**

While there remain various challenges and risks to address, there are large potential benefits for national and international partners, as well as for donors to promote and support a better alignment, and cross-fertilization between social protection/assistance responses and national social protection systems.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL PROTECTION

- **Social protection responses in the 3RP has already made important strides towards enhancing their contribution to the resilience of affected people and communities on a more comprehensive and sustainable basis.** These include, an increased use of multi-purpose cash-transfers; efforts to integrate cash-assistance with other social support services; linking cash assistance with the expansion of sustainable livelihoods for refugees and host communities, as well as efforts to advocate for and promote policy changes that allow for refugees to access work permits and social security. **If implemented at scale, these initiatives have the potential to propel significant advances towards more inclusive and sustainable social protection for all.**
- **Social protection/assistance responses can act as catalysts for developing self-sustaining national safety nets and social protection systems through:**
 - ✓ **Enhancing the efficiency, transparency and accountability of humanitarian and nationally-owned systems through better alignment.** In particular, the **use of common platforms** and registries with government can streamline processes, add value and enhance national capacities and learning in view of eventual transition and handover. These also can generate a range of **benefits for social inclusion and cohesion.**
 - ✓ **Leveraging the use of new technologies** (e.g digital delivery systems and help desks, biometric authentication, blockchain technology and more) for greater transparency and efficiency cost savings, data protection and mitigation of risks
 - ✓ **Joint piloting of schemes with national stakeholders** that can facilitate successful scale up or adoption by government in the longer term.

Performance improvements could incentivize donors to provide financial support that could help overcome funding constraints. Working through common systems could also improve the predictability of financing and sustainability of their programs, while ensuring that refugee needs are addressed through sustainable systems that rely less on short-term humanitarian funding

- ✓ **Improving prevention capacity through the introduction of mechanisms for risk preparedness** and rapid response to crises through engaging early on with national and/or local governments to strengthen the design of social protection systems by introducing features ahead of disaster and crises.

CHALLENGES AND KEY ENABLERS

The ability of 3RP social protection actors to successfully leverage these opportunities for enhanced investments in inclusive social protection systems depends on addressing a set of challenges and enabling conditions, including:

- ✓ **Establishing new and creative financing that helps to pool and bridge humanitarian and development funding,** channels funds to cover gaps in national systems, and provides multi-year, predictable support enhanced knowledge-sharing. Enhanced linkages between humanitarian and development funding streams would also enable the needed longer-term investments for strengthening, building or rebuilding integrated national social protection systems.

- ✓ **More robust evidence-building and learning from social protection/assistance interventions, also to secure effective and differentiated approaches that account for contextual specificities at country level.** In particular on (i) the relationship between displacement, vulnerability and poverty to inform the articulation of more harmonized targeting methodologies; (ii) the differential impact, including gender impact - of various social protection measures and delivery models and in various contexts; the economic and social security benefits of participation of displaced populations in the labor markets (iii) conditions under which the delivery of basic services and social protection contribute towards state legitimacy and social cohesion.

Leveraging and investing resources in monitoring & evaluation, as well as in high quality research by all stakeholders is required to generate a systematic evidence base that will then pave the way for improved effectiveness in social protection policy-making and programming whilst making the 'business' case to enable governments to expand social protection coverage.

- ✓ **Knowledge Sharing and South-South Cooperation:** effectively leveraging knowledge exchange opportunities and SSC in the challenging context of the Syria crisis response represents a critical enabling factor for achieving the key nexus objectives on inclusive and sustainable social protection: broader coverage and improved targeting; enhanced performance and efficiency.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE WAY FORWARD

- Based on a stock take of recent mapping and assessments, undertake a rapid country mapping of humanitarian and national social protection systems, platforms, mechanisms, challenges and opportunities for strengthened linkages between them
- Explore how the Social Protection Floor framework can facilitate work with governments in the region towards a common vision of the social protection coverage that needs to be put in place for refugees and vulnerable host populations alike
- Support approaches to include dedicated and coordinated investment in the shock-responsiveness of national social protection systems
- **Explore interest of governments, bilateral and multilateral donors in establishing common financing mechanisms** or adjusting existing ones to allow for channeling development and humanitarian funds to finance common social protection delivery mechanisms/systems (even through separate windows). Options could include:
 - ✓ Development financing for technical assistance to national institutions
 - ✓ Pooled financing mechanisms including for humanitarian safety nets in the absence of a durable solution or for joint/transitional schemes (not yet fully government-owned or funded)

Support and promote UN-wide country common approaches through existing coordination platforms and strengthen synergies between the 3RP Steering Committee and the regional UNDG working group on Social Protection to provide guidance for the preparation and monitoring of social protection/assistance programs for the next 3RP cycle !