

**ADVANCING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL PROTECTION  
IN THE RESPONSE TO THE SYRIAN CRISIS**  
*Strategic Opportunities, Challenges, and Way Forward*

## WORKING PAPER

R-UNDG WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL PROTECTION

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This paper 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 Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP)- from a social protection lens. The present issue paper aims to support a new vision for the response to social protection needs of refugees, IDPs 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.

### A. BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

**A.1 Objectives of the Paper:** The Syria crisis has entered its eighth year and has caused unprecedented displacement and humanitarian needs in Syria and its neighbouring countries. Governments of affected countries, humanitarian and development partners have coordinated their response to the crisis through the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for Syria. This brief aims to contribute to the articulation of a new vision for the response to the social protection needs of Syrian displaced populations and vulnerable host communities. This vision should be aligned with the global commitment of ‘leaving no one behind’ and harness synergies between humanitarian and development strategies to preserve human capital and build resilience of both communities. The paper provides an overview of the response provided to date and takes stock of evidence available on the impact of programs, while highlighting recent shifts in delivery models. It identifies gaps and opportunities for scaling up successful models of improved alignment and closer harmonization between humanitarian programs and national systems. Finally, it proposes recommendations that will help Governments, humanitarian and development partners move towards greater coherence in the delivery of national social protection for the most vulnerable amongst displaced and host communities. While informal social protection including faith-based charity such as zakat or remittances remain important in all contexts, the topic is beyond the scope of the paper.

**A.2 Global commitments to inclusive social protection:** Inclusive social protection is a powerful tool to fulfil the pledge of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs to leave no-one behind and

reach the furthest behind, by advancing human rights and tackling inequalities and exclusion, strengthening resilience capacities of vulnerable people and communities<sup>1</sup>.



Source: UN 2015.

Humanitarian Summit (2016) and the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants (2016), which specifically called on governments humanitarian and development actors to ‘invest in the development of social assistance delivery mechanisms while strengthening capacity at national and sub-national levels’ and to ‘develop strategies for the protection of refugees within the framework of national social protection systems’.<sup>3</sup> This also includes ILO’s recommendations on ‘promoting decent work, social protection and employment opportunities for refugees and host communities’ (2017)<sup>4</sup>. At the heart of these commitments lies the call for linking the work on social protection across the ‘development-humanitarian nexus’ with a vision of creating long-term and sustainable response mechanisms and prospects of decent and resilient livelihoods for crisis-affected populations (refugees, internally displaced populations and host communities alike).

The recent International Conference on Social Protection in Contexts of Fragility and Forced Displacement held in Brussels (Sept 2017)<sup>5</sup> served as an opportunity to reflect on the above mentioned global commitments and to put forward recommendations to help operationalize them. Of most relevance to this brief are recommendations of the Conference pertaining to i) Strengthening joint humanitarian and development action for collective outcomes; ii) Strengthening national social protection capacity/systems; and, iii) Ensuring adequate financing and a coherent funding architecture.

**A.3 Inclusive social protection challenges and opportunities for change in the sub-region:** Like most countries in the MENA region, countries affected by the Syria crisis have in place public social protection systems that combine social insurance and social assistance programs. State-provided benefits tend to be universal social assistance schemes (such as family allowances or food and fuel subsidies) or contribution-based (employment social security schemes). NGO programs tend to include categorical or geographical cash

<sup>1</sup> SDG 1.3 explicitly calls to “Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable” whilst SDG 10.4 calls for social protection to ‘progressively achieve greater equality’.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AAAA\\_Outcome.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AAAA_Outcome.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The latest draft of the Global Compact on Refugees (8 March 2018) recommends “efforts to deliver assistance through local and national service providers where possible (including through State-led social protection systems and multipurpose cash assistance), instead of establishing parallel systems for refugees from which host communities do not benefit over time”.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:R205](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R205) “Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (N°205).

<sup>5</sup> Proceedings can be viewed here: <http://socialprotection.org/livestream-2017-social-protection-contexts-fragility-and-forced-displacement>

and in-kind social assistance such as the provision of family allowances, orphan sponsorship, food rations and household items.<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that only one third of the MENA region populations are enrolled in formal social security schemes.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, if subsidies are excluded, social safety net programs in MENA represent a small percent of GDP (0.7%) and are generally fragmented and badly targeted. According to the World Bank (Silva, 2012), most of the poor and vulnerable fall through the cracks: two out of three people in the poorest quintile are not reached by non-subsidy SSNs. The countries affected by the Syria crisis are no exception to this regional pattern. According to the World Bank's ASPIRE database<sup>8</sup>, the coverage of the poorest fifth of the population with social protection and labour programs ranges from a mere 3.6% in Syria, 25.5% in Lebanon, 60.3% in Egypt, to a high 85.1% in Jordan and 89.5% in Iraq. In countries where coverage figures are higher, this is generally because of the reach of subsidies or in-kind assistance. The benefit incidence of social assistance for the poorest quintile ranges from 12.4% in Iraq to 22.7% in Jordan, confirming that social assistance schemes are not particularly pro-poor.<sup>9</sup> Spending on all forms of social assistance is estimated at 0.2% of GDP in Egypt, 0.7% in Jordan, 1.0% in Lebanon and 2.6% in Iraq.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, the most significant source of social protection (in-cash and in-kind services) for most vulnerable populations comes from religious welfare organizations, often linked to large networks of schools and hospitals.<sup>11</sup>

In recent years, faced with acute fiscal deficits, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq and Jordan have embarked on serious efforts to reform their social protection program including by reducing or lifting subsidies in addition to reforming their cash assistance programs. This presents 3RP partners with an unprecedented opportunity to leverage their cumulative experience and technical capacity to work with national governments and partners in the transfer of know-how to address context-specific needs and assist with ongoing reform efforts. In Syria, a comprehensive social protection reform will need to be part of post-crisis developments, building on reform efforts that started before the crisis.

Whilst health and education services to refugees in host countries are mainly provided through national systems, the same is not the case for social protection to refugees. National social protections systems in Syria and neighbouring countries were limited in their adequacy before the crisis and were not equipped to respond to shocks, let alone a shock of the magnitude that was the Syria crisis. In addition, there were political considerations that made opening national social protection systems to refugees an unviable option. As a result, and with the notable exception of Turkey, social protection support to Syrian refugees is largely delivered through parallel humanitarian channels<sup>12</sup>. However, there is a variety of ways in which the humanitarian and development response has spurred transformative changes in the delivery of social protection services for the benefit of all. And there is great potential to further build on these synergies.

As evidenced in this paper, the social protection response to the Syria crisis, and in particular, cash-based social assistance interventions, have de facto generated considerable innovations in terms of approaches, tools, and systems. The shift towards addressing the needs of refugees within an integrated framework that addresses the needs of host communities has been applauded as best practice. Across the region, cash-based interventions have utilized a variety of tools and systems that range from common vulnerability and targeting methodologies to the use of common delivery systems and technology for identification and cash delivery. These innovations were largely successful in promoting improved transparency, eliminating fraud, ensuring efficiency, while delivering to the most vulnerable utilizing effective targeting and a broad network of referrals utilizing a wide range of local and international partners.

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<sup>6</sup> Social Protection and Social Policy Systems in the MENA Region: Emerging Trends, Rana Jawad, UNDESA, N.Y. 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Inclusion and Resilience: The Way Forward for Social Safety Nets in the Middle East and North Africa, Overview. Joana Silva, Victoria Lavine, Matteo Morgard. MENA Development Report, September 2012.

<sup>8</sup> <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/aspire/> - accessed on 27 March 2018.

<sup>9</sup> No data are available for Lebanon and Syria.

<sup>10</sup> Data are from 2009-2013. No data are available for Syria.

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/eng/PIF40\\_Social\\_protection\\_after\\_the\\_Arab\\_Spring.pdf](http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/eng/PIF40_Social_protection_after_the_Arab_Spring.pdf)

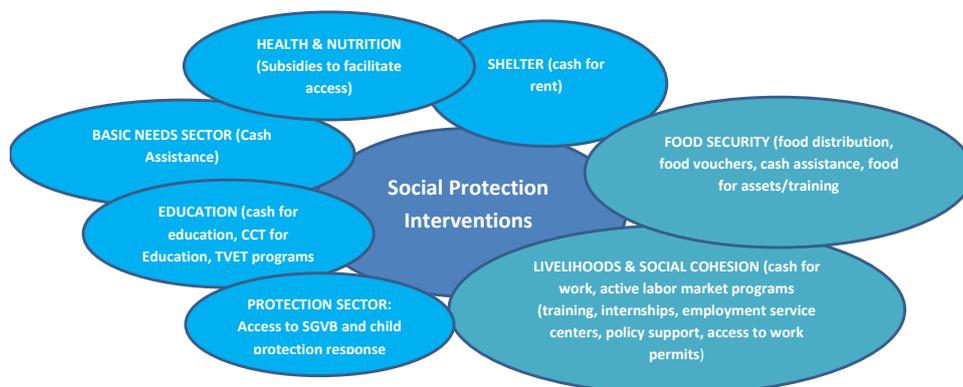
<sup>12</sup> Turkey is a notable exception, where a major social assistance program for refugees, the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), is run through Turkey's existing social assistance offices; likewise, the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) for Syrian Refugees was an extension of the national CCTE program of the Turkish Government, with EU funding. In Iraq, the Refugee Act (Law No. 51, 1971) recognizes the right of refugees to public employment, access to social services, monthly welfare allowances. However, in practice, most refugees and asylum seekers in Iraq do not have access to these services. However, in Kurdistan, refugees enjoy greater access.

Whilst risks and challenges cannot be underestimated, there are large potential benefits for national and humanitarian partners, as well as for donors to promote and support a better alignment between humanitarian assistance and national systems. From the perspective of Governments, huge gains can be achieved from utilizing common platforms and tools that have been tested and proven to contribute to improved transparency, efficiency and accountability. Governments could also benefit from embedding humanitarian mechanisms to enhance the shock-responsiveness of national social protection systems and to enable these to respond to future disasters. Finally, performance improvements resulting from enhanced capacity could incentivize donors to provide financial support that could help overcome funding constraints. Working through common systems could 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. Lastly, for donors, alignment between the two systems based on the use of common systems and tools, would provide the incentive for a more coherent, cost-effective and sustainable financing architecture.

## B. SOCIAL PROTECTION RESPONSE SNAPSHOT

**B.1 Social protection: a key feature of the response to the Syrian Crisis and key pathway to socio-economic resilience:** Social protection does not feature as a stand-alone response sector in the 3RP<sup>13</sup>. Rather, social protection activities cut across various sectors (food, basic needs, health, education, nutrition, protection, livelihoods) 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 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Social Protection and the 3RP



Whilst evidence remains scarce, findings from recent assessments suggest positive impacts of social assistance interventions, particularly cash transfers, on the resilience of affected populations and their ability to continue to access essential basic services. For instance, it has been found that in Jordan, refugees receiving a combination of UNHCR cash assistance, UNICEF conditional cash grants and full-value WFP food vouchers – have median incomes that exceed their median expenditures (370 JOD vs 321 JOD). This prevented harmful coping strategies, such as buying cheaper foods and resorting to debt. It facilitated vulnerable

<sup>13</sup> However, it is worth noting that the Jordan Response Plan (2016-2018) has an explicit section on “social protection”. The overall objective is to provide vulnerable groups affected by the crisis with access to improved social protection services and legal protection frameworks in governorates most affected by the Syria crisis - this however encompasses most *refugee protection* activities (incl. cash assistance for vulnerable refugees/NFIs for new arrivals; national procedures and mechanisms to ensure that refugees fleeing Syria are able to access the territory, to seek asylum and to understand their rights and obligations; reducing and mitigating the risks and consequences of SGBV, child protection; and ‘basic needs activities’ ..as well as support to the expansion of national safety nets (NAF, Zakat...) for Jordanians. Worth noting also that the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (2017-2020) has a strategic objective (3) on “Support service provision through national systems” (this includes social protection. The “Basic Assistance” sector strategy foresees further exploring approaches to social protection and safety nets, this includes setting up a “Social Protection Committee” within the Ministry of Social Affairs, assessing existing safety net programs, supporting the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP).

people's access to key services and contributed to better nutritional and child health outcomes. Reportedly also, beneficiary women are found to have a greater control over spending.<sup>14</sup>

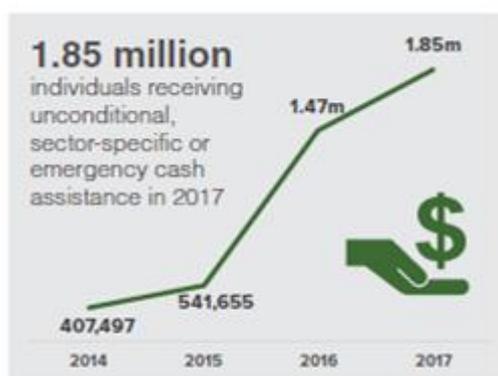
Likewise, an evaluation of the Multipurpose Cash Assistance Program in Lebanon<sup>15</sup> found that it increased refugees' consumption of living essentials, with their total monthly expenditures, on average, 21% higher than those of non-beneficiaries. Furthermore, non-beneficiary households were found to be 1.8 times more likely than beneficiary households to borrow money in order to rent the place where they live. Interestingly also, the program was found to have contributed to social cohesion, whereby cash assistance has increased by five times beneficiaries' sense of trust of the community hosting them.

Cash transfers in the food security sector have reportedly injected an estimated USD 3bn into host economies, stimulating growth to the benefits of refugees, host communities and governments. In Jordan and Lebanon, they helped a network of more than 700 contracted retail shops diversify their produce and expand operations further<sup>16</sup>.

Education-focused cash transfer schemes, in combination with associated interventions such as social work, have had a significant beneficial effect on enrolment and retention of Syrian refugee children in secondary education. Schemes in Lebanon and Jordan have demonstrated this impact.<sup>17</sup>

**B.2 Major shifts in the social protection response to the crisis:** Since the beginning of the crisis, the social protection response has undergone notable shifts geared towards enhancing its contribution to the resilience of affected people and communities on a more comprehensive and sustainable basis. These have included:

**Figure 2**



**Increased use of cash-based assistance:** In line with agreements under the Grand Bargain which call for greater dignity and choice for beneficiaries, multi-purpose cash transfers have been increasingly used as a prime response modality throughout the region, with partners increasingly working together to develop harmonized approaches (see Section C). Reportedly, the total number of affected people receiving unconditional, sector specific emergency cash assistance increased more than 3.5-fold between 2014 and 2017 (see Figure 2<sup>18</sup>). In 2018, 582,000 families, approximately 2.9 million people, are targeted for cash assistance. The use of cash-based programming has also expanded significantly inside Syria.

**Integrating cash-assistance with other social support services:** Partners have also recognized that cash-based social assistance must be complemented with an integrated package of interventions, service provision and referrals/case management that address non-income constraints. This is consistent with the notion that effective social protection responses need to be comprehensive and help tackle poverty in all its dimensions<sup>19</sup>. For instance, the Min Ila Cash Transfer in Lebanon program offers a monthly cash transfer to families enrolled in afternoon '2nd shift' and household visits with referrals to complementary services for children who do not attend. Through a combination of cash and referrals, the program can address income- and non-income-related vulnerabilities.

<sup>14</sup> ODI, Nov 2017, A promise of tomorrow: The effects of UNHCR and UNICEF cash assistance on Syrian refugees in Jordan

<sup>15</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-cash-consortium-lcc-impact-evaluation-multi-purpose-cash-assistance-programme>

<sup>16</sup> Source 3RP 2018-2019: Regional Overview

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF, Impact evaluation of the 'Min Ila' program in Lebanon, forthcoming

<sup>18</sup> Source, 3RP (2018-2019), Regional Overview, p.47

<sup>19</sup> Multidimensional poverty is made up of several factors that constitute poor people's experience of deprivation)—such as poor health, lack of education, inadequate living standards, lack of income (as one of several factors considered), disempowerment, poor quality of work and threat from violence.

**Linking cash assistance with the expansion of sustainable livelihoods for refugees and host communities**<sup>20</sup>: Particularly in the wake of the 'Supporting Syria and the Region conference' held in London in 2016, short term cash for work/public works and other active labour market programs have emerged as an important element of the response with a view to spurring transitions towards more sustainable livelihoods opportunities for both refugees and host communities. In Syria, labour intensive schemes such as asset creation programs have been used for the restoration and rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure in relatively stable areas, areas of return and hosting communities<sup>21</sup>. In Jordan, labour intensive programs are being implemented in the vulnerable Governorates of Irbid and Mafrq<sup>22</sup> that seek to optimize the use of labour and local procurement, thus increasing indirect job creation while improving decent work standards for workers. Other cash for work initiatives for vulnerable Jordanian youth and women are being combined with enrolment in skills development and the promotion of savings towards the start-up of micro-small businesses, including ventures between Jordanians & Syrians<sup>23</sup>. In Egypt, cash assistance programs are being combined with entrepreneur start up support and social support to help refugees move out of extreme poverty<sup>24</sup>.

**Combining downstream interventions with upstream advocacy and policy support.** Working closely with Governments and other national partners, 3RP partners have also been advocating for and promoting policy changes that allow for refugees to access work permits *and social security*<sup>25</sup>, including introducing job placement mechanisms and promoting measures that prevent unacceptable working conditions. In Jordan, efforts to foster Syrian refugees' mobility through the delinking of work permits to a single employer and improve their transferability across sectors are important strides towards greater social protection. In Turkey, the Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection issued in 2016, enabled Syrians under temporary protection to access the work permits and therefore benefit from social security. In March 2018 39,935 work permits had been issued to all Syrians, 19,578 of those are to Syrian under temporary protection.

To date, little attention is given in the 3RP and related national response plans to the strengthening of national social protection systems, and in particular national social safety nets, as an integral part of the response to the crisis. As seen in section C, the shifts also feature a number of pilot systemic changes and innovations, including "new ways of working" with and through national and local stakeholders and systems. If implemented at scale, these have the potential to propel significant advances towards more inclusive and sustainable social protection in all countries affected by the Syria crisis.

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<sup>20</sup> The 2018 3RP targets 608,700 people, emphasizing the promotion of self-sufficiency through broader livelihoods interventions; The 2017 SRP also emphasises the importance of the livelihoods and early recovery sector, with special focus on female headed households, adolescents and youth.

<sup>21</sup> The SRP contains plans to employ 18,360 people in the rehabilitation of damaged basic and social infrastructure including agricultural irrigation networks, water, drainage and sewage networks, electricity networks, markets, primary healthcare and maternal healthcare centres, nurseries and schools

<sup>22</sup> with support of ILO/KFW

<sup>23</sup> Cf. UNDP 3X6 Approach

<sup>24</sup> Cf. UNHCR Graduation Approach

<sup>25</sup> A recent ILO study however shows that only 20 per cent of Syrian workers with permits reports being covered by social security, compared to just 3 per cent among those who do not have work permits. Furthermore, work permits in agriculture do not require any social security

## C. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL PROTECTION IN COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY THE SYRIA CRISIS

**C.I Social protection responses as catalysts for developing self-sustaining national safety nets and social protection systems:** The social protection response in the Syria regional crisis provides a unique opportunity to achieve multiple objectives across the humanitarian-development nexus, leveraging investments in national policy dialogue and systems strengthening. These include: support to broader coverage and improved targeting across vulnerable national and refugee populations; enhanced performance and efficiency of humanitarian and nationally-owned systems through better alignment with and use of common systems, tools and platforms; and improved prevention capacity through the introduction of mechanisms for risk preparedness and rapid response to crises. There are a variety of strategic opportunities for achieving these objectives that can and should be leveraged by both humanitarian and development actors in the Syria crisis response, which are outlined below.

**Use of harmonized approaches, platforms and tools.** Governments and response partners can achieve significant gains from utilizing common (inter-agency, joint Government-UN) platforms and tools that have been tested and proven to contribute to improved transparency, efficiency and accountability, paving the way for further alignment and integration of cash-based and other social assistance interventions into national systems.

- ✓ In Lebanon, United Nations agencies<sup>26</sup> and the Lebanon Cash Consortium of NGOs use a common platform – the Lebanon One Unified Inter-Organization System for e-Cards (LOUISE) which serves as a common platform for the delivery of cash-based assistance with one financial service provider, one common ATM card, as well as a series of collective initiatives, including a common assistance targeting system, one call-centre and one information portal.
- ✓ In Jordan, UN agencies and INGOs also use the Common Cash Facility (CCF) for the delivery of cash which enhances the efficiency of delivery of cash to vulnerable refugee households.
- ✓ In Iraq, the Cash Working Group (CWG) and the Cash Consortium of Iraq (CCI) also use common targeting mechanisms for delivering multi-purpose cash.
- ✓ In Turkey, the Emergency Social Safety Net platform (including application and payment mechanisms) has been extended to include delivery of conditional assistance through the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education implemented by the UN and TRC, demonstrating the potential for a single platform to serve numerous actors.

**Introducing new technologies:** the scale of humanitarian need in the Syria regional crisis and the specificities of the context have supported the development of a range of innovations in use of cash at scale, including digital delivery systems and help desks, biometric authentication, blockchain technology and more.

- ✓ In Jordan, the use of biometrics for receipt of cash through ATM's and/or in stores for food vouchers avoids the duplication of assistance while reducing fraud and integrating assistance provision.
- ✓ Also in Jordan, the use of open-source Blockchain technology in the delivery of cash-based transfers allows for the creation and management of beneficiary accounts, the completion of assistance reloads, and authorization of transactions in a more efficient and less costly manner that has enhanced transparency and accountability.

Leveraged primarily by humanitarian actors, innovations have revolutionized the way in which assistance has been delivered and can be used to support transformational change in national systems, including improved transparency and efficiency in targeting and delivery of national programs, cost savings, data protection and mitigation of risks. In some cases, uptake of these technologies by governments can also support the preparation of humanitarian exit strategies.

**Joint piloting with national stakeholders:** Alignment of social assistance delivery with national systems and joint piloting of schemes with national stakeholders facilitate successful scale up or adoption by government in the longer term. Use of common platforms and registries with government streamline processes, add value

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<sup>26</sup> UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP

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.

- ✓ In Syria, a coordinated exercise between Ministry of Education, international organizations and education sector partners supports the delivery of locally produced date bars and milk to early and primary education schoolchildren as part of school meals programs and interventions targeting out-of-school-children and pregnant and lactating women.
- ✓ Also in Syria, collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour resulted in the revival and expansion of a cash benefit for children with complex disabilities. The project is providing much-needed humanitarian support but is also opening dialogue on a broader revival of the social protection system – including the certification process for persons with disabilities; the importance of an integrated social protection program that combines cash benefits with social work and referral to complementary services; the establishment of a social registry, etc.
- ✓ In Lebanon, the World Bank supported the government to launch the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP) to expand coverage and social assistance in response to rising poverty levels in Lebanese communities hosting refugees.<sup>27</sup> As part of this expansion, the NPTP jointly with UN agencies provides food assistance to vulnerable Lebanese through an e-card, leveraging the same digital delivery systems and the same network of retailers used in the emergency food assistance response for refugees. In recent discussions on the expansion of the NPTP, the inclusion of a cash transfer to promote enrolment and retention in education has been considered, drawing lessons from a similar humanitarian program for refugees.
- ✓ In Jordan, collaboration with the Ministry of Education provides support to a “Healthy Kitchen model” of school feeding whereby children receive healthy meals locally produced by vulnerable Jordanian and refugee women.

**Strengthening early warning systems and linkages with social protection delivery:** It is urgent that international and local actors engaged in development or humanitarian work join the efforts of national and sub-national governments to develop and scale up risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection systems. This can be done 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. Working closely with local authorities to support and adapt governance structures is also important to achieve improved coordination and create synergies between departments responsible for social protection, humanitarian assistance, forced displacement, agriculture, labour, disaster risk management, security, health, education and finance. In Palestine, for instance, UN agencies are supporting the Palestinian Authority’s capacity to deliver cost-effective and protective national safety nets while simultaneously strengthening its readiness to respond to external shocks. This is done by supporting the integration of a voucher transfer modality (and related capacity strengthening) into the national safety net system for rapid implementation and scale up in times of need, and providing technical and financial support to the Ministry of Social Development for preparation of its 2017-2011 Social Development Sector Strategy.

**C.2 Challenges and Enabling factors:** The ability of humanitarian and development actors to successfully leverage these opportunities depends on responses to a set of demand and supply side challenges and enabling conditions. These include but are not limited to:

**Preserving social cohesion:** In contexts where established national systems for social protection are lacking, it is essential to mitigate the risk (real or perceived) that humanitarian safety nets and benefits for refugees and IDPs develop faster than that for vulnerable host populations. This of course underscores enhanced efforts to strengthen national systems. Moreover, the joint piloting of assistance programs and the use of common platforms, approaches and standards for the delivery of cash assistance can be key to mitigating potential tensions across various groups and fostering social cohesion between refugees and host populations. In Lebanon, for instance, a strong partnership has been established with the NPTP through

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<sup>27</sup> The NPTP is implemented by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the NPTP Central Management Unit at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

which most actors are modelling targeting criteria for vulnerable Lebanese on the recommendations of the NPTP<sup>28</sup>. In Turkey and Iraq, cash transfers are carefully calibrated in terms of transfer amount and payment frequency to ensure they are not more generous than the social protection available to Turkish and Iraqi citizens (including IDPs) from their own national scheme.

**Securing sustainable social protection financing:** The 2016 London Conference changed the partnership landscape by incorporating IFIs for the first time in a significant way and introducing new funding mechanisms and modalities for more sustainable investment. Building on this success, enhanced investments in social protection systems will require 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. Bilateral and multilateral donors need to support governments in the Syria crisis regional response by ensuring a coherent funding architecture that:

*(i) Is flexible and provides predictable multi-year financing to enable social protection system preparedness and support to vulnerable people:* The number of donors confirming multi-year funding has been increasing.<sup>29</sup> The international community confirmed USD 3.7 billion in funding for humanitarian, resilience and development activities in 2018-2020 at Brussels, including for the 3RP and Syria HRP. The financial predictability provided by multi-year funding allows more strategic partnerships and better planning, and enhances coherence between development and recovery interventions. It is a critical enabling factor for supporting systems strengthening approaches related to social protection. DGNEAR's Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syria crisis (MADAD) is one example of an innovative funding response that channels EU London and Brussels pledges for multi-country, multi-partner and multiyear projects that address the longer term educational, economic and social needs of Syrian refugees and host communities. Eventually, MADAD may also be adopted to channel assistance for reconstruction in the post-conflict scenario. Another example is the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF) that provides concessional financing to host countries to complement short-term humanitarian assistance with affordable financing that allows them to pursue their longer-term development goals, accounting for the additional burden of hosting refugees.

*(ii) Enhances linkages between humanitarian and development funding streams and orients humanitarian funds to support broader nexus outcomes,* enabling longer-term investments for strengthening, building or rebuilding integrated national social protection systems. The EC for example, has expressed its commitment to supporting a more seamless transition from humanitarian to development interventions through its various funding instruments (ECHO-DGNEAR/MADAD-DEVCO). Meanwhile, channelling humanitarian funds to work through national systems, cover gaps and invest in systems strengthening has proven to be a winning combination in countries such as Turkey (ECHO support to WFP, TRC<sup>30</sup> and MoFSP<sup>31</sup> with the ESSN) and Yemen (UNICEF, WB and EU support to SWF<sup>32</sup>). Likewise UNDP and WB support to the Social Fund for Development (SFD) and the Public Works Project (PWP), where investments in safety nets are done in alignment with national systems, and are simultaneously leveraged to improve long-term system capacity. and to preserve and improve the implementation capacity of the most effective service delivery programs under Yemen's social protection service.

The creation of pooled or joint financing mechanisms for channelling development and humanitarian funds to common systems of social protection is another creative financing idea that could take a variety of forms. These might include for example: tapping development financing for UN technical assistance to national institutions, pooling resources through multi-donor trust funds for regional and national social assistance (GCFF<sup>33</sup>, existing MDTFs), and creating financing mechanisms for humanitarian safety

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<sup>28</sup> Source: LCRP

<sup>29</sup> From two (at the Kuwait III pledging conference in 2015), to 19 (at the 2016 London Conference), to 25 (at Brussels in 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Turkish Red Crescent

<sup>31</sup> Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies

<sup>32</sup> Yemen Social Welfare Fund

<sup>33</sup> The World Bank's Global Concessional Financing Facility

nets in the absence of a durable solution or for joint/transitional schemes that are not yet fully government-owned or funded.

*(iii) Addresses medium to longer term financial sustainability of social protection systems:* In the short term, innovative donor financing mechanisms that strengthen links between humanitarian and development ODA flows have an important role to play in supporting the establishment of social protection systems and building of local capacities. But the question remains of how to cover the longer-term costs of assisting refugees in protracted situations. Indeed, in the midterm the creation of synergies between ODA funding flows, on the one hand, and economic & financial flows from international finance institutions and bilateral donors who have economic interests and investments in host countries, on the other hand, is likely to be a critical piece of the puzzle. In addition, host governments will have a key role to play in bridging these funding flows, and this role should be further explored and defined.

**Building evidence:** There are important evidence gaps remaining around how to design and deliver inclusive, “shock-responsive” and sustainable social protection in contexts of protracted crisis and displacement such as the regional Syria crisis. Among others, these include understanding of:

- The conditions under which the delivery of basic services and social protection contribute towards state legitimacy (often an implicit but overarching objective of development and state-building agendas) and social cohesion.
- The social benefits of participation of displaced populations (refugees, IDPs) in labour markets, including gender dimensions.
- The relationship between displacement, vulnerability and poverty to inform the articulation of more harmonized targeting methodologies
- The differential, including gendered impact of various social protection measures and delivery models on various vulnerable groups.

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 quality in policies, promotion of better programming design and practices and making the investment case to enable governments to expand social protection coverage and contribute to learning. Documenting and evaluating the effectiveness of a range of experiences and differentiated approaches that account for contextual specificities at the country level will be important.

Equally critical is the need to strengthen early information systems to inform early action on any potential, known or emerging risk or hazard. This will require improved collection of food security and nutrition, environmental, conflict and livelihoods data needed to inform management and targeting decisions underpinning social protection systems.

**Sharing knowledge and South-South Cooperation:** South-South cooperation (SSC) on social development includes the promotion of technical assistance from an expert country of the South to other Southern countries in the development of social policies and programs. Many developing countries have already successfully taken measures to build their nationally defined social protection floors or to introduce elements thereof. The knowledge, expertise and experience that these countries have gained in their own efforts at establishing a social protection floor represent a valuable source for other countries interested in planning, expanding, extending or reorienting their social protection systems.<sup>34</sup> Our ability to effectively leverage 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 of humanitarian and national systems; and improved prevention capacity through risk preparedness and rapid response. A good starting point is to enhance SSC amongst the countries affected by the Syria crisis and beyond, of the wider region.

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.social-protection.org/>

## D. LOOKING FORWARD – LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Lessons on comprehensive social protection frameworks for vulnerable nationals and refugees:***

A clear lesson from the social protection response to the Syria crisis is that the social protection needs of refugees and vulnerable host populations should not be approached in isolation. In some instances, humanitarian social protection interventions initially intended for refugees also have been opened to vulnerable host populations. In other instances, the mere existence of schemes for refugees have sparked policy dialogue with host governments on the desirability of putting similar provisions in place for vulnerable nationals as part of the national social protection system.

The social protection floor<sup>35</sup> concept provides a useful starting point for developing a framework with governments in the region towards a common vision of the importance of social protection coverage for vulnerable citizens and refugees alike. This would be a powerful tool towards the establishment of a comprehensive social protection framework for vulnerable nationals and displaced populations alike. While the specific benefits and delivery mechanisms may differ, it would ensure better coordination.

In Lebanon, for instance, the UN Strategic Framework has a dedicated pillar on social protection that focuses on setting up national social protection floor for nationals, through improving both NPTP (social safety net) and NSSF (national insurance), but also health insurance. It also foresees extending 'social safety' to refugees around a basic set of social transfers, in cash and in kind, to enhance food and nutrition security, provide minimum income security and ensure equal access to essential services (including education and health care).

In Turkey, the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) program supported by ECHO delivers multipurpose cash assistance to some 1.3 million refugees entirely through the government social assistance system, in partnership with the Turkish Red Crescent and government agencies, including the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Refugees have legal access to social assistance, the formal labour market through work permits, social security through formal employment as well as public health and education services. Simultaneously, the ESSN program is working to enhance the design and delivery of social protection to Turkish nationals.

### ***Strengthening the Social Protection response – key recommendations:***

- Based on a stock take of recent mapping and assessments, undertake a rapid country mapping of humanitarian and national social protection systems, platforms, mechanisms, gaps and opportunities for increasing synergies and cross-fertilization, whilst assessing risks and mitigation strategies.
- Based on the above, support and promote UN-wide country common approaches through existing coordination platforms.
- Common approaches should include dedicated and coordinated investment in the shock-responsiveness of national social protection systems:
  - Consider and make use of the 3RP guidance on *Aligning Social Assistance with National Social Protection Systems*.
  - Consider creation of country-level social protection working groups and ensure their strong linkage to existing cash working groups, or designate relevant existing working groups as platforms to coordinate efforts on shock-responsive national social protection.<sup>36</sup>
  - Request governments, bilateral and multilateral donors to establish or adjust common financing mechanisms to allow for channelling development and humanitarian funds to finance common systems of social protection.

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<sup>35</sup> Social protection floors (SPFs) guarantee access to essential health care and basic income security for children, persons of working age, and older persons; the SFP four guarantees are (a) access to a nationally defined set of goods and services constituting essential health care, including maternity care, that meet the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality; (b) basic income security for children, at least at a nationally defined minimum level providing access to nutrition, education, care, and any other necessary goods and services; (c) basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity, and disability; and (d) basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for older persons

<sup>36</sup> As a good practice example of interagency coordination, the Turkey Social Inclusion Results Group is one of the coordination groups under the UN Development Cooperation Strategy with the Govt of Turkey, and covers social protection in the refugee crisis response.