

Effects of assistance provision on social cohesion in contexts of forced displacement

A background literature review

Christina Lowe

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Building the Evidence on Forced Displacement

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About this paper and project

This rapid literature review was conducted as background research for a paper on the social cohesion impacts of different assistance models in displacement settings (Lowe et al., 2022). That paper presents findings from primary research in Cameroon, Colombia and Greece, conducted by ODI in partnership with the Centre for Applied Social Sciences Research and Training (CASS-RT) in Cameroon, the School of Government at the University of Los Andes in Colombia and the National Centre for Social Research ('EKKE') in Greece.

This work is part of a wider ODI-led project that aims to explore potential approaches for and effects of linking international humanitarian assistance with state-led social protection programmes in contexts of forced displacement. This work is part of the programme "Building the Evidence on Protracted Forced Displacement: A Multi-Stakeholder Partnership", which is funded by UK Aid from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), is managed by the World Bank Group (WBG) and was established in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The scope of the programme is to expand the global knowledge on forced displacement by funding quality research and disseminating results for the use of practitioners and policy makers.

This work does not necessarily reflect the views of FCDO, the WBG or UNHCR.

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1 Introduction

The number of forcibly displaced people has more than doubled in the last decade, passing 100 million globally in 2022 (UNHCR, 2021; 2022). Displaced populations are now more likely to live among host communities, rather than in designated camps, often on a protracted basis (UNHCR, 2019a; 2020a; 2021; OCHA, 2017). This has required shifts in the response approach, away from traditional humanitarian assistance (based on providing immediate relief for emergency needs) towards longer-term, development-oriented approaches, including working more closely with national social protection systems where feasible and appropriate¹. Yet there is relatively limited evidence on the potential outcomes that may emerge from linking international humanitarian assistance to displaced populations with state-led social protection (Peterman et al., 2018).

This background paper presents key insights from past research on the effects of assistance provision on social cohesion, focusing on insights that hold particular relevance for our larger primary research study². We define social cohesion as the set of relationships between displaced and host communities ('horizontal' cohesion) and between those communities and the institutions that govern them ('vertical cohesion') (de Berry and Roberts, 2018).

Social cohesion has become a matter of increasing concern in displacement situations (UNHCR-UNDP, 2015; de Berry and Roberts, 2018; Kuhnt et al., 2020; UNHCR-UNDP, 2021). It is shaped by a wide range of factors, including: displaced and host communities' socio-economic profiles and pre-existing relations with each other and with the state; competition in access to jobs, infrastructure and services; the media, political and public discourse; the wider economic and political climate; and the nature and timeline of the displacement (de Berry and Roberts; Fajth et al., 2019).

Assistance provided by government or international agencies is unlikely ever to be a central determinant but it may nevertheless *play a role* in influencing attitudes and interactions between displaced and host communities, and between those communities and the state.

¹ For example, see the commitments to increase engagement with social protection systems and promote displaced populations' access to such systems in the 2016 New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants; the Grand Bargain emerging from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees.

² See 'About this paper and project' on page 3 for details.

These potential effects are explored in this background paper, looking at both horizontal (Section 2) and vertical cohesion (Section 3), before closing with a conceptual framework for our larger study (Section 4).

Methodology

Different approaches were taken to identify relevant literature on horizontal versus vertical cohesion. For horizontal cohesion, our review draws principally on the social cohesion component of a wider global evidence review that was conducted by Gray Meral and Both (2021) in early 2021 for our larger research project. Their review assesses the effects of cash assistance for displaced populations that was in some way aligned or integrated with social protection systems. The review is restricted to large-scale protracted displacement situations receiving international humanitarian assistance. As such, it is principally focused on low and middle-income countries, which are also host to nearly all the world's IDPs and over 85% of refugees.

For vertical cohesion, a rapid literature review was conducted in late 2021, with the aim of exploring the effects on state-society relations of different assistance models in displacement settings in low and middle-income countries. However, given the very limited evidence available on our precise research question, the review was instead expanded, to draw on wider literature on the vertical cohesion effects of social protection and non-governmental assistance. Within this broader scope, this paper presents findings that may hold relevance for displacement contexts, including studies on fragile and conflict-affected contexts, or on provision for historically-marginalised populations (as well as for displaced populations specifically).

Limitations

While recent years have seen a growing interest and body of literature on the effects of displacement on host communities, the primary focus has been on the economic and environmental effects of hosting refugees and IDPs, with the social dimension relatively less researched (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2011; de Berry and Roberts, 2018; Fajth et al., 2019). Where research on social cohesion exists, it has come predominantly from Europe and North America, rather than low- and middle-income countries (Gray Meral and Both, 2021). Research has also tended to be more qualitative in nature, leaving a gap in studies using either mixed-methods approaches or quantitative methods (ibid). Assistance programmes in displacement settings generally were not set up with social cohesion as a primary objective, meaning robust monitoring and evaluations assessing their effects over time typically did not include social cohesion variables.

Thus, while we draw on studies that offer potential insights on effects, there are crucial limitations in the extent to which these should be viewed as hard evidence on the causal effects of different assistance models on social cohesion. There is a clear need for further research, beyond that conducted as part of our study.

2 Effects on horizontal cohesion

Our literature review identified various ways in which assistance provision has been found to influence displaced-host relations, either in an objective manner (by altering the type or level of interaction between the two communities) or in a subjective sense (by altering the attitudes or beliefs held by members of one community about the other).

These effects are discussed below, first considering direct effects of assistance provision (section 2.1) and then discussing indirect effects (section 2.2.).

2.1 Direct effects on horizontal cohesion

2.1.1 Programme participation directly alters displaced-host interaction

Participation in assistance programmes may entail direct changes in the type and level of interaction between host and displaced communities (with knock-on effects for their attitudes towards each other). This shift in interactions may occur by (a) jointly involving both host and displaced community members as programme participants; or (b) requiring displaced participants to use the same facilities as host community members when accessing their assistance.

a) Joint host-displaced participation in assistance programmes

Joint participation of host and displaced communities in assistance programmes has sometimes been associated with positive cohesion effects due to improved opportunities for interaction between the two communities.

In Lebanon, for example, joint participation in committee meetings and training sessions as part of an NGO-run integrated shelter, WASH and protection programme for Syrian refugees and local Lebanese increased interaction between residents, contributing to increased empathy and trust (Parker and Maynard, 2018). Similarly, in Ecuador, joint participation of refugees and locals in monthly nutrition sessions accompanying a six-month humanitarian cash transfer programme was thought to have contributed to quantified improvements in refugees' social participation, personal agency and tolerance of

diversity (Valli et al, 2019). In Jordan, Cash for Work programmes targeting both refugees and locals (largely run by humanitarian agencies, sometimes collaborating with government) increased cooperation between refugees and host community participants on joint public works projects, strengthening trust between participants, as well as refugees' sense of belonging to the local community (Loewe et al., 2020; Roxin et al., 2020).

However, these positive effects of joint programme participation are often restricted only to specific cohesion outcomes, or only to participants themselves (or sometimes only specific sub-sets of participants), rather than host and displaced populations more broadly.

In Turkey, refugee and host trust levels marginally increased for those participating in jointly-targeted Cash for Work programmes, but overall trust levels between the wider refugee and Turkish population actually *diminished* during the period that jointly-targeted Cash for Work programmes were implemented, and the refugee population's sense of belonging was also reported to have decreased (Roxin et al., 2020, in Loewe et al., 2020). In the humanitarian programme mentioned above for its positive effects on certain refugee integration outcomes in Ecuador, there were no changes in other cohesion outcomes among refugees (such as their reported trust in individuals or freedom from discrimination), nor in any of the cohesion outcomes reported by host community members (Valli et al, 2019). Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, joint host and IDP participation in a (NGO-run) vocational training programme resulted in extensive contact between participants but the increased interaction generated no change in locals' attitudes towards IDPs (Zhou and Lyall, 2020).

Joint programme participation may have relatively limited impacts on inter-community relations when host and displaced populations already interact frequently in other settings, and have subsequently formed their perceptions of each other primarily based on these established relationships. In Jordan, for example, the effects of Cash for Work programmes on inter-community relations were noted to be relatively smaller due to high pre-existing levels of interaction and trust between Syrian refugees and local citizens (Loewe et al., 2020).

(b) Shared use of local registration or collection points when participants access assistance

While joint programme participation is the most obvious direct pathway for altering host-displaced interactions, **cohesion effects have also been associated with seemingly trivial changes in interaction due to shared use of local registration or collection points**, when displaced populations access their assistance.

Qualitative research has mostly highlighted negative effects of shared facility use, as assistance increased use of financial and administrative services but was not matched with sufficient increases in capacity to absorb this additional demand.

For example, when refugees withdrew humanitarian cash transfers in Lebanon, overcrowding at ATMs was associated with tense interactions with host communities, in part because most government salaries tended to be paid at the same time, re (Samuels et al., 2020). Similarly, in Turkey, delivery of government-integrated cash transfers resulted in crowding at ATMs, banks and government offices, again leading to some host community resentment (Maunder et al., 2018). Some local government offices even felt it best to establish separate locations for Syrians and Turkish families to apply for assistance, to avoid tensions in the registration offices (Ring et al., 2020).

2.1.2 Perceptions of the programme directly alters host-displaced attitudes

A multi-country study of the effects of assistance to displaced households on relations with host communities generally concluded that **where tensions existed between the two communities, these were rarely driven by assistance programmes** (Berg et al., 2013). Instead, such tensions related more to perceived competition for local services, land and jobs, as well as existing socio-cultural divisions. Host community members were often very much in favour of assisting displaced populations, sympathising strongly with their plight (as in Jordan (Berg et al., 2013) and Rwanda (Fajth et al., 2019)).

Nonetheless, there were also some instances where perceptions of an assistance programme, and in particular of **programme fairness, were found to directly influence host and displaced communities' attitudes towards each other**. These direct effects on attitudes related to perceived (un)fairness relating to (a) the *allocation* of assistance, and (b) the *source* of assistance.

a) Perceived (un)fairness relating to the allocation of assistance

Where programming is felt to favour one group's needs and neglect the other's, tensions may arise. For example, the exclusion of the host population from humanitarian assistance for Burundian refugees in Tanzania was associated with increased resource resentment and anti-refugee sentiment (Zhou, 2020). Similarly, when humanitarian assistance targeted Colombian refugees without including poor citizens in Ecuador, some researchers felt that this might contribute to increased tensions, whereas when vulnerable Ecuadorians also received some assistance, implementing agencies felt that these tensions were reduced (Berg et al., 2013). Comparable

tensions were also observed in relation to government programmes in Azerbaijan and Colombia; prioritising IDPs for state assistance caused resentment and jealousy among the host community because IDPs were not felt to be deserving of preferential treatment, given the perception that hosts had the same levels of poverty and vulnerability (Gureyeva-Aliyeva and Huseynov, 2011; Vidal Lopez et al., 2011).

Yet even when hosts and displaced populations are equally well-served, there may still be perceptions of unequal distribution. In Iraq, many host and refugee households believed there to be unequal access to a humanitarian assistance programme despite relatively equal provision in practice, likely contributing to community tensions (DSP, 2019). In Turkey, the (EU-funded but principally government-implemented) Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) of refugees is entirely aligned with the government's CCTE scheme for citizens, except that high-risk refugees also receive child protection visits. While many locals would not actually want these child protection visits, the fact that some refugees get an additional component led to some discontent (Ring et al., 2020). This suggests that the assistance arrangements themselves are not necessarily the real *cause* of tensions; rather where there is underlying dissatisfaction or sense of neglect among the host community, assistance programming may become a target for pent-up resentment.

On the other hand, where the host community was receiving little support prior to the displacement influx and is now included in assistance programmes, this may generate positive perceptions of the displaced, particularly where there is messaging that specifically links the programme's existence to the displacement situation. This was found to be the case in a study of a grant and mentorship programme run by a refugee-led NGO for microentrepreneurs in Uganda (Baseler et al. 2020).

b) Perceived (un)fairness relating to the source of provision

Host community tensions regarding assistance provision are likely to be exacerbated where government resources are perceived to be inappropriately diverted to the displaced population. For example, in Turkey, host community tensions were in part linked to the widespread misperception that the (EU-financed) Emergency Social Safety Net programme for refugees was government-funded, because it used some government delivery systems (e.g. local frontline agencies for registration, and the government social assistance information system for the programme database) (Maunder et al., 2018; Ark-Yıldırım and Smyrl, 2021). This occurred even though specific efforts were made to try to maintain the programme as visibly separate (e.g. by loading transfers onto a different electronic payment card than is used for Turkish social assistance, and keeping the Turkish Red Crescent as the public face

of the programme rather than the government social assistance agency) (ibid.).

2.2 Indirect effects on horizontal cohesion

Alongside the direct effects above, the literature also highlights several ways in which assistance provision might *indirectly* influence relations between displaced and host communities.

2.2.1 Programme indirectly alters interactions and attitudes, by increasing access to local economy

Where assistance has facilitated greater access for the displaced to the local economy, mixed effects on host-community relations have been documented.

On the one hand, paying more into the local economy has generated some positive effects on community relations. For example, in Kenya, humanitarian cash assistance to refugees in the UNHCR-Government Kalobeyei Integrated Social and Economic Development Programme (KISED) was felt to ease tensions with host communities since refugees spent assistance on local goods and services (UNHCR 2019b). In Lebanon, humanitarian cash transfers were similarly linked to at least some reduction in hostility towards Syrian refugees due to them buying more local goods and services (Lehmann and Masterson 2020). It also helped to reduce tensions and increase trust in refugees among Lebanese shopkeepers and landlords, by enabling refugee clients to re-pay store debts and make rent payments on time (Samuels et al. 2020).

On the other hand, assistance has also been associated with negative economic effects on locals. The latter Lebanon study observed tensions related to some locals' view that humanitarian assistance drove down local wages by enabling Syrian refugees to accept lower-paid jobs (Samuels et al. 2020), a view which was also prevalent in Jordan (Loewe et al., 2020). Cross-country empirical analysis has also linked displacement influxes with short-term food and rent price rises, which in some contexts is likely to have been driven in part by aid provision (although few studies separate the effects of aid-induced expenditure shocks from the general effects of the displacement influx) (Verme and Schuettler, 2020).

2.2.2 Programme indirectly alters interactions and attitudes, by increasing access to local services

Mixed effects of assistance have also been identified in relation to increased access to public services.

Receipt of assistance might allow for more positive interactions between host and displaced communities as shared service users, for example if it allows displaced children to enrol in schools where they and their parents can socialise with the host community. While this benefit was not commonly identified in the literature reviewed on transfer schemes, the cohesion benefits from shared service access have been more frequently noted in relation to projects and policies that actively promoted the integration of refugees into national education or health systems (e.g. in Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya in LET (2021)).

That said, sudden increases in displaced households' demand for local services can also generate resentment from host community members, due to concerns about over-stretched public service capacity. In a study of the CCTE for refugees in Turkey, inter-community tensions were reportedly exacerbated by the push to get all Syrian students into public schools, with refugee children facing increased discrimination and bullying due to the high visibility of the programme and its recipients (Ring et al., 2020).

2.2.3 Programme indirectly alters interactions and attitudes, by altering better-off participants' (perceived) contribution to the wider community

The final indirect effect relates to the greater income security that assistance typically provides, and its potential positive effects on recipients' (perceived) contribution to community life.

Several studies have documented instances of displaced recipients sharing assistance with the wider community, in some cases directly improving host community neighbours' attitudes towards them. In the DRC, IDPs receiving humanitarian vouchers frequently shared aid with locals and were more likely to be asked for contributions to the local village, indicating a marked increase in social capital (Quattrochi et al., 2019). Similarly, in Lebanon, Lehmann and Masterson (2020) note cases of Syrian humanitarian cash transfer recipients sharing this aid with hosts, which was thought to reduce hostility towards them. In a UNHCR review of various types of transfer schemes, Berg et al. (2013) documented multiple instances of assistance being shared with non-recipients (particularly food assistance, although sharing of food purchased with vouchers or cash transfers was also noted).

Receipt of aid can also free up recipient's time such that they are able to participate more in community life. In a study of the effects of humanitarian cash assistance for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, those who received the transfer typically received less verbal harassment from local citizens than non-recipients, which the researchers

hypothesise may have been due to the increased time and energy that recipients were able to spend developing mutually supportive social ties (Lehmann et al., 2014). The relaxation of time and financial constraints is also identified as a potential pathway facilitating Colombian refugees' greater participation in social activities in the study of humanitarian cash assistance in Ecuador (although the researchers are unable to test this hypothesis since the dataset they used was not designed explicitly to explore this question) (Valli et al., 2019).

Finally, assistance provision may be associated with a perceived reduction in negative social behaviours. For example, in Lebanon and Turkey, some locals felt that refugees engaged in theft or begging out of poverty and desperation, and argued that assistance helps to reduce these incidents (Samuels et al., 2020; Ring et al., 2020), thereby improving the refugees' public image. Similar perceptions were shared in focus groups with host community members in Rwanda regarding the importance of humanitarian aid to refugees for promoting community security (Fajth et al., 2019).

3 Effects on vertical cohesion

There is limited existing literature on the vertical cohesion effects of different assistance models for IDPs or refugees specifically. However, there is more extensive research on the vertical cohesion effects of social protection for marginalised populations more generally, as well as in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The latter contexts are by definition relevant for conflict-related IDPs, and, in some cases, may also be pertinent for refugee situations, given that the largest refugee-hosting countries are often fragile states (Hoeffler, 2013).

Below we draw on this evidence base to explore what existing literature can tell us about the vertical cohesion effects of assistance provision for the three areas of impact identified by Alik-Lagrange et al. (2021) in their study of the effects of social protection on state-society relations. These areas of impact consider effects on:

- (1) **The material relationship between people and the state** (e.g. what people get from the state) (*Section 3.1*);
- (2) **The contractual relationship between people and the state** (e.g. how people perceive and engage with the state) (*Section 3.2*);
- (3) **How people perceive themselves within the broader political project** (e.g. in relation to the nation-state) (*Section 3.3*).

For each area, we consider whether and how the effects might differ for assistance delivered by a non-governmental actor versus more closely integrated with the government system.

3.1 Effects on the material relationship between people and the state ('Redistributive effects')

Direct redistributive effects of assistance

In terms of direct redistributive effects, **social protection inherently alters the state's material relationship with recipients**, since it entails government provision of transfers or services. While an obvious point, its importance in some contexts should not be underestimated.

Where state capacity is low, government sovereignty newly-established, or populations historically under-served, social protection may constitute one of very few instances of direct government service provision (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021).

By contrast, parallel humanitarian assistance entails the provision of assistance by a non-governmental actor, and therefore has no direct impact on recipients' material relationship with the state.

Indirect redistributive effects of assistance due to recipients' increased access to wider state services and systems

Indirect impacts may also have a bearing on overall redistributive effects. Firstly, **social protection frequently results in, or even requires, recipient registration in wider government services and systems**, meaning the impact on the government's material provision to the individual potentially extends beyond the programme itself. Social protection often increases access to ID cards or other civil documentation (Osofian, 2011; Kisurulia et al., 2015; Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021; Schjodt, 2021), as well as enrolment in wider health, education and social services (Bastagli et al., 2016; Owusu-Addo et al, 2018).

Since displaced populations frequently lack access to government systems and services, or have sometimes even been barred from accessing them altogether, programmes that make specific efforts to facilitate or expand their access may have wide-ranging redistributive effects. This is especially true if the planning or implementation of the social protection programme results in increased provision of services (e.g. the issuance of national ID cards or a verified government-issued equivalent to refugees, where previously ID cards were limited to citizens, or the allocation of school places for displaced children, where previously there was limited provision for this new influx).

Humanitarian assistance (e.g. humanitarian cash transfers) may also have this indirect effect, if service access was primarily hindered by affordability barriers (Cross et al., 2018). However, if other notable barriers were hindering displaced populations' access (such as prohibitive government policies), **the indirect effects of humanitarian transfers may well be less substantial than for social protection, since government may play a less active role in overcoming the wider barriers** to public services or systems for non-governmental programme recipients.

Indirect redistributive effects of assistance due to impacts on future state capacity and will to serve assisted populations

A second indirect impact relates to the effect of internationally-financed assistance on state capacity for future provision to the assisted populations. The literature here shows mixed (although more frequently negative) impacts, for both donor-financed social protection and non-governmental programming.

Channelling aid into government systems has on the one hand been associated with reduced state responsiveness to local needs, lower capacity and increased corruption (e.g. Svensson, 2000; Moss et al., 2006; Busse and Gröning, 2009; Eubank, 2012). Yet politically-savvy, thoughtfully-designed and well-implemented budget support **also has the potential to enhance government capacity and performance**, thereby positively effecting the material relationship between people and the state (Leader and Colense, 2005; Williamson and Dom, 2010; Ibrahim, 2021).

Meanwhile, non-governmental provision has frequently been associated with undermining the state's capacity or impetus to deliver social services in the long term (Harrell-Bond, 2002, in Harvey and Lind, 2005; de Waal, 1997, Slim, 2007 in Harvey, 2009; Whaites 1998; Khan 1999; Martin 2004; Obiyan 2005 in Cammett and MacLean, 2014; Bratton, 1989, Kalb, 2006, Karajkov, 2007, Coyne, 2013; Bodea and LeBas, 2016, in Campbell et al., 2019; Deserranno et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, some research has also highlighted the important complementary role that non-state provision can play in supporting the state to gradually develop its capacity to serve additional populations (Brown 1998; Brinkerhoff 1999, in Cammett and MacLean, 2014; Brass, 2016; Bukenya, 2013), particularly in democratic states where there is more will to do so (Campbell et al., 2019).

3.2 Effects on the contractual relationship - how people perceive or engage with the state ('Contractual effects')

Social protection programmes offer a visible and tangible example of the government 'doing something' for its people (Holmes, 2009; Babajanian, 2012). Evidence from post-conflict Nepal and Central African Republic highlights the particular importance of this for historically-marginalised populations who may previously have had little to no 'sighting of the state' or interaction with government (or central government) (Drucza 2016; Schjødt, 2018; Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021). In Kenya, the issuance of registration documents for cash

transfer schemes led socio-economically marginalised recipients to finally 'feel recognized by the state' (Kisurulia et al., 2015), while in the Middle East and North Africa, Loewe et al. (2019) and Vidican and Loewe (2019) note the role of state subsidies in creating reciprocity between the government and citizens, and equilibria in state–society relations.

The stronger government presence can in turn help to strengthen the perceived legitimacy of and trust in the state (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021), which is fundamental to the development of the social contract (or the 'agreement between the state and society on their mutual roles and responsibilities') (Babajanian, 2012). In Georgia, IDP receipt of state benefits increased their trust in the government, with recipients feeling that their 'plight had not been forgotten' and that their 'situation is of concern to the government' (Funke and Bolkvadze, 2018). In Turkey, receiving the same assistance as citizens via the CCTE made refugee families feel that they were 'equal' and that the government took an interest in them (Ring et al., 2021). Beyond displacement contexts, robust evidence from 17 African countries found that well-implemented government programmes increased citizen satisfaction (Brinkerhoff et al., 2018), while government cash transfers enhanced recipients' perceptions of government responsiveness to citizen concerns and trust in elected local officials in Tanzania (Evans et al., 2018), and increased recipients' trust in implementing institutions in Peru and Nepal (Camacho, 2014; Schjødt, 2018).

Improved perceptions of the state based on social protection provision can subsequently contribute to increased support for the governing party and reduced civil conflict and social unrest (unless undermined by poor design and implementation, as discussed further below) (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021; Mahmud and Sharpe, 2021; Schjødt, 2021). Social protection programmes were associated with increased electoral success for the implementing parties in Honduras and Turkey (Linos, 2013; Marschall et al. 2016, in Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021), as well as improving voter turnout and incumbent support among social assistance recipients in Mexico and Latin America more broadly (De La O, 2013; Layton and Smith, 2015).

At the macro level, a cross-national study by Taydas and Peksen (2012) found that higher investment in social service provision reduced the probability of political unrest and civil conflict. This is complemented by experimental evidence at the country level: from the Philippines, where conflict-related incidents and insurgent influence decreased in conflict-affected villages targeted by the *4P* cash transfer programme (Crost et al., 2016); from Mexico, where indigenous recipients of *Progresa* cash transfers were less likely to join anti-government protests (Yörük et al., 2019); and from Colombia, where

the *Familias en Acción* conditional cash transfer had positive effects on the demobilisation of combatants (Peña et al., 2017).

Policymakers are well-aware of these potential benefits, sometimes exploiting them in a clientilistic manner to secure re-election (e.g. see Hickey et al., 2019 for sub-Saharan Africa; and Sharp et al., 2006, for Ethiopia; in Babajanian, 2012; Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021). Of particular relevance to our study, **policymakers have actively used social protection as an official strategy after divisive civil conflict, to rebuild the social contract** with previously-marginalised populations and to reduce risk of conflict relapse (e.g. Gunetilleke, 2005; Godamunne, 2015 and 2016, for Sri Lanka; Lavers, 2016 for Rwanda and Schjødt, 2021 for South Africa). While these strategies often focus on promoting demobilisation of former combatants³, they may also prioritise programmes promoting recovery of IDPs (e.g. Valters, 2015, for Timor Leste, in Schjødt, 2021).

However, while there are certainly many examples of social protection's role in improving perceptions of the state (at least among recipients), there is also extensive evidence from fragile and conflict-affected contexts showing that **government trust and perceived legitimacy frequently remain unchanged by social protection programming** (Nixon and Mallett, 2017; McCullough et al., 2020). A longitudinal study in Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Pakistan and Nepal suggests that other factors are typically more important than service delivery in shaping perceptions of state legitimacy, with attitudes frequently influenced more by people's identity and position in the political settlement, than their actual experience of the state, at least once basic security concerns have been met (Nixon and Mallett, 2017; McCullough et al., 2020). Certainly, the mere existence of a programme is unlikely to improve perceptions of legitimacy, since this will be contingent on the perceived quality and fairness of the programme. Perceptions are only likely to change if the programme meets expected standards, does not violate procedural fairness norms, *and* is particularly salient in people's conceptualisation of state legitimacy (ibid).

Furthermore, **people's views of the state are largely mediated by their prior interactions with government, and social protection is more likely to entrench than overturn existing perceptions** (Jones et al., 2016; McCullough et al., 2020). This means that where the state's wider approach to the recipient group is largely repressive, service provision is unlikely to improve perceptions, even when well-delivered (Koehler, 2021). It also means that where there are already tensions with or lack of trust in government, these feelings may be exacerbated by programming that appears to be corrupt, exclusionary, or unfair in favouring a group that is felt to be 'undeserving' or in

³ e.g. Peña et al. 2017 for Colombia; Holmes and Jackson, 2007; Holmes, 2009 and Willibald, 2006 for Sierra Leone and Liberia, in Babajanian, 2012 and Schjødt, 2021

neglecting a group that already holds grievances about their position in the state or society (Babajanian, 2012; Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021). For example, in Sierra Leone, perceived corruption in the poverty-targeted Social Safety Net appeared to further erode trust in governing institutions (HelpAge, 2011), while the prioritisation of ex-combatants in other assistance packages in Sierra Leone and Liberia led civilians to conclude that ex-militants were being 'rewarded for atrocities' (Willibald, 2006).

Ultimately, then, social protection may do more to harm perceptions of government than to improve them, if programmes are perceived to be badly designed or implemented, or if they negatively interact with conflict dynamics (Holmes, 2009; Babajanian, 2012; Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021; Schjødt, 2021; Mahmud and Sharpe, 2021). Indeed in the example from Peru mentioned earlier, while trust in institutions increased among cash transfer recipients, it *declined* among non-recipients who held grievances about exclusion from the CCT programme (Camacho, 2014). In Indonesia, community discontent about social protection targeting methods went so far as to trigger civil unrest and violent protest (Sumarto, 2020, in Mahmud and Sharpe, 2021). Meanwhile in Colombia, expanding the flagship *Familias en Acción* cash transfer scheme to conflict-affected populations was associated with increased insurgent violence in the newly-served areas, as armed groups reacted negatively to the expansion of government territorial control (Weintraub, 2016). These examples highlight the particular risks that social protection expansion may hold in already fragile settings.

When considering how the effects might differ for a non-governmental rather than a state-led assistance model, it seems unlikely that the impacts would occur to the same degree for non-governmental programmes, since these are often associated with a neutral or a negative effect on perceived government legitimacy and on the state-citizen social contract (Harvey, 2009; Ochieng, 2010; Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021). While there is limited evidence on how this might differ when non-governmental programmes are provided only to non-citizens, Samuels et al. (2020) find that humanitarian cash transfers for refugees in Lebanon still increased host community tensions with the government, since citizens felt that they should be receiving assistance from the state in the way that the UN assisted the refugees.

Although the above suggests far greater potential for contractual effects to arise from state over non-governmental provision, three caveats apply. First, the **legitimacy-detracting effects of non-governmental provision may in some cases apply to any externally-funded programmes** (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021), meaning donor-funded government social protection, as well as non-governmental schemes.

Second, past literature highlights that **people often do not accurately know who is responsible** for implementing (or financing) a programme (Nixon and Mallett, 2017; Burchi and Roscioli, 2021). Indeed, politicians frequently associate themselves with successful non-governmental programmes to garner support, creating beliefs that these programmes are in some way government-provided (Qian, 2015). Therefore, even if assistance provision or financing shifts from humanitarian to government actors, recipients themselves (and the wider public) may not be aware that any shift has taken place (although there is some evidence that effective information provision can lead to a clearer attribution- see Guiteras and Mobarak, 2014).

Thirdly, and relatedly, **where people already have negative experiences of the state, they may be less likely to attribute good service provision to the government** itself (as in South Africa, where historically-marginalised cash transfer recipients were less likely to attribute the programme to the state) (Plagerson et al., 2012, in Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021).

While failure to give credit to the true provider may in many cases be a major concern, in other cases it could have positive implications, for example if it enables the *positive* effects of state provision to be realised through a non-governmental programme. For example, in Ecuador, a largely humanitarian programme increased Colombian refugees' confidence in governing institutions (Valli et al., 2019). However, this benefit is not guaranteed; in Jordan, Cash for Work schemes for refugees and host communities were run largely by international agencies, with some government cooperation. Some participants attributed these programmes to international agencies, and trust only increased in these agencies. Where programming was attributed to government, the findings were mixed, with trust sometimes increasing and in other cases decreasing due to perceived government nepotism in the selection of participants and programme suppliers (Loewe et al., 2020).

3.3 Effects on how people perceive themselves within the broader political project ('Re-constitutive effects')

As well as altering the relationship between people and the state, assistance may also alter people's *perceptions of themselves* in relation to the state. There is limited evidence on how this might occur in relation to assistance for displaced populations. However, in the case of social protection more generally, two main effects are worth noting.

First, receipt of government transfers and broader access to public services has sometimes been associated with a greater sense of belonging and of affiliation to the nation-state, including

greater willingness to contribute to the state through tax payments in certain cases (Hunter and Sugiyama, 2014; Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021; Kidd et al., 2021). This may be particularly important for historically-excluded groups, as in Nepal where government benefits enabled socially-marginalised citizens to feel part of the state and a greater sense of inclusion (Druzca, 2016, in Schjødt, 2021) or in Ghana where the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty scheme ‘forged a sense of being part of the state’ for socio-economically disadvantaged recipients (Oduro, 2015).

In addition, social protection has sometimes been associated with enhancing recipients’ agency and consciousness of their rights in relation to the state, including increasing their confidence and ability to make demands of the state and to challenge it where it falls short (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey, 2010, Porisky, 2019, Molyneux et al., 2016, Bossuroy and Coudouel 2018, in Alik-Lagrange et al. 2021).

While this is often an ideal, rather than the level of accountability and empowerment that operates in practice, there is nonetheless evidence of valuable effects from various contexts, particularly for otherwise neglected groups (a category in which refugees and IDPs typically sit). For example, in Nepal, the social protection benefits mentioned earlier increased socially-excluded recipients’ sense of citizenship and rights consciousness, while in India and Kenya, ‘rights-based’ frameworks for social protection strengthened the voice of (often marginalised) recipients and the accountability of the state to citizens (Babajanian, 2012; Mahmud and Sharpe, 2021; Schjødt, 2021). In some cases, social protection has also been linked to increased recipient awareness or belief in their political agency, as in Latin America where female recipients were found to have higher self-confidence, public participation and political engagement outcomes (Molyneux and Thomson, 2011, Soares and Silva, 2010, in Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021).

While non-governmental actors can undoubtedly help to increase people’s voice, agency and awareness of their rights, this influence may be more likely to occur through accompanying advocacy activities than through the cash or in-kind assistance itself. Moreover, it seems improbable that non-governmental provision would achieve the same effect as government provision on perceived affiliation or belonging to the nation-state. Nevertheless, as discussed in section 3.2, there can be confusion about the government’s role in a programme that has little or nothing to do with the state in practice. This means that the potential positive effects described above would not necessarily be restricted to nationally-led provision, particularly if humanitarian communications strategies specifically sought to highlight some form of government cooperation in an otherwise non-governmental project.

4 Conclusions

Social cohesion is shaped by wide-ranging factors, including displaced and host communities' profiles and pre-existing relations with each other, the media and public discourse, economic and political climate, nature and timeline of the displacement, and broader state policies governing the rights and opportunities available to affected populations. Past research suggests that assistance provision is therefore unlikely to itself be the driver of overall attitudes and interactions between displaced and host communities, or of those communities' perceptions of the state. Yet assistance provision can sometimes help to strengthen social relations, and can also play a role in exacerbating social tensions.

This paper has identified several ways in which assistance to displaced populations may influence inter-community and state-society relations. These potential effects are summarised below for horizontal and vertical cohesion in turn, and form the basis of the conceptual frameworks that we subsequently test and develop in our primary research.

Horizontal cohesion

Direct effects

Particularly where contact between communities is limited at the outset, participation in assistance programmes can sometimes directly influence the type or frequency of interactions between displaced and host populations. While programmes that actively and effectively encourage joint participation of host and displaced communities sometimes improve relations (at least among participants), programmes that require shared use of community facilities without properly expanding the capacity of those services may exacerbate tensions.

While attitudes between displaced and host communities are largely shaped by wider factors, they may sometimes be directly affected by perceptions on the (un)fairness of assistance provision. Tensions can sometimes be exacerbated where programming is felt to favour one group's needs and neglect the other's, or where government resources are perceived to be inappropriately diverted to the displaced population at hosts' expense. On the other hand, where the host community was receiving little support prior to the displacement influx and is now included in assistance programmes, this may generate positive perceptions of the displaced. Furthermore, many host

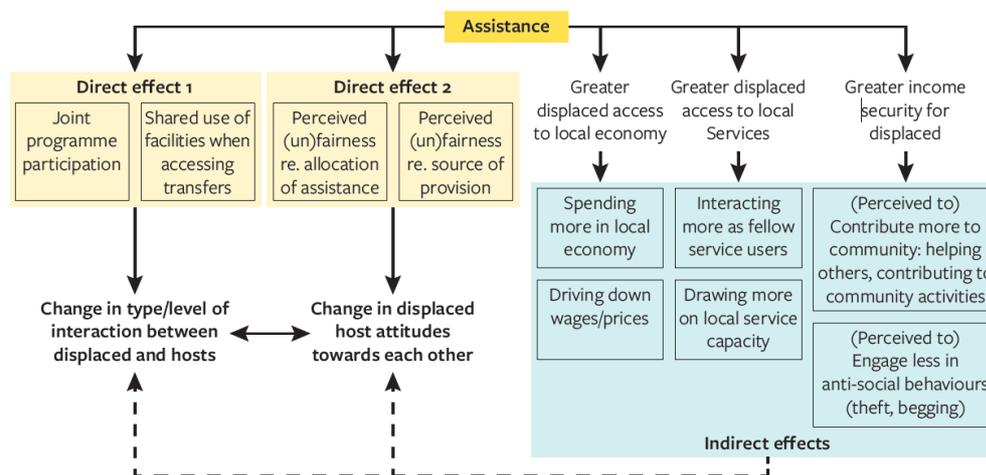
community members sympathise strongly with the plight of displaced households, so are overall highly supportive of assistance that can help meet refugees and IDPs' acute needs.

Indirect effects

Assistance provision can also *indirectly* influence relations between displaced and host communities. By facilitating greater access to the local economy, it can promote positive views of displaced recipients among local businesses who benefit from their patronage. But it can also trigger hostility when displaced recipients appear to undercut local wages or drive up prices. By enhancing displaced recipients' access to local schools or health services, assistance may promote positive shared interactions with host communities using those same services. Yet it may also generate discontent over the perceived strain in service provision, particularly if there is a lack of investment in service capacity to absorb the additional demand. Finally, greater income security among assistance recipients may enhance their role and status in the community, by enabling them to share resources with neighbours, freeing up their time and energy to participate in community activities, and reducing their (perceived) engagement in negative coping strategies such as begging or theft.

These potential effects on horizontal cohesion are summarised in the conceptual framework in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for potential effects of assistance provision on horizontal cohesion in displacement settings



Source: Author

Vertical cohesion

The literature on the vertical cohesion effects of assistance to displaced populations was relatively limited, particularly in relation to state-run schemes. Consequently, this review explored broader insights on the vertical cohesion effects of assistance provision (social

protection and non-governmental programming) in fragile or conflict-affected settings, and for marginalised populations.

The review notes three main ways in which state-society relations might be influenced.

First, assistance provision may have redistributive effects on recipients' material relationship with the state. For social protection, these effects may occur in a direct sense (since it entails direct provision of transfers and services by the state to recipients) and in an indirect sense (since participation in one programme may facilitate recipients' access to wider government services and systems). When donor-financed, both social protection and non-governmental assistance may also affect recipients' material relationship with the state by influencing state responsiveness and capacity to attend to their needs in the longer term; the literature here shows mixed, but more frequently negative, impacts, particularly for non-governmental programmes.

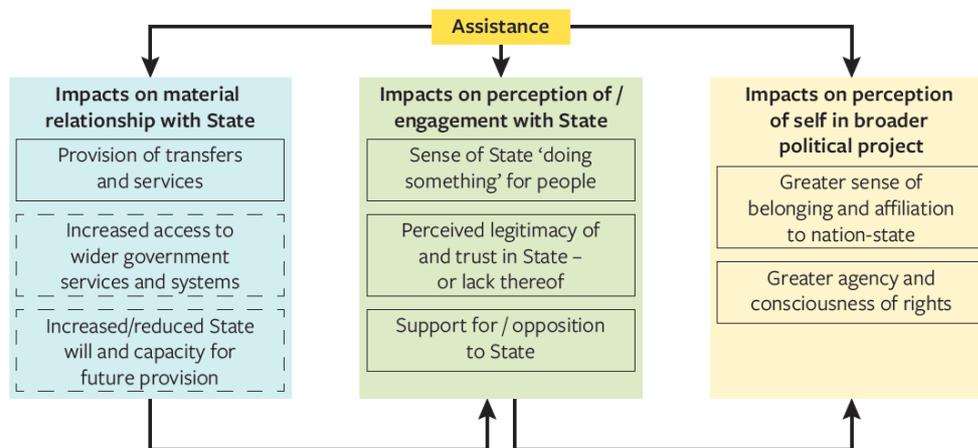
Second, assistance provision may have contractual effects on the way in which people perceive and engage with the state. As a visible and tangible example of the government 'doing something' for its people, social protection can in certain cases help strengthen the perceived legitimacy of, trust in and support for the state. But in many cases, social protection may do little to alter people's perceptions of the state, since these are largely mediated by people's prior interactions with government. Furthermore, social protection may also damage perceptions, if programmes are felt (by recipients or non-recipients) to be badly designed or implemented, or if they negatively interact with existing political or social divisions.

While this second category of effects is more likely to arise for state than non-governmental provision, the latter may also influence perceptions where the state is somehow associated (rightly or wrongly) with a non-governmental programme. This could occur even when the state is in no way responsible for the scheme, since people do not necessarily know who is implementing or financing assistance.

Finally, assistance may alter people's perceptions of themselves in relation to the state. In particularly positive cases, social protection has been found to help improve recipients' sense of belonging and affiliation to the nation-state, and to enhance their rights-consciousness and ability to make demands of the state. However, the evidence reviewed related to social protection on citizens; there is therefore a need to consider how such effects might differ for non-governmental assistance or for provision to displaced populations specifically (including non-citizens).

Figure 2 summarises these potential effects of assistance provision on vertical cohesion in a conceptual framework.

Figure 2 Conceptual framework for potential effects of assistance provision on vertical cohesion



Source: authors, based directly on Alik-Lagrange et al. (2021).

Together with the conceptual framework for horizontal cohesion in Figure 1, these frameworks form the basis for our forthcoming primary research, which explores the effects of various assistance models on social cohesion in displacement settings in Cameroon, Colombia and Greece (Lowe et al., 2022).

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