

Linking social protection and humanitarian assistance

A toolkit to support basic needs and wellbeing in displacement settings

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

The number of people in the world who are forcibly displaced has more than doubled in the last decade, passing the 100 million mark in 2022 (UNCHR, 2022). This includes both those fleeing across borders – asylum seekers and refugees – and internally displaced people (IDPs) – people displaced within their home country. Such displacement is increasingly long term, and those affected typically live in the global South and among host communities rather than in camps.

Such shifts have required those responding to displacement to revise their approach, and they have increasingly moved away from traditional ‘care and maintenance’ models of humanitarian assistance – based on the immediate relief of emergency needs – towards development-oriented solutions. One potential approach is to engage more closely with national social protection systems as a crisis response mechanism. Yet the implications – including for **basic needs and wellbeing** – of linking humanitarian assistance for displaced populations with social protection in different ways has been the subject of only limited investigation to date.

UNHCR (2017) defines basic needs in terms of access to basic services and assistance in the areas of health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food, shelter, energy and education, as well as domestic items and specialised services for people with specific needs.

In this toolkit, **basic needs and subjective dimensions of wellbeing** focus on:

- the availability of food and water for consumption (for material wellbeing)
- levels of satisfaction with life in general and the household’s financial situation and of mental wellbeing over the past thirty days (for subjective wellbeing).

As part of a wider project funded under the Building the Evidence on Forced Displacement partnership, primary research has explored the effects of assistance provision on basic needs and wellbeing in three countries:

- Cameroon (Levine et al., 2022)
- Colombia (Ham et al., 2022)
- Greece (Tramountanis et al., 2022).

An overall thematic paper gathers the findings of these three case studies (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2022), discussing in detail cross-country conclusions, including whether and how the impacts on basic needs and subjective dimensions of wellbeing differ if assistance is in some way linked with the state’s social protection system rather than delivered separately by independent humanitarian agencies.

With this toolkit, we aim to offer guidance for both government and non-governmental actors (i.e. implementing agencies and donors) providing assistance in displacement settings, where that displacement is expected to be long-term and when settings are sufficiently stable to support development-oriented approaches. We root that guidance in evidence gathered across three key country contexts (Cameroon, Colombia and Greece), and we draw conclusions and make recommendations at two levels:

- policy
- programme design.

A separate toolkit draws conclusions and makes recommendations at the level of implementation (Holmes et al., 2022).

We offer not only general guidance on assistance provision in such contexts but also more specific guidance for those wondering how – or indeed whether – to link humanitarian assistance with social protection programmes or systems. We recognise that the decision will reach beyond basic needs considerations into a wide range of factors, including the nature of the displacement, the structural features and state of the social protection system in the host country, and the legal and institutional frameworks, as well as wider displacement policy responses, in place (see Lowe and Cherrier, 2022).

In practice, host governments and international actors will face competing demands and, in balancing these, may find themselves making decisions that result in trade-offs among the desired outcomes. With this in mind, we recommend that all involved consider the guidance in this toolkit carefully within, and apply it appropriately to, the specific context of their own displacement setting.



POLICY



POLICY LESSONS

LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Both displaced and host populations have a wide set of basic needs with which they may require assistance. The needs of displaced populations are shaped, however, by their losses both before and during displacement. Not only will those needs continue long after they have arrived in the host country, but also it will be more challenging for displaced populations to meet those needs independently due to displaced persons' more limited networks, assets, livelihood opportunities and legal rights.

Social protection or humanitarian assistance may go some way towards overcoming 'demand-side' constraints on meeting some of these needs, for example by providing households with food and other in-kind necessities, or the financial means to purchase them, or (in some cases) by enabling the displaced person to retrain or otherwise rebuild their livelihood. In other cases, however, meeting these basic needs may face 'supply-side' barriers, which may affect host populations as well as displaced persons. For example there may be too few school places, inadequate healthcare services, limited WASH facilities or a lack of labour market opportunities. In addition, there may be broader legal, policy or context-specific factors standing between a displaced person and the resources and opportunities which they can access. Such factors may include laws with direct or indirect exclusionary effect, documentary requirements a displaced person cannot fulfil, violence and insecurity, and discrimination.



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

Asked about the assistance that would help them to meet their basic needs, many of the displaced persons interviewed highlighted the importance of wider policies and programmes reaching beyond cash and in-kind transfers. Across all three countries, quicker and simpler access to documentation was identified as a key way of assisting displaced people, enhancing their access to many basic rights and services.

- In **Cameroon**, IDPs and refugees spoke not only of access to education, a right to land and freedom to move throughout the country but also of the need for security and for protection from conflict- and gender-based violence.
- In **Colombia**, Venezuelans emphasised the need for policies and programmes improving their access to decent work.
- In **Greece**, refugees and asylum seekers highlighted gaps in support for mental health conditions thus left untreated.

COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

The 2011 Victims' Law in **Colombia** is considered one of the world's most comprehensive legal frameworks for IDPs. Alongside many other rights, the Law entitles such persons to various forms of state assistance, including preferential access to social assistance. For those surveyed in low-income neighbourhoods of Bogotá and Cúcuta, this seems to have played an important role in facilitating relatively high rates of coverage among the IDP population: 76% of IDPs were accessing routine or pandemic-related transfers, compared to 62% of host community households.

In **Greece**, although recognised refugees legally have the right to benefit from social assistance programmes on the same terms as Greek citizens, only 2 out of 310 refugees surveyed in Athens and Ioannina had accessed any such welfare scheme.

The results of our research emphasise that social protection or humanitarian assistance schemes must be complemented by broader legal and policy frameworks designed to meet the wide-ranging needs of both host and displaced populations. These frameworks may vary according to the specific legal status of the displaced population (e.g. IDPs may have the same rights as citizens that refugees and asylum seekers do not). Our findings show that, where assistance is enshrined in law, it can sometimes guarantee the rights and entitlements of displaced persons more explicitly, and thereby improve their ability to access provisions that meet their various needs.

In some cases, however, embedding assistance for displaced persons into national law or policy does little to improve their ability to access support: bureaucratic and other barriers may mean that provision on paper does not mean basic needs are met in practice (Lowe et al., 2022a). As such, sound programme design and delivery, as well as implementation, must partner with laws and policies to have positive effects in practice.

We all rely on a job, you understand me? We are in a country as undocumented Venezuelans, we do not have papers, we do not have passports, we do not have authorisations to work or look for a job, imagine that.

Venezuelan respondent, Colombia



General recommendations for effective assistance provision

Host governments and international actors should:

- **Invest** in the infrastructure and broad socio-economic development of displacement-affected regions, seeking support (including financial support) from international actors through an area-based approach.
 - **Strengthen** the wide-ranging social, economic and political rights of both displaced and host populations.
 - **Recognise** that further work, sustained financing, and investment in capacity and coordination is needed to ensure that legal provisions on paper are implemented in practice.
 - **Partner** with civil society and non-governmental organisations to offer targeted advocacy and support to help people understand their rights and access assistance (see also ‘Governance and coordination’).
- **Collaborate** to develop comprehensive policies to help displaced and host populations meet their basic needs and support their well-being, recognising that the needs of displaced and host populations are different, and typically require different amounts and types of assistance (see ‘Recommendations for linking humanitarian assistance with social protection’ below).
 - **Remember** that assistance is only one component of effective social protection, which must also include the right to work, social security and labour protection, and access to broader social services (including basic and specialised services such as protection).

International actors should:

- **Deliver** on existing commitments, such as the Grand Bargain on localisation, the Paris Declaration on ownership and the New Deal for fragile states on the centrality of the state, to help strengthen national policy responses.

Recommendations for linking humanitarian assistance with social protection

Actors considering linkages should:

- **Develop** multi-annual strategies to ensure that displaced populations’ wide-ranging and long-term needs are met. Strategies should consider linking humanitarian assistance with social protection based on context-specific analysis of their likely effects on the basic needs of displaced populations.
- **Not automatically assume** that displaced populations – even those who have been in the host country for a protracted period – will need the same type or level of assistance as the host population or be able to ‘graduate’ from social protection programmes within the same time frame as host populations. Analyse the potential impacts these linkages would have on the basic needs of displaced populations.
- **Strengthen** existing social protection systems (contributory and non-contributory) for host populations and, where appropriate, look to progressively rely on them to support displaced populations, by:
 - **Providing** financial resources, technical advice and capacity-building support (e.g. South–South cooperation, training) to strengthen systems and build shock-responsiveness.
 - **Facilitating** discussions of different policy options, including new (or revised) legal frameworks regularising the residence of displaced populations and facilitating their access to social protection.
- **Use** politically informed approaches to assess whether or how to advocate for linking humanitarian assistance with social protection, recognising that the barriers hindering displaced people’s access to social protection are often political (see Lowe and Cherrier, 2022).
- **Build** on the host government’s broader displacement response wherever possible when assisting displaced populations, but recognise that the government’s laws and policies may not yet be fully operational and that assistance may continue to be largely internationally provided.

GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION

Helping populations affected by displacement to meet their diverse basic needs is a complex process that requires cohesive and comprehensive provision across a broad range of programmes, policies and actors.

Our research found that there are generally potential benefits to be had when policy coordination is strong across different schemes and systems, even when those schemes and systems are not fully aligned or integrated. Strong governance and coordination can result in basic needs being met to a greater extent. Conversely, where such coordination is ineffective or absent, our findings revealed clear gaps in provision, leaving urgent needs entirely unmet.

Now that the recognition process is faster, we have people being awarded the same rights and obligations as the native population, but they don't speak the language, they are not informed about their rights and responsibilities, they do not understand the system, [...] while civil servants are often not educated about how to deal with the displaced.

Key informant, Greece



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

The **Greece** case study illustrated the neglect of basic needs that may result when humanitarian assistance and social protection systems are not yet well coordinated. As soon as asylum seekers are granted refugee status in Greece, they are 'logged out' of the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) humanitarian assistance scheme funded by the European Union and are required to vacate their ESTIA-funded apartments within a month. In principle, these newly recognised refugees then become eligible to apply for certain state social welfare schemes, as well as for a six- to twelve-month 'transition' programme (Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection, known as HELIOS), also funded by the European Union. In practice, many refugees have found themselves homeless or in dire poverty, having fallen into the gap between the humanitarian assistance and social protection systems.

There is weak coordination within and across the humanitarian and social protection systems, with the result that only 15% of respondents were accessing

the HELIOS scheme and less than 1% had managed to access any form of social protection. There is a lack of political will to improve refugees' access to state-led or state-supported assistance, because of concerns that this might encourage more refugees to settle in Greece.

By contrast, in **Colombia**, key informants observed that there has been increasing coordination of the international humanitarian assistance and national social protection systems over time, and they felt that this had helped to improve the country's response to an influx of displaced persons, helping actors to identify gaps in provision between agencies and enhancing their ability to understand and address the displaced population's needs.

In this context, the government's political will to serve as the coordination focal point for the overarching displacement response has enabled humanitarian agencies to complement state provisions more effectively, increasing the adequacy and coverage of provision to meet internally displaced and Venezuelan populations' needs.



General recommendations for effective assistance provision

Host governments and international actors should:

- **Collaborate** *within* and *across* the social protection and humanitarian assistance space to ensure the provision of adequate assistance across government and non-governmental programmes, coordinating efforts with careful attention to the different types and levels of assistance delivered to different target populations.
- **Develop partnerships** and coordinate with a wide range of local and national partners, including those sometimes overlooked in social protection and humanitarian assistance activities. For example, this includes coordination with local governments and with organisations providing specialised services such as psychosocial support, protection from violence (including from sexual and gender-based violence) and access to justice, as well as with civil society organisations supporting marginalised and vulnerable populations who may be at greater risk (including, among others, disabled persons, older persons, and women and girls).

Recommendations for linking humanitarian assistance with social protection

Actors considering linkages should:

- **Improve** coordination both within the humanitarian assistance and social protection systems, and across these two systems, remembering that political will may be low and donors may need to put incentives in place to make this happen.
- **Develop** mechanisms that will strengthen coordination (see also Smith, 2021) by:
 - **Establishing** sources of funding that encourage collaboration.
 - **Identifying** national focal points (e.g. institutional focal points responsible for refugees and focal point for IDPs) with which humanitarian actors will work.
 - **Appointing** a lead agency to coordinate or convene efforts (i.e. a government, a humanitarian agency or development lead, depending on the displacement setting).
 - **Formalising** procedures by means of memorandums, partnership agreements and other documents that clearly set out the various actors' key roles and responsibilities.
 - **Building** forums or other online platforms to facilitate discussion and knowledge sharing among actors.
 - **Establishing** procedures and systems for sharing information and data.
 - **Co-producing** assessments, options and strategies to support displaced populations.
 - **Setting** goals to support displaced populations as part of national and local government development plans.
- **Identify** which displaced or host populations might not be receiving adequate assistance **and assess** why, then provide assistance to these too, while:
 - **Looking** through a gender-based lens and with other characteristics in mind when identifying gaps that may be specific to vulnerable and minority communities within the broader populations.
 - **Framing** messaging with care to ensure that assistance targeting these communities is sensitive to social cohesion (see Lowe et al., 2022b).

FINANCING

Our research clearly highlighted the importance of adequate and sustained financing in meeting the basic needs of both displaced populations and host communities. Where financing for displacement responses had been dramatically reduced over time (as was the case in Cameroon – see ‘Transfer amounts’), this had reduced the extent to which the humanitarian provisions met the displaced population’s basic needs.

In large-scale protracted displacement situations, the depth, breadth and duration of need is immense. As the United Nations’ Global Compact on Refugees and associated frameworks make clear, host countries cannot and should not bear this financial burden alone. It is therefore vital for the international community to fulfil its commitments to sharing responsibility for global displacement challenges and easing pressure on host countries – both by providing financing for host countries (the focus of this section) and by providing resettlement opportunities so that responsibility for hosting refugees is globally shared.

Whether this international financing should be fully linked with (i.e. channelled through) state systems or delivered through humanitarian or non-governmental agencies is a separate matter. Our research pointed towards various potential impacts of linking international and national financing on its ability to meet affected populations’ basic needs.

Linking international financing with state systems may be beneficial if it means that broader, better or more reliable support reaches those affected by displacement crises. But this is not a given, and affected populations’ wellbeing may be adversely affected if channelling funds through national systems sees resources diverted, resulting instead in a total reduction in the quality or quantity of assistance reaching people on the ground. It can also be challenging for governments to serve populations effectively in areas in which they lack capacity, control, public trust or political will.

It’s better that [humanitarian assistance and government programmes] don’t merge. If they did, we wouldn’t receive anything anymore... there’s too much misappropriation, we’d rather the government doesn’t get involved in the work of the NGOs.

IDP respondent, Cameroon



COUNTRY IN FOCUS

When asked about the potential impacts of channelling assistance through government systems rather than humanitarian agencies, respondents in **Cameroon** shared concerns that resources might be misused, reducing the overall amount available to meet people’s needs.

In **Colombia**, however, many respondents highlighted a need for the international community to provide more support to the government to enable provision for Venezuelans without further cutting into the state budget.

[If] ... the World Food Programme comes and wants to sign an agreement with the government to give us, I don’t know, 10,000 or 15,000 food quotas for migrants. [That means that] the food we had that was provided by the government goes towards more Colombian kids that are also excluded from the school feeding programme.

Government KII, Colombia



General recommendations for effective assistance provision

Host governments and international actors should:

- **Identify and agree** longer-term financing options to provide all recipients – both host and displaced populations – with more reliable access to assistance that meets their specific needs.
- **Identify and resource** the basic needs of displacement-affected populations.
- **Assess** whether additional budgets may be needed to meet the needs specific to the displaced population, as well as the sustainability of such budgets.
- **Set** goals to support displaced populations as part of national and local government development plans to help promote the allocation of public resources to these goals.

International actors should:

- **Deliver** on their commitments to share responsibility for global challenges and to ease pressure on host countries:
 - **Offer** resettlement opportunities to ensure an equitable distribution of refugee-hosting responsibilities across countries.
 - **Provide** sufficient and sustained financing to meet the basic needs and wellbeing of populations affected by displacement.
 - **Consider** whether to channel this financing through state systems or independently of government (see ‘Recommendations for linking humanitarian assistance with social protection’ below), which will be context-dependent. Even if using state systems for the response, this does not eliminate the need to provide international financing.

Recommendations for linking humanitarian assistance with social protection

Actors considering linkages should:

- **Promote** international funding sources for host countries, such as the World Bank International Development Association (IDA) Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR), to incentivise the inclusion of displaced populations in the national social protection system, where such assistance will meet displaced people’s needs and bearing in mind that lack of political will can be as limiting as lack of funding.
- If considering a decision to channel financing through national budgets or independently, **assess** what the net provision reaching the target population is likely to be either way.
- **Explore** multi-donor financing options across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus to facilitate greater coordination and collaboration.



PROGRAMME DESIGN LESSONS

Displaced populations typically have needs that are different from, and often greater than, those of the host community, since they tend to have more limited access to employment and livelihoods, land, secure housing, community and social networks, and public services in their new place of residence. They may have lost or exhausted most of their assets, savings or income before or during their journey to the host country, and they may also have developed specific additional needs as a result of physical injury or trauma, for example. Some of these effects may be permanent and they may be exacerbated by discrimination and wider disadvantages on the basis of an individual's other characteristics, including age and gender. Others might reduce over time – but, in practice, such effects and the specific additional needs to which they give rise are likely to persist for many years.

All this means that, even in situations of protracted crisis, displaced populations will generally require different types and higher-than-average levels of support than host populations if their basic needs are to be met. Such differences create important considerations for designing humanitarian assistance and social protection programmes, and for linking them, in ways that do not jeopardise the wellbeing of displaced populations. In this toolkit, we explore those considerations that relate to:

- the transfer amount (value and duration)
- the transfer type
- targeting criteria.

TRANSFER AMOUNTS

Transfer amounts have generally been very different between humanitarian assistance and social protection systems, with humanitarian agencies generally giving significantly higher levels of assistance than that offered through social assistance. In part, this is a direct reflection of the different needs between displaced and host populations. It also reflects the different objectives of humanitarian assistance and social protection programmes, as well as – relatedly – the different methods that humanitarian agencies and host countries use to calculate the level of assistance they will grant, and the constraints they each face (see also McLean et al., 2021).

The core objectives of humanitarian assistance are typically saving lives and meeting the basic needs of crisis-affected populations for as long as those needs arise. By contrast, social assistance programmes generally aim to alleviate poverty and vulnerability but not necessarily to meet all of the multidimensional needs of recipient households, nor are they intended to serve as households' sole source of livelihoods and income. Moreover, certain social assistance schemes, such as poverty-oriented 'graduation' programmes or unemployment benefits, are specifically designed to provide support only for a fixed period of time, as temporary support intended to help recipient households 'graduate' out of poverty or to support individuals while they find work.

To determine transfer amounts, humanitarian agencies typically make reference to the current market price of meeting all basic needs, known as the (Survival) Minimum Expenditure Basket, or the (S)MEB. In principle, they aim to set transfer values at a level that – in combination with any other goods, services or earnings that they can access – will allow households to meet their full range of needs. In practice, however, the amounts available for delivery as humanitarian assistance are heavily tied to funding appeals, which means that the support delivered and length of time for which the support is available may therefore fall short of the amounts that would truly meet displaced people's needs, or may support displaced populations for only a limited time.

Social assistance programmes, meanwhile, are more likely – at least in principle – to set transfer values with reference to benchmarks such as the national poverty line or national minimum wage. Neither of these tend to be regularly updated, so amounts often correspond less closely to the current cost of living than does the (S)MEB. In practice, however, the support provided through different social assistance schemes is frequently skewed by the economic and fiscal constraints on the host government, and above all by political will. Furthermore, while social protection is often said to be more reliable than humanitarian assistance, the reality of this depends on context, and access may be time-limited.

The sum of this is that the value and duration of assistance provided through humanitarian systems is often much higher and more long-term than assistance provided through social protection – and the latter often falls well short of the amount required to adequately meet basic needs among even host households, let alone the higher-than-average needs of displaced populations.

In our case studies, the positive wellbeing outcomes of assistance – including both the material and the subjective dimensions of wellbeing – were more strongly indicated among recipients of humanitarian assistance than those in receipt of social protection.

Our research raises concerns about the potential effects of reducing humanitarian assistance amounts and shortening the time for which they are available to align them more



COUNTRY IN FOCUS

The different objectives of humanitarian assistance and social protection programmes, as well as the different methods used and constraints evident when calculating transfer amounts, were clearly demonstrated in **Cameroon**.

- Humanitarian food assistance aims to meet and sustain basic needs, while the main social protection programme (PFS) is intended to help households move out of poverty within two years, based on an assumption that they have some degree of independent livelihood.
- Humanitarian food rations are calculated with reference to recipients' daily calorie needs (originally providing 100% of this required amount and halved over time by funding cuts), while the national social protection cash transfer scheme amount is set at much lower levels (the monthly cash transfer equating to only 12% of the national poverty line – even after a large recent increase).

closely with social protection programmes. Lowering transfer amounts, or aligning amounts for host or displaced populations such that they ‘meet in the middle’, may simply replicate – and exacerbate – problems that already exist as a consequence of inadequate social protection provision for host populations and, in the process, adversely affect displaced populations’ ability to meet their basic needs.

Transfer amounts and the duration of the transfer must therefore be carefully considered in light of population-specific poverty and vulnerability levels as well the broader context, which can be more restrictive for displaced populations. From the perspective of ensuring the needs of all displacement-affected populations, the most effective approach will be to maintain adequate provision for displaced populations while increasing transfers for host populations, where provision has been inadequate – drawing on new sources of domestic and international financing where feasible and necessary. This also means monitoring food prices and inflation, as well as considering and addressing the differing needs of communities within recipient populations (e.g. of women and girls, of older people, of disabled people and of those who have been displaced for longer than average).



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

In our qualitative research, displaced respondents within each of the settings studied described the central role that assistance played in their lives, enabling them to meet more of their basic needs while avoiding (or relying less on) negative coping mechanisms. By contrast, some host respondents receiving (lower-value) social protection transfers described them as a welcome supplement to household income rather than a significant source of income on which to rely.

In **Greece** and **Cameroon**, recipients of humanitarian assistance generally showed better outcomes than non-recipients in various dimensions of wellbeing (e.g. food insecurity, access to sufficient drinking water, satisfaction with life in general and with the household’s financial situation, and mental wellbeing). Such differences in outcomes were generally less pronounced among those receiving and not receiving social protection – although it is important to note that, in some cases, this may reflect in part transfers reaching the most deprived households as a result of effective targeting (see ‘Targeting criteria’).

The widest wellbeing gap between recipients and non-recipients was evident among the internally displaced population receiving humanitarian assistance in **Cameroon**, where recipients showed better wellbeing outcomes across the board. However, research in Cameroon also demonstrated the decreases in wellbeing that may arise when humanitarian assistance is cut, as had been the case repeatedly since 2016 for the food rations that the World Food Programme (WFP) delivers to refugees. Respondents in the country commonly shared concerns about their ability to meet basic (food) needs with the reduced ration amounts, while quantitative analysis indicated that shrinking assistance levels over time may have been responsible for the raised levels of psychological stress observed among those who had witnessed continuous cuts to support, compared with those who had received only started receiving support more recently.



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

Various differences related to gender emerged from our research into the relationship between assistance receipt and wellbeing outcomes in all three settings. Whereas the differences between wellbeing outcomes for recipients and non-recipients were mixed where a man headed a household, displaced recipients in households headed by women were generally likely to show much stronger wellbeing outcomes than non-recipients in **Cameroon, Colombia** and **Greece**. While we could not analyse the specific causal pathways in depth in our research, our findings may indicate that assistance is even more important to households headed by women, which we anticipate might be related to their reduced access to other sources of income and livelihoods.



General recommendations for effective assistance provision

Host governments and international actors should:

- **Conduct** or use (where already available) context-specific analyses of the distinct needs of sub-groups, for instance in terms of displacement status, gender, age, length of displacement, etc.
- **Ensure** transfer amounts are informed by different levels of basic needs, including food, shelter, income, access to WASH facilities, access to infrastructure and services, employment and other income-generating opportunities, and psychosocial and protection needs (e.g. those resulting from sexual and gender-based violence, and displacement-related trauma, which demand specialised, culturally appropriate support).
- **Consider** the implications of assistance in general and of transfer values (and other design aspects) specifically not only in meeting basic needs but also for other dimensions of wellbeing (e.g. the empowerment of women and girls, reduced risk of violence, psychosocial wellbeing) by
 - **Monitoring** regularly recipients' experiences of receipt
 - **Evaluating** transfer amount adequacy using mixed methods approaches
 - **Embedding** feedback loops that will drive potential programme change, if necessary (see also Holmes and Levine, 2021)
- **Provide** transfer amounts that adequately meet both host populations' and displaced populations' basic needs (and the needs of specific vulnerable and minority communities within these populations). This may mean drawing on new domestic and international financing sources to increase the adequacy of provision if assistance arrangements have historically failed to meet these needs.

Recommendations for linking humanitarian assistance with social protection

Actors considering linkages should:

- **Align** transfer values with programme design only where doing so contributes to the goals of meeting basic needs and supporting wellbeing.
- **Aim** to provide assistance at a level and for a period of time that adequately meets the needs of populations and distinct groups within these populations (taking into account gender, age and disability needs at a minimum).
 - **Provide** similar levels of support only if the needs of host households and displaced populations are similar.
 - **Respond** to the different and often higher needs of displaced households with higher levels of support, for longer periods of time or indefinitely where required.
- **Consider** layering assistance, delivering a base-level transfer for all and adding further assistance for those with special needs, noting the need for strong coordination, interoperable databases or registries and excellent recipient profile data if the layered assistance is to be targeted effectively (see 'Targeting criteria').
- **Recognise that there may be different** effects on social cohesion if different groups receive different transfer levels from the same provider, and take care to manage perceptions (see Lowe et al, 2022b).
- **Increase** the adequacy of social protection transfers where provision is inadequate to meet the needs of host households (drawing on new domestic and international financing sources where feasible and necessary) rather than reducing vital support for displaced households.

TRANSFER TYPE

Our research found that assistance to displaced populations was not always given in the form that best enabled those households to meet their basic needs. Where humanitarian assistance is provided as vouchers or transfers in-kind (historically the most common humanitarian transfer type), the transfer type may not align with the recipient's preferences and can result in reduced wellbeing outcomes.

In those displacement settings in which humanitarian assistance is most commonly provided in-kind and social protection is most commonly provided as cash, aligning the transfer types across both humanitarian assistance and social protection programmes may improve the extent to which transfers meet recipients' basic needs. Cash is often the more cost-effective and timely type, and it can be delivered more broadly and in a way that empowers households to manage their own finances and meet their own specific needs.

In some other settings, however, our research illustrates ways in which aligning transfer types across humanitarian assistance and mainstream social protection programmes might *reduce* the extent to which they meet displaced populations' needs. This is likely to be the case in relation to those needs that are unique to, or much more common among, displaced households compared with the host population.

So, the shop-keeper will tell you, 'OK, you have 13,000, so give me that. I'll keep 3,000 and 10,000 is for you... This is called 'le cash-out'.

Refugee, Cameroon



COUNTRY IN FOCUS

In **Cameroon**, humanitarian assistance was predominantly provided as food rations in-kind or as vouchers. Many recipient respondents highlighted the failure of this food ration to meet their needs and said that they opted instead to exchange the food voucher for cash (with the shopkeeper often taking a 25% cut) and then use this cash to meet other needs, such as medical ones. But the costs of exchanging the food for cash are often frustratingly high for recipients and it is an inefficient way of helping people to meet their needs.



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

In both **Colombia** and **Greece**, the severe and unique mental health needs of traumatised displaced individuals required highly specialised psychological support of a type far beyond any the state was currently providing within its social protection programmes (Ham et al., 2022; Tramountanis et al., 2022). Simply facilitating these people's access to mainstream social protection programmes was not enough to address those mental health needs; rather, the standard design of social protection programmes needed to be adjusted to provide, or link with, specialised support and services.



General recommendations for effective assistance provision

Host governments and international actors should:

- **Conduct** contextual assessments to determine the needs and preferences of the populations (including by type of displaced household, and for individuals within the household based on gender, age, disability, etc.) to inform the most appropriate and feasible assistance with which to respond to those requirements, including:
 - **Carrying out** a local market assessment for the feasibility of cash
 - **Investigating**, if transferring vouchers or in-kind, whether there are culturally preferred options
 - **Exploring** whether the type of transfer meets different needs (e.g. given the different nutritional requirements across age groups) and cultural preferences.
- **Provide** transfers of a type that maximises recipients' ability to meet their needs, which may mean paying assistance in cash rather than food rations (wherever appropriate and feasible, and where requested by recipient households), or a mixed-modality assistance package, depending on the needs and context.
- **Liaise** with partners outside the humanitarian assistance and social protection systems to build links with or **referrals** to other relevant services and programmes that enhance recipients' ability to meet their needs for both basic and specialised services (e.g. mental health support, as well as economic inclusion programmes that build recipients' capacity to meet their needs independently).

Recommendations for linking humanitarian assistance with social protection

Actors considering linkages should:

- **Align** system modalities only where this will result in improved wellbeing outcomes for recipients by:
 - **Assessing** how different modalities will support the objectives and outcomes for displaced populations broadly, and vulnerable and minority communities within these specifically (e.g. women and girls, older people, disabled people).
 - **Measuring** the extent to which alignment will help them meet their broad range of basic needs, including food, shelter, WASH), access to health care, education, jobs and economic opportunities, and supporting protection and mental wellbeing (e.g. by means of links with and referrals to complementary services and programmes).
 - **Enhance**, in partnership with relevant supply-side sectors, the availability and quality of local services.
- **Ensure**, where international actors are considering the full integration of displaced populations into social protection systems, that social protection programmes can be adapted to deliver, or act as referrals, to specialised services that can meet displaced households' unique needs.

TARGETING CRITERIA

The ability of a programme to address individuals' or households' basic needs depends on how effectively it is targeted to those individuals or households. Humanitarian assistance and social protection schemes generally identify needs and target the available assistance towards people with those needs in very different ways. In contexts where existing humanitarian assistance for displaced populations may be integrated into mainstream social protection provision, there is a risk that the latter may not clearly identify displaced households or that the mainstream eligibility criteria may exclude or otherwise be a barrier to those most in need.

Such divergence between the two systems may be overcome – at least initially – by developing separate shock-responsive provisions within the social protection system that are targeted using criteria that differ from those applied in mainstream programming. This may enable more 'humanitarian'-style targeting approaches to be used in the social protection system. However, where these provisions are available to recipients on a fixed-term basis, meaning that the mainstream system is expected to identify and serve crisis-affected populations after a certain point in time, these challenges may again emerge, since standard social protection criteria may not adequately target the specific needs of displaced populations even years after their arrival.

It is possible to integrate different targeting considerations into mainstream social protection programming to ensure the inclusion of displaced households in need, by proactively adjusting existing social protection objectives, strategy and targeting criteria. The framing, communication and funding of such adjustments must be undertaken with care, however, because these have important implications for social cohesion (see Lowe et al., 2022b; Commins et al., 2022).

They (humanitarian agencies) help them (refugees) more than us, and I find that normal because they are foreigners and their situations are more complicated than ours.

Host respondent, Cameroon



COUNTRY IN FOCUS

In **Cameroon**, the social protection programme (PFS) is not intended or designed to sustain the destitute but rather to help households advance out of poverty. Targeting is based on geographic quotas, which are filled by identifying the households with the most severe asset poverty, as assessed first by the community itself and then by a proxy means test. Over five years of rollout, the project aims to reach 200,000 households – less than 10% of those living below the poverty line nationally. By contrast, humanitarian assistance is targeted based on vulnerability to food insecurity, with the aim of assisting all those who would otherwise have urgent unmet needs. It is unclear how reliable asset poverty alone would be as an eligibility criterion for identifying and supporting, through the social safety net, the destitute members of the displaced population.

In **Colombia**, meanwhile, the standard social protection targeting criteria (based on a household's multidimensional poverty score as recorded in the *Sistema de Selección de Beneficiarios Para Programas Sociales*, or SISBEN) has been modified such that IDPs qualify more readily both for mainstream social protection and for specialised IDP assistance schemes, based on their status as IDPs in the national victims' registry. The relatively high rates of IDP coverage in the sample studied suggests that, in Colombia, the modified targeting approach is helping to increase access to social protection for IDPs in need.



General recommendations for effective provision of assistance

Host governments and international actors should:

- **Develop** targeting criteria with consideration of all available assistance programmes to ensure the coverage of those with unmet basic needs, through an appropriate assistance source.
- **Recognise** that not only displaced and host populations, but also specific groups within those populations, may have different needs from and be more vulnerable than one another, meaning that eligibility criteria must accurately capture these varying characteristics.
- **Ensure** that schemes that aim to include displaced households in principle have qualifying criteria that such households can meet in practice (e.g. by adjusting long-term residence requirements, nationality requirements, documentation requirements).
- **Establish** effective appeals and grievance mechanisms.
- **Communicate** clearly and with careful framing any changes to programme criteria (see Commins et al., 2022, for further guidance on adapting programme design with sensitivity to social cohesion risks).

Recommendations for linking humanitarian assistance with social protection

Actors considering linkages should:

- **Recognise** that vulnerability – and therefore the approaches to identifying priority recipients – often differ between humanitarian assistance and social protection schemes. This means that it is not generally appropriate to fully link with social protection targeting criteria, without either modifying existing programme criteria or developing new shock-responsive programmes with displacement-specific criteria, to ensure displaced residents can qualify for assistance in practice.
- If integrating displaced households into mainstream and/or shock-responsive social protection systems, **collaborate** to determine which eligibility mechanisms and targeting criteria might be most appropriate to identify displaced households with unmet needs.
- **Be cautious** when adjusting existing programme criteria to avoid aggravating concerns that displaced households are being granted access to the existing programmes at the expense of vulnerable host communities (see Commins et al., 2022).

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About this publication

The overall aim of this project is to better understand effective mechanisms for the integration of social protection programmes and humanitarian assistance. By providing clearer guidance about when, how and why different forms of integration might be considered, the project will develop the theory, evidence base and operational guidance on how social protection systems and humanitarian systems can work together to meet the needs of those affected by displacement crises. It draws on a total of six study sites that present different contexts of displacement and humanitarian response: Greece (Athens and Ioannina), Colombia (Bogotá and Cúcuta) and Cameroon (Far North and East). The project is led by ODI, who work in close collaboration 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.

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This is one of four toolkits published as part of this project. The toolkits distil findings from the longer project publication and draw out policy recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. The other toolkits focus on contextual analysis, social cohesion and operational delivery.

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