Working paper

What can existing microdata tell us about transfer receipt among host and displaced populations?

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Key messages

Microdata for displacement-affected contexts is now readily available through initiatives such as the World Bank/UNHCR Joint Data Centre, covering most displacement crises globally.

Most surveys have a transfer module or transfer receipt, covering social protection and/or humanitarian assistance. These can be used to calculate effective coverage of displacement-affected coverage.

Given that transfer variables are often included in limited detail, and asked in different ways, comparability of coverage rates is limited. This means that while microdata can be used to calculate coverage rates, the findings are not fully reliable or comparable.

Standardisation of transfer modules and questions will improve the feasibility of using existing microdata to calculate effective coverage of displacement-affected populations.

Building the Evidence on Forced Displacement

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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, including not only the displaced but vulnerable households in their host communities as well. The research is grounded in three country contexts with a total of six study sites that present different contexts of displacement and humanitarian response: Greece (Athens and Ioannina), Colombia (Bogotá/Cúcuta) and Cameroon (Far North/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.

This work is part of the program “Building the Evidence on Protracted Forced Displacement: A Multi-Stakeholder Partnership". The program is funded by UK Aid from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), it 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 program 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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Acronyms

IDP	internally displaced person
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
JDC	World Bank/UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement
MIS	Management Information System
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	power purchasing parity
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USD	United States Dollar

1 Introduction

The number of forcibly displaced people has more than doubled in the past decade, passing 100 million globally in 2022 (UNHCR, 2022). Those affected are increasingly displaced on a protracted basis, and typically live among host communities (rather than in designated camps), often for many years or even decades (UNHCR, 2021; OCHA, 2017). The shift in displacement situations has also required changes in the response approach, away from traditional 'care and maintenance' models of humanitarian assistance (based on providing immediate relief for emergency needs) towards more sustainable and development-oriented solutions, including greater engagement with and strengthening of national social protection systems as a potential crisis response mechanism (Gagnon and Rodrigues, 2020; Lowe et al., 2022).

The larger research project on social protection responses to forced displacement,[1] funded via a World Bank-managed Trust Fund on Forced Displacement, aims to start building the evidence on the potential effects of linking humanitarian assistance with state social protection systems in different ways, including potentially full integration of displaced populations in state social protection programmes (see Lowe et al., 2022). Other papers in this research project explore the case studies of Cameroon, Colombia and Greece, all of which display different models of support for displaced populations and different degrees and types of linkages between humanitarian assistance and state social protection, drawing on unique mixed methods data collected in 2020–2021.

However, to fully consider the role social protection might play in supporting displaced and host populations, it is important to draw on the wider evidence base. A literature review by Gray Meral and Both (2021) considers the published academic and grey literature on linkages between humanitarian assistance and state social protection programmes, including outcomes and decision-making processes. Also of interest is the evidence and data on the extent to which displaced (and host) populations are already covered by different types of support.

The objective of this paper is to **explore publicly available micro datasets to see what they can tell us about social protection and humanitarian assistance coverage[2] of displaced and host populations**. As such, the primary aim is to investigate the

[1] See https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/social-protection-responses-to-forced-displacement.

[2] Also referred to as 'transfer receipt' in this paper

methodological feasibility of using existing microdata sets to measure transfer receipt. A secondary aim is to present the findings from this exercise.

The next section looks at what the existing data tells us, starting with a discussion of potential data sources for establishing transfer receipt indicators for displaced populations. It then applies this in practice and presents data on social protection and humanitarian coverage based on 18 existing data sets from 13 countries. We then go on to consider the methodological limitations of the analysis that can be done with these existing data sources in Section 3. The final section draws out lessons and considers implications for policy and practice, including the feasibility of future analysis and the implications for future surveys.

2 What does the existing data tell us?

2.1 What data exists on social protection and humanitarian assistance coverage of displaced populations?[3]

In general, there is a dearth of data on people in displaced situations, both in international as well as internal displacement situations. Despite recent progress on improving the collection of this type of data (Baal, 2021) – particularly through the UN Statistical Commission's adoption of the Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics' International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (UN/Eurostat, 2018) and International Recommendations on Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (UN/Eurostat, 2020) – data on displaced populations is still rarely part of regularly collected government data, either administrative data or household survey data. The Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (JDC)[4] (2020) – a collaboration between the World Bank and UNHCR to improve the availability and quality of data on forced displacement launched in 2018 – also highlights different types of data gaps, including a lack of quality socio-economic data on displaced populations, limited integration of displaced populations in national statistical systems and lack of data on key population groups and geographical areas.

Moving on to social protection, there are a relatively large and growing number of countries providing information on access to social protection for the national population (this may include IDPs in theory and permanent refugee residents, though mostly unidentified). However, here too we see that we know much less about displaced populations. There are four key reasons for a lack of data on coverage for displaced populations.

Displaced households are frequently excluded from government-provided social protection. Displaced populations frequently do not receive government transfers, particularly in low- and lower middle-income countries, often instead receiving support from community organisations, international organisations or other humanitarian actors, especially in immediate crisis situations (Kool and Nimeh, 2021; Sabates-Wheeler, 2019, see also the Cameroon

[3] The introduction to section 2.1 and section 2.2.1 draw on background work that ODI conducted for a OECD-EBA report (OECD/ EBA, 2022)
[4] See www.jointdatacenter.org.

and Greece case studies for this project Tramountanis et al., 2022 and Levine et al., 2022). The exclusion of many displaced households from government social protection systems means that data on their social protection coverage is not seen as important. This paper explores those surveys where displaced households are included and considers their de facto social protection and humanitarian assistance coverage.

Political dynamics affect whether and what data on displaced persons is collected and shared. A complex web of political factors is often at play in the collection of data on displaced populations (see JDC, 2020). On the one hand, displaced households may have concerns about identifying themselves in data collection exercises. For example, refugees might be living in areas where they do not officially have the right to reside, or conflict-affected IDPs may be wary of officials following experiences of government-sanctioned violence or persecution. Conversely, both national governments and international agencies may have incentives to under-report or exaggerate the size, needs and access to support of the displaced population, for example because the data may directly influence the urgency, approach and scale of funding deemed necessary to respond, or because governments might wish to minimise the gravity of a situation if they were in some way responsible for the displacement event.

Humanitarian priorities may shift the focus away from capturing the data of interest. Humanitarian actors operating in emergency situations have often worked on the basis of certain assumptions or principles that make the need for detailed assessments of socioeconomic status or transfer receipt less relevant (see UNHCR/WFP, 2018). These include assumptions that, in the aftermath of a crisis, everyone should receive some cash or food support for their immediate survival (i.e., universal targeting) and that the amount of food support should be based on minimum food baskets. Targeting in the emergency phase may also not be methodologically or practically feasible, where capacity and time is limited, data is lacking, and social dynamics, political factors or protection risks make it difficult to collect the information required or to target on the basis of this data.

Displaced households are often omitted from underlying data collection exercises. As discussed in the previous section, the exclusion or invisibility of displaced populations in administrative or household survey data has made it very difficult to generate consistent, comparative cross-country indicators on transfers to displaced populations. Displacement status – both refugee or asylum status and IDP status – is often not collected, stored or made combinable with either administrative social protection data or survey data that includes questions or modules on social protection and humanitarian assistance (including for political reasons, as discussed above). This invisibility is exacerbated by the fact that many

displaced populations may live in areas that are currently in conflict and thus less likely to be covered during data collection exercises.

2.1.1 Potential data sources

There are two potential types of data that could be drawn on to provide social protection and humanitarian assistance receipt indicators for displaced populations: (1) administrative data and (2) survey data. Both have their advantages and limitations.

Administrative data, which is collected, stored and accessed through Management Information Systems (MIS) or so-called social or beneficiary registries, **is a potential starting point for developing a better understanding of social protection and humanitarian assistance coverage**. It includes every recipient of either a programme or a set of programmes, rather than a sample. Moreover, the exact attribution of members to a scheme allows researchers to determine exactly how many people receive specific kinds of social protection and humanitarian assistance – a level of detail that more general household survey questionnaires might not be able to deliver.

However, administrative data is rarely collated in a way that allows for an easy analysis, particularly in low- and lower-middle income countries. This can be due to a range of issues. Firstly, the data is typically collected to enable administrative processing for a particular programme, rather than research and analysis. This means that in most administrative social protection systems, displacement status of any kind will not automatically be captured as it is irrelevant for administering a transfer – unless the transfer is specifically aimed at displaced populations or there is political interest in disaggregating the data in that way.

Moreover, it can be prohibitively time-consuming to use administrative data for calculating displacement-related figures – and might involve combining administrative data requiring different levels of data clearance in complex processes. This is particularly true for less automated and under-resourced administrative systems in low- and lower middle- income countries. Given that the data set contains personal data about highly vulnerable groups, there usually are concerns about the security and sensitivity of stored data, which means it may not be readily shared for research purposes, or even for administrative purposes to link up databases held by different government agencies. Furthermore, integration of the different data sets needed for analysis may be particularly complicated or even impossible in the case of displaced populations, if they lack the unique identifiers (for example a national ID number) needed to link up their entry in different administrative systems.

Beyond these displacement-specific concerns, the more general issues relating to social protection coverage estimates would also apply when trying to assess coverage rates among displaced

households. While some countries are developing more advanced social registries, in many cases registries exist only for single programmes or sub-sets of programmes within the social protection system, meaning recipient overlap between different programmes is not known and accurate estimates of overall social protection or humanitarian assistance are not possible. In addition, since administrative systems to collect the data are often under-resourced or reliant on outdated technologies, there may be concerns about the accuracy of some or all of the data collected.

Recent efforts to capture improved *survey* data for displaced populations provide an opportunity to analyse coverage of social protection and humanitarian assistance, including across different demographic and other factors. In particular, the newly developed UNHCR micro-database library (UNHCR, 2022) provides a useful additional platform (on top of the existing World Bank micro-databases and others)[5] for downloading and analysing (mainly representative) surveys to estimate different indicators such as coverage and transfer amount figures. It includes more than 450 surveys. However, survey questionnaires in displacement settings to date have often only included very short questions on transfers that are rarely enough to establish receipt of a specific (type of) social protection transfer – or even to determine if the transfer does indeed relate to a social protection scheme, as opposed to another form of governmental or non-governmental transfer. In the future, improving the quality and depth of the questions that are asked in many of the surveys in humanitarian and protracted displacement contexts would provide an opportunity to create more standardised indicators on transfer receipt for displaced populations.

Regardless of the approach, any effort to estimate such transfer receipt indicators for displaced populations will face certain challenges. If people are officially registered as refugees or asylum seekers with UNHCR and are living in clearly delineated camps, counting them and conducting surveys to assess their wellbeing may be relatively easy. However, as definitions of refugees and IDPs for statistical purposes tend to be fairly complex and displaced persons often do not live in clearly geographically demarcated locations such as camps, it may be difficult to identify them in the wider population – both for administrative and household survey purposes.

2.1.2 Data used in this analysis

Based on the discussion outlined above, we chose to focus our attention on survey data. The data used in this paper was collected from the new UNHCR micro database: this collates high-quality micro-data on displaced populations globally, and since its inception has been able to make available 400 surveys (UNHCR, 2022). The collection covers a wide range of data sets: first, different types of regular household surveys (national household surveys, multiple

[5] See www.jointdatacenter.org/resources/#microdata.

indicator cluster surveys [MICS], high-frequency poverty surveys and Covid-19 surveys) and census data that also include displaced populations; second, (often repeated) displacement specific household surveys (multi-sector needs assessments, Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon); third, data from (academic) impact evaluation studies of interventions for and with displaced populations.

In principle, most of the surveys can be linked to (often UNHCR) administrative transfer data, either using the UNHCR ID or individual household information such as mobile phone numbers. However, due to the complicated data access procedures in place to protect the individual data of vulnerable people, we only include this type of data in the survey data set that UNHCR had already combined with administrative data in Lebanon (2016).

Inclusion criteria

For our study, we included data from the UNHCR database (and some that, at that point, were still only contained in the Microdata library of the World Bank) that were (1) less than 10 years old (so from 2012 or after), (2) contained at least some basic questions on receipt of any form of assistance and that provided (3) a longitudinal view on some countries using the same survey repeatedly and (4) a good spread of types of surveys and countries. We focused on survey data and excluded purely administrative and monitoring data (such as the Post-Distribution Monitoring Surveys) due to their biased sampling among recipients only.

Error! Reference source not found. below shows an overview of the surveys that were eventually included in the analysis. The majority of surveys come from countries known to host large numbers of displaced populations that receive more international attention (such as Bangladesh, Iraq and Lebanon, for example). In those countries, data collection on displaced populations is also more frequent, including repeating (nearly) identical surveys (such as the multi-sector needs assessments in Bangladesh) over multiple years.

In total, the analysis looks at 18 surveys from 13 countries. After the data collection for our analysis was completed in late 2021, further data sets were made available to the public. The majority of the surveys were collected on the UNHCR microdata base (12), and the rest on the World Bank microdata base (6). Nearly all the surveys were representative at least of the sub-population of displaced populations (in camps or specific regions) and some also include host populations (in the same regions or the vicinity of camps, etc.), with the exception of the surveys in Kenya and Malawi. The sample size of the surveys differs substantially, ranging from smaller phone surveys, like the one in Brazil with its 950 respondents, to large, nationally representative surveys that include refugees and IDPs such as the large Rapid Welfare Monitoring Survey 2017 in Iraq, which covers 52,966 households.

Table 1 Overview of included surveys

Country	Name	Year	Organisation	Sampled population	Authors' assessment of sampling representative-ness	Unit of analysis	N - Hosts	N - Refugees	N - IDPs	N - Other	N - Total
Bangladesh	Multi Sector Needs Assessment: Cox's Bazar, Rohingya Refugee Response, January 2019	2019	UNHCR	Rohingya in camps	Yes, rigorous sampling protocols described	Individual		15,612			15,612
Bangladesh	Multi Sector Needs Assessment: Cox's Bazar, Rohingya Refugee Response, July 2018	2018	UNHCR	Rohingya in camps	Yes, rigorous sampling protocols described	Individual		15,935			15,935
Brazil	Socio-economic profile of refugees, 2018–2019	2019	UNHCR	Refugees in cities in Brazil	Yes, but excludes rural refugees and small sample	Household		490			490
Ethiopia	Skills Profile Survey 2017, A Refugee and Host Community Survey	2017	World Bank	Refugees in camps and hosts within 5km of camps	Yes, sampling description sounds very rigorous	Individual	7,754	19,722			27,476
Iraq	Profiling of South and Central Governorates in Iraq, 2016	2016	UNHCR	IDPs and hosts in nine South and	Yes, but only includes those nine governorates	Individual	7,254		8,283		15,537

Country	Name	Year	Organisation	Sampled population	Authors' assessment of sampling representative-ness	Unit of analysis	N - Hosts	N - Refugees	N - IDPs	N - Other	N - Total
				Central governorates							
Iraq	Rapid Welfare Monitoring Survey	2017	World Bank	IDPs, hosts and refugees (outside of camps)	Yes, but excludes displaced in camps in Kurdistan	Individual	44,691	1,180	7,095		52,966
Iraq	High Frequency Phone Survey, 2020–2021	2020	World Bank	IDPs, hosts and returning refugees via phone across the country (displaced from Kurdistan and Northern governorates)	Yes, but excludes households without a mobile phone	Household	1,651		720	605	2,976
Kenya	Socio-economic impact of Covid-19 on refugees in Kenya, 2020	2020	UNHCR	Refugees and Shona with phones from UNHCR database	Yes, but excludes displaced not registered with UNHCR and mixes sample with census (for Shona)	Household		1,112		198	1,310
Lebanon	Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, 2016	2016	UNHCR	Refugees across Lebanon	Yes, rigorous sampling protocols described	Individual		21,884			21,884
Lebanon	Vulnerability Assessment of	2017	UNHCR	Refugees registered with UNHCR	Yes, very rigorous sampling	Individual		23,303			23,303

Country	Name	Year	Organisation	Sampled population	Authors' assessment of sampling representative-ness	Unit of analysis	N - Hosts	N - Refugees	N - IDPs	N - Other	N - Total
	Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, 2017				protocols described						
Lebanon	Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, 2019	2019	UNHCR	Refugees registered with UNHCR	Yes, very rigorous sampling protocols described	Individual		23,932			23,932
Malawi	Socio-economic assessment of refugees and asylum seekers in Malawi's Dzaleka and Luwani camps, 2017	2017	UNHCR	Refugees from Luwani and Dzaleka camps	No, sampling protocol unclear	Household		1,026			1,026
Nigeria	Profile of Internally Displaced Persons in North-East Nigeria, 2018	2018	World Bank	IDPs and hosts in six north-eastern states	Yes, but only includes those six north-eastern states	Individual	9,427		8,524		17,951
Rwanda	Socio-economic assessment of refugees in Rwanda's Gihembe, Kigeme and Kiziba camps, 2016	2016	UNHCR	Refugees in Gihembe, Kigeme and Kiziba refugee camps	Yes, but only includes refugees from those three camps	Individual		2,506			2,506

Country	Name	Year	Organisation	Sampled population	Authors' assessment of sampling representative-ness	Unit of analysis	N - Hosts	N - Refugees	N - IDPs	N - Other	N - Total
Somalia	Somali High Frequency Survey 2016, Wave 1	2016	World Bank	IDPs and hosts across Somalia	Yes, though using slightly different sampling in IDP camps and two volatile strata (microlisting)	Individual	15,217		1,201		16,418
South Sudan	High Frequency Survey: Wave 4 and Crisis Recovery Survey, 2017	2017	World Bank	Hosts from urban areas and IDPs from four camps	Yes, but only includes urban areas and only IDPs from four clearly delineated camps	Individual	4,304		599		4,903
Sudan	Progress Towards Durable Solutions in Abu Shouk and El Salam IDP Camps, 2019	2018	UNHCR	IDPs in two camps (Abu Shouk and El Salam)	Probably yes, though the information on sampling is limited and only includes IDPs in the two camps	Individual	11,854		6,679		18,533
Uganda	UGA REACH UNHCR Joint Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, 2018	2018	UNHCR	Refugees from settlements and hosts from hosting districts	Yes, but refugees only include those in the government system and hosts only includes those close to the camp	Household	2,492	4,292			6,784

2.2 Results of our analysis

The analysis provides figures on coverage of different types of social protection and humanitarian assistance and transfer amounts across multiple countries and years. It shows to what extent the analysis of currently available microdata sets can tell us about social protection and humanitarian assistance coverage among displaced populations (and how that coverage compares to that of host populations).

The unit of analysis is the specific population (refugee/IDP/host), the year and the respective survey and the country, and the analysis shows the average for each population group in a specific year. For some countries, the same survey is asked to different populations. More often though, several surveys covered different populations at different years, often also using different questions in the survey instrument.

Across different countries, the types of transfers included in survey instruments varied considerably. Transfers range from government social security programmes and government social assistance programmes to humanitarian cash transfers and in-kind support by (international) non-government or UN organisations. Surveys often covered just a few of these categories. The analysis excludes any private remittances, health insurance, *zakat* payments, and 'other' transfer categories.

The main indicators presented are:

- **Received**: whether households are receiving some non-private transfer. Receiving means that a household has indicated to have received some kind of support.[6] For all surveys but South Sudan 2017 and Brazil 2019 this relates to a specified recall period.
- **Government or non-government**: Another distinction is between government and non-government support. Government programmes are all government programmes including government humanitarian programmes and army support (like in Bangladesh), while all the others are non-government support. The information is usually based on the respondents' knowledge of the source of the support. This response is more likely to be accurate when referring to specific programmes (such as the PDS programme in Iraq). At the same time, there are more potential sources for bias if the questionnaire asks for broader sources of receipt (e.g., 'Has your household received any support from the following sources: government… / NGOS/INGO/UN (UNHCR, WFP, etc) / religious organizations…'). In Lebanon, the data is an exception because it combines both survey data and

[6] The survey in Lebanon in 2016 is a slight exception of the rule. While the underlying data is still survey data, the downloadable file also includes what appears to be administrative data on receipt on top of the "usual" self-report. The data had already been enriched with that administrative data before being uploaded.

administrative data from UNHCR on receipt of UNHCR support. Therefore, the variable on government or non-government in Lebanon is made up of a combination from the two sources: administrative data and survey responses.

- **Cash and in-kind**: cash transfers are programmes that provide payments in cash (including cash for work), while in-kind support includes everything else from food support, food and water vouchers, and rent vouchers. As for the government versus non-government variable, this variable is also predominantly based on the respondents' responses on the questionnaire and hence their understanding of the nature of the transfer.

- **Demographic disaggregation**: wherever available, the calculations also include the percentage of households with a female and male household head receiving transfers, to provide a potential insight into the effect of the sex of the household head on the likelihood of receipt.

- **Value of transfers**: the values are standardised to the past 30 days[7] in the local currency unit, based on per capita basis for better comparability. The household size is either established through the size of the household roster in the questionnaire or questions in the questionnaires on the size of the household.[8] In a next step, those values are then expressed in power purchasing parity (PPP) USD of the respective year using World Bank USD PPP estimates. This allows a comparison between countries using identical denomination as well as a comparison between the transfer values as well as the international extreme poverty line of US$1.90 per capita a day (or US$57 in 30 days).

Other disaggregations that were part of the analysis but did not show any distinct differences and therefore not presented in the results are:

- information on registration for social protection and humanitarian assistance (with or without actually receiving a transfer)

- the percentage of male and female recipients

- the percentage of three large age-categories (children < 18 years of age, working age population from 18 to 64 years, and older persons > 65 years) receiving

[7] Depending on the recall period, the transfer size may be increased or decreased accordingly. If the value of the transfer was asked over the past two weeks, for instance, the value was multiplied with 30 days/14 days to align it for comparison across countries.

[8] It is important to note that in one questionnaire (the Uganda JMSNA from 2018) did not ask for the household size using a numerical but a categorical selection of a range of household sizes (such as 1 = "1-3 household members"; 2 = "4 to 6 household members"; 3 = "7 or more household members"). For those cases, we approximated the actual household size by selecting the mid-point of the category (for the category 1 = "1-3 household members" that would be 2 household members, for instance).

- the percentage of the population receiving by recall period of receipt (past seven days, past two weeks, past month, past six months and past year).

For more information on the coding of questions and answers into the final variables, see Appendix 2.

Figure 1 Percentage of respondents receiving transfers, by reported source (where stated)

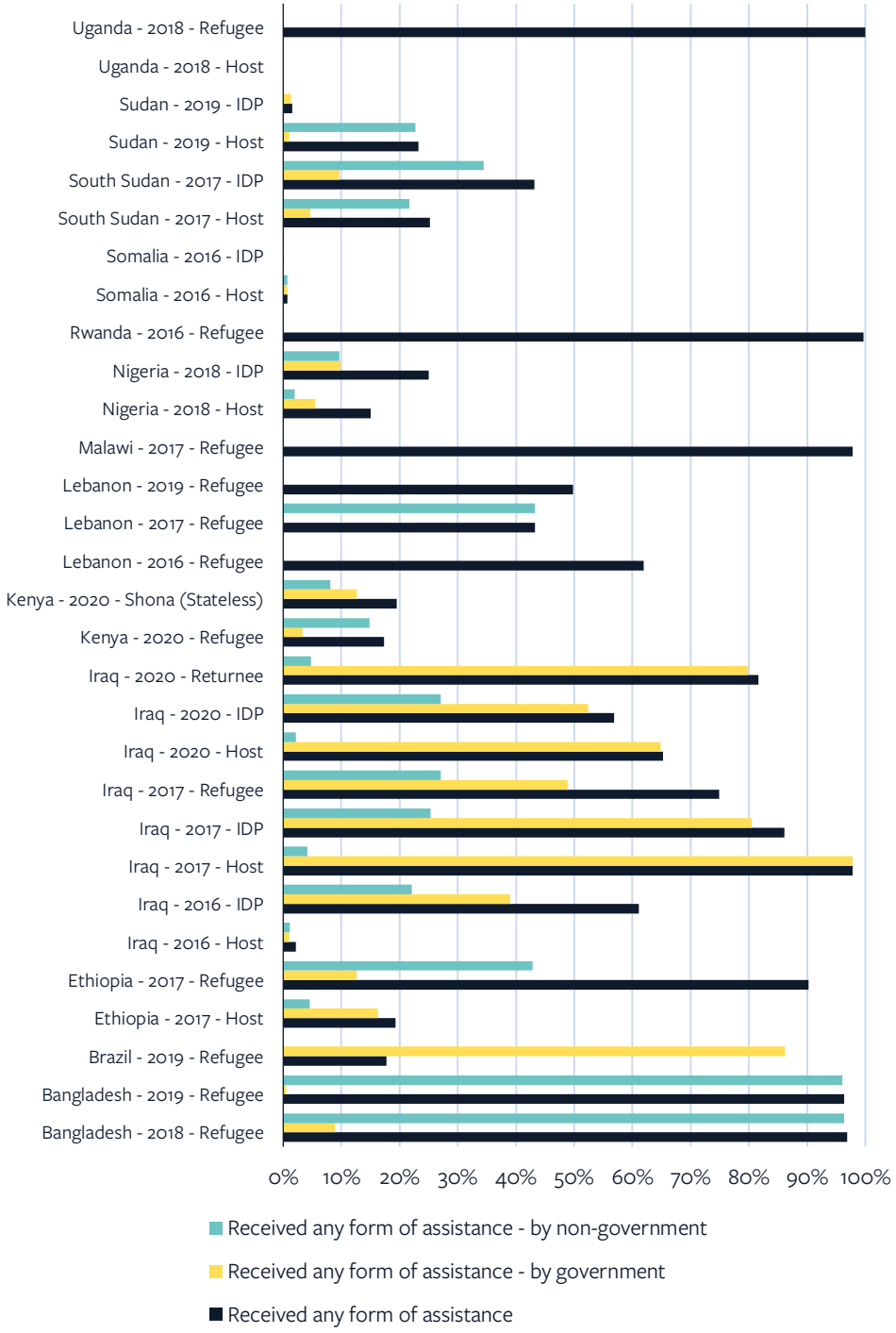


Figure 1 shows that the percentage of displaced persons and host populations reporting receipt of any assistance (navy blue) differs

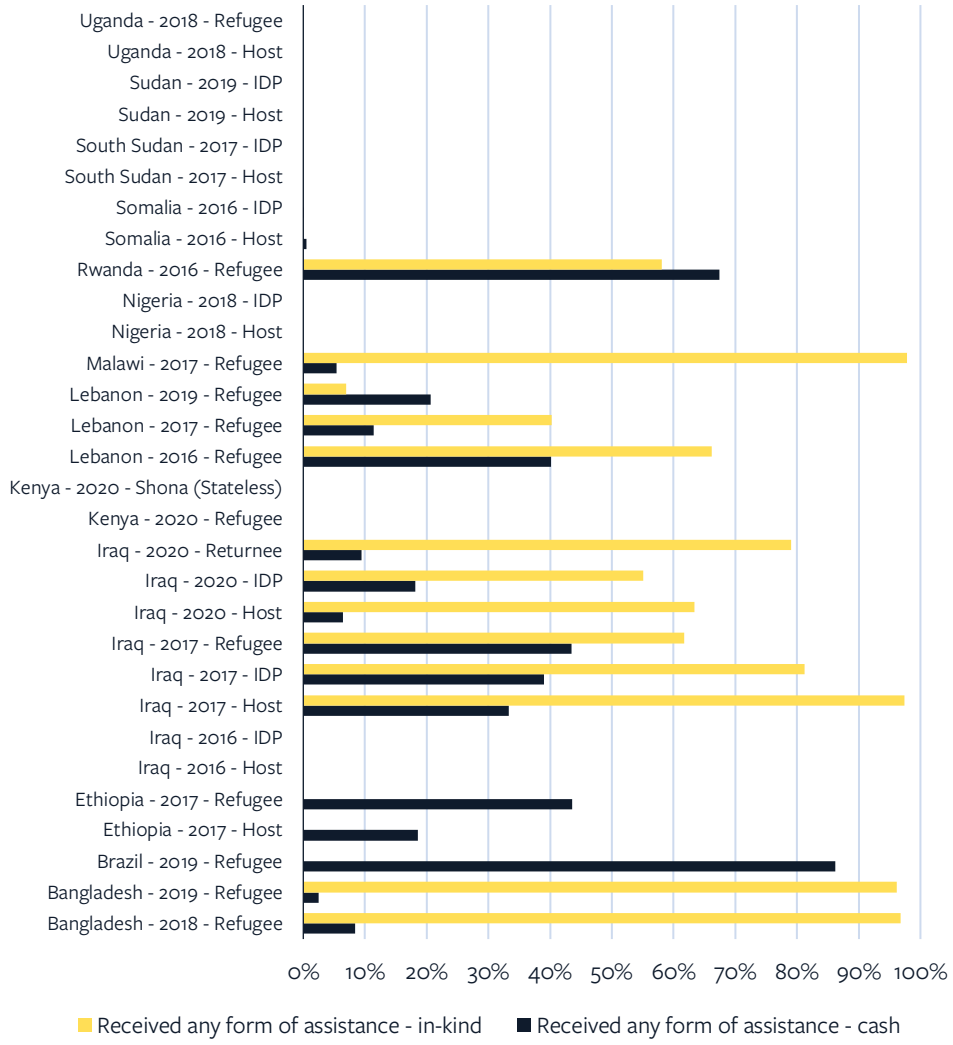
widely across countries. In some instances, this is a direct reflection of differences in coverage levels between different populations.

However, it is also important to note that different questionnaires using different questions to ask about social protection and humanitarian assistance to different samples will lead to widely differing results, as the example from IDPs in Iraq 2016 and 2017 shows. The seeming increase in coverage between the years probably result from differences in the design of the 2016 and 2017 surveys. First, the different sample (2016: nine south and central governorates; 2017: all governorates but excluding refugees in camps in Kurdistan) means that the underlying population is likely to be different, particularly with a view to IDPs in the northern governorates. Second, the broader range and greater number of questions on assistance in the 2017 questionnaire versus the single question in the 2016 questionnaire also is a likely cause for underreporting in 2016 in comparison with 2017. As such, people using this kind of data need to be aware of coverage rates as these are not just showing differences in effective coverage but also differences in sampling and the design of survey instruments.

Another finding is that while in some surveys the coverage for host and displaced communities is relatively similar (for instance in South Sudan), in other countries the coverage rates are very different (see for instance 100% in Uganda among refugees compared to 0% among hosts). This could again be a result of which programmes were included in the survey instrument and which demographic group of the host population was sampled and where, but in at least some cases (e.g., Uganda) it is also a reflection of the generally low coverage of social protection programmes for host populations compared to much higher rates of humanitarian assistance provision for displaced populations (OECD and EBA, 2022). As such, it is important to look into the details of which interventions were included and the sampling strategies.

The contribution of government and non-government support varies widely between countries, too. Most refugees in most countries are much more likely to state that they receive some assistance from non-governmental sources (turquoise in Figure 1) compared to governmental sources (yellow), a rule to which Iraq is a notable exception. It is also notable that the source of the assistance is missing for a few of the surveys (those with only a navy-blue bar). However, more generally, it is important to remember that these are the providers stated by the recipients (i.e., their perception of who has provided the transfer), which may not necessarily reflect the actual provider.

Figure 2 Percentage of people receiving transfers, by type of transfer



Comparing cash versus in-kind assistance in Figure 2, it appears that most recipients are more likely to receive in-kind assistance than cash assistance. Rwanda is a notable exception, where more refugees receive cash than in-kind assistance. It is also interesting to see that in Iraq, the displaced are more likely to receive cash assistance than the host population. A trend towards cash for refugees in Lebanon is also notable: while any kind of receipt among refugees seems to reduce over time, those who are receiving seem to be increasingly more likely to receive cash rather than in-kind. As before, the substantial changes in the survey module on social protection and humanitarian assistance across years makes it hard to draw definite conclusions in this specific instance. Moreover, the financial value of in-kind assistance may not be calculated in a reliable way across surveys. Finally, many surveys do not allow disaggregation by cash/in-kind transfers, limiting the kind of analysis that can be done with it.

Figure 3 Percentage of households receiving, by sex of household head

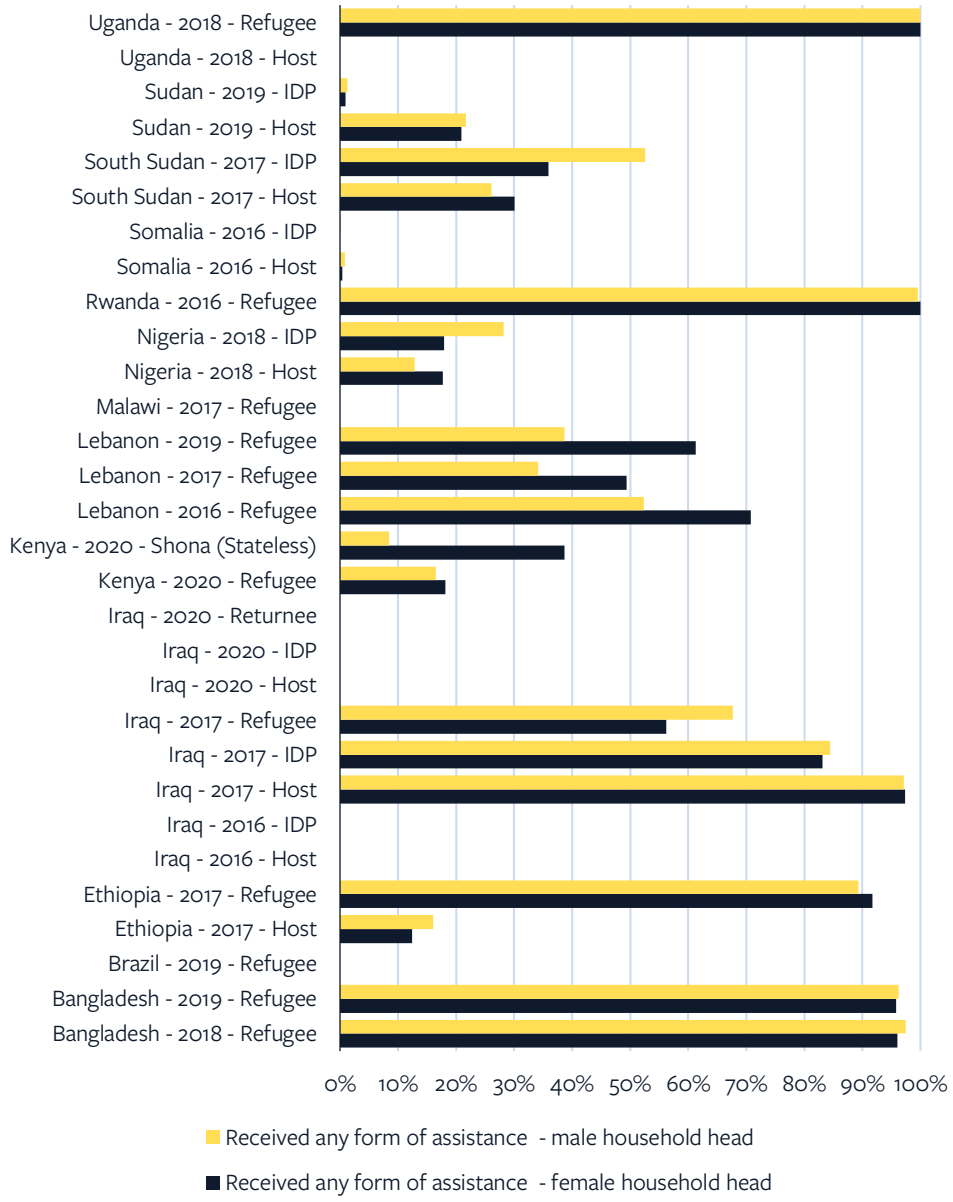
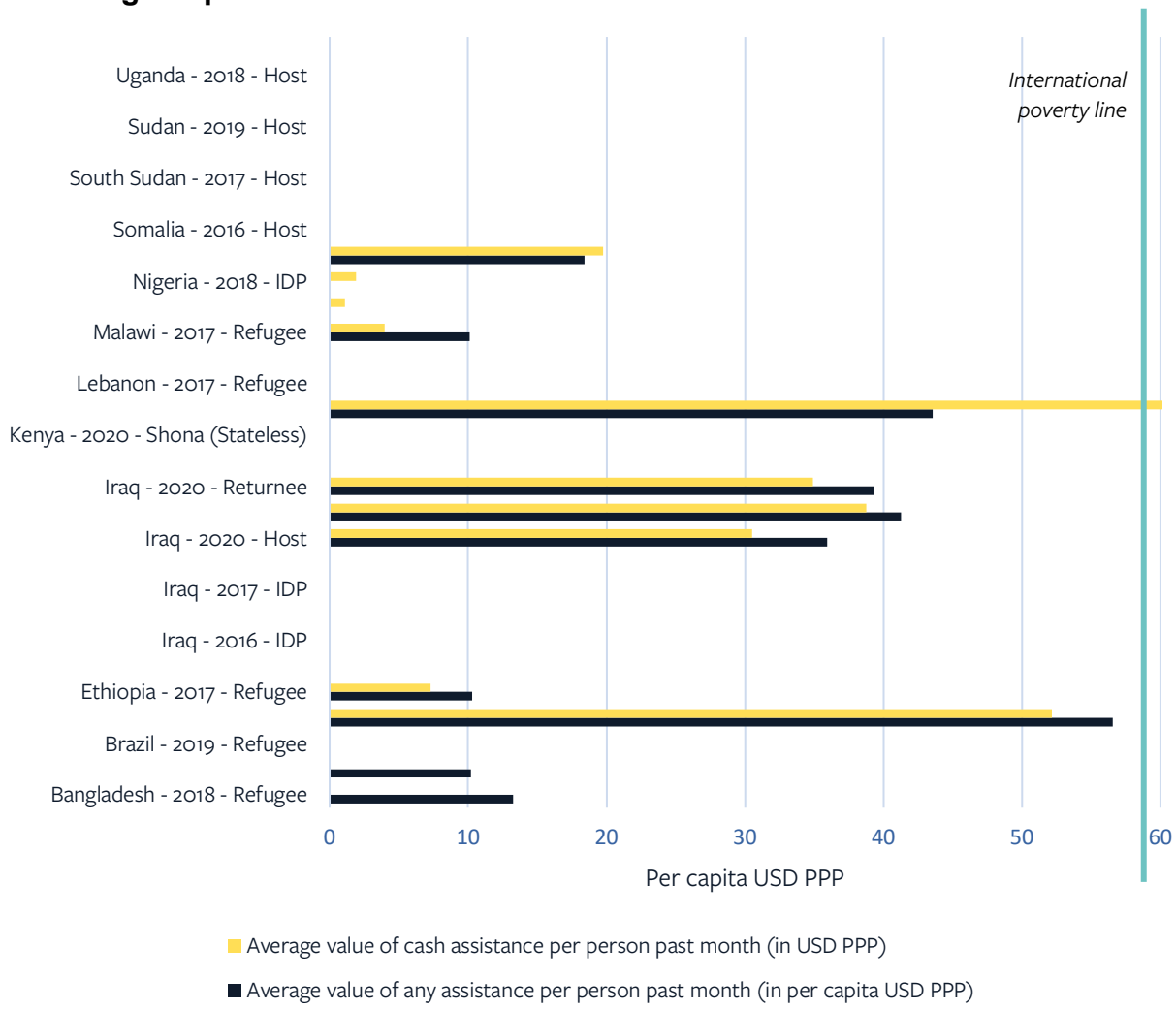


Figure 3 highlights differences between the reported rate of receipt for male and female headed households. This graph shows that there is a difference in coverage between male and female household heads in many countries, though those differences usually seem to be relatively small in most countries and groups. In Lebanon, female-headed households are clearly more likely to receive than male-headed households. This was also the case among the Shona in Kenya, though the sampling process was not very conducive to producing reliable representative estimate and samples sizes were small. But in other specific populations – IDPs in South Sudan, IDPs in Nigeria, refugees in Iraq – it appears that male headed households were slightly more likely to receive some assistance than female headed households.

Figure 4 Average estimated transfer amount per person among recipients in USD PPP



Some surveys also ask respondents about the value of the transfer. As Figure 4 shows, only a smaller number of surveys includes this question. Based on the respondents' estimates, transfer sizes per capita among receiving households usually do not reach the international extreme poverty line, except for cash assistance in Lebanon in 2016 (and nearly in Ethiopia 2017 for host recipients). Generally, recipients of cash transfers and in-kind transfers seem to receive roughly similar amounts in the small sample of countries, except for Lebanon in 2016, where cash recipients receive substantially higher transfer values than those receiving in-kind transfers.

Part of the reason why the average transfer values are comparatively high in Lebanon might have to do with the way the questionnaire asks about the value of several different transfers separately, whereas the majority of other surveys used only one question to assess the value of all combined transfers that had been received. More generally, any survey that asks a transfer question in relation to the value of (total) assistance will not be comparable to the value of a

specific transfer, because the transfer in question might only constitute one of many transfers that the recipient received.

3 General lessons on methodological limitations of this approach

The analysis highlights the potential of such an exercise, but also the shortcomings of creating comparative indicators based on often very short and very different questions on receipt of assistance. Section 3.1 considers the coverage of the existing surveys globally. Section 3.2 considers the viability of using these types of micro surveys to calculate representative rates of transfer receipt, while section 3.3 talks about the challenges of aligning transfer data across different surveys to calculate comparable transfer receipt outcomes.

3.1 Global coverage of the surveys

The analysis covers a number of surveys in several countries over a number of years. It includes surveys from Asian, Latin American and African countries. And despite being an important exercise, it does not represent the situation of all displaced globally. It is important to mention that a whole range of countries have been added to the UNHCR microdata-base that could not be added any longer due to time constraints: Djibouti, Honduras, Liberia, Peru, and Zambia. The analysis could, of course, be expanded in the future to cover a greater number of countries.

The coverage of the data – both in countries, years, and sampling coverage of the whole population – generally was surprisingly high in the data repositories. Most serious displacement events of the last ten years or so (Syrian refugee crisis, [South] Sudan crisis, Venezuelan crisis, Rohingya crisis, Democratic Republic of Congo crisis) are represented by at least one country in the data set. Two major crises that are currently not represented in the data above are the Afghanistan and Ukraine crisis, and the Sahel region is also under-represented.

3.2 Ability to calculate representative transfer receipt rates

Given the inclusion criteria we had developed for this exercise, the coverage of the data within each country usually was high and reliable. The data sets were often large data sets with a predominantly rigorous random sampling which allowed the analysis to draw conclusions using provided weights (see Table 1).

The main drawback was that the sample was often restricted to displaced populations in certain camps) or certain regions (e.g., Nigeria). The rates presented in Section 2.2 are not necessarily representative for the entire populations in question in the respective countries. Refugees and IDPs are often only interviewed in camps (as for the displaced in Bangladesh [all years], Ethiopia, Kenya [2020], Malawi, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda) (Table 1). Moreover, the sampled population is often further restricted by the fact that UNHCR registration information of (some of the) refugees or IDPs is used as a sampling frame, excluding all those who are not registered (as in Brazil, Kenya [2020], Lebanon [all years], Rwanda). Moreover, many of the host community interviews are only those in immediate surroundings of the respective camps (as in Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda); this provides a useful comparison between the coverage of displaced and host populations living in close proximity with one another, but means the host population is not representative of the country as a whole. In these cases, the name of the survey will typically indicate which camps (and by extension which adjacent host community population) have been interviewed. Another drawback was that since data collection often took place in countries currently in conflict, data could only be collected in areas that were safe enough to do so (such as in Iraq [2016]).

While the sample is sometimes restricted to specific sub-populations, the surveys are generally representative of that group, providing important estimates on coverage rates for those sub-populations. Exceptions to that rule are Kenya 2020 and Malawi, which while sampling from a wider group of displaced, are likely to be less representative due to their sampling strategies.

The sampling is random, and there are weights provided for nearly all surveys, which have been applied in the calculation (exceptions: Iraq 2016 and Lebanon 2017). Additionally, Brazil had a smaller sample size of 490 respondents. This can be expected to substantially increase the confidence intervals of estimates and also result in high random sampling error.

Some of the surveys did not include a household roster, which means that it is not possible to calculate coverage rates representative of the population covered by the survey (only for respondents, where no other information on the household is available). Those surveys where household rosters were missing have been included by multiplying the respective household weight (where available, otherwise weight of 1) with the household size so that the indicator value represents the underlying population and individual level indicators based on demographic information available in the survey.

3.3 Aligning of transfer variables to calculate comparable transfer rates

While considerable effort has gone into establishing comparable indicators across countries, coverage rates and amounts are not necessarily comparable across countries, and often not even within countries. This section discusses the challenges in calculating comparable transfer rates and amounts across such varied surveys.

The transfers have been aligned and categorised according to our best ability. However, the varying phrases of questions on which this analysis is built means that the surveys are comparable with one another only up to a point. Some households are labelled as recipients if the respondent says that one person in the households has worked in an NGO project that is a cash-for-work project (Bangladesh [2019]) or that transfers are one of the main sources of income (Iraq [2016]). However, in other surveys the respondents are asked about one or several specific transfers. For an overview of the different type of question combinations see Table 2 below (with a more detailed overview in Appendix 2).

Therefore, comparisons across surveys have to be considered carefully. It also leads to very broad analytical categories in the outcome variables of interest (such as ‘receiving any assistance’), as narrower definitions are difficult to construct consistently across the different surveys. It also means that in some countries, these coverage rates are also likely to be an underestimate given the limited number of questions on transfer receipt.

There have also been data quality issues. In many of the surveys, the transfer modules tend to be complicated and not always a major focus of the survey. Therefore, they were sometimes covered in limited detail in some of the surveys we analysed. Moreover, presumably late changes in the survey questionnaire sometimes resulted in discrepancies between the survey questionnaires and the survey data (questions that appear in the questionnaires are not in the publicly available survey data sets and vice versa) in several of the analysed data sets (for instance in the Lebanon surveys). Similarly, to reduce the length of the surveys, transfer questions tend to be among some of the first variables to get cut regularly, as happened for instance in later waves of the Iraq 2020 high-frequency phone survey. These issues make it much more cumbersome to construct comparable variables and may in extreme cases also lead to biased findings.

Table 2 Typology of different types of questions used to establish receipt of a transfer

Type of assistance	Cash or in-kind	Source of assistance	Time horizon	Response options	Level
Receives/ received specific transfer	Cash	Any (I)NGO	Continuous	Yes/no	Individual
Owns a ration/ transfer card and receives specific transfer	In kind	Any government	None	Yes/no/don't know	Case (UNHCR case)
Owns a ration/ transfer card	Cash and in-kind	Specific (I)NGO	Time since last receipt	Amount for one programme	Household
Some of the work included cash for work	Not specified	Specific UN agency	Last 7 days	Amount for multiple/all programmes	
Received food assistance		Military	Last 14 days	Specific programme / type of programme	
How much money received in cash		Other	Last 30 days/ last completed month		
Main source of income		Any	Last 3 months		
Main source of assistance			Last 12 months/ last completed year		

4 Building our understanding for the future: lessons and recommendations

The aim of this paper to investigate data and methodological feasibility of using existing microdata sets to measure the receipt of social protection and humanitarian assistance transfers in displacement contexts. Data is now readily available for many countries across the world, covering most major displacement contexts with the exception of Afghanistan and Ukraine. While the data often only covers certain areas, refugee camps or only the host population near the camp, it is mostly representative for the population covered. The exercise allowed us to present different indicators of transfer receipt and transfer outcomes, though also showed the manifold challenges, particularly in terms of comparability. Transfer variables are often included in limited detail and asked about in different ways. This makes it hard to calculate comparable coverage rates across countries.

Despite these challenges, there is growing interest in and impetus to try to measure social protection indicators and data on displaced populations, which should gradually facilitate the development of a cross-country database on this topic area. This includes the following initiatives:

- The World Bank's Joint Data Center (JDC) contributes to that goal by collecting more data and by making more data of displaced populations accessible (JDC, 2020), as does the UNHCR micro-database.
- The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has focused on the topic of improving our understanding of coverage of displaced persons in terms of social protection programmes in a recent report (OECD and EBA, 2022).
- Additionally, UNHCR, the International Labour Organization and other stakeholders in the Netherlands' PROSPECTS project have also started thinking along similar lines, specifically trying to contribute to survey data collection efforts and use the data to – among other things – estimate basic social protection indicators for displaced populations in four countries (Uganda, Sudan, Kenya and Ethiopia). They are

either collecting their own survey data (such as in Sudan), or adding modules on social protection to existing survey efforts (such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis assessment in Uganda).

- There are also individual, country-specific initiatives under way to ensure that surveys with displaced populations include questions on social protection receipt (such as in Iraq, where the Cash and Livelihoods Consortium has worked with the World Bank to include a module on social protection receipt when assessing households' vulnerability in areas covered by their programming, which includes many IDP and returnee households).

In future years, there will be opportunities to draw on these household surveys for a sub-set of countries, to provide some estimates of displaced households' coverage (for the programmes that are included in the survey questionnaires) and, as such, shed light on an area we do not know much about. The number of additional surveys on the UNHCR database is constantly growing. Many of the newly added data sets are the result of recent data collection exercises, but some are also older data sets that had included displaced populations earlier already.

Up-to-date data on displaced populations is needed alongside those of other population groups to be able to design and deliver social protection and humanitarian assistance programmes that effectively meet the needs of all vulnerable populations.

4.1 Recommendations on improving social protection and humanitarian assistance coverage data collection and analysis

- **Support and contribute to more and better data collection on displaced populations and their access to social protection and humanitarian assistance.** Improved data can be collected through different means: First, including displaced and their displacement status in administrative databases and national household surveys, where appropriate given potential sensitivities (see below), is crucial. This means both expanding coverage of administrative databases to displaced and surveys to areas where displaced populations reside, devising clear definitions of different types of displacement and capturing those in the data, and sharing methodological approaches (e.g. how to survey unregistered populations).

- **Support improved interoperability and responsible data-sharing between relevant data(bases)** on social protection and displaced populations. International partners are in many cases working with governments on the development of social protection and humanitarian assistance MIS or registries, and

are also involved in developing databases on displaced populations (such as UNHCR's ProGres database for refugees). This presents an opportunity to enable practitioners and policymakers to identify where and how these databases can be linked, at least for policy monitoring and research. This would require collaboration to identify the unique identifiers (such as [refugee] ID numbers or others) that are or could be included in both data sets to make combining the data easier. Where appropriate, improving database interoperability could also later enable certain components of the databases to be linked for administrative purposes (e.g. to target vulnerable refugees or IDPs for programming). At all stages of data management, it remains crucial (and even more relevant for vulnerable displaced populations) that data is only collected and processed with appropriate confidentiality, privacy and security measures in place, and with the explicit consent of the individual in question. Detailed practical guidance on improving interoperability and responsible data sharing can be found in the literature (Barca, 2017; Enabling Digital, GIZ and SPIAC-B, 2020; Goodman et al., 2021; IRC, 2021; ICRC and VUB, 2020; Raftree and Kondakchyan, 2021 and UNICEF, 2021).

- **Collect and prepare more disaggregated data to understand dynamics between different sub-groups**. In particular, it is useful to allow for disaggregation by sex, sex of the head of household, age, etc., in order to get a better picture of gender and other horizontal group dynamics which may influence access to social protection and humanitarian assistance.

- **Add more standardised and detailed questions on social protection and humanitarian assistance in surveys of displaced populations**. The international community should provide funding and technical assistance to nationally led data collection exercises (see Gagnon and Rodrigues, 2020 on progress made so far). Where possible, this should be done as part of larger concerted efforts across multiple actors in the space, such as the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) and Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessments (ISPA) tools, to harmonise social protection and humanitarian assistance data collection and analysis more broadly.

An ideal minimum transfer module would follow the pattern laid out in Appendix 1 and the principles below

- **Specific transfer:** Rather than asking for generalised transfers, transfer modules should ask for transfers as specifically as possible. Ideally, this would mean to ask respondents for the different specific transfer names (while

providing enumerators with the information and training to enable them to distinguish between the different transfers). The questionnaire should still contain larger and/or 'other' answer options additionally to capture all different kinds of transfers as much as possible. Capacity and funding must be in place for the survey instrument to be updated each time a new social protection or humanitarian assistance programme is rolled out.

- **Consistent recall period** (the time period covered by the question on transfer receipt): after one introductory question on whether the interviewee or anybody in their household ever received the specific transfer, the recall period ('Did you receive X over the past Y [time period]' should be consistently 30 days / the last month / the last [full] calendar month. This would make it easier for the respondents to answer and the analyst to use the data afterwards. Also, it would make sure that the response captures receipt over a slightly longer timeframe (than the last seven days, for instance).

  These additional recommendations are less critical for ensuring comparative analysis, but would allow for more detailed analysis:

  - *Optional: Distinguishing between cash and in-kind:* to make sure that the response captures the correct transfer, checking the transfer modality (cash or in-kind) and to provide additional information to the data analysts, this should be included as part of the survey question on the specific transfer (which would be more timesaving) or in a separate question.

  - *Optional: Mention/ask for the mode of transfer:* likewise, the mode of transfer (in person pick-up, automatic bank transfer, mobile money, voucher) can be included in the set of questions.

  - *Optional: Mention/ask for the perceived source of the transfer:* similarly, it is useful to ask for the perceived source of the transfer (government/ [specific] UN-agency/ [specific] [I]NGO, etc.) both to confirm the transfer being the correct transfer and for analysis purposes afterwards.

- **Be aware of the sensitivity of collecting data on displaced populations.** In some cases, it may not be feasible to collect data on displaced populations because of underlying issues and tensions. For instance, displaced populations may be wary of identifying themselves as such – data collection needs to be done carefully with strong data protection policies in place, if at all. This is particularly the case for IDPs, where their current situation may be linked to internal political strife (OECD and EBA, 2022). Moreover, data users should also be

aware that both national governments and international agencies may have specific incentives to under-report or exaggerate the size, needs and access to support of the displaced population (Crisp, 2022).

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Appendix 1 Overview of included surveys

Introduction text: *Now I am going to ask you questions about any assistance you or anyone in the household has received from any organisation (not private sources such as friends, neighbours or relatives).*

Optional questions						*Optional, alternative to 5 (b)*	*Optional, alternative to 5 (a)*	*Optional*
Conditions				*IF QUESTION 2 IS "YES"*	*IF QUESTION 2 IS "YES"*	*IF QUESTION 2 IS "YES"*	*IF QUESTION 2 IS "YES"*	*IF QUESTION 2 IS "YES"*
		Question 1:	**Question 2:**	**Question 3:**	**Question 4:**	**Question 5 (a):**	**Question 5 (b):**	**Question 6:**
	Short explanation of transfer (if necessary)	Proof: Can show card/ documentation	Has anyone in your household ever received...	Has anyone in your household received in the last 30 days...	How much did your household receive the last time you received the transfer? How much would you pay for it in the market if it was in kind?	How was the assistance received?	How was the assistance received?	Where did your household receive this assistance from?

Transfer A	*Transfer A is the government transfer for people with...*	Yes / No / Programme has no documentation	Yes / No / Don't know	Yes / No / Don't know	[Numeric amount]	As a cash transfer (paid out as cash, paid into a bank (card), paid into a mobile money account) / Handed out in-kind or paid through a food-voucher or food-only bank card / Both / Don't know	Paid out as cash/ Paid into a bank (card)/ Paid into a mobile money account / Picked up in-kind / Delivered to home in-kind/ Handed out as food-voucher/ Provided as food-only card / Don't know	Government / NGOs / Churches / UN organisations / Other / Don't know
Transfer B	*Transfer B is the NGO transfer for people with...*	Yes / No / Programme has no documentation	Yes / No / Don't know	Yes / No / Don't know	[Numeric amount]	As a cash transfer (paid out as cash, paid into a bank (card), paid into a mobile money account) / Handed out in-kind or paid through a food-voucher or food only bank card / Both / Don't know	Paid out as cash/ Paid into a bank (card)/ Paid into a mobile money account / Picked up in-kind / Delivered to home in-kind/ Handed out as food-voucher/ Provided as food-only card / Don't know	Government / NGOs / Churches / UN organisations / Other / Don't know
Transfer C	*Transfer C is the NGO transfer for people with...*	Yes / No / Programme has no documentation	Yes / No / Don't know	Yes / No / Don't know	[Numeric amount]	As a cash transfer (paid out as cash, paid into a bank (card), paid into a mobile money account) / Handed out in-kind or paid through a food-voucher or food only bank card / Both / Don't know	Paid out as cash/ Paid into a bank (card)/ Paid into a mobile money account / Picked up in-kind / Delivered to home in-kind/ Handed out as food-voucher/ Provided as food-only card / Don't know	Government / NGOs / Churches / UN organisations / Other / Don't know
...								

Other transfer 1 [NAME]	*Any other transfer [insert name]*	Yes / No / Programme has no documentation	Yes / No / Don't know	Yes / No / Don't know	[Numeric amount]	As a cash transfer (paid out as cash, paid into a bank (card), paid into a mobile money account) / Handed out in-kind or paid through a food-voucher or food only bank card / Both / Don't know	Paid out as cash/ Paid into a bank (card)/ Paid into a mobile money account / Picked up in-kind / Delivered to home in-kind/ Handed out as food-voucher/ Provided as food-only card / Don't know	Government / NGOs / Churches / UN organisations / Other / Don't know
Other transfer 2 [NAME]	*Any other transfer [insert name]*	Yes / No / Programme has no documentation	Yes / No / Don't know	Yes / No / Don't know	[Numeric amount]	As a cash transfer (paid out as cash, paid into a bank (card), paid into a mobile money account) / Handed out in-kind or paid through a food-voucher or food only bank card / Both / Don't know	Paid out as cash/ Paid into a bank (card)/ Paid into a mobile money account / Picked up in-kind / Delivered to home in-kind/ Handed out as food-voucher/ Provided as food-only card / Don't know	Government / NGOs / Churches / UN organisations / Other / Don't know
Other transfer 3 [NAME]	*Any other transfer [insert name]*	Yes / No / Programme has no documentation	Yes / No / Don't know	Yes / No / Don't know	[Numeric amount]	As a cash transfer (paid out as cash, paid into a bank (card), paid into a mobile money account) / Handed out in-kind or paid through a food-voucher or food only bank card / Both / Don't know	Paid out as cash/ Paid into a bank (card)/ Paid into a mobile money account / Picked up in-kind / Delivered to home in-kind/ Handed out as food-voucher/ Provided as food-only card / Don't know	Government / NGOs / Churches / UN organisations / Other / Don't know

Comments:	*Answer options depend on the known assistance modalities*	*Answer options depend on the known assistance modalities*	*Answer options depend on the known assistance modalities*