

Linking social protection and humanitarian assistance

Guidance to assess the factors and actors that determine an optimal approach in a displacement setting

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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 (UNHCR, 2022). This includes both those fleeing across borders (asylum seekers and refugees) and internally displaced people (IDPs) – that is, those displaced within their home country.

Such displacement is frequently long term, and those affected increasingly live among host communities, rather than in camps. Host populations are often socioeconomically vulnerable themselves. Host countries are predominantly low- and middle-income countries with high (and frequently growing) rates of poverty, inequality and precarious employment. Both displaced and host populations are increasingly based in urban areas that appear to offer better prospects but which are not always set up to accommodate increasing and additional needs.

Such shifts have required those responding to displacement to rethink and adapt 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 programmes. One potential approach is to include displaced populations in national social protection systems and to engage more closely with these in the displacement response. Yet there is limited guidance to help actors determine when and how to link humanitarian assistance led by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or international agencies with state-led social protection in a given displacement setting.

As part of a wider project funded under the Building the Evidence on Forced Displacement partnership, we developed an Analytical Framework outlining: (a) the approaches for linking humanitarian assistance for displacement-affected populations with state-led social protection, (b) the potential outcomes of different approaches, and (c) the factors and actors that determine the likely selection and outcomes of a given approach in a particular displacement setting (Lowe et al., 2022). This framework built on earlier literature and was refined over the course of the project, drawing on primary research from three countries:

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

This toolkit offers guidance to government, non-governmental and international actors providing (or planning to provide) assistance to displaced populations, to help them consider whether and how NGO/internationally-led humanitarian assistance might be linked with state-led social protection, based on analysing the key contextual factors and actors in their displacement setting.

The toolkit first offers a brief overview of the **range of possible approaches** for linking humanitarian assistance and social protection in a displacement setting, and of the **outcomes** (both benefits and drawbacks) that may result. Two other toolkits in this series discuss in detail how these approaches can impact on specific areas of concern – namely, social cohesion (Commins et al., 2022), and basic needs and well-being (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2022).

The toolkit then provides guidance for **analysing the key contextual factors and actors** that are likely to influence which approach NGO/international actors might opt for in a given displacement setting (considering political, financial and technical feasibility and desirability) and what its benefits and drawbacks might be, drawing on examples from the three country case studies.

POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO LINKING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Traditionally, humanitarian assistance in displacement settings has often been developed and delivered by NGOs or international agencies entirely separately from the state's social protection system. In recent years, however, many countries have experimented with linking the two.

Broadly speaking, there are four main approaches that non-governmental and international actors can take to linking their efforts with the state social protection system when assisting displacement-affected populations:

- **parallel** – a standalone approach to humanitarian (NGO/international) programming is used, with no link to the state social protection system.
- **aligned** – the approach is humanitarian-led, but uses the state's existing or future social protection system as a reference point. This could mean that humanitarian programming 'mirrors' the state-led social protection approach, but it could also mean that humanitarian arrangements are informed by the state's existing (or planned future) approach but adjusted for their specific humanitarian purposes.
- **leveraging** – the approach is humanitarian-led, but involves the state, and directly uses or is subsequently used by the state social protection system²
- **state-led** – the approach is state-led (with or without humanitarian support).

Even if the assistance approach is linked with the social protection system or state-led, it does not necessarily have to use an existing ('standard') social protection approach. It can – indeed, in most cases, should – still be tailored to the unique circumstances of the displaced population whose needs it aims to meet. **For the latter three categories, there is therefore an additional decision to be made regarding the extent to which the approach is tailored for the displaced population, versus replicating a standard approach of the existing social protection system.**

1 By referring to the 'future social protection system', we acknowledge that in many displacement settings such a system is planned but not yet fully established. Humanitarian actors may refer to the state's policy and plans when developing their own approach.

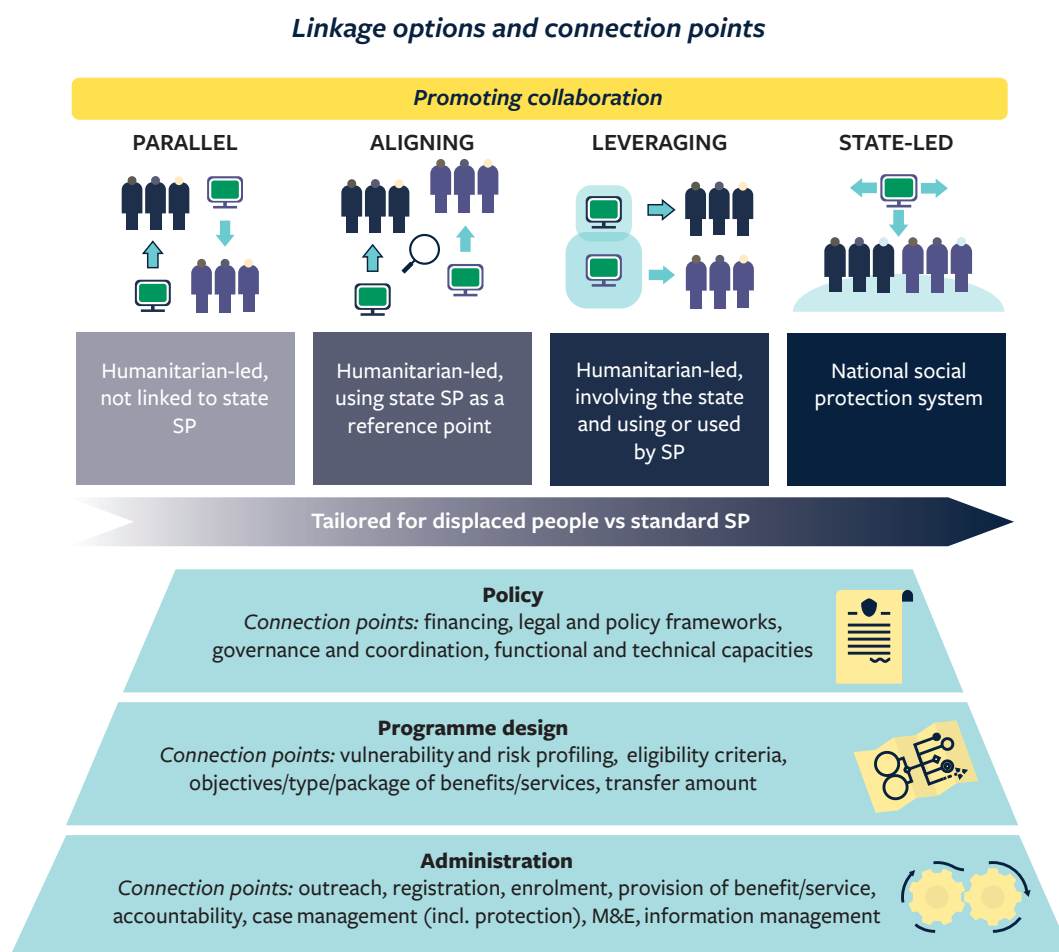
2 'Leveraging' can work in both directions, i.e. humanitarian actors may use the state social protection system or the state may use the humanitarian approach.

When developing, designing and delivering assistance programming for displaced populations, there are many ‘connection points’ at which programmes might link with state social protection provision, and the same linkage option does not necessarily have to be applied across all these points. These points can be grouped at three levels of assistance provision:

- **policy** – that is, the key legal and policy frameworks that inform the programme, its governance and coordination mechanisms, its financing mechanisms, and the functional and technical capacities that are engaged in its development
- **programme design** – that is the specific design features of the assistance programme, such as vulnerability assessment or risk profiling, the programme’s objectives, the nature of the assistance provided (e.g. values, frequency, type), and the eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions
- **administration** – that is, the operational processes and mechanisms with which the assistance programme is delivered in practice, including outreach and communications, registration, decision-making and notification of eligibility and enrolment, provision of benefits or services in practice, accountability mechanisms (including complaints and appeals), case management (including protection services), monitoring and evaluation, and information management.

As illustrated in Figure 1, regardless of which approach they adopt, NGOs, international agencies and state actors can – and (in almost all cases³) should – still look to promote collaboration with one another.

Figure 1 Range of possible approaches to linking humanitarian assistance and social protection



3 The exceptions include cases in which: engaging with the state might legitimise actions that violate international humanitarian or human rights law; the state is hostile or non-complicit; and humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence or impartiality might be threatened by the type of collaboration being considered.

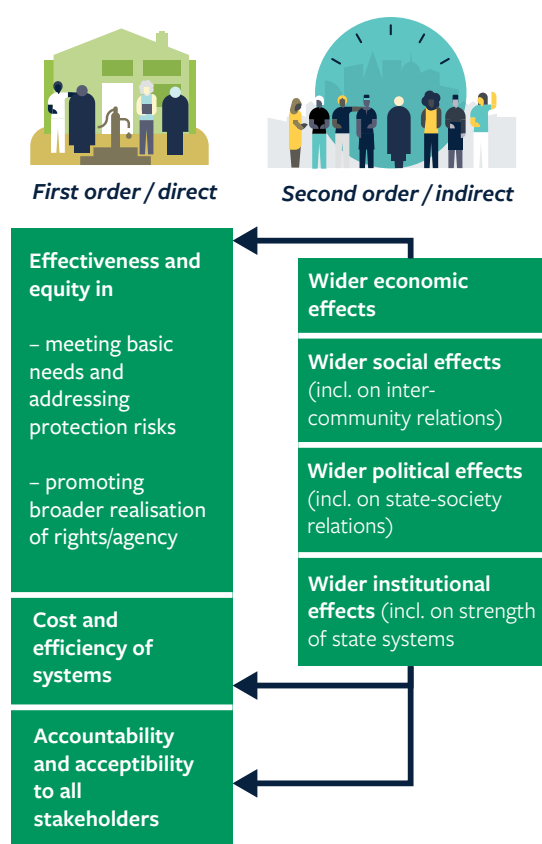
Collaborating means that the NGOs, international agencies and state actors will regularly and openly communicate, keeping one another up to date with developments in their programming and providing technical assistance to one another where appropriate. In this way, actors will:

- avoid duplicating effort or incongruent activities
- remain aware of opportunities and needs to change approach, should circumstances shift
- improve coherence for affected populations (e.g. humanitarian agencies can make people aware of state programmes, even if they do not directly refer clients to or work with those programmes).

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF THE DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Each of the various ways in which humanitarian assistance can be linked with social protection is likely to have different outcomes. As Figure 2 illustrates, the key outcomes may be both direct and indirect benefits and drawbacks, for both displacement-affected populations and for other stakeholders. (For more on this, see Lowe et al., 2022.)

Figure 2 First- and second-order outcomes of the different approaches



These outcomes are likely to emerge to different degrees or in different ways *over time*, meaning they should be considered both in relation to short-term outcomes as well as the wider impacts that may emerge over the medium and long term.

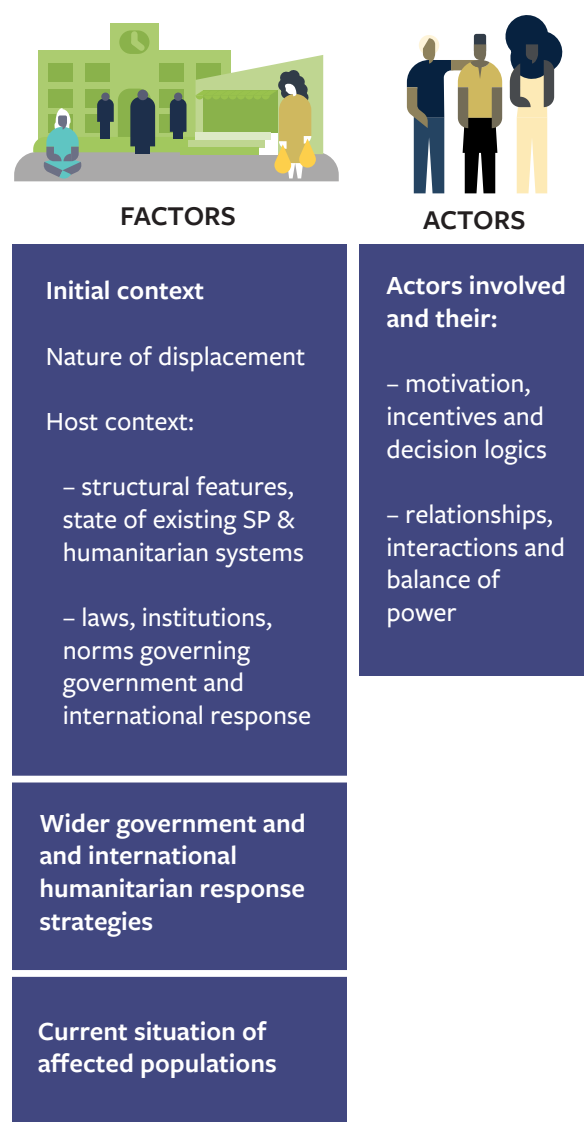
The potential outcomes and resulting benefits and drawbacks are also best considered at the systemic level. For example, a single programme may score well in terms of effectiveness and equity for its recipient populations. But to determine the overall outcomes that have been or are likely to be generated (e.g. the wider social and political effects), it is necessary to look at the ways in which that programme operates in relation to/in combination with all other humanitarian and state social protection programmes for displaced and host populations (including the approach or approaches taken to linking them).

KEY FACTORS INFORMING THE APPROACH SELECTED AND ITS OUTCOMES

The approach adopted to link humanitarian assistance and social protection in a given displacement setting – and the outcomes that emerge from that approach – will in part depend on the specific factors present in that context. Our research shows that the approach selected will be informed not only by what is most beneficial or technically feasible but also by what is politically feasible (i.e. what best aligns with the interests of key actors).

In this section, we discuss the factors that emerged from the research project as central to that selection decision (see Figure 3). Each factor is illustrated by examples taken from the case studies. This is followed by guiding questions, to help policy-makers and practitioners assess the factors and their implications in a specific context.

Figure 3 Determining factors and actors of the approach for linking humanitarian assistance and social protection



APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK IN A SPECIFIC CONTEXT

The research illustrated the importance of thoroughly assessing the political economy of any displacement context, and of the existing humanitarian and social protection provisions, to determine how humanitarian actors might develop politically feasible approaches to linking humanitarian and social protection systems, and whether, when and in what forms host governments might support linking state and humanitarian systems to assist displacement-affected populations. For a useful beginner's guide to the concepts and tools involved in political economy analysis (PEA), see Whaites (2017).

The guidance in this toolkit is centred on the two areas that Harris (2013) identifies as a framework for applied PEA:

- **structural diagnosis** – to analyse the structural features of the host context and the factors in play in that context (see 'Key factors informing the approach selected and its outcomes')
- **agency diagnosis** – to analyse the actors involved in the host context, and issues such as their power, motivations and behaviours (see 'Key actors involved in the approach selected and its outcomes').

The framework set out in this toolkit is a foundation on which a more detailed PEA will build to identify those approaches to linking humanitarian and state systems that will be not only technically feasible and desirable but also politically achievable. The questions set out at the end of each section aim to explore the factors and actors at play in each instance, and thereby to help identify where and how changes in assistance approach might be initiated.

NATURE OF THE DISPLACEMENT

The nature of the displacement itself is likely to play an important role in determining the approach taken to linking humanitarian and social protection systems - and the outcomes of that approach. More specifically, it may be relevant to identify and explore the:

- **characteristics of the displacement shock** – that is, its type (e.g. internal vs cross-border), its causes (e.g. conflict, generalised violence, natural hazard or disaster), the speed of its onset, its size, location and frequency, and the (expected) duration of the shock. For example:
 - if IDPs are displaced by a conflict in which the government is an active party, a state-led approach to serve these populations will be less desirable and feasible
 - if the crisis is a relatively small-scale influx of refugees, a state-led approach may be more politically and socially acceptable
- **characteristics of the displaced population** – their demographic and socioeconomic profiles both prior to their displacement and at the time of their arrival (see also 'Current situation of the affected populations' below). For example:
 - if the displaced populations share an ethnicity, a language and socioeconomic background with the host population, this is likely to increase the political and operational feasibility of serving both populations by means of a state-led approach
 - if the displaced populations are even more vulnerable than the most vulnerable members of the host population (perhaps because of a profound loss of assets, income and resources as a consequence of their displacement), a state-led system might not fully meet their needs without significant re-design

- **phase of the displacement cycle** – that is, emergency, protracted displacement, durable solution or preparedness. For example:
 - in an acute **emergency** phase, a humanitarian-led approach (whereby humanitarian actors take the lead to complement an overwhelmed state social protection system) may be beneficial
 - in subsequent **protracted displacement** and **durable solution** phases, a state-led approach may be more appropriate (e.g. to enhance displaced populations’ access to subsidised health care and contributory benefits, and to facilitate their inclusion in expanded social safety nets).



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

In **Colombia**, respondents from both the government and the international community indicated that a state-led approach to the Venezuelan influx was adopted in part because the displacement was expected to be long-term, with no obvious resolution likely of the situation in Venezuela. The urgency and scale of the crisis propelled the government towards national programming as an immediate response; the government sought international support to bolster that response. The fact that around a third of those arriving from Venezuela were Colombian citizens who had been living in the neighbouring country for work or family reasons, or as refugees themselves, created a strong impetus to integrate the displaced populations directly with host communities and to serve them through the host state systems. This was reinforced by the fact that many Venezuelans are living within Colombian household members during their displacement and the two populations share a language.

By contrast, in **Greece**, the initial trajectory of the displacement shock created a precedent of asylum seekers and refugees continuing on to other countries in Europe, meaning that neither the government nor the displaced populations themselves were motivated to integrate into state systems. Most asylum seekers’ point of arrival was one of the Greek islands; this allowed the government to establish a ‘containment’ policy, accommodating displaced people in geographically isolated camps for extended periods – a barrier to integration. Unlike the displaced population in Colombia, the displaced populations in Greece were relatively distinct from the host population, both linguistically and culturally, and they were unfamiliar with the Greek state system, having arrived from much farther afield, usually with few (if any) existing ties to Greece. The result appears to have been limited access to the state social welfare system, both in law and in practice.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF THE HOST CONTEXT

A wide range of structural elements in the host context play a role in informing both selection of the most appropriate approach and its emerging benefits and drawbacks. These can be grouped loosely into five areas, as follows.

- **Political context**, for example:

- If a government is an authoritarian regime with a poor human rights record, this will reduce the feasibility and desirability of working through state-led approaches.
- If a government is highly decentralised or fragmented, this may complicate the response development, but it may also offer more a broader range of opportunities for establishing linkages with state-led systems.

- **Economic context**, for example:

- If the host state is a high-income country, with low levels of poverty, in which most host citizens are already well served by state systems, this may increase the feasibility and desirability of extending state-led programming to include displaced populations.
- If a country has recently fallen into economic crisis, resulting in a spike in poverty and unemployment among the host population, this is likely to reduce the feasibility and desirability of a state-led approach. It also increases the need for an approach that contributes to wider economic benefits and avoids aggravating social tensions.

- **Sociocultural context**, for example:

- If social norms within the host context heavily emphasise shared ownership, this will likely increase the feasibility of integrating newcomers into existing social protection systems.
- If there are already ethnic tensions and a fragile social contract in a host country, and the influx of displaced people drastically shifts the ethnic distribution, this will demand an approach with greater emphasis on achieving positive wider social impacts on community relations.

- **Environmental context**, for example:

- If a host region has recently been affected by an environmental disaster, leaving many host households suddenly vulnerable but with no assistance, this will point towards an approach whereby support for the displaced population is partnered with scaled-up support for the host community.

- **Security context**, for example:

- If the state is an active party in a conflict and the population is internally displaced, linking assistance with state systems will often be both ineffective and unacceptable to humanitarian agencies, who must adhere to principles of neutrality and independence.
- If the specific region in which IDPs are now residing is still affected by conflict and governed by non-state actors, this renders a state-led approach neither feasible nor desirable.

COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

In **Cameroon**, a low level of national income and a weak economy have led the government to prioritise general economic growth over inclusive social protection. In the current phase of its national development strategy, the government is struggling to invest adequately in provision for even the general population. Active conflict between the government and the Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North has meant that the government has tended to respond to this displacement primarily through a security lens. This has sometimes resulted in suspicion of whether displaced populations might have ties with Boko Haram and an eagerness to see IDPs return home (to demonstrate state control of areas formerly under threat), rather than an offer of comprehensive assistance to help them rebuild their lives among their new communities. From the perspective of international actors, as well as many displaced and host respondents themselves, the research also suggested little incentive or desire for a state-led model, given the political context of historically high levels of corruption.

Meanwhile, in **Colombia**, social discontent was high even before the influx of displaced Venezuelans, due to high inequality, a fragile social contract and extensive unrest about the government's failure to address long-standing concerns among its citizens. In this context, social tensions have in some cases been exacerbated by the government's apparent prioritisation of non-citizens' concerns through a strong state-led approach to assisting Venezuelans. This has drawbacks both for horizontal cohesion (i.e. relations between host and displaced communities) and vertical cohesion (i.e. relations between host communities and the state).



Guiding questions for analysing the structural features of the host context

- **What** is noteworthy about the host context at the national and regional levels in the following dimensions?
 - (a) Political (e.g. the political affiliation, profile and performance of the governing regime; governance structure; state–society relations)
 - (b) Economic (e.g. the strength of the economy; the vitality of markets; price volatility; labour market patterns and opportunities)
 - (c) Sociocultural (e.g. social dynamics and norms; demographics; cultural traits of the host population)
 - (d) Environmental (e.g. current or recent experiences of environmental shocks and stresses)
 - (e) Security (e.g. the nature and extent of current or historic violence, conflict or insecurity in the host country or region; whether the government has played any active role in any such conflict; the nature/ extent of state control in the affected region)
- **How** might these features affect:
 - (a) the potential reception and integration of the displaced populations?
 - (b) the potential for NGOs and international agencies to engage with state systems?

THE HOST COUNTRIES' EXISTING SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

For obvious reasons, the options for linking humanitarian assistance with a social protection system and the likely outcomes of doing so are shaped by the state of that system, including its formation, maturity, performance, coordination and shock-responsiveness at the policy, programme design and delivery levels, as well as by the displaced population's existing legal and de facto access to that system.

Non-governmental and international actors can use tools such as the inter-agency Core Diagnostic Instrument (CODI) to assess how social protection might be engaged in a given displacement response, as well as to explore the potential ways in which their response to the displacement might strengthen the existing social protection system.



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

In **Cameroon**, it is not yet possible to fully integrate assistance into the national social protection system because there is as yet no such 'system'. Fragmented social protection initiatives exist, with minimal coverage, spread across multiple government ministries. The right to social protection has not been enshrined in law, and the national social protection policy has yet to be fully ratified. Although shock-responsiveness and displaced inclusion is being developed as part of the Social Safety Net Project funded by the World Bank, it is too soon to rely on the national system as the dominant assistance channel for displaced people in the short to medium term.

By contrast, in **Colombia**, the right to social protection is enshrined in law for all residents, and there is a more developed system of social assistance through which vulnerable households can be identified and supported. Although Venezuelans had no official access to major national cash transfer schemes until the Covid-19-related *Ingreso Solidario* scheme, they had already benefited from other aspects of the social protection system, such as early childhood development services, the school feeding programme and the subsidised health insurance scheme. This encouraged both government and international actors alike to consider ways of meeting Venezuelans' needs more comprehensively through that system.



Guiding questions for analysing the structural features of the host context

- **What** social protection policies, programmes and administrative systems exist in the host country or displacement-affected region? (see, e.g., ISPA, n.d.; TRANSFORM, 2020)?
 - **How** are these financed?
 - **Who** are the main stakeholders and how are they coordinated?
- **How** mature is the system, and how well is it performing overall in the host country and displacement-affected regions, and for specific groups within the populations (see, e.g., ISPA, n.d.; OECD, 2018; O'Brien et al, 2018)?
 - **How** effectively and equitably, promptly and predictably, is it delivering adequate and comprehensive assistance?
 - **How** far does it meet the needs of affected populations and pay attention to the particular risks of vulnerable groups within the populations?
 - **How** cost-efficient and sustainable is it?
 - **What** accountability mechanisms are available and in use?
- **What** rights to social protection exist in the country for (a) the population as a whole, and (b) the displaced population specifically (e.g. see country profiles in ISSA, n.d.; ILO, n.d.)?
 - **How** far are these rights realised in practice?
 - **How** does the political economy of social protection influence provisions in law and in practice (see, e.g., ESID, n.d.)?
- **How** prepared, capable and willing is the government to use the social protection system to respond:
 - (a) to shocks in general (see, e.g., UNICEF, 2020; WFP, 2019; World Bank et al., 2021; Barca, 2020)?
 - (b) to this displacement shock in particular (see Smith, 2021; CashCap, 2022)?

EXISTING HUMANITARIAN PRESENCE IN THE HOST CONTEXT

The existing humanitarian presence in the country can shape the approach taken to linking that assistance with the social protection system and the outcomes of doing so. That presence can be assessed in terms of its scale and scope, its frequency and duration, its financing and orientation, in both the present day and in the past, and in both the host country and specifically in the displacement-hosting region. It is also important to take account of the performance of those responses – including both the intended outcomes (e.g. the extent to which the responses met, or were perceived to meet, humanitarian needs in an effective, equitable, cost-efficient and accountable manner) and the unintended outcomes (e.g. any negative impacts on community relations or the social contract). Understanding the existing humanitarian presence will also require analysis of the diverse coordinating, implementing and donor agencies involved in humanitarian responses both now and in the past, and their ways of working – including their engagement with state systems (see also ‘Key actors involved in the approach selected and its outcomes’ below).

Our research suggested that the nature and extent of the existing humanitarian presence may inform the approach selected or its outcomes – but in diverse ways, such that no clear pattern emerged among the case studies. This suggests that while it is important to consider the existing humanitarian presence, this factor alone will not drive either the selection of the optimal approach or the likely outcomes.



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

In **Cameroon**, humanitarian agencies were already operating in the East Region, largely by means of parallel food assistance programming, when the activities of Boko Haram stoked insecurity in the Far North. This existing way of working may have set a precedent informing similar responses to that crisis.

Such precedents are not always necessary, however, and a largely parallel humanitarian operation may be newly established. There was no international humanitarian presence in **Greece** before 2015; the subsequent influx of refugees and other migrants saw internationally led assistance programmes established with only limited links to the state social protection system.



Guiding questions for analysing the existing humanitarian presence

- **What** existing humanitarian response is under way in the host country and/or the specific affected region, if any? If none, has the humanitarian system recently been engaged there?
- **What** are (or were) the characteristics of that response (i.e. its size, frequency, duration, financing, orientation and performance)?
- **Who** are (or were) the main humanitarian actors? (See also ‘Key actors involved in the approach selected and its outcomes’ below.)
 - **How** well coordinated are (or were) they?
 - **What** is (or was) their approach to engaging with state systems?
- **What** is (or was) the degree of coherence across the response (e.g. fragmented or well coordinated)?
- **What** are (or were) the funding considerations (i.e. the size and performance of funding appeals, donor priorities and modalities, aid restrictions)? (See also ‘Key actors involved in the approach selected and its outcomes’ below.)

LAWS, INSTITUTIONS AND NORMS GOVERNING THE DISPLACEMENT RESPONSE

Alongside the structural features of the host context, the laws, institutions and norms governing the response to a displacement situation can shape the approach taken to assistance.

- **Institutions** are the rules, both formal and informal, that govern behaviours (Harris, 2013).
- **Laws** are set out as statutes or regulations, as well as treaties, at national and supranational levels.
- **Norms** are the social, political and cultural customs that are commonplace in the host country or region.

In our research, we noted various instances in which laws that applied equally in theory to each of the countries studied (e.g. obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention, guarantees of the right to social protection under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) were applied in practice to very different degrees in each. The extent to which these applications correlated with the approach selected was consequently unclear.

By contrast, norms at local, national and international levels were demonstrated to have a clear impact on which approach was selected.



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

In **Cameroon**, the international humanitarian principles of neutrality and independence meant it was not feasible for international humanitarian agencies to work through state systems in response to the Anglophone IDP crisis in the North-West and the South-West regions of the country, given the state's active role in that conflict. Fledgling links with state systems were more viable in response to the influx into the East region of refugees from the Central African Republic: Cameroon played no part in the cause of that displacement.

Respondents in Cameroon also highlighted the influence of informal institutions at the local level on how an approach was implemented in practice. Findings suggested that local-level officials and community leaders sometimes had an unofficial policy to prevent 'double-dipping' – excluding from the emerging social protection system those already receiving humanitarian assistance. This meant that even though IDPs technically had an equal right to social protection as their host communities – and even though there was no official eligibility requirement restricting their access – they were sometimes excluded in practice, reducing the effectiveness of the state-led approach in the few areas in which it had been rolled out.

In **Greece**, the European Union strictly specifies – with the Common European Asylum System and in human rights law – how assistance must be provided to displaced people in its member states. Yet findings suggest that while these laws certainly influenced the assistance package offered to asylum seekers in Greece, they had no strong bearing on the model used to deliver that assistance (i.e. on decisions about linking humanitarian assistance with social protection). Although the government was nominally involved in certain elements of delivery, at the time of the research assistance was largely delivered (and financed) by international agencies.



Guiding questions for analysing the relevant laws, institutions and norms governing the displacement response

- **What** are the (formal or informal) ‘rules of the game’ governing the ways in which the following actors respond to a displacement situation (see, e.g., Harris, 2013)?
 - (a) Non-governmental and international
 - (b) Governmental
 - (c) Local
- **Who** has the authority in this setting to determine how an approach is implemented in practice?
- **Which** laws, institutions or norms govern, at the local level, the displacement response?
- **Which** laws, institutions or norms, at the international and national levels, determine the rights accorded to the displaced population in the host country or displacement-affected region?

WIDER DISPLACEMENT RESPONSE

International and national actors’ decisions about linking a given humanitarian intervention with a social protection system do not happen in a vacuum; such an intervention will typically be only one element of the wider displacement response.

The wider displacement response often has implications for the approach taken to linking specific assistance programmes with the state social protection system. In particular, it is helpful to consider the wider displacement response of the state and of the international community in terms of the overarching policy and strategy to respond to the displacement situation, and the stakeholders involved, the mechanisms for coordinating them, and the financing sources/flows for implementing this wider policy/strategy.

COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

In **Colombia**, the state is officially responsible for leading the response to internal displacement under the 2011 Victims' Law, which is considered one of the world's most comprehensive legal frameworks on internal displacement. This resulted in a strong overarching national policy, strategy and coordination mechanism (i.e. the government's established Victims' Unit). This wider response has encouraged both government and international actors to rely on a state-led approach to assisting IDPs. Meanwhile, the Colombian government's response specifically to the Venezuelan influx and its strong leadership has been applauded as exceptionally progressive – resulting in expectations that non-governmental and international assistance should be provided as a supplement to and in alignment with state systems rather than through a parallel humanitarian system.

By contrast, in **Greece**, the national response to the refugee influx was, for many years, a de facto policy of non-integration. Asylum seekers were geographically and socially isolated for protracted periods, accommodated on the islands in camps and reception centres, and the government largely side-stepped the thorny question of long-term integration. The result was humanitarian assistance that for many years was led, financed and delivered by international agencies, with minimal links to the state social protection system.

Cameroon, meanwhile, demonstrated that the mechanism through which the overall displacement response is financed can play a role in shaping the extent to and ways in which assistance for displaced populations links with social protection.

Historically, assistance for refugees and IDPs within Cameroon has been financed and delivered through traditional humanitarian means, offering little incentive to integrate displaced populations into state systems. The World Bank – historically, a development partner, rather than a humanitarian donor, in the country – has, however, changed that. Accessing funding through the World Bank's IDA18 Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities, the government of Cameroon was awarded funding for the expansion of various state services and systems to both host and displaced populations; this included the further expansion of the nascent World Bank-funded national Social Safety Nets project on the condition that displaced populations also be covered in the rollout.



Guiding questions for analysing the wider displacement response

- **What** is the following actors' overall policy towards the displaced population and strategy in response to the displacement situation?
 - (a) The government
 - (b) The international community
- **Who** is involved, and how are they working together?
- **How** is the national and/or international response being funded?

CURRENT SITUATION OF THE AFFECTED POPULATIONS

One of the main factors that should influence the assistance approach taken and will influence its outcomes is the situation of the displacement-affected populations – that is, the needs and risks they experience, and their preferences and capacity to address these needs and risks (which are likely to differ substantially between different individuals or households, e.g. based on gender, age, disability). The needs and risks considered should cover both narrow and broad dimensions of material and subjective wellbeing, as well as consideration of social wellbeing at the community level (i.e. social cohesion).

When considering the current situation of the displacement-affected populations, it is important to explore those needs and risks that have arisen specifically as a result of the displacement itself. For example, displacement may strip individuals and households of assets and land, introduce them to food insecurity, limit their access to income or livelihood opportunities, dismantle their social networks and erode their social capital. Physical or mental health conditions may be a consequence of both the crisis leading to their displacement and the displacement journey. A ‘mainstream’ social assistance programme – one developed with only a host population in mind – might not be sufficient for, or flexible enough to adapt to, the needs and risks to which displaced populations are exposed.

When considering the approach to assisting displacement-affected populations, it is paramount to not only consider the basic needs that displacement-affected populations may have (e.g. direct consumption needs, immediate protection risks), but also to consider broader wellbeing needs, including people’s broader rights to social inclusion and economic agency. Seeking to address these broader needs may require state-led initiatives that reach beyond cash or in-kind transfers – for example to promote solidarity with the displaced community, and to facilitate access to legal residency status, decent work and formal employment, and land or housing (for more, see Hagen-Zanker et al., 2022).



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

In **Cameroon**, levels of poverty and deprivation are high among host and displaced populations alike, which is one reason why there has been growing interest in transition from a parallel humanitarian assistance model serving only displaced populations to one that is linked with, and supportive of, the developing social protection system. Yet the generally higher needs of displaced populations mean that linking with the lower-value social assistance available in the country may leave displaced households unable to meet their needs: the main national cash transfer value is only 12% of the national poverty line and is widely seen as inadequate even for the host population.

This has given rise to concerns that aligning or integrating humanitarian assistance with the social protection system more closely in terms of programme design (i.e. transfer amounts) will neglect displaced populations’ needs and potentially fuel tensions between displaced and host communities because displaced populations will be less able to contribute to the local economy and may resort to coping strategies with negative social impacts (e.g. begging, theft).

COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

In **Greece**, asylum seekers' and refugees' abilities to fulfil their basic needs independently were extremely limited given the constraints on their access to decent work. Such constraints are wide-ranging, from initial restrictions on their right to work when they first apply for asylum through limited formal employment opportunities, to language barriers and discriminatory practices. Only 4% of displaced respondents living in our survey sample from Athens and Ioannina were formally employed.

This creates challenges for the ability of the current assistance model to meet the displaced populations' needs, particularly for refugees. The main assistance programme – the Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection (HELIOS) scheme – lasts only one year at most, and only one in seven refugees surveyed were accessing it. After that first year, refugees can in theory turn to mainstream social assistance programmes for support. But the length of the minimum residence requirement of many such programmes, alongside various other barriers, excludes them in practice. Only two refugees in the research sample had accessed the state system, suggesting that it could not be relied on as an effective assistance model for this group.



Guiding questions for analysing the current situation of the affected populations

- **How** has the displacement situation affected the levels of poverty and vulnerability among the displaced and host populations?
 - **What** effect has it had on particular marginalised groups (e.g. older people, disabled people, women) within the broader populations?
- **What** risks do displaced and host community households face?
- **What** do displaced people want and need to help them to:
 - (a) meet their basic needs and avoid protection risks?
 - (b) access their broader social and economic rights, and reclaim agency over their lives?
- **How** do these needs and preferences differ from those of:
 - (a) the host community broadly?
 - (b) host recipients of social protection?
- **What** is the current state of community relations between displaced and host households?
 - **How** have these relations been influenced by the provision of assistance to date?
- **What** capacity or infrastructure exists *within* the displaced and host communities to help them cope with the displacement shock?

KEY ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE APPROACH SELECTED AND ITS OUTCOMES

A major finding that emerged from the research was that the approach taken – and the outcomes of that approach – depend far more on the political will and incentives of key actors than on any of the contextual factors explored in the last section. It is therefore essential to understand who the key actors are in any given context, as well as their different motivations, their incentives and their decision logics. This is key for identifying whether and why they might benefit from (or be disadvantaged by) a shift away from the default approach.

The logic that informs an actor's decisions may be far from straightforward. For example, unconscious biases can often cloud judgement about the intentions or capacity of other actors, or information asymmetries may be at play, where one actor has access to more data to inform their decision than another and may use that information to its advantage. Alternatively, the optimal approach may be clear to all actors, but a collective action challenge may lead them towards another approach: each actor may be wary that others are not committed and that they will be left alone to finish and / or pay for what was jointly started. Or an actor may not have the time or energy to engage deeply in complex decision-making processes so may rely on heuristics – that is, 'simple decision-making procedures that we use to help find generally adequate, though imperfect, answers to difficult questions' (Kahneman, 2011, in Harris, 2013).

The approach taken – and its outcomes – will also be influenced by the relationships among and balance of power between the diverse actors that are responding within a context. While we refer to them collectively in this toolkit as 'the state', 'the international community' or 'the humanitarian response', these actors comprise various entities, at various levels, and are staffed by diverse individuals. Every one of these is a distinct actor in a given displacement setting, and they each have diverse interests, as well as varying levels of capacity and authority to pursue those interests. In some cases, the actors with the greatest capacity and authority to govern an area or respond to a displacement situation in practice may not be the actors officially said to be responsible.



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

The stronger influence of actors rather than factors on both the selection and outcomes of approaches in a displacement setting was most clearly evidenced by findings comparing Greece and Colombia.

Although **Greece** is a higher-income country than **Colombia**, with a more advanced social protection system (in terms of expenditure and coverage) and a smaller-scale displacement crisis (i.e. 120,000 refugees and other migrants settled since 2015–16 at time of writing), the Greek approach was much less integrated and less state-led than the Colombian approach to assisting the 8 million IDPs and 1.8 million Venezuelans in the country (at time of writing). In both cases, this was primarily explained with reference to the very different levels of political will and incentives, particularly of the government.

In **Greece**, the absence of political will was found to be explicit. Rather than a state-led approach aiming to integrate displaced people into the social protection system, the government adopted a policy to ‘make the asylum system unattractive to third-country nationals’, on the basis that ‘benefits and hospitality act as a pull factor to come to our country and take advantage of these benefits’ – as argued by the minister of migration and asylum in 2020 (Proto Thema, 2020).

By contrast, the government in **Colombia** has been praised for its exceptional policies and will to integrate Venezuelans into many aspects of society and services. Although other elements undoubtedly played a role, the primary reason given in the government’s official policy is the strong economic incentive and perceived gains that Colombia could achieve through well-managed integration - based on convincing economic models of the contribution an integrated Venezuelan population might make to gross domestic product. At a political level, the tense inter-governmental relations between Colombia and Venezuela likely also played a part: there may have been some political gains for the Colombian government of demonstrating that opportunities for Venezuelans in Colombia were superior to those available to them in Venezuela.



COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

In **Cameroon**, the relationships between the different governmental actors involved in social protection was found to have influenced the approach adopted to supporting displaced populations through the social protection system. Where displaced populations were included in the state system, the Ministry of Planning (MINEPAT) took the lead rather than the Ministry of Social Welfare (MINAS). This is because MINEPAT, not MINAS, is responsible for the new Social Safety Net Project funded by the World Bank (which required that displaced households be included in the state system as one of its terms). Key respondents offered various explanations: one was that MINEPAT has more substantial operational capacity than MINAS, at the national level; another was that MINEPAT is a gatekeeper in the resource allocation process, so has strong incentives to maintain control of the large sums of money that management of the Social Safety Net Project entails.

Respondents in **Colombia** also pointed towards the importance of the relationship between local and national governments in shaping the approach selected and its outcomes for displaced people in the country. Local governments were often found to play a critical part in determining whether and how displaced people are served through the social protection system in practice, as well as defining the extent of coordination between governmental and non-governmental actors.



Guiding questions for analysing the key actors involved

- **Who** are the key actors shaping the approach taken to assist displacement-affected populations? Specifically, who is involved – on paper and/or in practice – in (a) the displacement response; and (b) social protection provision from:
 - the host government – at the national and local level;
 - civil society – at the national and local level;
 - the international community (donors, multilateral organisations, UN agencies, INGOs, foreign governments with particular interests in the host context response);
 - others (e.g. the private sector, in relation to social protection and employment interventions)?
- **What** are the motivations (i.e. financial, political, personal, ideational) of relevant organisations and individuals for assisting (or not assisting) displaced and/or host populations?
 - **What** are their incentives to use (or not use) state and/or humanitarian systems to assist displacement-affected populations?
- **What** are their decision-making logics?
 - **What** barriers might any such logics represent to optimal decisions about linking humanitarian assistance with state social protection (e.g. collective action problems, credible commitment problems, information asymmetries, principal-agent relationships, heuristics and biases, as discussed in Harris, 2013)?
- **What** are the relationships between the key individuals and organisations, both in general and specifically in relation to linking humanitarian and state systems in displacement contexts?
 - **How** do the key individuals and organisations interact (or not) in such settings?
- **What** is the balance of power between the key actors?
 - **How** might this affect (a) the selection of the most appropriate approach to linking humanitarian and state systems; and (b) the implementation of that approach?

WHAT NEXT?

Completing an initial analysis of context – of the factors and actors involved – is only the first step of a longer journey to considering and implementing links between humanitarian assistance and state social protection in a given displacement situation. The next step is engagement with stakeholders to agree an approach, then to implement, monitor and refine it as conditions evolve. The effectiveness of the engagement will determine the likely outcomes of the selected approach – particularly if the approach involves linking closely with state systems or requires reform of established hierarchies.

Linking humanitarian assistance with social protection is a deeply political process, requiring actors not only to understand, but also to effectively work with and around changing social, political and economic dynamics. It requires ongoing insight into and engagement with the interests driving different actors, as well as the space and capacity to act on those insights. It also requires liaising with those whose interests lie in reform to identify, debate and dismantle or refine the barriers to positive outcomes.

Changes to traditional approaches will need to be pursued in a politically smart and adaptable way, which often implies quite different ways of working. This shift has been variously captured as:

- thinking and working politically (TWP) (TWP, n.d.)
- adaptive development (see, e.g., Pett, 2020)
- problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) (Samji et al., 2018)
- doing development differently (DDD) (ODI, n.d.).

In practice, for international actors, a politically smart and adaptable approach means:

- focusing on addressing problems as they are perceived at the local level rather than implementing generic ‘solutions’
- enabling, brokering and convening locally led reform processes rather than simply funding, directing or implementing them
- proceeding incrementally and adaptively, with a focus on intentional learning-by-doing, testing approaches with periodic reflection on what is working and what is not, and flexibly updating the design and implementation of the programme based on that learning
- hiring skilled and experienced people who understand the political features of displacement responses, and who have deeply rooted contextual knowledge and networks they can tap into
- recognising that local dynamics are continually evolving and regularly assessing whether the approach remains fit for purpose in the changed context (TWP, n.d.).

FURTHER RESOURCES

While not necessarily specific to displacement situations, there is a growing wealth of resources available to help humanitarian agencies consider whether and how to link with social protection more generally in their work. For more guidance, see:

- Longhurst and Smith (2020) for strategies to link humanitarian responses to the state social protection system along the delivery chain
- Smith (2021) for guidance on overcoming barriers when coordinating across social protection and humanitarian assistance programmes
- CashCap (2022) for a framework humanitarian actors and cash working groups can use to link humanitarian cash and voucher programmes to the social protection system
- socialprotection.org for the ‘Social protection in crisis contexts’ online community and resources.

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About this publication

The overall aim of this project is to better understand effective mechanisms for linking social protection programmes and humanitarian assistance. By providing clearer guidance about when, how and why different links 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 policy-makers and practitioners. The other toolkits focus on transfer adequacy, social cohesion and operational delivery.

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