



Social Protection and Conflict Sensitivity

Dedicated to the memory of Wesam Qaid

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Section 1: Introduction

1.1 About this TRANSFORM sub-module

This Guidance Note builds out from [TRANSFORM's Shock Responsive Social Protection base module](#) and was developed to provide guidance for technical government officials and other national social protection stakeholders on the topic of social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings. It aims to support the design and implementation of systems that are more attuned to the highly political and volatile environment in which they often operate and to the rapidly evolving needs and vulnerabilities of the people they serve. The module focuses primarily on engaging with social protection *during* conflict, while bringing up considerations for social protection before and after conflict, stressing that designing and implementing social protection in conflict-sensitive ways is critical to impact and sustainability. It is firmly rooted in evidence and good practices of social protection in fragile and conflict-affected countries, showing that social protection is not only possible in such countries, but already being done.



See [Annex 1](#)

The module builds on an expanding body of knowledge and evidence on social protection in conflict settings that is referenced throughout the document and shared in [Annex 1](#). It is also complementary to two other sub-modules on social protections in contexts of forced displacement and of climate change.

The document is organized as follows:

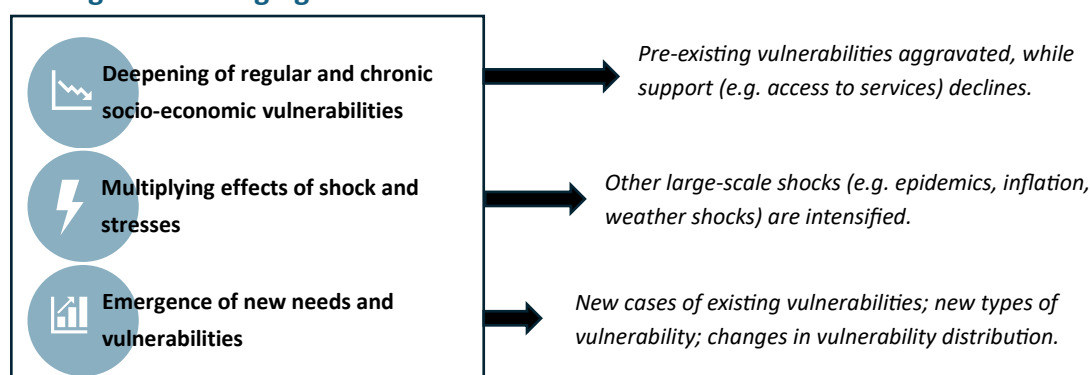
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1.2 Rationale and context

In 2025, the world faced the highest number of violent conflicts in over three decades, forcing large numbers of people to leave their homes, and increasing human suffering. In 2023 alone, more than 1.6 billion people lived within a 5 kilometre radius from violent events (ACLED, 2025), with 473 million children – more than 1 in 6 globally – within 50 kilometres from an active conflict zone (PRIO, 2024). In 2024, 61 fragile or extremely fragile contexts hosted 72% of the extreme poor. The OECD predicts that this number will have surged to 92% by 2024 (OECD, 2025). Moreover, conflicts are becoming more protracted and are increasingly layered with other shocks, which deepen their impact. Given that they are the primary driver of displacement, 80% of refugees and internally displaced persons originate from fragile or conflict-affected contexts (OECD, 2025). Conflict is also closely linked with climate pressures and increasing scarcity of resources (Jaramillo, 2023).

Conflict both increases and changes people's needs and vulnerabilities, undermining progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (see also Figure 1). This comes as a result of displacement, loss of livelihoods, destruction of infrastructure, and increased food insecurity, while also amplifying vulnerabilities and inequalities across multiple dimensions, including gender, age, ethnicity, disability status, citizenship, and employment status (HLP, 2025). It is not surprising that 70% of acutely food-insecure people live in fragile or conflict-affected countries, where food systems and livelihoods are more likely to be disrupted, leading to acute food insecurity and malnutrition (WFP, n.d.). Conflict also weakens labour markets, reduces access to decent work, and is a driver of informality (ILO, 2016). Conflicts have long-lasting repercussions, as they can severely hinder children's development by disrupting schools, exposing them to psychosocial trauma, and various forms of exploitation (UNICEF, 2023).

Figure 1. Changing needs and vulnerabilities in the face of conflict



Source: Based on WFP, 2025.

Conflict also significantly shapes the environment in which social protection is implemented. It creates a range of political, institutional, and financial challenges that affect all aspects of social protection provision (UNICEF, 2025; WFP, 2025; World Bank, 2025).

Box 1 How does conflict shape the environment in which social protection is implemented (beyond shaping needs and vulnerabilities)?

- **Disrupted government functions:** Conflict often weakens or fragments state institutions, disrupting the planning, coordination, and delivery of social protection services. In some cases, the government's role is reconfigured, contested, or replaced by non-state actors. It often means that existing risks are reenforced and new risks materialize, including fiduciary risks.
- **Reduced financing for social protection:**
 - *Domestic:* Conflicts often reduce tax revenues and shift public spending toward security and emergency needs, shrinking fiscal space for social programmes, including social protection.
 - *International:* High risk aversion, donor fatigue, shifting priorities, or security concerns may reduce or divert international funding for long-term social protection investments.
- **Changing role of government:** Disruption to governance arrangements or shifting power dynamics may lead to reduced or altered views on legitimacy, authority, and reach of the state, affecting its ability to act as the primary provider or regulator of social protection. This may have repercussions for vision and governance structure of any social protection strategy

or policy in place, who owns it, and how easily international actors can support. Fragility may manifest in different ways at national and local levels, requiring careful consideration of the most suitable level to move the social protection agenda forward.

- **Changing landscape of international actors:** This includes a change in the *composition* of actors focusing on social protection, as well as a shift their *ways of working* towards a more 'humanitarian'/'emergency focused set-up, such as in their internal processes and procedures, mandates, fundings models, and partnerships. The donorship typically also changes, whereby already active development donors may demand greater assurances or withdraw, and new humanitarian donors may come in or increase their engagement. In protracted crises, however, the interest of humanitarian donors may wane as crises persist.
- **Operational and security constraints:** Conflict creates a volatile and insecure environment that complicates implementation - restricting access to affected areas, endangering staff, disrupting supply chains, and increasing delivery costs. These conditions demand more flexible, adaptive, and conflict-sensitive approaches to ensure safe and effective service provision.

In the Arab region, conflicts in countries such as Syria, Yemen, Libya, and the State of Palestine have disrupted social protection systems and deepened existing inequalities. In Africa, protracted and recurrent conflicts in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, the Central African Republic, and the Sahel have similarly weakened state capacity and exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities.



Despite these challenges, several of these countries have sought to maintain or expand social protection coverage, often with donor and UN support – including via innovative partnerships. Social assistance in the form of cash transfers and public employment schemes have been adapted to reach conflict-affected populations and displaced persons. Both regions illustrate both the fragility and adaptability of social protection systems in the face of protracted crises, highlighting the importance of institutional resilience, regional learning, and stronger humanitarian–development linkages to sustain support for vulnerable groups. See the [Promising Practices Annex 5](#) for examples.

The multidimensional repercussions of conflict demand approaches that have the potential to not only address immediate needs but also foster long-term stability and resilience. Social protection systems have this potential. They are designed to respond to shocks and can serve as a lifeline in these challenging contexts, helping to mitigate the immediate impacts of conflict while also addressing some of its root causes (*see Annex 1 for an overview of key resources*). Growing evidence on social protection in fragile and conflict settings finds positive impacts across a wide range of outcomes, including increased food security, protection of human capital investments, reduction of negative coping strategies, consumption smoothing, and increased resilience among others. Moreover, social protection decreases the need for repeated humanitarian interventions and emergency responses. Finally, investments in social protection could potentially help stabilise societies, build social cohesion, and rebuild social contracts, and as such could be seen as a forward-looking investment in stability and resilience (HLP Secretariat, 2025).

Yet, despite the urgent and widespread need, financing and thus social protection coverage remains limited in fragile and conflict-affected contexts (ILO, 2024), as domestic resources are constrained and

international financing falls short, incumbered by both real and perceived investment risks and the chronic underfunding of the sector compared to others (Smith and Barca, 2025; Swithern et al, 2025; Longhurst and Slater, 2022a). One of the culprits for this trend - the idea that fragile and conflict affected settings cannot provide state-led social protection to their populations - is a myth that needs dispelling (HLP Secretariat, 2025). However, given that social protection is a human right and a key enabler of the SDGs, the commitment to scale it up before, during and after conflict remains critical.

In 2023, only 3.4% of total aid to FCAS went to social protection, compared to 26.5% for humanitarian assistance.

In countries experiencing extreme fragility, only 13% of the population is covered by any form of social protection, compared to 17% in fragile countries and 49% in other low- and middle-income countries.

Source: HLP (2025)

1.3 Key definitions

In order to ‘speak a common language’ across sectors and better work in alignment with peacebuilding principles and objectives, this section summarises some key definitions that social protection actors must understand when thinking strategically about conflict (in alphabetical order).

- **Conflict:** Refers to tensions between people, groups, states, and other entities over competing ideas, resources, opportunities, identity, or power, often involving a combination of these elements. Conflict is a natural component of societal dynamics and can produce positive outcomes when peaceful resolution can be reached through appropriate conflict management. When institutions lack the capacity to appropriately manage conflicts, however, conflict can become violent and can impose considerable human and economic costs (adapted from UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2018; WFP, 2025).

Box 2 Conflict needs to be further broken down, to understand its implications for social protection:

- **Causes of conflict:** Conflict typically arises when grievances about one or more societal issues remain unresolved for extended periods of time, leading to an unjust and unequal distribution of power, opportunities, and resources within societies. The risk is especially acute when inequalities fall along identity lines—such as ethnicity, religion, or region—and when certain groups are systematically excluded from accessing power, services, or economic opportunities (adapted from UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2018; WFP, 2025).
- **Stages of conflict:** The first (often cyclical) stage of conflict can be referred to as **latent conflict**, which is characterized by inequality, exclusion, grievances, mistrust, or significant patterns of group-based discrimination. At this stage, violence is not yet manifest, and opportunity for peaceful resolution is still possible. Once a conflict escalates and manifests as violent, it can become an **acute/active conflict**. Conflicts characterized by persistent violence over extended periods, often marked by recurring hostilities, stalled peace processes, and unresolved root causes, are protracted or chronic conflicts. A **post-conflict transition** is the critical period following the end of large-scale violence when a society begins to move from war toward peace, recovery, and development. It is characterized by stabilization, rebuilding institutions, and addressing the root causes of conflict while preventing a return to violence (Brahm, 2003).
- **Scale of conflict:** **Localized conflicts** are those confined to specific areas within a country. They often involve intercommunal and intra-elite violence. **National conflicts** generally refer to violent struggles that occur within the borders of a single country, often involving the state as a key actor.

Transnational conflicts transcend national borders, often posing risks that no single country can manage alone and requiring global partnerships. Different levels of conflict are fluid and interlinked (World Bank, 2011).

- **State political will and legitimacy in conflict settings:** there are wide differences in operational possibilities across contexts that are **politically stable** (countries where the legitimacy and actions of centralised public authorities is recognised domestically and internationally, e.g. Mauritania); **politically estranged** (where international assistance organisations limit their operations, or these may be restricted, due to concerns about the legitimacy of ruling authorities, e.g. Myanmar); **politically degraded** (where the authority of central government is weakened and/or ineffectual and, instead, hybrid governance structures prevail, e.g. Chad), or; **politically contested** (where central public authority is contested and fragmented e.g. [Yemen](#), [Sudan](#)) (Lind, forthcoming).

See Error!

Reference

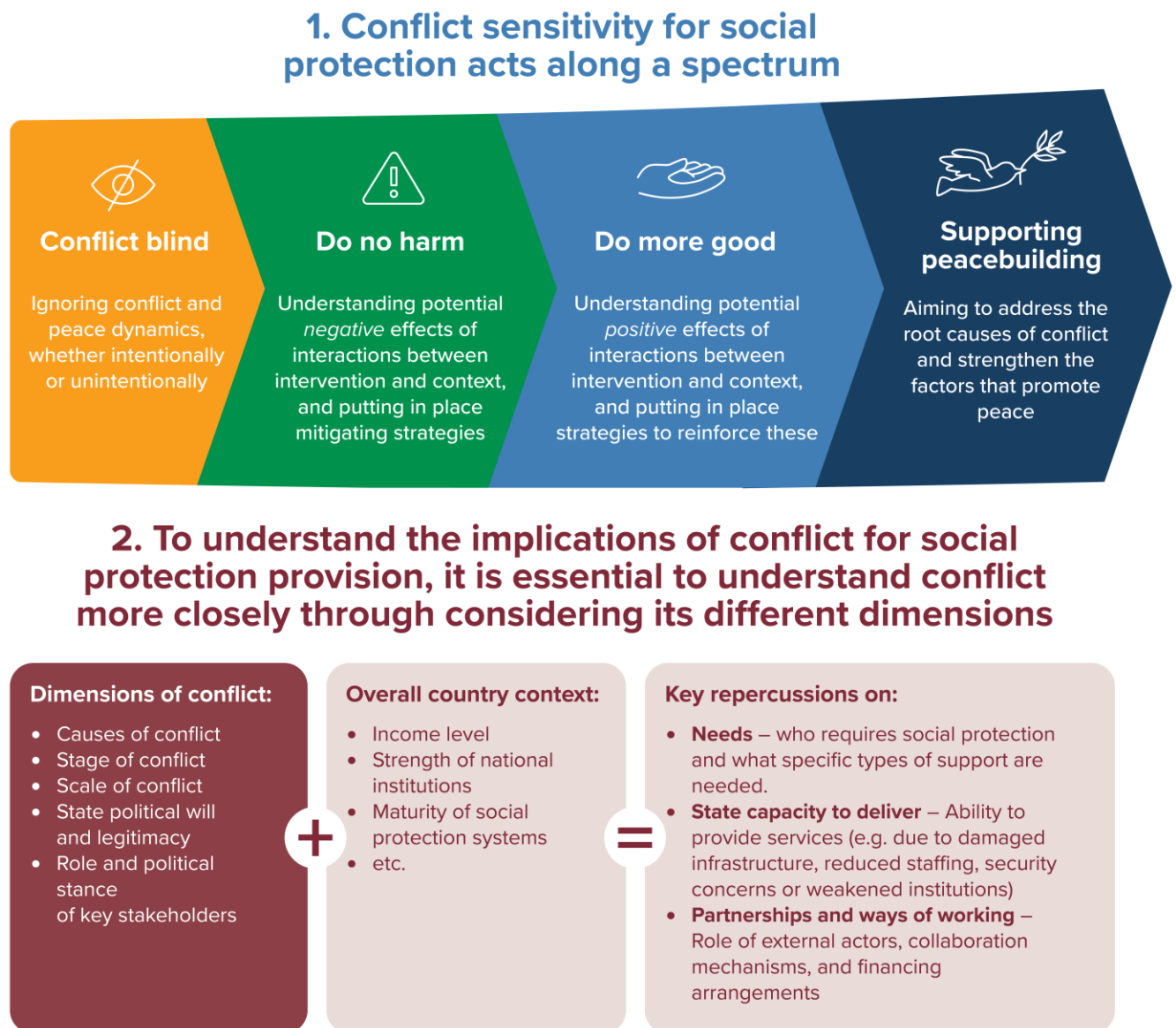
TABLE 5 IN ANNEX 2 is designed as an accompanying guide to these definitions, to reflect on the implications for social protection programming of thinking about conflict more intentionally, along these key dimensions alongside others.

- **Conflict (and Peace) Analysis:** Conflict and peace analysis is a structured approach to better understand the causes, dynamics, actors, and impacts of conflict, as well as opportunities for actions that are at minimum conflict-sensitive, and ideally proactively contribute to peace. (UN Secretary General, 2018; ILO, 2021). It should consider age, gender dynamics, protection issues, access to services, including the impact of conflict and violence on children, young people, and older persons, as well as their role in conflict and peace – see UNICEF’s [Guide to Conflict Analysis](#), WFP’s [Conflict Analysis and Conflict Sensitivity Risk Assessment](#), ILO’s [Peace and conflict analysis guidance note](#) or Everyday Peacebuilding’s [User-friendly Guide](#) as useful examples. While conflict sensitivity is about avoiding harm, peacebuilding is about intentionally contributing to peace. The two concepts are thus linked, but not interchangeable. For the social protection sector this means understanding the impact of conflict on the context, the resulting changes that are required in different elements of social protection, and the ways in which social protection can avoid doing harm and contribute to enhancing stability, social cohesion, and peace.
- **Conflict-sensitivity (often framed as ‘Do No Harm’)** – see Figure 2: The *Do No Harm framework* analyzes how humanitarian and development aid can unintentionally exacerbate conflict and offers strategies to minimize harm by understanding local conflict dynamics (Anderson, 1999) so as to ensure that programming is designed, implemented and evaluated with an understanding of the conflict context. *Do No Harm* has since become a foundational principle for conflict-sensitive programming (Figure).
- **Fragile contexts:** While there are widely varying definitions of fragility, most definitions converge around the idea that in fragile contexts governments lack the capacity, authority, and legitimacy to execute their core functions, resulting in failure to meet citizens’ expectations (Grimm, 2023). Fragility can occur across all income categories (high, middle, low) and may or may not include humanitarian crises or countries in active conflict.
- **Peacebuilding (often framed as ‘Do More Good’)** – see Figure 2: A range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development (UN Secretary-

General's Policy Committee, 2007). It thus refers to long-term efforts to address the root causes of conflict and to create the conditions for sustainable peace and development.

- **Social cohesion:** Social cohesion refers to the quality of bonds and dynamics that exist both within and among groups in a society, encompassing horizontal relationships (among individuals and groups across society) and vertical relationships (between people and institutions in positions of power and those over whom they have influence, at all levels). It is characterized by a shared sense of belonging and identity, mutual respect, shared values, and a willingness to cooperate for the common good. Social cohesion is closely linked to the pursuit of structural equity, social justice, and active civic participation (adapted from World Bank, 2011; UNICEF, 2019; UNDP, 2013, OECD, 2011).

Figure 2. The conflict– peacebuilding spectrum



Source: HLP (2025)

Section 2: Guiding principles and ways of working

2.1 Global legal frameworks and principles

A set of global legal frameworks and overarching principles should guide our work in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, especially where these refer to social protection rights, roles and responsibilities. These include (but are not limited to) [UN resolution 46/182 of 1992](#), which highlights that the state ‘has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory’ and [ILO Recommendation 205 on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience](#), which states that “in response to crisis situations, member [states] should, as quickly as possible: (a) seek to ensure basic income security, in particular for persons whose jobs or livelihoods have been disrupted by the crisis; (b) develop, restore or enhance comprehensive social security schemes and other social protection mechanisms, taking into account national legislation and international agreements; and (c) seek to ensure effective access to essential health care and other basic social services, in particular for population groups and individuals who have been made particularly vulnerable by the crisis.”



See [Annex 3](#)

ANNEX 3 provides useful further details on each of these legal frameworks, as well as several other relevant frameworks and principles, to frame discussions with national and international stakeholders by clearly establishing the implications for action in the social protection sector.

It should also be noted that working ‘at the nexus’ between social protection and humanitarian assistance in conflict settings comes with inherent tensions which will need explicit addressing. For example:

- Between principles (as well as standards and commitments) supporting development outcomes (e.g. the principles enshrined in ILO Recommendation 202, tied to commitment to national ownership) and those underpinning humanitarian action (e.g. neutrality, impartiality and independence, sometimes used as an excuse for non-engagement with national systems).
- Between ‘pure’ interpretation of the Do No Harm Principle (see [Section 1.2](#) – Key Definitions) and an interpretation which also focuses on ‘doing no harm to existing national systems that are there to support people in the medium to long-term’ (after humanitarian actors have left).

These tensions can only be resolved by understanding in full the principles to which each sector is bound and making explicit the tradeoffs they surface, while always designing and implementing with a conflict sensitivity lens. This requires a deep understanding of the political economy and conflict dynamics within any given conflict-affected context, to understand perceived legitimacy and bias of different stakeholders, including within institutions and at different levels of governance, and working with those willing to operate in ways that ensure maximum neutrality, transparency, accountability, etc.

2.2 Considerations on ways of working in contexts of conflict

Changes in contexts affected by conflict have repercussions for the way social protection is conceptualized, coordinated, and implemented. The global discourse on social protection in conflict settings – and especially the most recent [STAAR](#) and [BASIC](#) research as well as recommendations from the Synthesis of the Evidence of the 2025 High-Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings – has highlighted a set of broad and cross-cutting recommendations on ‘ways of working’.

- ✓ It is not easy work on social protection in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, but it is worth it and feasible with persistence of engagement and a focus on both maintaining and strengthening systems.
- ✓ Where possible, Governments (at an appropriate and feasible level) must lead and coordinate social protection efforts, even amid conflict.
- ✓ Understand changes in the context that are relevant to social protection, take stock of how conflict affects needs, as well as operational capacity at the various administrative levels, and determine what needs to be adapted or built (see Figure 1/2, Box 1 and [Box 3](#)).

Box 3: Care and support in the context of conflict: addressing intersectional needs

Conflict and fragility fundamentally reshape risks, needs, and coping capacities, but these impacts are not experienced evenly. Women and girls, people with disabilities (PwDs), children, older persons, displaced populations, and minority groups are disproportionately affected due to pre-existing inequalities in access to resources, safety, services, legal identity, and decision-making power. Conflict exacerbates these disparities through violence, displacement, loss of livelihoods, disruption of markets and services, and the erosion of formal and informal support systems—heightening risks of poverty, food insecurity, exploitation, and exclusion. As an example, conflict is inherently gendered in both its causes and consequences. Women and girls are disproportionately exposed to sexual and gender-based violence, including rape used as a weapon of war, forced marriage, and trafficking, while also assuming expanded unpaid caregiving roles as households and services break down. The collapse of health systems further heightens sexual and reproductive health risks. This is compounded by a sharp increase in the number of economically/socially vulnerable female-headed and widower households. Conflict is similarly a cause and an amplifier of vulnerability for PwDs. Armed violence results in traumatic injuries that lead to permanent impairments, while the destruction of health systems means preventable or treatable conditions can become disabling. Conflict-driven food insecurity and disease further contribute to developmental/chronic disabilities, particularly among children. Persons with disabilities are also disproportionately exposed to violence, neglect, and exclusion during conflict due to barriers to mobility, communication, and access to protection and assistance.

This requires intentional, inclusive design and implementation that recognizes and addresses the specific intersectional needs of vulnerable populations, grounding interventions in their lived experiences, including via disaggregated data and monitoring, understanding and mitigating their barriers to access and use, protecting from violence while guaranteeing psychosocial support, and ensuring meaningful participation.

Source: HLP (2025) Question 6

- ✓ ...while addressing the risk context via conflict analysis, on a continuous basis: not avoiding the risk by favouring one channel (e.g. humanitarian delivery) over another but anticipating and finding ways to address and mitigate the risk and emerging tradeoffs
- ✓ Even when donor regulations or humanitarian mandates limit direct engagement, strongly encourage external actors to align their approaches and delivery mechanisms to national systems.
- ✓ No matter what, build flexibility and simplicity into programming to ensure a) appropriateness to national capacity to deliver; b) potential for rapid accelerations and transitions; c) a focus on those facing the highest vulnerabilities
- ✓ Continuously build evidence to drive support for social protection and inform action and advocacy
- ✓ Pay heightened attention to accountability principles and put in place appropriate measures and mechanisms.

See Annex 4

These ways of working are discussed in depth in Annex 4 and are referenced throughout [Section 3](#).

Figure 3 attempts to bring together all these considerations. It demonstrates that – no matter the context – there are *always* options to work on systems strengthening, and for international actors to engage with (and finance) the national social protection system in conflict-affected and fragile settings. Naturally, the type of engagement will change depending on the strength and maturity of social protection systems and on the type and stage of the ongoing conflict.

Figure 3 Engaging with social protection in conflict and fragile settings is always possible



Source: Adapted from UNICEF, 2025.

Section 3: Programmatic considerations¹

This section of the Guidance Note provides the bulk of programmatic insights and potential starting points for government and other stakeholders to better incorporate a conflict lens when thinking about social protection design and delivery. Conflict is closely linked to climate change and displacement and related considerations for social protection in these respective contexts are available in two separate Guidance Notes. Programmatic considerations are grouped along four dimensions of the [Social Protection Systems framing](#): M&E evidence and learning, policy, programme design, and administration – but map back to all the dimensions discussed within the [TRANSFORM SRSP Guidance](#) and [other Modules](#). Some of the considerations are of direct relevance to government actors and the steps they can take to adapt national social protection systems, while others intend to empower other national partners to play a positive complementary role to governments.

**See Annexes
4 and 5**

Promising country-level practices and in-depth Case Studies are referenced throughout and showcased in Annex 4 and Annex 5, to further illustrate the many points presented below.

***NOTE:** An explicit choice has been made to keep these considerations and recommendations as broad and ‘universal’ as possible, focusing on what needs to change for national social protection systems to better contribute to climate change action. While this Guide is primarily targeted at Governments, all actors working on social protection and climate change may interrogate the Sections below by asking ‘what can I do to support this change?’*



3.1. M&E, evidence and learning

This paragraph focuses on better integrating conflict considerations into social protection **evidence generation to inform advocacy, planning and decision-making** as well as into **Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)**. Key actions are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Evidence and analysis: key actions that may be useful in contexts of conflict (and fragility more broadly)

A. Evidence generation to inform advocacy, planning and decision-making	
→ see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.1 and also information systems and data Section below	
•	Conduct Conflict (and Peace) Analysis and Political Economy Analysis, making this available to all stakeholders for a sustained focus on social protection’s conflict-sensitivity. Analyses will need to be updated as the conflict situation changes. In the absence of domestic resources for this, pooled funding from donors may be an option. See further details in Table 5 in Appendix 2.

¹ Reflections and examples in this section draw on the growing body of literature and discussion on the role of social protection in conflict and fragility, including a wide number of case studies developed by STAAR and BASIC as well as the Synthesis of the Evidence for the 2025 High-Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings. To enhance overall readability, this literature is not academically referenced. The full list can be found in the Bibliography, while the main resources are cited at the bottom of each Table.

- **Encourage all social protection actors to integrate insights from these analyses** into their ways of working.
- **Ensure that (routine) social protection system assessments and associated recommendations are conflict-sensitive**, pre-empting key issues that are likely to pose risks and challenges in case of conflict escalation and mitigating these explicitly (e.g. [Palestine](#)). Where feasible, include conflict and peace experts in these assessments and in subsequent decision-making.
- **Build up a body of evidence that provides a shared basis for conflict-aware policy discussion.** This is crucial to establish trust in social protection and enable evidence-informed and conflict-sensitive action – de-politicising decision-making (e.g. [Yemen](#)). E.g.:
 - including conflict drivers of vulnerability in routine data collection and poverty analysis;
 - pre-empting likely concerns (and [common ‘myths’](#)) around diversion of funds, security, accountability and providing tailored evidence on those (e.g. [Sahel](#)).
 - collecting evidence about how social protection may support or undermine peace (via questions on social cohesion, trust in Government institutions, etc.) helps to understand whether and how ‘doing harm’ can be prevented and how peace can be a byproduct of regular social protection programming, as well as how this can be fed into programme design (e.g. [Sahel](#)).
- **Facilitate shared learning** on social protection response in conflict through communities of practice, donor networks, and other platforms for policy dialogue.

B. M&E

- **Scale up independent (third party) monitoring and oversight mechanisms**, such as spot checks and Third-Party Monitoring. This helps closely and continuously monitor adherence to standard operating procedures and perceptions of communities and beneficiaries.
- **Consider conducting M&E digitally and remotely when tensions escalate**, e.g. inviting feedback via internet, call centres and Short Message Service (SMS) messages ([Palestine](#)).
- **Continuously monitor exclusion from social protection in its various forms**, as well as the role of intersecting inequalities (age, gender, disability, ethnicity, age, religion, etc.) and potential factors that may exacerbate or mitigate intra-group tensions. This makes it easier to prevent grievances and their escalation.
- **Monitor fiduciary risk** (also heightened during conflict) to prevent leakage of funds, for instance through fiduciary assessments of government departments, audit spot checks, independent investigations of any alleged fraud and corruption cases, and screening potential contractors (e.g. against sanctions lists). This also contributes to donors’ trust and willingness to provide financing (e.g. [Yemen](#)).
- **Encourage all partners that are providing technical assistance to build reporting systems that collect routine data and report on dimensions of strengthening government social protection systems** in addition to programme-specific output-focused metrics (e.g. numbers of individuals reached).
- **Build on [conflict-sensitive DAC criteria](#) to integrate conflict sensitivity into M&E frameworks** – including embedding conflict drivers and assumptions in Theories of Change and associated logframes and indicators: a) **Relevance**: Is the intervention responsive and adjusting to the conflict context?; b) **Effectiveness**: Are conflict mitigation measures effective in managing conflict and generating peacebuilding outcomes?; c) **Impact** What are the effects, intended or unintended, on the peace and conflict context? d) **Sustainability**: Will the intervention be culturally accepted, and how does it link to local capacities and power structures?
- *See also the [TRANSFORM Guidance Note on Social Protection in Contexts of Forced Displacement](#)*

Source: Developed by authors based on the literature cited in the bibliography, most prominently the STAAR Case Studies (Smith, 2025), the BASIC research Case Studies, HLP Secretariat (2025), UNICEF (2025), WFP (2025) and World Bank (2025).

3.2 Policy and institutional setting

A. LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS; B) COORDINATION AND GOVERNANCE; C. FINANCING; D. FUNCTIONAL AND TECHNICAL CAPACITY

This area of action focuses on better integrating conflict considerations into the key building blocks of social protection institutionalisation within government, including through: a) Clarity of strategic vision embedded in legal and policy frameworks; b) Sustainable financing sources; c) Established governance arrangements and coordination mechanisms, d) Strong technical and functional capacities at all levels of administration, including the social workforce.

Table 2 Policy and institutional setting: key actions that may be useful in contexts of conflict (and fragility more broadly)

A. Legal and policy frameworks (see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.3)
<u>Government Frameworks, Policies, and Systems:</u> • Engagement with social protection in conflict depends on its status quo. Key questions will include: Is there an (emerging) national development plan and is social protection featured in it? Is there a social protection policy? How much buy-in do these have within Government (e.g. across departments, administrative levels)? How much resistance do they receive and from where? Does social protection have an explicit or implicit aim to address underlying causes and drivers of conflict? Does the central government enjoy the trust and political support to perform its role as duty bearer of social protection rights? How big is the role of non-Government actors in the current social protection system, and is this role expected to grow? To what extent is the work of external actors aligned with national social protection systems? What could be potential hurdles or catalyzers for their stronger alignment with national systems? • Where social protection systems are nascent, building government-led national consensus from the ‘bottom’ via broad and inclusive (‘conflict-aware’) stakeholder participation contributes to broad-based ownership and sustainability. This requires bringing together all relevant actors, including all relevant levels and institutions within government, civil society, UN, NGOs, think tanks, academics, and activists, as well as other local actors and the institutions that represent them (e.g. Lebanon, CAR). • Strong working relationships between all stakeholders are crucial for a fertile ground for social protection. To the extent that this is feasible, government should provide leadership and/or oversight, ideally via existing national coordination structures, supporting the strengthening of the State-Citizen social contract in the medium-term (e.g. Yemen, Somalia). If it is not feasible to provide national-level leadership, governments can lead at sub-national levels (see Appendix 4 on <i>Key Considerations</i>).

- **Developing a social protection policy, strategy or strategic framing** can be an important process to shift from exploitation of social divisions for political gain towards shared commitment to inclusion and equity, particularly when done inclusively across social and political divides (e.g. [Sudan](#), [Lebanon](#), [Yemen](#)). This approach addresses the root causes of fragility – such as exclusion, inequality and weak institutions – rather than just responding to the consequences.
 - Make sure the policy or strategy is concise and realistic, includes a set of actionable priority policy points, and is accompanied by practical “how-to” steps that reflect a realistic understanding of current delivery capacities.
- **Ensure legal/policy frameworks and accompanying procedures/processes touch on:**
 - **Managing access, safety, security, staff safeguarding, etc.** There may be space to support state counterparts leveraging partner guidance and standard procedures on these topics.
 - **Exception processes in cases of conflict escalation** e.g. access to/proof of documentation, waiving/pivoting of routine processes (e.g. shift to remote operations, e.g. changes in targeting criteria, etc.).
 - **Provisions to clarify eligibility and access for displaced persons and returnees** (e.g. related to documentation flexibilities, portability or benefits, non-discrimination clauses). For more detail, see [Guidance Note on Social Protection in Contexts of Forced Displacement](#).
 - **Provisions to ensure gender and disability inclusiveness** is guaranteed even during escalation e.g. in accordance with Common Principle 2 ([Tipsheet here](#) for details) and with the [Gender-Transformative Social Protection in Crisis Contexts Guidance Note](#).
 - **Data protection/privacy/security** – critical in conflict settings.
- **Make sure that Standard Operating Procedures are flexible** to adapt to contextual changes. These could even be designed to have pre-arranged strategies for pre-agreed levels of conflict escalation (e.g. [Ethiopia](#), [Sahel](#)).

Social Protection Delivery through non-Governmental actors:

- **Ensure that development and humanitarian actors are aware of government frameworks, policies, and systems and take these into account** when developing their own strategic documents. This is particularly important for humanitarian actors (e.g. through their Humanitarian Response Plans, e.g. [CAR](#)) - who often prioritize speed of delivery over sustainability and alignment with national systems. It will facilitate transition of any humanitarian interventions to government at a later stage.
- **Humanitarian actors will need additional support to understand the implications of the country’s social protection legal framework** for aligned humanitarian programming (e.g. [Ukraine](#)).

B. Financing (see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.4)

Underlying government Public Financial Management (PFM):

- **It is strongly recommended that Governments continue exploring and prioritizing the use of domestic resources, including through taxation and increased contribution collection** (via social insurance affiliation), to sustainably fund and strengthen nationally-owned social protection systems and to move away from aid-dependency. Political prioritization of spending social

protection in resource-constrained settings requires building a strong case (e.g. visavis social protection's stabilising role) to compete with other urgent spending priorities.

- **Ideally, integrated national social protection strategies** engaging all relevant ministries and (often fragmented) donors **should be the foundation for financing plans**.
- **Where domestic resources are limited, public financial management expertise can help mobilise and safeguard resources**, for instance through conducting fiscal space analyses, budget reviews, sectoral expenditure analyses, simulations, investment cases, and capacity building.
- **Decentralized financing**: Contingency budgets accessible to lower-level programme implementers can be used to support rapid responses to conflict dynamics as they unfold, due to their heightened agility because they often do not rely on federal-level monitoring and authorisation.

Understanding Alternative (Non-State) Financing Options:

- **In contexts where domestic resources for social protection are limited, alternative sources of financing can be explored.** This can be done with support from cooperating partners.
- **Pre-empt and pro-actively address donors' potential concerns about supporting programmes through government systems and constraints they face in their decision-making.** These may relate to concerns over weak public financial management (and related fiduciary risk) and delivery systems (e.g. [Ethiopia](#)), apprehensions related to the humanitarian principles of neutrality in dependence in contexts where Government is a party to the conflict, or worries about performance metrics focusing on tangible outputs or time pressures. Examples of ways to address concerns include evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of domestic PFM systems ex-ante and supporting PFM reform (this can help ease donors' concerns about fiduciary risk and build trust and long-term confidence); demonstrating more structured risk ownership; and more effective operational and financial planning.
- **Understand the rules/procedures linked to key channels of external financing available in conflict and crisis settings ahead of time to avoid that financing taps are switched off** when support is needed the most, particularly in contexts where reliance on donor financing is big. Examples include [Performance-Based Allocations](#), the [Crisis Response Window](#), and [World Bank IDA](#) financing (e.g. [Yemen](#)).
- **Ensure broader flexibility in financing arrangements**, e.g. via unallocated contingency budgets (e.g. [South Sudan](#))
- **Multi-Donor Trust Funds and other pooled, flexible, multi-year, and multi-agency funding mechanisms (aligned with sector-wide approaches) have also proven effective** in conflict-affected contexts. They support integrated humanitarian, transition, and development outcomes while promoting predictable and front-loaded donor contributions (e.g., [Lebanon](#)). During active conflict, flexible options – such as Multi Donor Trust Funds - makes redirecting financing easier (e.g. [Sudan](#)).

---See also [\(2022\) Financing in Fragile and Conflict Contexts: Evidence, Opportunities, and Barriers](#).

C. Governance and coordination (see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.2)

- **As the primary duty bearer of the provision of social protection, where feasible, Governments should assume a central role in the governance and vertical and horizontal coordination** of social protection actors and systems, even during conflict (e.g. [Yemen](#)).
- **This includes building a coalition and vision across a broad set of actors – via national social dialogue**, understanding and bridging differences in approaches, fostering trust and ownership of decisions while ensuring transparency and accountability. This is to ensure safe, authorized, and effective delivery, improve access and legitimacy, and foster inclusive governance. Key actors beyond the usual stakeholder will include Home Affairs, the Army, the private sector, as well as humanitarian actors who can act as neutral brokers (e.g. [Ukraine](#)).
- **Where social protection cannot be driven by or delivered through central-level Government capacities, decentralised and localised capacities may be crucial** to accelerate development of the social protection system and/or delivery, as long as this does not undermine the coherence of the national system (e.g. [Somaliland](#)). Focusing on areas of greater stability and government capacity helps maintain delivery when conflict escalates (e.g. [Somalia](#), [Yemen](#)).
- **Where Government is constrained and non-state leadership is unavoidable, non-governmental actors (e.g. UN, NGOs) can be requested to play an interim role as a neutral coordinators and brokers for the sector** (while stepping back from implementation role), including across the nexus (with humanitarian actors), pushing for broad coordination across all relevant actors and potentially acting as chair/co-chair (e.g. [CAR](#), [Yemen](#), [Lebanon](#), [Palestine](#)). This role should be time-bound, government-anchored, and include a clear handover/transition pathway.
- **Fragmentation and the proliferation of parallel coordination structures should be avoided.** Coordination across social protection and humanitarian actors can be introduced:
 - in existing and emerging social protection governance structures such as SP-Working Groups, at National and Sub- National level;
 - in similar humanitarian structures, such as Cash Working Groups, and Cluster Coordination (e.g. [Sudan](#), [Palestine](#)) .
- **Such coordination can help guide and achieve consensus** with humanitarian actors on the role and design of social protection in conflict settings, focusing on joint outcomes and sustainability. This requires alignment (not necessarily harmonization) of objectives, targeting, and delivery processes among others.

---See also *Capacity* section below and [Appendix 4](#) on *Ways of Working*

---See also [UNDP \(2016\) Building a Resilient Foundation for Peace and Development – Local Governance in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings](#)

D. Functional and technical capacity

Government Leadership and Continuity:

- **Technical civil servants should be the primary government actors engaged in social protection capacity building as opposed to political appointees.** Technical staff provide continuity and

institutional knowledge needed for effective implementation and sustainability. Understanding the political economy is important for navigating complex environments (e.g. [Yemen](#)).

- **Local government administrations are key for the delivery of social protection** besides national-level structures (e.g. [Yemen](#))
- **Where Government systems are strong and need to be maintained** throughout a crisis to prevent the erosion of development gains, **the focus should be on 'institutional preservation'** – i.e. not preserving the positions and salaries of current civil servant cadres (e.g. [Yemen](#))

National Human Capital for Social Protection:

- **In cases where partners address national capacity constraints, they should be encouraged to do this in the most sustainable ways possible**, for instance via recruitment and training, job shadowing, or secondments. Only in exceptional cases, e.g. for fiduciary risk/financing reasons, setting up of externally-dictated Project Implementation/Management Units should be considered (e.g. [Yemen](#)).
- **The expertise and capacities of the national workforce – particularly of social workers, social assistants, and other frontline staff - are critical to identifying the needs** of people in situations of fragility and conflict, and **strengthening their capacity is thus crucial** for social protection delivery (e.g. via TRANSFORM district training in [Somalia](#)).
- **Depending on resource-availability, embedding social protection in national curriculums** (e.g. within public training institutions and universities) can guarantee a future cohort (e.g. of social workers) that is well-equipped to support system-building and respond to the needs of vulnerable populations (e.g. [Somalia](#)).
- **Embed displacement-related considerations for social protection in capacity building** of national and local authorities (e.g. social workers/administrators, e.g. on documentation barriers, status changes, portability of benefits).

Navigating the Consequences of Conflict:

- **Duty of care** – Beware of and avoid risks to staff associated with support from and association with international actors, particularly when international geopolitics affect conflict dynamics.
- **Where government staffing is disrupted due to conflict** (e.g. civil servant salaries not paid, staff killed/displaced) or salaries are insufficient (e.g. hyperinflation), options may be explored for potential for financing (fully or partially, directly or indirectly via incentives) key staff positions within government structures by other actors, such as UN or NGOs. This must be accompanied by adequate safeguards, learning from good practices in health and education sectors (e.g. [Yemen](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Sudan](#), [Somalia](#)).
- **Anticipate and plan for staff displacement** (e.g. surge capacity, support) **and staff loss** (e.g. social insurance and other protective measures).

Source: Developed by authors based on the literature cited in the bibliography, most prominently the STAAR Case Studies (Smith, 2025), the BASIC research Case Studies, HLP Secretariat (2025), UNICEF (2025), WFP (2025) and World Bank (2025).

3.3 Programme design level

SETTING OF: A. INTERVENTION TYPES, OBJECTIVES & LINKAGES; B. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA & QUALIFYING CONDITIONS ('TARGETING'); C) SOCIAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTION LEVELS & MODALITIES; D) TRANSFER LEVEL, FREQUENCY & DURATION; E) CONDITIONALITY

This section focuses on better integrating conflict-sensitivity and peacebuilding considerations into the **key building blocks of social protection programme design**. Decisions relating to these elements not only inform individual programme design, but also how the range of programmes within elements of a system can best work together cohesively to maximise outcomes. This includes the capacities to weigh trade-offs and translate data-informed insights into programmatic decisions on the most appropriate: a) Benefits and service package (→ affecting *comprehensiveness* of support): the choice of programmes that best address different vulnerabilities and needs of different groups, with what key objectives and intentional linkages between these; b) Eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions (→ affecting *coverage* of support): in other words, targeting design decisions, which are likely to differ across programmes; c) Level, value, frequency and duration of support (→ affecting *adequacy*); d) type of conditionality, if any.

Table 3 Programme design level: key actions that may be useful in contexts of conflict (and fragility more broadly)

A. Setting Intervention Types, Objectives and Linkages (see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.5) → affecting <i>comprehensiveness</i> of support provided
<u>Intervention Type:</u> • Social assistance in the form of unconditional and unrestricted cash transfers (e.g. child, benefits, disability benefits, and social pensions) is easier to sustain and deliver in conflict settings than many other forms of social protection or economic inclusion/ additional measures (e.g. Sahel). Domestic financing for non-contributory programmes may however be at greater risk. • School Feeding programmes often have strong political traction, meaning they can be resilient to crisis, and can be used as a 'quick-win' in contexts where domestic appetite and financing for other forms of social protection is weak (e.g. Somalia). See e.g. the School Meals Coalition. • Public works can be run in contexts where the political economy favours these over other forms of support (e.g. CAR, DRC), ideally with waivers from work requirement in cases of active conflict where being forced to travel, gather, or work in specific locations may expose beneficiaries to safety risks (Sahel). They are however best-suited for post-conflict/recovery settings, where they can help rebuild economies and train workers for longer term jobs/entrepreneurship. • Ensuring continuity or adaptation of disability benefits - through digital transfers, mobile teams, or temporary top-ups - is critical for inclusive, equitable social protection given that persons with disabilities face heightened risks and barriers in crises (see IASC Guidelines). • Social insurance schemes (e.g. pensions, maternity benefits, unemployment insurance, workplace injury schemes) are an essential pillar of social protection, while often facing considerable operational and fiscal challenges in conflict settings as these largely rely on

contributory mechanisms, functioning labour markets, and primarily formal employment. Coverage may shrink rapidly when labour markets collapse, (formal) employment decreases, and contributions reduce. Exploring alternative financing mechanisms (e.g. transitional co-financing through donor-financing), adapting contribution arrangements, and adjusting delivery mechanisms can help preserve these schemes, protect institutional capacity, and prevent further exclusion.

- **Social health protection (e.g. health insurance, fee waivers, subsidized access to essential services)** is both critical to prevent impoverishment due to out-of-pocket expenditures in times when health risks and costs increase, and more difficult to deliver due to disrupted financing and delivery mechanisms. Preservation requires a similar approach as above.
- **While subsidies are often regressive** (against poverty objectives) and thus not ideal visavis most other intervention types, if these are the only forms of support possible given the current political settlement they are still preferable over no support – especially given their proven resilience to crisis (e.g. Iraq).
- **Informal social protection (e.g. mutual aid, including Zakat) may be most resilient to conflict in extreme circumstances** and should be supported as such (e.g. [Sudan](#) Emergency Rooms), with formal efforts designed not to undermine -and in fact foster- these systems. This does NOT mean informal social protection can be a substitute to formal State-led arrangements.

Intervention Objectives and Linkages:

- **Linkages and referrals to social care services**, such as psychosocial support, disability support, or community-based care, can enhance the effectiveness and inclusiveness of social protection responses and further strengthen households' resilience and well-being.
- **Linkages with employment strategies and programmes**, where feasible and relevant
- **Including peacebuilding objectives into social protection design and delivery**, where relevant and possible, maximizes positive contributions to social cohesion, stability, and peace.
- **Linking social protection with tailored social and behaviour change communication**, as well as complementary support services, can enhance cross-sectoral impact (e.g., in [Sudan](#)) and mitigate unintended negative consequences (e.g. Gender Based Violence, see [Ethiopia](#)).

B. Setting of eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions ('targeting')

(see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.5) → *Affecting coverage*

Impacts of conflict that need to be addressed:

- **Conflict is likely to:** a) widely affect the non-poor (often not included in existing programmes and registries); b) cause widespread displacement (IDPs and refugees) and splitting-up of households (need for revalidation, etc.); c) significantly affect employment status, food security status, and household material circumstances and assets (due to widespread material destruction and deprivation, leading to large losses in income, employment, assets, wellbeing and life).
- **Targeting is typically a contested exercise**, especially in conflict contexts where discrimination and social exclusion tend to be heightened and benefits are more susceptible to elite capture and diversion. Conflict-sensitive targeting requires ensuring that targeting is acceptable from both a political and social/cultural perspective.

Choosing eligibility criteria and targeting strategy:

- **Understanding conflict-exacerbated vulnerabilities and tensions, as well as entry points for improving social cohesion** is crucial for conflict sensitivity of targeting efforts and, if possible, contributions to peacebuilding.
- **Where feasible, ensure that beneficiaries targeted under existing programmes – when conflict escalates – continue to receive their benefits**, keeping grievances at a minimum.
- **When designing new targeting approaches, including during stages of latent conflict:**
 - **A layer of geographic targeting/prioritisation may be necessary to ensure approaches that resemble (less contentious) universal targeting in a specific area.** To facilitate this, it is crucial to have a data-informed, transparent and socially acceptable approach to prioritisation (e.g. reflecting the intensity of conflict, emergency needs and food insecurity, of displacement, etc.) (e.g. [Sudan](#), [DRC](#)).
 - **On top of geographic targeting, near-universal eligibility criteria that are easily understood and communicated, while ensuring transparency and social acceptability, help to guarantee perceived fairness** in conflict settings and avoid exacerbating existing tensions. These can include demographic, life cycle, or other categorical and broad-based eligibility criteria, e.g. children below a specific age, elderly, disabled (including those with conflict-related injuries), widow/widower tied to death registration etc. (e.g. [Sudan](#), [Timor Leste](#), [Somalia](#), [Palestine](#)).
 - **Simple criteria -rapid to apply and 'good enough'- are also easier and less costly to manage/deliver** with finite resources and limited capacities (lower data needs, validation, etc.).
 - **The tradeoff between targeting accuracy and other relevant dimensions (e.g. acceptability, feasibility) tips in conflict settings: accuracy should not be the main driver for decisions** (e.g. [Yemen](#)).
 - i. Easily-understood/ transparent targeting strategies increase buy-in from diverse, and often opposing, political actors, and conflicting parties.
 - ii. Tensions between recipients and non-recipients may also affect informal support that is crucial to households in these contexts.
 - **Consider potential for affluence-testing rather than poverty-targeting in contexts where means-testing is the only politically viable option, ideally aiming for a very high threshold.** If proxy-means-testing (PMT) is the only alternative, e.g. because it is already in place, a rights-based approach to its implementation must be ensured (see *forthcoming ILO MENA Guidance on Developing a rights-based framework to assess social assistance schemes in the Arab region*).
 - **Address exclusion errors, as this is more important than addressing inclusion errors in such settings**, because the consequences of excluding vulnerable individuals from support can be far more severe, e.g. unmet basic needs, undermining trust, worsening inequalities, and increasing social tensions (e.g. [Yemen](#)).
 - **In general, hybrid targeting approaches may allow for greater flexibility and responsiveness** in dynamic crisis settings than binary choices (e.g. between proxy means test and categorical targeting).

Further process considerations:

- **Different actors must collaboratively and comprehensively consider eligibility and 'targeting', across multiple 'social protection'/development and humanitarian programmes.** This will open opportunities for sequencing and layering across programmes, while filling gaps, rather than

duplicating efforts (e.g. [Yemen](#), [Ukraine](#)). Government leadership can help in catalyse joint and coordinated action where possible (e.g. [Palestine](#)).

- **Adjusting targeting strategies is essential to minimize discrimination against insecure areas and maximize de-facto coverage.** Reaching these vulnerable populations avoids perceptions of marginalisation driving recruitment into armed forces and further conflict (e.g. [Sahel](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Somalia](#)).
- **Ensuring broad buy-in for the criteria and overall targeting strategy** from diverse civil society/political actors, and conflicting parties, including potential to pivot strategy for differing levels of conflict (e.g. [Lebanon](#)) can help maximize legitimacy, conflict sensitivity, and sustainability. **Making use of the role of local brokers** with a deep understanding of local conflict dynamics can help facilitate community processes (e.g. [Sudan](#)).
- **Understand whether household level or individual level eligibility may make more sense**, especially in contexts where pre-conflict understanding of household (living under same roof, eating from the same pot) may have been severely disrupted by death, displacement, etc.

C. Setting of transfer level, frequency duration. (see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.5)

à *Affecting adequacy*

Transfer level:

- **It is recommended that the transfer value be adapted to address additional conflict-related needs** (loss of income/livelihood, housing, assets, etc.). This requires at a minimum adjusting for inflation (where this is legally feasible, e.g. [Ethiopia](#) vs [Yemen](#)). See also *CALP Guidance on Adapting Cash Programming to Inflation, Depreciation and Economic Volatility*
- **Significant differences between social protection transfers and humanitarian transfers can undermine appreciation of state support.** To reduce this risk, there should be coordination across the two, including layering of support to the same individuals to achieve optimal transfer levels. In case of differing values, there should be a strong justification, for instance higher needs of those displaced, e.g. in [Ethiopia](#), [Palestine](#)). Efforts are often undermined by lack of interoperability/sharing of beneficiary data between interventions.

Transfer frequency:

- **Reducing the transfer frequency by lumping transfers into batch disbursements reduces workload** at a time when capacities are overstretched, and limits exposure to risk for beneficiaries and implementers (e.g. [Ukraine](#)).

D. Conditionality

- **Hard conditions are not advised in most conflict or fragile settings** given difficulties in participants successfully meeting the conditions or gaining benefit from them (e.g. insisting on health conditions if people cannot travel safely to the clinic and/or if there are no medical personnel/supplies present).
- **This also holds true for public works programmes**, when working is a de facto condition which poses security concerns and additional administrative burden. Embedding waivers in protocols and issuing guidance for pivot to cash-transfer only alternatives are advised (e.g. in [Ethiopia](#), unless conditions allow)

- **Soft conditions could be an option in some of these contexts** – e.g. training/sensitisation /behavioural change, financial literacy and savings etc.

Source: Developed by authors based on the literature cited in the bibliography, most prominently the STAAR Case Studies (Smith, 2025), the BASIC research Case Studies, HLP Secretariat (2025), UNICEF (2025), WFP (2025) and World Bank (2025).

3.4 Administration level

A. OUTREACH & COMMUNICATION; B. REGISTRATION AND ENROLMENT, PAYMENTS/DELIVERY, COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS (GRIEVANCES) AND ACCOUNTABILITY, CASE MANAGEMENT, REFERRALS AND PROTECTION RISKS; C. INFORMATION SYSTEMS & DATA

This section focuses on key actions at the administrative level to strengthen measures to enhance the core operational processes along the [social protection delivery chain](#) that enable effective and accessible delivery of social protection in contexts of conflict.

Table 4 Administrative level: key actions that may be useful in contexts of conflict (and fragility more broadly)

A. Outreach and communications (see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.6)
• Clear and consistent communication among stakeholders across the conflict spectrum is key, properly resourced at all governmental and operational levels, referencing agreed policy parameters and programme rules and procedures. • Clear communication that Government is providing support (even when financing is external) should be in place where this is the case, reinforcing the social contract, whereby government should guide specific communications strategy and visual identity, while partner-branding may have to be left out. • The rationale of any targeting strategy (eligibility criteria, qualifying conditions, and related process) must be effectively communicated to society. • Working closely with media/communications experts can help to de-escalate tensions, address misinformation, and counter divisive narratives and messages related to social protection programming. This includes planning ways to deal with false information and negative campaigns against social welfare programmes. • Exploring potential for layering conflict-sensitive/peace-building Behavioural Change Communication alongside the core intervention (e.g. DRC) should be explored in collaboration with conflict experts. • Ensuring communication efforts are tailored to people across the conflict spectrum i.e. different languages, dialects, communications needs, levels of digital literacy, etc (e.g. Somalia)

B. Registration and enrolment (see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.4 B)

New registration vs using existing data:

- **Carefully weigh the pros and cons of re-registration.** Pros may include large numbers of people who may have become newly eligible (e.g. [Palestine](#)). In cases where re-registration is not feasible (e.g. rekindling potential conflict) or needed, flexible re-verification process may still need to be set up to establish proof of life, identity, etc. (e.g. [Yemen](#)).
- **Disability assessment and registration (especially new conflict-induced disabilities, and especially for children) may pose a particular challenge in conflict contexts but remains a priority.** Quick and practical tools for screening can be developed to support streamlined processes, with further assessment being postponed to periods of stability.

What data (see also information systems):

- **Pre-agree how/what registration data is collected across all actors involved, including humanitarian** (e.g. common registration form with standardised data dictionary, etc.) to facilitate future data sharing or transition to national registry/information system. Keep data collected to a minimum, e.g. via shortened questionnaires focused on key variables (e.g. [Palestine](#)).
- **Ensure that data on displaced populations are a core component of data collection.**

Registration/enrolment process and teams:

- **Consider developing SOP or security guidelines, which would supplement standard operations manuals** for data collection in high-risk contexts, e.g. navigating checkpoints and roadblocks; handling potentially hostile situations with armed groups or local populations, including when to withdraw from an area.
- **If needed, consider alternative (e.g. self-registration) and remote registration methods** (e.g. via USSD technology), e.g. where travel to affected areas is severely restricted. COVID-19 learning on this can be reaped (e.g. see this [webinar](#)).
- **Ensure registration teams/frontline staff of mixed ethnicity/background**, with strong training, including on managing conflict, and supervision practices, accompanied by security teams in conflict areas when needed (e.g. [Kenya](#)).
- **Ensure community mediation and validation** (time allocated to ensuring clear messaging, trust, buy-in with chief/elders/local committees, validation etc), both at registration and enrolment stages (e.g. [Kenya](#)).
- **Where necessary, consider registration by third party local actors**, including humanitarian counterparts, NGOs or CSOs, 'on behalf of government'.

➔ See also World Bank (2025) *A Guide to Implementing Social Safety Nets in Fragile, Conflict, and Violent Contexts*

C. Payments/delivery (see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.4 C)

Payment modality (cash):

- **Digital delivery (mobile money, debit cards, etc.) poses many conflict-related advantages** and is thus advisable as it ensures: a) portability of benefits (catering to displacement), b) increased secrecy and safety of cash-out, c) remote operations e.g. when conflict levels are high (e.g. [Burkina](#), [Somalia](#), [Palestine](#)). Yet risks and challenges of digital delivery also need to be evaluated

– especially as there is often a limited availability of qualified payment agencies capable of or willing to operate in high-risk areas.

- **Offering a range of options for the receipt of transfers remains essential** (payment instruments, devices, paypoints, implementation partners, e.g. [Sudan](#), [Ethiopia](#)), including options outside the national financial system (e.g. PayPal in Palestine, WFP e-wallets in shops in Iraq) helps absorb contextual changes resulting from high uncertainty in conflict, such as liquidity, connectivity, or banking infrastructure changes.
- **In contexts where digital solutions are not viable**, appropriate security assessments should be conducted and corresponding risk mitigation strategies put in place, including in coordination with local actors such as payment service providers. Potential accessibility assessments must also be undertaken (e.g. for Persons with Disabilities, PWDs)/ security needed.
- **If using digital solutions**, all factors affecting exclusion need explicit understanding and addressing, especially as conflict can further exacerbate access and inclusion challenges for vulnerable groups – such as by creating further restrictions on movement of women, or challenges for PWDs to travel to payment sites. Solutions include: appoint recipients, offering non-digital alternatives, mobile teams and home visits, enhancing digital literacy (e.g. [Yemen](#), [Sahel](#), [Sudan](#)).
- **Negotiating with Financial Sector Providers is worth it**: where their penetration is low, the prospect of populations' increased purchasing power via cash transfers can alter e.g. mobile operators' business plans towards higher coverage. More generally, social protection/government actors have higher potential to change rules of the game and negotiate favourable terms (e.g. lower transaction costs) than humanitarian ones: stable presence, larger scale, etc.

Conflict-proofing processes:

- **The cash-out stage can pose difficulty whether digital or not**, especially because of disruptions to financial service providers (damaged infrastructure, electricity or connectivity outage, staff displacement or liquidity constraints). These situations should be pre-empted, and clear alternate plans be created in advance: e.g. modality switch, lumping of payments, surge capacity in affected locations, 'authentication letters' to switch paypoint (e.g. [Ethiopia](#), [Niger](#)).
- **Clear protocols should be in place indicating to stop payment in an area if there is a risk of harm to staff or beneficiaries**. Risks that may materialize at distribution points encompass theft, exploitation, violent attacks, sexual harassment and abuse (e.g. via continuously updated risk register/assessment, traffic-light systems etc., e.g. [Ethiopia](#)).
- Depending on context, **accompanying cash distribution with security escorts (private or national forces or UN peacekeepers) can be a double-edged sword**: military presence can serve both to deter, as well as to attract attacks from extremist groups or rebels (e.g. [Sahel](#)).
- Independent of context or payment modality, **strong payment reconciliation processes must be in place**, ideally via digitally enabled comparison.

Distribution modality (in kind):

- **Many of the considerations above hold true, noting this is not a preferred distribution modality** for social protection because it reduces households' and individuals' agency to choose what they need most. Cash provides that flexibility.

D. Complaints and appeals (grievances) and accountability *(see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.4 E)*

- **Functional complaints and grievance redress mechanisms/ complaints feedback mechanisms (GRMs/CFMs) are an essential, non-negotiable component in conflict settings** - to uphold Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) principles and promote transparency (e.g. [Sri Lanka](#), [Somalia](#), [Yemen](#))
- **Engaging independent third parties** to monitor grievance resolution can further maintain program credibility and reinforce beneficiary trust.
- **Ensuring short turnaround times is crucial** to build trust and prevent that grievances escalate into conflict. In addition to ensuring that there are clear and accessible channels through which grievances can be aired, this requires thorough development of the back end of GRMs/CFMs.
- **Accountability systems should not only focus on those who receive assistance** (solving issues along the delivery chain) **but also on those who do not.**
- **Integrate grievance and complaint mechanisms that consider intimate partner violence issues and other forms of violence, exploitation, and abuse** and ensure that the appropriate referrals are in place (e.g. [DRC](#)).
- **Clear protocols should be in place for handling of cases with lacking documents** (e.g. letters of attestation, alternative IDs).

➔ See also [Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship](#)

E. Case management, referrals and protection risks

- **Safeguarding and protection risks are often exacerbated by conflict.** Many beneficiaries have specific vulnerabilities – for example, PWDs, single women, and children – that can predispose them to risks of violence, exploitation and abuse that need explicit mitigation, potentially with the support of humanitarian counterparts and dedicated expertise.
- **Set up referral systems via case managers**, based on the availability of complementary services (e.g. health, nutrition, water, sanitation, education, child protection)

F. Data, digital and information systems *(see also Main SRSP Guidance Section 3.4 D and Evidence and Analysis Section)*

- **Building (if necessary with partners' support) the ecosystem of checks and balances** and the governance, organisational, legal arrangements (e.g. data protection) and capacity (including local level) helps run digital systems smoothly and make better use of data (see [Ukraine](#)). Digital mechanisms provide an important pathway to enable speed of support, address benefit diversion, enhance accountability and allow for discretion - critical in conflict contexts.
- **Keep digital systems simple, lean, flexible and resilient:**
 - a. start small/simple, whatever can realistically be managed given capacity/context at that point in time;
 - b. collect less data as most is never used and data minimisation principle is crucial in conflict;

- c. build in flexibility because things are likely to change fast: e.g. modular, open source and decentralized information systems (not centralized in one 'huge' database, but different databases able to interoperate);
- d. ensure capacity to maintain and adapt digital systems deployed;
- e. ensure on-demand approaches to data collection wherever possible ('universality of delivery systems', potentially able to reach anybody);
- f. build portability in (to cater to forced displacement).
- **Data security and protection** are crucial in conflict (given the heightened vulnerability of individuals, families and children in conflict and crises). E.g. running Data Privacy Impact Assessments, supporting changes in legislation, informed consent or other improvements based on global Guidance
- **Invest in/link to other foundational digital building blocks for mutual reinforcement:** civil registration and ID (e.g. supporting free of charge registration as complementary action), disability registration, etc. In some cases, these may even be sufficient for universally leaning targeting.
- **Prioritise inclusion and accessibility.** Vulnerable populations (e.g. [women, people with disabilities](#), IDPs and refugees, [pastoralists](#), [informal workers](#), etc.) will be excluded from digital systems if their needs are not explicitly and intentionally addressed.
- **Ensure conflict-affected areas are not automatically excluded from the national social registry** and broader social protection information system – key risks can be mitigated and operational challenges addressed (e.g. [Sahel-Chad](#)).
- **Avoiding fragmented data systems and standardizing data policies, frameworks, and indicators across humanitarian, development, and peace actors while ensuring alignment with government-led data initiatives** is of great benefit for coordinated analysis and planning, accountability and transparency, more efficient resource allocation, and strengthening of national systems.

see [Implementation Guide: Good Practices For Ensuring Data Protection And Privacy In Social Protection Systems](#)

Source: Developed by authors based on the literature cited in the bibliography, most prominently the STAAR Case Studies (Smith, 2025), the BASIC research Case Studies, HLP Secretariat (2025), UNICEF (2025), WFP (2025) and World Bank (2025).

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Appendices

Annex I: Relevant guidance and framing documents

This Appendix references guidance and resources which are fully complementary to this document and may be viewed alongside it. These include:

1. **HLP Secretariat (2025). Public Enquiry: Synthesis of the Evidence. High-Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts**, which summarizes 78 submissions from organisations and individuals across the humanitarian, development, and academic sectors from a Public Enquiry to examine how social protection systems can be developed and sustained in fragile and conflict-affected settings, balancing immediate needs with long-term goals like resilience and social cohesion - and **Catalytic Agenda 'Social Protection for Stability**.
2. **UNICEF (forthcoming) Operational Note: Strengthening Social Protection Systems in Contexts of Conflict**, This goes hand in hand with the Social Protection System Readiness Assessment Tool, the Peacebuilding programming Framework, building and sustaining peace through children's rights, and the Guide to Conflict Analysis.
3. **WFP (forthcoming) Social Protection in fragile and conflict settings**. Developed on the basis of the most recent research on the topic (e.g. by BASIC and STAAR), it provides a systematic and practical overview that aligns with the TRANSFORM framing. This goes hand in hand with WFP's Conflict Sensitivity Mainstreaming Strategy
4. **World Bank (2025) Planting Roots in Shifting Soil : Building Social Protection and Labor Systems in Fragile, Conflict, and Violence-Affected Settings**. To guide policy and operational engagement in these complex contexts, the Bank's new Approach Paper provides a structured framework for supporting social protection and labor systems and policies in FCV settings
5. **World Bank (2025) A Guide to Implementing Social Safety Nets in Fragile, Conflict, and Violent Contexts**, which provides practical operational guidance for designing, delivering, and implementing World Bank-supported social safety nets in contexts affected by fragility, conflict and violence (FCV). It identifies the unique challenges faced in these environments and presents a set of operational adaptations to ensure the continuity, effectiveness, and impact of safety net interventions under challenging conditions.
6. **FAO (2024) Social Protection as a Pathway to Sustaining Peace**. Which discusses how social protection can sustain peace efforts by understanding peace not as an outcome but, rather, as an ongoing process, working to both offset the impacts of conflict and deliberately address its underlying drivers.
7. **ILO (2021) Peace and conflict analysis, a guidance note for ILO's programming in conflict and fragile contexts** developed through a collaboration with Interpeace with a focus on working across all three dimensions of the HDP Nexus.
8. **World Bank (2025). The Impact of Social Safety Nets on Economic, Social, and Political Outcomes in Fragile, Conflict, and Violent Contexts: A Review of Evidence**, which, under the World Bank's Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program, reviews existing literature to assess the impacts of social safety nets (SSNs) on economic, social, and political outcomes in fragile and conflict-affected settings. It examines how SSNs influence household well-being, social cohesion, conflict, and trust in state institutions, aiming to guide SSN design to enhance benefits and minimize conflict risks.

Annex 2: Breaking down conflict: to understand implications for social protection

Table 5 is designed as a useful guide to reflect on the implications for social protection programming of thinking about conflict and peacebuilding more intentionally, along several dimensions: e.g.: A) Pursuing conflict sensitivity ('doing no harm') vs peacebuilding ('doing more good') ; B) the different stages of the conflict cycle; C) different roles of government/state actors vis-à-vis the conflict; D) different scales of conflict; E) different repercussions on State capacity to deliver and; F) intersections with displacement and climate change. They build on [ILO](#), [UNICEF](#), and [WFP](#) resources on conflict analysis and peacebuilding.

Table 5 Understanding conflict and peacebuilding: key considerations and implications for social protection

Details	Key considerations and implications for social protection
Focus on pursuing... conflict-sensitivity vs peacebuilding	
Conflict/violence sensitivity ('Do No Harm')	This broadly involves not being conflict-blind and considering the interactions between planned or ongoing interventions and the conflict context, to understand: - the impact of the conflict on: - the population (new needs - frequency, severity, type of need), and what that means for social protection. E.g. this may require adjustments or flexing/scaling of existing programmes or creation of new programmes to address emerging risks - the programme/system (new risks or reinforced existing risks; damage and disruption to institutions and systems; access, safety and protection risks; fiduciary risks), and what that means for system maintenance and delivery. E.g. This may require modifying programme design and delivery systems to mitigate these risks, while building in features for conflict resilience. - the impact of social protection programme design and implementation on reinforcing existing conflict dynamics - and intentionally mitigating/minimizing potential negative impacts (many examples below and in Section 4).
Peace-building ('Do More Good')	This broadly involves: - Asking "what can we do within current social protection programming to contribute to peace?" as a standard question - not making peace a separate silo - Reducing the risk of a lapse or relapse into violent conflict by aiming to directly/indirectly addressing root causes and consequences of conflict; - Strengthening national, community and individual capacities to address conflict constructively; - Laying and supporting the foundations for sustainable peace and development. - Explicitly pursuing the following outcomes as part of the programming Theory of Change: Strengthened vertical and horizontal social cohesion²; enhanced trust and confidence in the legitimacy and responsiveness of state and local authorities; increased inter-communal and inter-personal trust and confidence; reduced prevalence and impact of violence.
Stage of conflict: latent, acute, post-conflict, recovery and protracted/recurrent	
Latent	Do no harm – conflict sensitivity: - Ongoing conflict analysis is necessary (understanding stakeholders, conflict dynamics, root and proximate causes, potential triggers and peace capacities). - Ensure equitable, impartial and non-discriminatory access to social protection (across social/ethnic groups, regions, etc.) – and communicate this widely

² See definition above

Details	Key considerations and implications for social protection
	• Ensure inclusive and transparent planning & delivery, including via enhanced accountability measures, so as to avoid feeding of further conflict (which escalates when grievances, injustice and exclusion are active and left unaddressed) • Be aware of possible conflict triggers (elections, trickle effects of global crises, etc.) and pre-empt where possible – including the use of social protection as a tool to curb social discontent • Prepare for possible escalation of conflict e.g. Standard Operating Procedures for shifts in delivery model (see below) • More generally, develop a strategy for maintaining continuity of support and preventing collapse of social protection structures and capacities in case of conflict Do More Good – Peacebuilding: • Emphasize redistribution of resources to citizens contributes to peacebuilding • Emphasize ‘peace dividends’ where possible, building capacities, institutions & mechanisms for enhancing cohesion (both at central and decentralized levels). • Define peacebuilding outcomes as explicit programmatic objectives where possible.
Acute armed and violent conflict	Key considerations: • Likely significant impacts on vulnerabilities, which social protection programmes may be ill-equipped to address. Violence can generate new, heightened needs for those who are already covered, but also (significant) parts of the population that were previously food secure and had access to livelihoods (i.e. not covered). Requires significant shift in targeting approaches. • Higher operational costs of delivery and disruption to staffing. • Complex context for delivery. Do no harm – conflict sensitivity: • As above (<i>latent conflict</i>), with renewed conflict analysis given changed context. Do More Good – Peacebuilding: • Many of the considerations above (<i>latent conflict</i>) are complex to retain during conflict itself, but at a minimum important to support maintaining whatever systems/processes/capacities possible so as not to lose years of investments. • Work alongside media & other channels to de-escalate, quash rumours and counter divisive narratives and messages, alongside advocacy for cessation of violence.
Post-conflict transition	Key considerations: • Depending on scale, impacts and length of conflict medium- and long-term impacts on vulnerability and poverty will vary widely and will require ad-hoc new assessment to inform shifts in programming. Do no harm – conflict sensitivity: • As above (<i>latent conflict</i>), with renewed conflict analysis changed context. Do More Good – Peacebuilding: • As in the <i>latent</i> conflict phase, but with a focus on post-conflict scenario and analysis. • Address psychosocial impacts & traumas by explicitly integrating these in programming (in terms of process as well as linkages via case management and referrals e.g. to behavioural change communications, psychosocial support, etc.).
Recovery and state-building	Key considerations: • Programming as-if conflict had not happened will not be feasible, social protection can be part of a renewed social contract if explicitly designed to play that role Do no harm – conflict sensitivity: • As above (<i>latent conflict</i>), with renewed conflict analysis given changed context.

Details	Key considerations and implications for social protection	
	Do More Good – Peacebuilding: - As in the <i>latent</i> conflict phase, but with a focus on medium-term reconstruction of State capacity. - Address social trauma, harms and new ruptures head-on in programming (...)	
Protracted/ recurrent	Very often conflict is not a discrete shock but a chronic condition, meaning the space for medium to long-term planning (along many of the lines discussed above) is ample. All reflections above still valid, but with even more policy-space to move beyond short-term humanitarian responses towards national systems building.	
Scale of conflict:		
Localised	- Potential for ‘twin track’/third party approaches, such as those operated by UNICEF and WFP in Sahel, whereby some areas of the country are supported via national systems and others are aligned, ensuring access to areas and populations where State-led provision is compromised due to armed militia. - Likely to generate a wide number of Internally Displaces Persons (IDPs), see Guidance Note on Social Protection in Contexts of Forced Displacement - Potential to work via local administrations rather than at national scale.	
National	- More likely to impact national capacities and systems - Likely to generate a wide number of Refugees, see Guidance Note on Social Protection in Contexts of Forced Displacement	
State political will and legitimacy in conflict settings:		
Politically stable	Strong potential for deepening developmental engagement of international actors (incrementally building a social protection system and establishing multi-year funding time frames) and phasing out international humanitarian support	
Politically estranged	- International actors’ incentives tipped towards principled distancing and risk informed engagement (targeted technical assistance, third party contracting to maintain delivery) - Where humanitarian actors take over delivery, crucial for this to be done in alignment with existing/future national systems and transitions back to these pre-planned.	
Politically degraded	While retaining risk mitigation measures, potential for international support to develop policy frameworks, programmes and coordination mechanisms, while institutionalising emergency preparedness and conflict-sensitivity	
Politically contested	- International actors’ incentives tipped towards principled distancing and risk informed engagement, but strong potential for strengthening localised and sub-national systems (different approaches for different areas). - Where humanitarian actors take over delivery, e.g. in contested areas, crucial for this to be done in alignment with existing/future national systems and transitions back to these pre-planned.	
Key repercussions on State capacity to deliver:		
Major damage to infrastructure (buildings, transport etc.); disruptions/scarcity in power supply (electricity, fuel), interruptions and outages in mobile/internet networks, banking services etc.	Requires: a. Pre-empting via Standard Operating Procedures ex-ante and addressing via tailored and strategies to ensure continued delivery ex-post. b. Flexibility in delivery systems, e.g.: digital vs in person; state-led vs third-party led; cash-based vs in-kind delivery modality; etc. c. Contingency funding for additional costs.	

Details	Key considerations and implications for social protection	
Local staff unable to carry out their duties (unpaid, eroded salary, displaced etc):	Requires protocols for potential: d. duty of care towards affected staff e. remote management and oversight f. activation of surge capacity g. maintaining staff salaries via non-standard approaches (e.g. ‘incentives’)	
• Conflict intersecting with:		
Displacement	see Guidance Note on Social Protection in Contexts of Forced Displacement	
Climate change	See Guidance Note on Social Protection and the Climate Crisis	

Source: Authors, drawing on UNICEF (2016a/b), STAAR and BASIC Research, HLP Secretariat (2025), ILO (2021), UNICEF (2016) and WFP (2025).

Annex 3: Relevant global agreements, legal frameworks and principles

Table 6 briefly outlines the key principles relevant to social protection provision in contexts of fragility and conflict, paraphrasing and referencing global agreements, legal frameworks, principles and UNICEF guiding documents where these are reinforced.

Table 6 Global agreements, legal frameworks, principles and documents where principles for social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings are reinforced

Relevant principles for social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings	Global agreements, legal frameworks, principles and documents where this is reinforced
States bear the primary responsibility for ensuring the basic needs of civilian populations under their control, including social protection. This is a consequence of the principle of sovereignty and includes the implication to grant unimpeded humanitarian access to protect civilians in armed conflict (e.g. ensuring access to food and relief)	• Customary International (humanitarian) Law (see also here) • ILO C102 - Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), ILO R202 - Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), and R205 - Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205). • UNGA resolution 46/182 (1991) (Guiding Principles on Humanitarian Assistance, stating that 'the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory') • Geneva Convention (1949) and additional protocols
Poverty eradication and social protection are key contributors to peacebuilding; strengthening the capability of states to fulfil their core functions (including, crucially, offering social protection) is thus essential	• UNGA resolution A/RES/70/262 (2016) and Security Council resolution S/RES/2282 (2016) (Review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture) • UNGA A/70/709, One humanity: shared responsibility (2016) • UN New Agenda for Peace (2023) • OECD (2011) Principles of Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations
Importance of international actors (including UN) working with and through Government in these contexts (through close strategic and operational partnerships, coordination and complementarity), and importance of national ownership and leadership, given the scale and nature of the	• UNGA resolution A/RES/70/262 and Security Council resolution S/RES/2282 (2016) • OECD (2005) Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness • OECD (2011) Principles of Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations

Relevant principles for social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings	Global agreements, legal frameworks, principles and documents where this is reinforced
challenge of sustaining peace. As flip side of the coin, they should seek to avoid activities which undermine national institution-building, such as developing parallel systems without thought to transition mechanisms and long term capacity development.	• SPHERE (2018) Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response • (2014 and 2024) Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability • SPIAC-B (2023) Common Principles for Linking Humanitarian Assistance and Social Protection Principle 8 and associated Tipsheet • See also forthcoming UNICEF and WFP guidance and World Bank (2025)
Act fast and flexibly, but stay long enough to give success a chance and to work on ‘prevention’ not just ‘cure’. Assistance to fragile states must be flexible enough to take advantage of windows of opportunity and respond to changing conditions on the ground. Capacity development in core institutions will require long-term engagement.	• OECD (2011) Principles of Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations • UNGA A/70/709, One humanity: shared responsibility (2016) • See also forthcoming UNICEF and WFP guidance and World Bank (2025)
Do no harm. International interventions can inadvertently create societal divisions and worsen corruption and abuse, if they are not based on strong conflict and governance analysis, and designed with appropriate safeguards.	• OECD (2011) Principles of Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations • SPHERE (2024) Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS)
Uphold the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence (these ‘should guide action in every context, conflict affected or not’, but do <i>not</i> preclude principled action alongside State actors in conflict settings).	• See forthcoming UNICEF and WFP guidance and forthcoming High Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings Outcome Document
Promote and ensure commitments to non-discrimination (e.g. gender, ethnic, regional), defining deliberate actions to address exclusion and inequalities, leaving no-one behind	• OECD (2011) Principles of Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations • UNGA A/70/709, One humanity: shared responsibility (2016)
Special respect and protection of children in conflict via all feasible measures (including granting of essential care and assistance; access to food, health care and education etc.).	• Customary International (humanitarian) Law (see similar provisions for women; the elderly, disabled and infirm) • (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (see Box below) • (2019) Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS) • UNICEF (2022) Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action
The importance of women’s leadership and participation in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding , including through the delivery of gender-sensitive and targeted programming	• UNGA resolution A/RES/70/262 and Security Council resolution S/RES/2282 (2016)
• For displacement specific principles see Guidance Note on Social Protection in Contexts of Forced Displacement	

Annex 4: Key considerations on ways of working in contexts of conflict

The global literature on social protection in conflict settings (see [References](#)) has highlighted a set of broad and cross-cutting recommendations on 'ways of working' when strengthening social protection in such contexts, with the overarching insight being that **engaging on social protection in such contexts is *always* possible** (Figure 3).

- ✓ **It is not easy work on social protection in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, but it worth it and feasible with persistence of engagement and a focus on both maintaining and strengthening systems.**
 - Do not be discouraged by the widespread misconception that social protection is not the right policy instrument to protect the most vulnerable in such contexts against various risks. Evidence shows that social protection is not only possible but successfully being done.
 - It will take time and likely face several setbacks (e.g. [CAR](#), [Sudan](#)). Persistence of engagement will be crucial, building trust over time with clarity over shared long-term goals (the World Bank similarly refers to this as 'staying engaged').
 - Systems building often offers less immediate gratifications and 'visible' wins than e.g. setting up parallel 'solutions', but is the only way to achieve durable impacts. This is also optimally done in advance of conflict (see also [Table 5](#)).
 - Systems building is also about [maintaining continuity of support](#) and preventing collapse of social protection structures and capacities in case of conflict – with large Value for Money implications.
- ✓ **Where possible, Governments (at an appropriate and feasible level) must lead and coordinate social protection efforts, even amid conflict.**
 - This means setting direction, aligning partners, and safeguarding core principles like equity and inclusion. Active leadership helps sustain systems, reinforce legitimacy, and build trust during crisis and recovery.
 - Ensure that external actors in conflict settings do not work in politically naïve and purely technocratic ways as this will yield disappointing results and may even cause harm. Encourage them to adopt [Thinking and Working Politically](#) approaches and ensure support them in acquiring a deep understanding of local conflict dynamics, including tribal, ethnic, and political divisions.
 - Support actors in overcoming concerns that engaging with state actors (even if with conflict sensitivity) may compromise humanitarian principles or delay response, when in fact 'politically informed impartiality' is vital in situations where both national and international actors may politicise humanitarian assistance. Also help them in removing bottlenecks from the donor side through demonstrating transparency and accountability.
 - Emphasize that co-design is inherently conducive to peacebuilding and crucial for sustainability of investments.
 - In case working with Government at national level remains constrained, propose working with local actors and at localized levels. Local level practices of adaptive management, their deep understanding of their own environments and long-term presence and relationship capital (visavis local gatekeepers, etc.) are crucial to work on conflict (e.g. negotiating and securing 'humanitarian' access and ensuring the safe delivery of assistance).
- ✓ **Understand changes in the context that are relevant to social protection, take stock of how conflict affects operational capacity at the various administrative levels, and determine what needs to be adapted or built.**
 - In the face of changing, increasing and newly emerging vulnerabilities, understanding the impact of conflict on the magnitude, depth, and types of risks faced by the at-risk population through new needs and vulnerability assessments is crucial to inform social protection system adaptation to the new context.
 - Governments must take stock of their capacity to operate in this new context, including the implications of conflict on state capacity to proactively prevent, and/or control/mitigate the repercussions of conflict and deliver social protection.

- In any conflict-affected context, social protection system adaption requires
 - building flexibility and clarity into programming to ensure a) appropriateness to national capacity to deliver; b) potential for rapid accelerations and transitions; c) a focus on those facing the highest vulnerabilities.
 - if not yet in place, establishing mechanisms to detect and respond to emerging threats, such as displacement, violence, policy shifts, or natural disasters, enabling timely adjustments.
 - ensuring routine documentation and learning loops through processes for real-time monitoring, reflection and learning to allow for continuous improvement and adaptive management.
 - continuously generating evidence to inform action and advocacy.
 - sustaining critical civil service staff at national or subnational level to ensure continuity of national social protection programmes and to increase the likelihood of adoption and ownership of programmes implemented by external actors during a potential transition phase.

- ✓ **...while addressing the risk context via conflict analysis, on a continuous basis: not avoiding the risk by favouring one channel (e.g. humanitarian delivery) over another but anticipating and finding ways to address and mitigate the risk and emerging tradeoffs**
 - In fragile and conflict settings there may be increased risks of corruption, diversion and interference requiring more focus on risk analysis and mitigation. But avoid assuming that local actors (states or NGOs) face higher corruption and diversion risks than international actors using parallel systems to provide assistance. The evidence suggests that local and international actors both face corruption risks and that strong risk mitigation can be put in place when using local and national systems.
 - Anticipate and find ways to address the risk - by conducting conflict analysis and routinely monitoring for changes – rather than trying to avoid the risk through favouring one channel, e.g. humanitarian delivery, over another. The analysis should examine the context, causes, actors and dynamics of the conflict as well as the conflict's direct and indirect impacts on the social protection sector, and vice versa. Consider political, social, economic, and security dimensions and ensure that the analysis considers gender, disability, identity, geography and age.
 - Ensure frequent and comprehensive review and assessment of *implementation* risks to:
 - enable swift mitigation actions (e.g. via continuously updated risk register/assessment, traffic-light systems etc e.g. [Ethiopia](#) traffic light assessment and [Sahel](#) insecurity-level-informed implementation adjustments)
 - ensure current and potential recipients and staff are not exposed to any harm, and that support remains accessible, considering factors such as gender, disability, identity, geography, and age.

- ✓ **Even when donor regulations or humanitarian mandates limit direct engagement, strongly encourage external actors to align their approaches and delivery mechanisms to national systems.**
 - Partner implementation models³ and Twin Track approaches can be useful but need to be thought through (and exit/transition strategies pre-planned).
 - These models, if well designed, can ensure access and neutrality alongside alignment with Government systems. They are also a useful solution where donors/Bank cannot channel funds to government, and where state capacities to deliver services (nationally or in particular locations within a country) are constrained (e.g. [Sudan](#), [Sahel](#)).
 - However, it is important that:
 - the pivot to partner implementation is not the default mode, i.e. clear protocols for when to pivot, when/how to pivot back, data sharing etc.
 - partnership frameworks are negotiated ahead of time and integrated into pre-agreed programme designs

³ The World bank calls these Third Party Implementation (TPI) models

- even during partner implementation, capacities of national systems are reinforced and design choices/delivery systems are aligned and coordinated with government needs and capacity (enabling transition)
- transitions from government implementation into and out of partner implementation are planned from the outset, with clear and agreed milestones amongst donors and implementers. This is not an all or nothing decision, as different functions/elements of the system can be transitioned over time, e.g. starting from elements with lower fiscal risk such as communications, outreach, and GRM (including job shadowing), before transitioning responsibility for payments and fund management.
- Wherever possible, supporting service continuity of existing national social protection programmes has greater potential for long-term sustainability than establishing parallel programmes/systems
- In some cases separate humanitarian programmes will be necessary, but design these so they contribute to building and strengthening social protection systems and national disaster management systems.
- ✓ **No matter what, build flexibility and simplicity into programming to ensure a) appropriateness to national capacity to deliver; b) potential for rapid accelerations and transitions; c) a focus on those facing the highest vulnerabilities**
 - The intensity, modality and location of armed conflict changes swiftly, meaning flexible design needs to be built across every element (e.g. geographic and household targeting, information systems, transfer modality, payment channels, etc). The ability to switch activities, locations, approaches (etc.) depending on the intensity of insecurity is a powerful risk management strategy and can also guarantee rapid acceleration of progress when and if opportunities arise (political momentum).
 - Scenario-based contingency planning will help: Standard Operating Procedures for adaptation in case of conflict (not only drought, flood, cyclone as is increasingly the case) (e.g. **Ethiopia's** 'Amber Guidance Note', [Sahel](#)'s implementation adjustments based on different levels of insecurity).
 - Important to be pragmatic and opportunistic. One cannot wait for the politics of the country to be correct, but can reap windows of opportunity to secure government buy-in, revive national programmes or take steps to build resilience against future crises.
 - Simplification of processes/activities will help mitigate risks of failure and delays in delivery under conditions of increased volatility and insecurity - rather than pulling out because of risks that are too high. This also means ensuring delivery processes and systems are aligned with contextual realities i.e. can be run via existing capacities.
- ✓ **Continuously build evidence to drive support for social protection and inform action and advocacy**
 - Invest in evidence generation to build support for social protection. Generating credible evidence can be crucial for overcoming obstacles and building trust with governments, partners and donors, while informing data-driven planning and action. Evidence about how social protection leads to/undermines peace should also be prioritised.
 - Smaller scale initiatives capable of generating evidence on the effectiveness of social protection measures can serve as important starting points to help dispel misconceptions and create momentum for scaling up initiatives. However, pilots can be a double edged sword: can provide proof of concept but if not co-developed with government and aligned with future vision these risk faltering (e.g. **Zimbabwe, CAR**)
- ✓ **Pay heightened attention to accountability principles and put in place appropriate measures and mechanisms**
 - Principles such as Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and Prevention of Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) become even more important as vulnerabilities due to increased power imbalances between providers and recipients and a potential breakdown of trust in institutions become more pronounced.
 - Feedback and complaints mechanisms coupled with intersectoral referral mechanisms can increase AAP and contribute to PSEA. They help to protect transparency, promote trust, and prevent misuse or abuse.

Annex 5: Promising country practices

These examples complement the statements in Section 3, offering short country-specific examples where relevant and possible. These are organized within country Boxes but are designed to be read across relevant dimensions in Section 4, not as coherent ‘case studies’ per se (the hyperlink can be used to navigate up again).

DRC
• Setting Intervention Types, Objectives and Linkages: In DRC the STEP programme adopted a Community Driven Development approach with the dual objective of building and/or rehabilitating community infrastructure and of improving social cohesion among beneficiary communities, while embedding mediation and conflict prevention in design and implementation (via capacity building and sensitization), with the explicit objective of strengthening community relations. • Setting of eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions (‘targeting’): Geographic prioritization of the STEP programme focused on areas with the highest security risks, in the Eastern DRC provinces, of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Orientale. The expansion subsequently followed forced population movements, and beyond when new funding was available. All areas were classified as high risk or low risk. • Outreach and communications: In the context of DRC’s STEP programme, a radio program titled “My Neighbor is My Brother” was produced and aired by local radios, to accompany the broader range of measures. • Complaints and appeals (grievances) and accountability: the grievance mechanism for STEP includes a toll-free number with dedicated staff, suggestion boxes and a GRM office, including a Social Safeguards Specialist, an Environmental Safeguards Specialist, and a GBV Specialist. Source: Fuselli et al (2022);

Central African Republic (CAR)
• Legal and policy frameworks: The transitional period, including a peace agreement signed in 2019, ushered in a period of hope for long-term stability and peace in CAR and provided an opportunity to promote social protection as a contributor to the peace process. Following a stall of its policy-development process, the National Steering Committee for Social Protection led the development of a National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) in collaboration with UN agencies and the World Bank. Social protection was also integrated into the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan 2017-2021 and the UN’s 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). This articulates efforts made to integrate work across the HDP-nexus and between humanitarian cash and social protection coordination mechanisms, and to seek opportunities to transition humanitarian cash programmes into national social protection schemes. • Financing: In 2020, a general reduction in humanitarian aid encouraged humanitarian actors to begin thinking about social protection system building for sustainability in the long run. The development of the NSPP was one of the results of this. • Governance and coordination: In 2020, development partners established the Social Protection Working Group (SPWG), which is now co-chaired by the Government and UNICEF, to lead development of a shared agenda for social protection. In addition to Government and UNICEF, the SPWG also includes the World Bank and UN agencies involved in both social protection and humanitarian cash transfers, although there is a separate Cash Working Group coordinated by WFP, Concern, and OCHA. Source: UNICEF (2025a)

Ethiopia
• M&E: Given heightened fiduciary risks due to conflict, the Government and PSNP donors agreed to establish multiple additional layers of assurances. In 2022 independent third party monitoring (TPM) exercises were

introduced in the conflict affected areas of Amhara and Afar, while regular spot check exercises were expanded and independent TPM exercises were put in place for the IDP support programme, facilitated by UNICEF.

- **Legal and policy frameworks:** In Ethiopia, the 'Amber Guidance Note' acts as a clear manual of operations for conflict-related adaptations at different levels of insecurity for the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). The color amber uses traffic-style early warning systems' categorization of risk, referring to a situation of heightened risk and need for close monitoring.
- **Financing:** The escalation of the conflict during the War in Tigray caused difficulties for donors that were financing the Federal government to implement the PSNP, driven by concerns about the government's ability to adhere to controls and standards and active involvement in the conflict. The PSNP is supported by a number of donors, UN organisations, the World Bank and NGOs.
- **Functional and technical capacity:** The displacement of social workers due to the conflict hampered case management and service linkages of PSNP beneficiaries. In Amhara, the costs of 95 social workers are covered by development partners (in this case UNICEF) to enhance capacities for social service provision.
- **Setting Intervention Types, Objectives and Linkages:** A new PSNP GRM channel – a toll-free hotline – has been rolled out by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). Additionally, measures to deal with emerging risks in areas affected by the War in Tigray and its regional spillovers were introduced. This included developing a GBV code of conduct for all staff aimed at preventing SEA to beneficiaries; implementation of a cascading capacity building training programme to ensure that all staff are aware of this as well as of the routine gender provisions in the PSNP before its resumption; and mapping of GBV and other related social services, for referral GBV cases. Technical support was provided on this by the World Bank.
- **Setting of eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions ('targeting'):** Positive efforts to restart the PSNP in Tigray (i.e. not discriminating against insecure areas), but very little assistance reached people for far too long during the first phases of the conflict.
- **Setting of transfer level, frequency duration:** Conflict has been one factor contributing to rampant inflation in Ethiopia and the real value of the PSNP transfer to households has eroded during the PSNP Phase 5 implementation period. In response, in 2023 the PSNP transfer value was increased by around 34%. However, financial constraints have impeded efforts, with the extent of inflationary pressures so high that the increase was managed through making budget cuts elsewhere in the programme while also reducing transfer duration. A recent evaluation found that spiking inflation has drastically reduced purchasing power for urban PSNP beneficiaries to the extent that it isn't sufficient to cover even basic food needs. On the other hand, the transfer design of Shock Responsive Cash Transfers (SRCT) to IDPs was set based on humanitarian needs, with monthly support around three times the size of the monthly support provided on the PSNP. Tensions were avoided by raising awareness that IDPs are more vulnerable and have greater levels of need.
- **Conditionality:** Insecurity created problems for implementation of public works activities on the PSNP. During the regional spillovers from the War in Tigray, new procedures in the earlier mentioned Amber Guidance Note allowed woredas (districts) to waive the public works attendance requirement on the grounds of safety and security.
- **Payments/delivery:** During the regional spillovers from the War in Tigray, local solutions were found to resume transfers to populations in woredas still occupied. Kebele authorities provided 'authentication letters' to PSNP beneficiaries, who then travelled to reopened payment sites in other neighbouring zones to get their transfers. Research also noted that even with e-payments to bank accounts, challenges with rolling out the 'cash out' step constrained access to payments during conflict: e.g. closed branches, liquidity constraints of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE). Adapted procedure for 'amber' woredas allowed for grouping of monthly payments, which helped. In terms of the IDP SRCT, conflict-related risks were managed by diversifying partnership arrangements, based on a continuous security assessment (in some locations via the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs and some via INGO partners). Bottlenecks in account opening and liquidity were also overcome by negotiating to deploy more CBE staff to the IDP hotspot areas of Tigray, Amhara and Oromia and to enrolment sites.

Sources: Smith (2025e), Caeiro et al (2025)

Lebanon
• Evidence generation: A body of evidence has emerged that provided a shared basis for policy discussion including the Min Ila impact assessment, a review of social safety nets, the social protection sector situation analysis and mapping, and a paper on developing a social protection floor. • Legal and policy frameworks: In 2018, amidst the start of Lebanon's economic collapse, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) developed a two-year roadmap towards endorsement of a National Social Protection Strategy, promoting a highly collaborative approach to build consensus and secure buy-in across all sectors of society. NGOs, think tanks, academics, and activists were engaged, facilitating discussions between civil society and relevant ministries at key stages in the NSPS process including the national dialogues in 2019 and the thematic working groups in 2020, to reach consensus. Technical support was provided by UNICEF. • Financing: the EU's Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syria Crisis (known as the Madad fund), has a specific objective to bridge the nexus with a mixture of quick impact and multi-year programmes, operating in Lebanon (among other countries). • Governance and coordination: To support the initiative, multiple coordination platforms for social protection and cash were merged into one primary coordination mechanism for development partners and donors - the unified Social Protection Coordination Forum (SPCF) - which helped build consensus among different actors. The SPCF is led jointly by UNICEF, the EU, and the World Bank. The SPCF has been essential for policy influencing and forging common approaches to wider system building efforts. • Payments/delivery: Cash transfers for the <i>Min Ila</i> programme, coordinated with the Ministry of Education (MoE) were delivered using a common ATM card, until the collapse of the banking system rendered this unviable. In response, the programme switched the delivery of cash transfers from ATMs to mobile money transfer agencies, ensuring safe and accountable delivery of cash assistance to children and their families. Moreover, the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP) and the Emergency Crisis and Covid-19 Response Social Safety Net (ESSN), assisting Lebanese and Syrian refugees living in poverty, equally benefitted from humanitarian operations and innovation driving improved national systems for payments, monitoring, data management, etc. While main implementers of these programmes are the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (PCM), efforts to strengthen delivery systems were supported by UNICEF and WFP.

Source: UNICEF (2025b)

Palestine
• Evidence generation: In Palestine, despite the highly volatile environment, a number of analytical pieces were produced over the years, which have contributed to moving forward the conversation on shock-responsiveness of the social protection system as well as efforts to better collaborate and coordinate between the Palestinian Authority (PA), social protection and humanitarian actors. In particular, some of the recommendations of the 2021 Social Protection Floor Assessment and the 2022 Assessment of System Readiness were implemented, including in the response to the escalation of conflict in Gaza since October 7th 2023 which combined humanitarian interventions with the simultaneous extension of coverage and comprehensiveness of social protection. For instance, the fact that the authorities allowed humanitarian actors to access social protection registries has been essential for a humanitarian cash response at scale. Based on the humanitarian response, the authorities made important steps forward on adopting digital payments for routine social protection (another recommendation of the Assessment). • M&E: UNICEF has designed M&E systems that are flexible across in-person and remote/digital modalities of data collection. • Financing: The PA has allocated domestic funding for social allowances supporting persons with disabilities and older persons in the West Bank. • Governance and coordination: A new coordination mechanism – the Social Protection-Cash and Voucher Thematic Working Group (SP CVA TW) – was put in place in 2022 to foster closer collaboration

and better alignment between national, development, and humanitarian actors through the a problem-solving and trust-building approach. The SP CVA TWG is co-chaired by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) and OCHA, demonstrating strong national leadership, even amidst conflict. An important result achieved by the SP CVA TWG is that two of the most prominent humanitarian actors which have been delivering cash transfers in Gaza for many years – UNRWA and WFP – have agreed to collaborate with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) to a triple-strand social safety net (3SSN), with the intention of aligning their respective cash interventions in the West Bank to the NCTP under MoSD. The SP CVA TWG is part of the project "Strengthening capacities towards a coherent national social protection system across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus" (UNICEF and ILO).

- **Setting of eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions ('targeting') and setting of transfer level, frequency duration:** one of the ambitions of the SP CVA TW is to better align different social protection and humanitarian cash interventions to each other, so that the overall social assistance landscape becomes less overwhelming for beneficiaries. With a variety of agencies delivering social assistance to different groups of people with different transfer values and eligibility criteria, confusion is unavoidable without good coordination. For instance, UNICEF, UNFP, UNWRA, and WFP, alongside various NGOs, are delivering humanitarian cash in Gaza and the West Bank, while MoSD is delivering its NCTP and other programmes in the West Bank.
- **Functional and technical capacities:** Despite the ongoing emergency in Gaza, and the deteriorating situation in the West Bank, a series of TRANSFORM SRSP trainings with both national-level government and local-level organizations, including representatives of civil society and of the private sector were held, supported by UNICEF. This has laid the groundwork for the development of the Government's West Bank Preparedness Plan.
- **Registration and enrollment:** While new rounds of registration are not always needed or feasible, MoSD decided to undertake this exercise given the likely increase in the number of people in need of support due to the destruction and poverty caused by the escalating conflict after October 7, 2023. The Ministry implemented a reduced intake form to quickly gather data on households impacted. Building on the success of the form during the COVID-19 response, where rapid data collection was essential to supporting households that suddenly needed assistance, the MoSD again adapted the process. The simplified emergency intake form – first on paper and then digitised – contained only essential questions and could be easily completed by registrants, enabling swift identification of households eligible for emergency cash transfers.
- **Payments/delivery:** in the Gaza Strip, digital transfers were adopted among humanitarian actors (in the specific case creating a channel to bypass liquidity issues/lack of hard cash in the market). This experience shifted the national debate on the usage of digital payments for routine and shock-responsive social protection.

Source: ILO (2021); UNICEF (2025); World bank (2025); ILO (2024c/d/e)

Sahel

- **Evidence and learning:** Recent evidence from Sahel's SASPP, based on joint assessments by WFP, UNICEF and the World Bank, discusses how economic inclusion efforts alongside cash transfers in Niger and Burkina Faso boosted trust, inclusive identity and community cooperation, with broadly comparable effects in Mauritania, Mali and Chad. A second publication on 'Understanding the impacts, deconstructing the myths' analyses evidence generated by SASPP to showcase the proven effects of social safety net programs in the Sahel and beyond.
- **M&E:** In the Sahel UN Joint Programme's support to implementation of cash transfers through government systems ('Track 1'), additional measures were introduced to mitigate heightened risks. This included (beyond a grievance hotline): Fiduciary assessments of Government departments along with audit spot checks; Contracting

an independent TPM to check receipt of payments by beneficiaries; A verification survey by phone to a random sample of beneficiaries.

- **Setting Intervention Types, Objectives and Linkages** Across the **Sahel**, unconditional cash transfer components were the most straightforward components to continue in the context of insecurity, in comparison to the accompanying measures and economic inclusion activities. In Burkina, a planned labour-intensive public works programme was later cancelled due to technical challenges and insecurity.
- **Setting of eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions ('targeting')**: Across Sahel countries, a [twin-track approach](#) guaranteed support across both government-controlled and insecure areas. The Governments of several countries worked closely with UNICEF and WFP to develop and implement this approach. It combines a Government-led cash transfers delivered through government programmes and delivery mechanism (Track 1), and humanitarian cash transfers that are aligned to Government systems and implemented in close collaboration with Government (Track 2).
- **Registration and enrolment**: In 2020, the World Bank published regional guidance on adapting SSN operations to insecurity in the Sahel. It aims to provide a framework, key principles, and a repertoire of options to guide country teams in adapting SSN projects to insecurity.
- **Payments/delivery**: In **Burkina Faso** the adoption of mobile money as a payment channel on the SSN helped in the continuation of payments to beneficiaries that were not possible to reach face-to-face due to insecurity, enabling remote, more secret and secure payments as well as portability of benefits. In contrast, continuity of payments was more challenging in **Niger**, where payments were made manually at designated payout points. The most common way to deal with this was to pause payments and provide a backdated block payment to beneficiaries upon their return.
- **Information systems and data**: Strategic coverage of social registry data has been key to policy discussions in Sahel, with [strategic decisions differing widely across countries](#). For example, in **Chad**, the majority of the social registry data comes from refugee hosting and surrounding areas (because of donor funding) while in Burkina Faso secure access has been a pre-requisite for social registry deployment, disadvantaging areas affected by conflict and displacement. Informed decision-making on these topics took place via [in-depth country diagnostics](#) and a strategic regional workshop alongside country practitioners, co-hosted by UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank.

Sources: *Grun et al (2020); Smith (2025c); Sharma and Menke (2024); SASPP (2025)*

Somalia
• Legal and policy frameworks: The entry point for policy reform in Somalia came through the sub-working group (SWG) on social protection, under the Somalia Development and Reconstruction Facility (SDRF). The group (supported by development partners) started from a shared understanding and definitions of poverty, vulnerability, and social protection in the Somali context, formally adopted in late 2015, and accompanied by a five-year road map for the sector, which made 'systems strengthening' a primary policy objective. This laid the foundation for development of the Social Protection Policy in 2019, and subsequently of the Social Protection Policy for Somaliland as well. • Financing: Most development-oriented donors were initially reluctant to support programmes through government systems due to concerns over weak public financial management and programme delivery systems, though the guarantees posed by cooperation with development partners such as World Bank, UNICEF and WFP helped to overcome these. Financing, however, remains fragmented due to differing objectives and donor risk appetites: mainly World Bank for the shock responsive safety net Baxnaano (alongside FCDO), but also EU through SAGAL and NGOs/cash consortia, BMZ/KFW for CSSP child grants, and humanitarian donors for anticipatory action and shock responsive scaleups. • Governance and coordination: As shown above, crucial role of the sub-working group (SWG) on social protection. In Somaliland (based on the principle that where there are localised areas of stability and government capacity within a country it is important to explore opportunities to accelerate development of the social protection system, as long as this does not undermine the coherence of the national system) UNICEF

supported the government to establish a Social Protection Working Group (SPWG) and Social Protection Advisory Committee (SPAC), playing key roles in furthering a Somaliland-specific policy vision, taking full advantage of higher levels of state capacity and building on the progress made in supporting decentralised service delivery models through the UN Joint Programme on Local Governance and Decentralized Service Delivery.

- **Functional and technical capacity:** In Somalia, the Ministry (MOLSA) initially had no staff dedicated to social protection, relying on one consultant senior advisor to the minister. UNICEF directly supported key technical positions within MOLSA and provided equipment and training/skills. This included a [12-week course run by Harvard's Centre for International Development](#). In Somaliland, UNICEF similarly provided funding for key posts including the Director General and ministry focal point responsible for social protection, while supporting government officials to participate in the [TRANSFORM district training](#) and supported the development of social protection modules for the social worker degree curricula. WFP also played a capacity-building role, with MOLSA's Project Implementation Unit shadowing WFP delivery, and State level Labour and Social Affairs departments created through MoUs with WFP, with CSOs as delivery partners.
- **Setting Intervention Types, Objectives and Linkages:** beyond a crucial role for cash transfers such as Baxnaano, school meals programmes also feature in Somalia's 2019 Social Protection Policy. Run by WFP as of 2003, these have evolved over time towards a home-grown school feeding model and are currently being transitioned to government ownership and management, including via inclusion in a National School Feeding Policy (2021) and National Education Sector Strategic Plan (2022-26).
- **Setting of eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions ('targeting'):** different programmes in Somalia are designed to target different at risks groups, though critics stress that divergent visions and approaches to system building – especially on targeting – has led to fragmentation and reduced coherence across key programmes. Baxnaano targets poor households (based on PMT) with children under the age of 5. The CSSP draws from the national policy, which advocates a lifecycle approach (acknowledging that in the Somali context poverty targeting 'will be fraught with difficulty and risk undermining social cohesion'), and targets pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and children in their first 1,000 days of life. SAGAL piloted and tested social transfer models targeting four different vulnerable population groups, especially PLWs. Negatively, across all, there continues to be very limited efforts to reach people in areas held by Al Shabaab.
- **Communications and outreach:** Somalia's Baxnaano social protection program incorporated mobile-based communication strategies, including SMS alerts in multiple local dialects, to ensure beneficiaries received timely and accurate information on cash transfers
- **Payments/delivery:** The expansion of mobile money in SOMALIA has been part of a shift towards remote monitoring and learning in a context where operating risks are high. Digital technologies help agencies overcome the constraints on physical access imposed either by the security situation or by donors in line with anti-terror legislation.
- **Grievance:** Baxnaano's GRM aims at strengthening accountability and identify protection issues, as well as risks of fraud and diversion or other concerns related to the delivery of assistance, with clear referral and escalation pathways for different types of complaints. It includes a toll-free hotline, managed by WFP through a call centre, and additional channels (email and face to face) managed through WFP's implementing partners and field monitors.
- **Information systems and data:** During the phase of development of the Unified Social Registry in Somalia an appropriate federal legislation on data protection was not in place. With support from development partners, a data protection policy has since been adopted by the government.

Sources: Smith (2025d); UNICEF (2025c), Birch, I. (2023a), Sabates Wheeler, Carter and Adan (2025)

South Sudan

- **Financing:** The South Sudan Safety Net and Skills Development Project left a portion of the budget unallocated to allow flexibility in responding to local needs and sudden crises. Given the high volatility, the project kept \$1 million unallocated for physical and price contingencies. This approach enabled the project to adapt to situations like localized conflicts and natural disasters.

Sudan

Analysis refers to design and implementation choices pre-further escalation of tensions in 2023, which showcased the resilience of informal mutual support mechanisms over Ministry-led programmes (Birch et al. 2024).

- **Legal and policy frameworks:** In Sudan, the Ministry of Social Development is in charge of social protection. Following the 2018-2019 Revolution, the ministry started working on Sudan's first social protection strategy. The intervention could be viewed as a conflict-sensitive intervention because it reflected a major shift in direction: the former regime's exploitation of social divisions for political gain would be replaced by a commitment to inclusion and equity, with social protection available to all when they need it during their lives. UNICEF provided technical support during this process.
- **Financing:** After the coup in October 2021, the World Bank and the STARS trust fund suspended development assistance to the Government. By May 2022, US\$100m in the Multi-Donor Fund originally intended for the Sudan Family Support Programme (SFSP), was redirected towards a more conventional humanitarian response through WFP. With regard to the Mother and Child Cash Transfer+ (MCCT+) – which was initially implemented through Government – donor requested that it be directly implemented by UNICEF through service providers rather than one led by the ministry. However, coordination with state-level government entities and partial implementation through frontline workers (social workers, doctors, midwives) continued to set up for a smooth transition back to government upon green light of donors. Both examples demonstrate how donors across the humanitarian and development space could stay engaged financially on a social protection agenda despite political turmoil.
- **Governance and coordination:** The SFSP had as its objective for the transitional Government to build a new social contract with its citizens, aiming to provide 80% of the population with a cash transfer to cushion them against shocks of macro-economic reforms. Before its suspension in 2023, WFP provided support to Government on various operational aspects of the SFSP. WFPs support to the SFSP was provided under a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MoFEP), which situated it directly with the HDP-nexus. Programme design elements were determined by Government in collaboration with the World Bank. In 2025, following the collapse of previous attempts, a new locally driven [Sudan Social Protection Alliance \(SSPA\)](#) aims to address Sudan's urgent social protection challenges and a safe space for setting the agenda for a re-imagined social protection system.
- **Functional and technical capacity:** In Sudan, remuneration to frontline workers has been limited since the outbreak of the current conflict. To ensure continuity of service provision, development partners have paid incentives to frontline workers, which has helped strengthen the social workforce.
- **Setting Intervention Types, Objectives and Linkages:** The MCCT+ offers a combination of regular cash payments, social and behavioural change communication, and complementary support services, in addition to a component to strengthen social protection systems.
- **Setting of eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions ('targeting'):** The MCCT+ programme targets pregnant women and those with children under two (first 1,000 days), with attention given to social cohesion during the targeting process: nationally, Red Sea and Kassala states were selected for the first phase based on their high rates of malnutrition. Within each state, localities were again selected based on data. Within each locality the principle of universality was applied: The process of selecting localities was the most sensitive given inter-group tensions, despite the evidence-based process: this required senior staff in the region with a finely tuned understanding of those dynamics and personal relationships with stakeholders to navigate them successfully.
- **Payments/delivery:** The SFSP's intention was to deliver payments directly to beneficiary bank or mobile money accounts, and where digital payments were not possible, to provide cash through Sudapost or temporary cash-out facilities, with households able to choose their preferred payment method. The introduction of mobile payments would be gradual, and payment systems established by humanitarian agencies could be used in remote areas where the government had less reach, but in close coordination with the SFSP. A study on digital access barriers among displaced populations in White Nile was also conducted, finding low digital literacy, particularly among women, older people, people with disabilities, and non-Arabic speakers, and that 'sizeable minorities', especially among refugees, had no SIM card registered in their name.

Sources: Birch (2023b), Smith (2025a), Birch et al. (2024), Mahgoub et al (2025)

Ukraine
• Legal and policy frameworks: One of the outputs of the PeReHID Initiative was an ‘Overview of the Legal Framework and Legislative Process for Social Policy in Ukraine’ designed to support humanitarian actors in understanding the national legal setup for social protection in Ukraine and implications for humanitarian response. • Coordination and governance: The PeReHID Initiative was a technical collaboration between the Government of Ukraine, represented by the Ministry of Social Policy, the UN (IOM, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP), humanitarian donors (BHA, DG ECHO, FCDO, SDC, SIDA), and national and international NGOs. It served as an information forum for exchange on topics related to shock-responsiveness in social protection and alignment between the humanitarian response and the social protection system in Ukraine. While the operational arm of the Initiative, the Technical Assistance Facility (TAF), existed standalone outside of traditional coordination structures, it filled a critical gap, bringing different stakeholders together and providing evidence-based input to policy discussions. At the same time, the work of the TAF complemented efforts by the Cash Working Group, Clusters, and the ICCG, providing actionable evidence to make the response more social protection-sensitive, be it in targeting, transfer value determination, or in terms of delineating humanitarian and social protection spaces (including at local levels of governance). In that regard, the PeReHID contributed to de-siloisation between and among the humanitarian and development actors, and the Government, building mutual understanding and highlighting the need to engage in joint planning, collective outcome setting, and financing in line with global good practice on implementation of HDP Nexus. • Setting of transfer level, frequency duration: Delivering pensions to rights holders residing in Russian occupied territory (following the 2014 invasion of the Donbass region) required extensive coordination on how to provide transfers to pensioners who were IDPs and approaches to ‘lumping’ payments together to ease access. • Setting of eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions (‘targeting’): Participatory research in Ukraine concluded that overlapping targeting criteria (across sectors) leave key groups of people excluded. • Data, digital and information systems: Ukraine’s Unified Information System of the Social Sphere (UISSS) and its swiftly created and connected eDopomoga platform played an important role in the early phases of the Ukraine humanitarian response, as it supported humanitarian actors to link and/or align humanitarian multipurpose cash (MPC) assistance transfers with national data and systems. <i>Sources: Ground Truth Solutions (2024); Byrnes (2023); NRC (2017); PeReHID Initiative publications</i>

Yemen
• Evidence and learning - Since 2015, UNICEF Yemen Country Office (YCO) has supported the government of Yemen through Ministry of Planning and International Coordination (MoPIC) and in coordination with Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL), to publish a monthly update; namely “the Yemen Socio-Economic Update” (YSEU) as the key national source providing information on the social and economic developments in the country. Also capacity strengthenig to monitor and report on the social economic situation in a way that helps policy and decision makers to in policy and programming for social protection and social services in Yemen’s humanitarian and development context. • M&E was set up with a strong focus on managing fiduciary risk, a concern on all social assistance programmes given the conflict setting. Multiple layers of control include: a) the MIS ‘red flagging’ cases of concern; b) secure storage and use of beneficiary data, including controls for MIS access; c) reconciliation reporting and spotchecks by FSP; d) screening of contractors, including senior management, against sanctions lists; e) contracting private companies as independent Third Party Monitors (TPM); e) real time field monitoring by UNICEF and SFD staff, f) contracting two independent Quality Implementation Support Services (QISS) organisations to conduct investigations of alleged fraud and corruption cases. • Financing: Post conflict, financing was able to resume in 2017 thanks to a Third Party Implementing Agency (TPIA) arrangement, with UNICEF operating as a neutral actor to deliver the ECT independently of government systems. Programmes delivered by Yemen’s quasi-public bodies (such as SFD) were also able to continue receiving funding from the World Bank, with these acting as ‘local implementation agents’ (subcontracted through UNDP).

- **Legal and policy frameworks, governance and coordination:** While creation of a Social Protection Strategy was stalled in 2015 due to conflict, in 2018 UNICEF re-engaged in policy discussions, aiming to develop a strategic guiding vision that both sides of the contested dual system of governance could buy into, and that the international community could also engage with. This involved the establishment of Social Protection Consultative Committees (SPCC), led by the Ministry (MOSAL), in controlled areas across both parties to conflict, providing financial and technical support. Maintaining a collaborative and ongoing dialogue with the legitimate government, including during program suspension, allowed for rapid reengagement when the opportunity arose. The SPCC thus managed to develop a national Social Protection Strategic Framework (SPSF) launched in early 2025, outlining the vision and desired strategic transformations in the field of social protection in Yemen for the period 2025-2030.
- **Functional and technical capacity:** UNICEF and partners also engaged at several levels in terms of maintaining and strengthening State capacity to deliver social protection, despite the ongoing conflict. Key actions included: 1) Working with technical officials (not political appointees) given the instability at the political level of government, and with the Social Fund for Development as a key intermediary. 2) Paying staff ‘incentives’ to support continuation of basic services: given civil service salary payments were suspended in 2016, with public services in key sectors pushed to the verge of collapse. However, despite the attempt to ‘indirectly retain’ SWF frontline staff by hiring them as community facilitators (identified as a key success factor in subsequent reviews), these efforts have not been enough to compensate for sustained loss of funding, meaning national institutions’ capacity has been severely impacted. 3) Establishment of an independent Project Management Unit to manage the emergency programmes, which brought both benefits (independence, adequate capacities, risk management) and drawbacks (costs, opacity for partners and beneficiaries). The agreement with the World Bank required UNICEF to establish this independent, dedicated unit to manage the payments and associated risks. 4) Relying on a strong role for a range of local actors/workforce to ensure success of the overarching Third Party Implementation arrangement (partner implementation): while UNICEF assumed implementation responsibility of programme functions, it relied throughout on national and local organizations to execute these functions. There were important roles played by national private sector service providers, quasi-governmental bodies, SWF’s social workers, who provided the local knowledge of communities and granular information. Local governors and village councils – while outside the project – were key interlocutors with armed groups to ensure access to districts and villages. 5) Reviving and strengthening capacities of core national institutions via a phased transition plan accompanied by a multiyear capacity building plan, based on a prior assessment. UNICEF and SFD have recently begun engaging with SWF staff, who have been shadowing some of the programme components and participating in facilitation, grievance collection, and monitoring. The broader capacity building plan focuses on training and joint planning and implementation, as well as enhancing SWF’s technical capacity for leadership.
- **Setting of eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions** (‘targeting’) for the UCT Project: the pre-conflict SWF beneficiary list was maintained during conflict to reduce chances of friction at the community level, while also ensuring that the government authorities could maintain ownership of the programme after transition. Humanitarian cash transfers (HCT) were used as a complementary mechanism to reach those excluded from the list in the short-term (e.g. the socially marginalised Mohamasheen, and families with children with disabilities). Over time, this approach was being updated to acknowledge conflict-related vulnerabilities (under the Musanadah program).
- **Transfer level, frequency and duration,** under the UCT Project maintaining the fixed benefit level for the post-conflict programmes was seen as necessary because it was codified in the law, and there were concerns that increasing it may have undermined the possibility of transitioning the programme back to government, because of the increased fiscal burden. However, this has meant that the real value of the transfer to households has eroded over time due to inflation, undermining the ability to meet needs. While layering transfers with humanitarian top-ups could have been an option, this has proven complex in Yemen due to reluctance to share beneficiary data. Another problem was the existence of two central banks and a dual currency and dual exchange rate between North and South, with widening gaps between the two exchange rates creating equity issues for cash assistance. UNICEF engaged with the World Bank in 2021 to jointly agree on a new foreign exchange strategy, leading to a reconvergence of benefit values. Under the Musanadah program, the transfer levels were adjusted to 16% of the minimum food basket
- **Outreach; Registration and enrolment:** As targeting remained unchanged post-conflict, there was no new registration and enrolment exercise for the UCT project. However, before payments to households could resume, UNICEF helped verify the identity of named household and clean and update the list (accounting for death, displacement). This problem was addressed through UNICEF’s investment in identity verification mechanisms supported by community outreach and sensitization activities, managed primarily through ‘community facilitators’ alongside community leaders (e.g. confirming legal identity).
- **Payments:** processes were adapted to be more appropriate for the conflict conditions. Whereas pre-crisis cash was delivered manually by the postal service, UNICEF switched to delivery by multiple commercial banks (ensuring optimal geographic coverage). These had internal controls in place to assume the risk involved in

moving and disbursing large volumes of cash. Payment modalities were diversified to include cash in hand, fixed payment sites, mobile teams for remote and nomadic communities and home outreach teams for vulnerable groups) and (since 2023) digital payments where possible (e-payments). Procedures to cater to displacement were also set up via temporary payment sites. Measures to ensure gender sensitivity included segregating payment sites along gender lines, providing female payment agents at distributions, diversifying payment delivery options to include home delivery for the severely disabled and elderly, and mobilising village councils to sensitise vulnerable groups and support them to access payment sites. The restrictions on movements of women made it challenging for FSPs to ensure female agents in all sites.

- **Complaints and appeals** are managed via an automated Grievance and Complaint Handling Mechanism (GRM), comprising a hotline, social media channels and field deployed staff equipped with a mobile app for grievance collection that can be used for reporting alleged fraud and corruption cases.

Sources: UNICEF (2022) *'Strengthening Social Protection Systems in Fragile, Conflict and Violence Settings: Lessons from UNICEF Experience in Yemen'*; STAAR (2025) *Maintaining and strengthening social assistance systems in conflict settings in Yemen*; Alawi Al-Ahmadi and de Silva (2018) *Delivering Social Protection in the Midst of Conflict and Crisis: The Case of Yemen*

Other examples

- **Setting of eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions ('targeting').** Timor-Leste created a veteran pension programme to provide a dividend to those who fought the independence war, thereby containing a volatile group and maintaining political stability. On one side, this has meant it was spending 7 % of its GDP on social assistance, a much higher ratio than the regional average (1.1 percent) and the average for its income group (1.4 percent). However, it also meant it was not targeting the most vulnerable. A new programme, the Bolsa da Mae, was designed to replace it and target pregnant women and children – while guaranteeing social acceptability.
- **Setting of eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions ('targeting').** In Kenya, targeting in HSNP's phase three adds a layer of community-based validation to the PMT, blending different instruments to maximise acceptance. Government officers regard this as key to managing potential conflict at the community level (Birch & Carter, 2023).
- **Complaints and appeals (grievances) and accountability.** In post-conflict Sri Lanka, perceptions of favouritism in beneficiary selection and benefit provision, disrespectful treatment by government officials and ineffective grievance mechanisms contributed to generating a feeling of discontent towards the government (undermining vertical social cohesion).