

Feasibility of achieving resilience

By linking vulnerable populations
receiving humanitarian CVA to
development and social protection

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ACRONYMS

ABC	Area-Based Coordination	NNGOs	National Non-Governmental Organizations
CBOs	Community Based Organizations	oPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
CCY	Cash Consortium of Yemen	PDS	Public Distribution System
CFT	Cash for Training	PMT	Proxy Means Testing
CFW	Cash for Work	PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
CMWG	Cash and Markets Working Group	PwDs	Persons with Disabilities
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019	RRM	Rapid Response Mechanism
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations	SFD	Social Fund for Development
CTV	Cash Transfer Value	SP	Social Protection
CVA	Cash and Voucher Assistance	SPIAC-B	Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board
CWG	Cash Working Group	SSN	Social Safety Net
ECD	Early Childhood Development	SSoIF	Social Solidarity Fund
ECT	Emergency Cash Transfers	SPSF	Social Protection Strategic Framework
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding Nexus	SWF	Social Welfare Fund
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan	ToR	Terms of Reference
IDPs	Internally Displaced Populations	UN	United Nations
ICF	Iraq Cash Forum	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
ILO	International Labour Organization	UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations	UN-OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government	US	United States
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
LYD	Libyan Dinar	UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
MENA	Middle East and North Africa	WFP	World Food Programme
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs		
MoP	Ministry of Planning		
MOSA	Ministry of Social Affairs		
MoT	Ministry of Trade		
MPCA	Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance		
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations		

01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

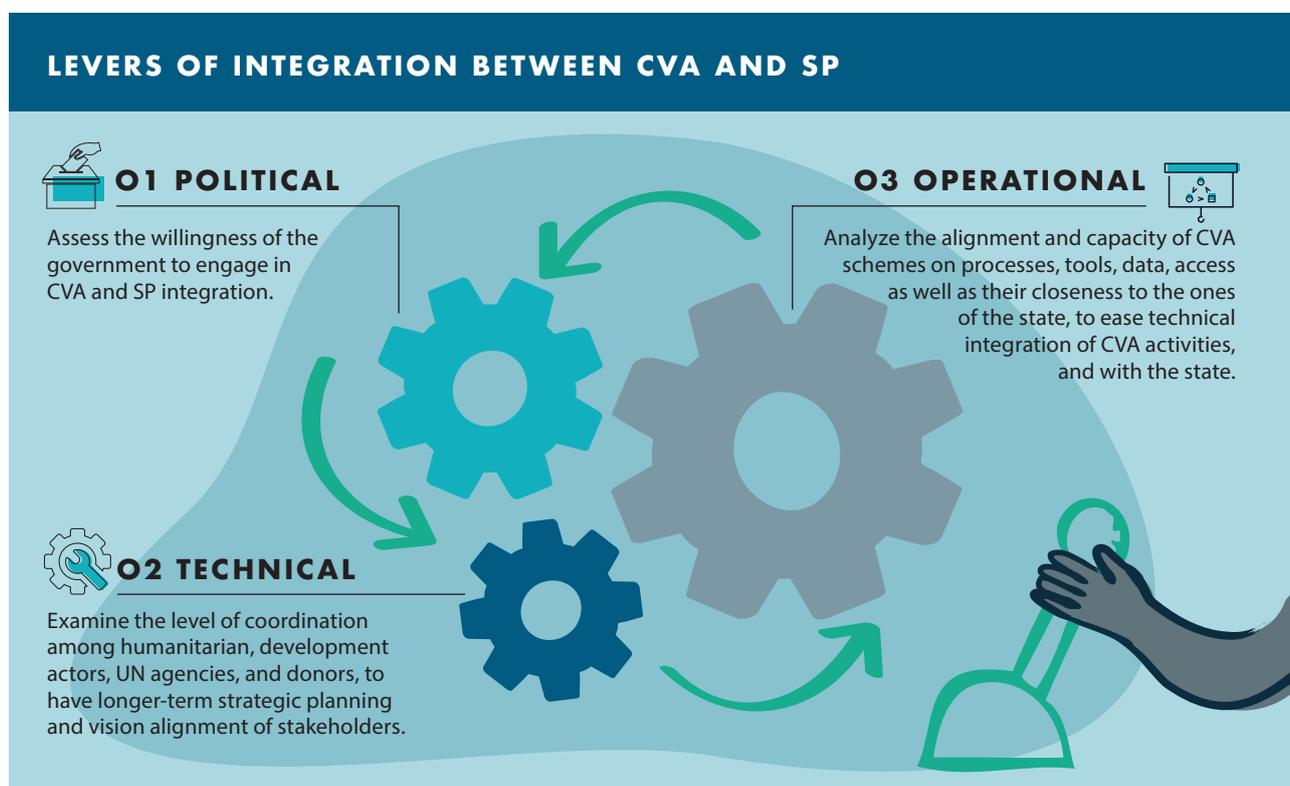


INTRODUCTION

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region faces multiple crises, including armed conflicts, economic instability, and public service breakdowns. These crises have resulted in around 70 million people, including 27 million children, in need of humanitarian aid,¹ with countries like Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, occupied Palestinian Territories (oPT), Lebanon and Türkiye being particularly affected.

There is a pressing need to invest in connecting humanitarian cash and voucher assistance (CVA) with social protection (SP) programmes. CVA in the humanitarian aid sector has experienced growth in tandem with the escalating population demands. This underscores the imperative to establish connections with enduring, sustainable, and integrated strategies that prioritize investment in national capacities.

Following an inception phase and discussion with the MENA Community of Practice (CoP) on linking humanitarian CVA with SP on relevance of countries in the region, this report focuses on Iraq, Libya and Yemen. These countries were selected based on a set of factors, including the humanitarian and political context, operational factors and the state of cooperation and linkages between stakeholders in these countries. A thorough research phase, including primary and secondary data collection, led to the development of key findings and practitioner takeaways aiming to achieve an enhanced integration of humanitarian CVA and state-led social protection. The infographic below is the framework adopted for analyzing and assessing the feasibility of linking and/or harmonizing CVA with SP in these selected countries.



¹ UNICEF. (n.d.). Humanitarian Response | UNICEF Middle East and North Africa. <https://www.unicef.org/mena/humanitarian-response>

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Throughout this study, under the aforementioned framework, we broadly examined Iraq, Libya and Yemen’s political environment, technical aspects of humanitarian assistance and social protection provision, and stakeholder coordination and cooperation. We evaluated the capacities for establishing linkages between humanitarian CVA and state-led social protection through these levers of integration in Iraq, Libya and Yemen.

IRAQ

Significant political and socio-economic challenges have marred Iraq’s recent history. The social protection landscape in Iraq has had to contend with substantial obstacles, primarily stemming from sectarian and ethnic divisions. However, when assessing it against the three levers of the framework employed for this study, it has a more favourable context for improving the social protection system and strengthening its connection with humanitarian CVA than initial context analysis might indicate.

The table below presents a synthesis of some key insights that have been gleaned from key informant interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders across the spectrum of government, donor, development and humanitarian entities operating within Iraq.

SUPPORTING FACTORS FOR LINKAGES	KEY CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING LINKAGES
<p>01 STRONG GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT:</p>  <p>Iraq’s fiscal capacity and commitment to investing in and reforming its SP system, as well as the ongoing engagement between government and other relevant stakeholders sends a positive signal for supporting linkages with humanitarian and development efforts around cash assistance.</p>	<p>01 FRAGMENTATION AND SILOS:</p>  <p>Politicization, fragmentation across ministries, and frequent policy shifts threaten to derail SP efforts. Internal coordination challenges arise from decentralized authority, with various programmes and departments continuing to operate independently.</p>
<p>02 ADVANCED COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION:</p>  <p>Coordination mechanisms have evolved in response to a shifting humanitarian landscape towards development-focused efforts under a UN framework. They involve donor-led coordination, support for CVA and SP research, and collaboration among all stakeholders. Such endeavours include the development of a unified registry for recipients and the digitization of social protection operations.</p>	<p>02 TRANSITIONAL HURDLES: (from humanitarian to development-oriented response)</p>  <p>Deactivation of humanitarian clusters has revealed challenges around effective transition, unclear roles, and insufficient government capacity. NGOs also face difficulties transitioning from humanitarian to government-led systems without adequate planning. There are coordination gaps between lower and higher levels of policy and governance.</p>
<p>03 HARMONIZED HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE:</p>  <p>Humanitarian efforts have evolved to encompass a broader approach, encouraging collaboration between NGOs and supporting localization. Harmonized assessment tools and standardized processes have been developed among cash actors.</p>	<p>03 OPERATIONAL INEFFICIENCIES AND TRUST DEFICITS:</p>  <p>Challenges persist regarding full interoperability and data sharing protocols along with differences in recipient targeting criteria between humanitarian and government programmes. A trust deficit among potential recipients in government SP schemes prevails, with security related and community acceptance issues.</p>

LIBYA

Libya's intricate socio-political situation, compounded by ongoing humanitarian crises, presents a relevant landscape for both government-led social protection initiatives and non-governmental humanitarian interventions. Considering the scarcity of humanitarian CVA in the country, the avenues for connecting these resources to the SP system are limited, but opportunities still exist.

The table below presents a synthesis of some key insights that have been gleaned from key informant interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders across the spectrum of government, donor, development and humanitarian entities operating within Libya.

SUPPORTING FACTORS FOR LINKAGES	KEY CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING LINKAGES
<p>01 GROWING GOVERNMENT INTEREST:</p>  <p>There is a strong interest in expanding SP coverage to various population segments. Proposed reforms aim to improve coverage, target specific groups, and establish a social registry for better programme coordination and efficiency. Libya is also exploring regularization processes for foreign workers.</p>	<p>01 FRAGMENTED AND CONSTRAINED BY BUDGET:</p>  <p>Fragmentation leads to inefficiencies and duplication, with overlapping mandates among government entities and a lack of a unified strategy or policy to organize the sector, all compounded by the existence of two parallel governments within Libya. The State faces budget constraints that have also resulted in the suspension of several cash assistance programmes.²</p>
<p>02 DEVELOPMENT RESPONSE FRAMEWORK FOCUSING ON MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS:</p>  <p>The shift from humanitarian to developmental approaches has also been formalized through the UN-led Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. It combines two collective outcomes focusing on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Migration Management, providing guidance for UN and international/local partner collaboration in these critical areas. It also aids in transitioning from a humanitarian to a development-oriented response amid diminishing humanitarian needs.</p>	<p>02 UNFAVOURABLE OPERATING CLIMATE FOR INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ENTITIES:</p>  <p>NGOs are sometimes perceived as foreign agents working against state interests and the public, thus hampering direct engagement with the government, and affecting collaboration. They also encounter operational obstacles, such as delays in renewing international staff visas and difficulties accessing the Libyan financial system, hindering international financial transactions, local bank account establishment, and cash withdrawals on account of liquidity challenges.³ Furthermore, their reliance on donors and development partners for coordination may also impact the efficiency of developing linkages.</p>
<p>03 COMMITTED INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE FOR REFORMING SP:</p>  <p>International organizations are actively involved in improving Libya's SP system. They are assisting the government in enhancing database accuracy for vulnerable populations and are working on harmonizing processes and tools while also offering support on targeting models and information management systems.</p>	<p>03 UNDERDEVELOPED AND INCONGRUENT HUMANITARIAN AND SP SYSTEMS:</p>  <p>The lack of a consolidated recipient database, weak monitoring and evaluation frameworks, limited process and impact evaluations, coupled with non-computerized databases and a lack of interoperability, hinder data sharing and coordination efforts within the humanitarian community.⁴ Beyond that, disparities in access to SP are evident, especially for migrants, followed by IDPs and refugees.</p>

² REACH. (2022, March). Blueprint Initiative: Social Protection Systems for Children in Libya Report – 2022. https://repository.impact-initiatives.org/document/reach/044fd14f/LBY2106_Blueprint-Initiative_Overall-Findings-Report.pdf

³ USAID. (2023, April). Libya Assistance Overview – Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. <https://reliefweb.int/report/libya/usaidbha-libya-assistance-overview-april-2023>

⁴ Retrieved from Interviews with Key Informants

YEMEN

Yemen’s complex yet disjointed political terrain compounded by the adverse consequences of the ongoing conflict, has placed a large burden on social protection systems. State-led social protection has all but disappeared, leaving humanitarian CVA programmes to address substantial needs in the country. Still, amid this challenging environment, opportunities for improved coordination and long-term linkage planning emerge.

The table below presents a synthesis of some key insights that have been gleaned from key informant interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders across the spectrum of government, donor, development and humanitarian entities operating within Libya.

SUPPORTING FACTORS FOR LINKAGES	KEY CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING LINKAGES
<p>01 RELATIVELY FUNCTIONAL SP SYSTEM DESPITE UNCERTAIN GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT:</p>  <p>Despite variable government willingness to pursue longer-term solutions, state institutions such as the SFD have become even more crucial given their reliability for cooperation, institutional neutrality, and capacity to work with humanitarian and SP actors.</p>	<p>01 POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION AND CONTINUING CRISIS:</p>  <p>There are no comprehensive national approaches to address integration of humanitarian CVA to the SP system, while some government institutions are only able to function with donor funding. Given the political stalemate between the north and the south, there appears to be little room for developing a consistent reform approach.</p>
<p>02 THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY’S INCREASING FOCUS ON SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS:</p>  <p>There is growing donor recognition on the importance of transitioning from short-term humanitarian CVA to longer-term SP mechanisms. The CMWG has also initiated discussions with SP actors to explore potential collaboration avenues.</p>	<p>02 INEFFECTIVE COORDINATION BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN, DEVELOPMENT AND DONOR ENTITIES:</p>  <p>Coordination between humanitarian and development programmes faces significant hurdles. Donor coordination is challenging due to resource constraints and a lack of structured coordination, despite a recognition of the importance of developing linkages. Active collaboration with the recognized government also remains minimal.</p>
<p>03 EXPANDING AND HARMONIZING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE:</p>  <p>Humanitarian actors are adopting a single recipient management system with harmonized tools and transfer values for Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA). Additionally, they are exploring the transition from emergency cash assistance to cash plus programming; integrating cash interventions with livelihood support and income generation activities through a graduation approach.</p>	<p>03 UNDERDEVELOPED SP SYSTEM:</p>  <p>Outdated recipient lists, political sensitivities, and difficulties in updating the lists hamper the effectiveness of SP programmes. The absence of a single registry and lack of civic documentation also compounds SP programmes’ ineffectiveness.⁵ A structured and formal collaboration between humanitarian actors and the government also appears to be lacking, thus further impeding efforts to harmonize the two systems.</p>

5 REACH. (2022, March). Blueprint Initiative: Social Protection Systems for Children in Libya Report – 2022. https://repository.impact-initiatives.org/document/reach/044fd14f/LBY2106_Blueprint-Initiative_Overall-Findings-Report.pdf

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To facilitate effective linkages, it is imperative to customize strategies according to the unique conditions of each country. Concurrently, it is also important to identify common, and attainable opportunities that can be leveraged across different contexts. These opportunities should address the supporting factors and address the challenges associated with each of the levers of integration needed to achieve the linkages between CVA and SP systems in the selected countries. These opportunities, alternatively referred to as pathways, are presented below.



O1 POLITICAL

Depending on the state's existing regulatory frameworks and willingness to develop linkages with humanitarian caseloads, the following can be proposed:

EARLY GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT:

In case of government openness to developing linkages, the transition from humanitarian to government-led initiatives should prioritize early, collaborative, and coordinated engagement with the government.

ADVOCACY EFFORTS:

Government resistance to linking humanitarian CVA with SP should be addressed through advocacy efforts and aligning with local and international entities capable of exerting the required influence on government.

CAPACITY BUILDING:

If government buy-in is pending, then investing in building the capacity of state authorities along with identifying strategic sectors to engage with ministries may be desirable. These can serve as possible entry points for a more extensive cooperation.



O2 TECHNICAL

To pave the way towards more aligned processes, tools, and related technicalities, the following can be suggested:

DATA SHARING MECHANISMS:

Harmonized assessment tools used by humanitarian organizations could be leveraged to prevent duplication. Data sharing through protocols is vital for effective coordination, while also aligning data protection and privacy standards remains essential.

DIGITALIZATION:

Prioritize areas for digitalization aligned with the government's interests. Digital solutions can improve data management, coordination, and most importantly, lead to accountability in the system.

CIVIL DOCUMENTATION:

Further invest in helping vulnerable individuals obtain identification documents, which are essential for protecting their rights while also enabling them to access social protection programmes.



O3 OPERATIONAL

Coordination between the various groups of stakeholders can benefit from longer-term strategic planning and vision alignment, through the following:

COMMON LANGUAGES:

Simplifying different stakeholder terminologies to find common ground and to promote meaningful coordination between all relevant actors, including the humanitarian development community, CSOs, and UN agencies.

SHARED PROGRAMMING & INTEGRATION:

Key steps can be prioritized, including expanding coverage and developing comprehensive systems that include multiple non-state actors, to enhance the overall effectiveness and efficiency of social protection programmes.

ENGAGING DONORS & INFLUENTIAL ACTORS:

Depending on the context, engaging and securing buy-in of specific influential actors (specific CSOs) or donors that possess the capacity to drive discussions and enforce implementation.

02

INTRODUCTION



CONTEXT & OBJECTIVES

THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA) REGION

IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING IN LINKAGES BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN CVA AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The MENA region faces several crises, including armed conflicts, displacements, refugee crises, economic instabilities, social pressures, and breakdown of public services. Natural disasters and disease outbreaks, especially the recent COVID-19 pandemic, worsen the situation. As per UNICEF, approximately 70 million people, including 27 million children, are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance in the region.⁶ Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, oPT, and Lebanon are among the countries in need of significant aid. Humanitarian assistance has been ongoing for several years in these countries.⁷

Furthermore, cash and voucher usage for humanitarian aid has significantly increased, with a volume of US\$5.3 billion in 2021, a 3.7% increase from 2020. Over the past six years, this volume has been consistently rising, increasing by 62% since 2017.⁸ However, despite efforts to improve efficiency and effectiveness, the gap between humanitarian needs and available funding continues to widen. To address this, investments in resilience, sustainable livelihoods, and Humanitarian Development and Peace Nexus programming are crucial, considering the escalating needs due to climate change, economic decline, and ongoing political unrest in the region.⁹ The international community recognizes the need for new approaches that adopt sustainable and integrated strategies, investing in national capacity, systems, and ownership to address the recurring and interconnected nature of these crises. In terms of governance arrangements, SP is often characterized as the responsibility of the state and geared towards enhancing state capabilities. However, the distinction between state-led initiatives and other actors can sometimes be unclear, notably in conflict-affected areas, where ongoing assistance may be lacking due to insecurity, financial constraints, operational limitations, population movements, absence of social registries and limited political support. Consequently, humanitarian NGOs may step in to provide services that are typically part of regular development programmes.¹⁰ Humanitarian CVA frequently plays a role in addressing persistent vulnerabilities when SP systems are insufficient, overwhelmed, or exclude certain communities. However, the greater the effectiveness of a domestically managed SP system in addressing various shocks, the lower the reliance on additional humanitarian aid.¹¹ To conclude, despite the growing use of humanitarian CVA, driven by their flexibility and effectiveness, the gap between needs and available resources continues to widen in this crisis and conflict-ridden region. This necessitates a shift towards more sustainable and integrated approaches, and investment in national capacities, where it is feasible.¹²

OBJECTIVES OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

The CALP Network, through its regional Community of Practice for Linking CVA with social protection, aims to explore the potential for linkages between humanitarian CVA and social protection programmes. The primary objective of this research is to examine the viability of shifting humanitarian caseloads,

⁶ Humanitarian Response | UNICEF Middle East and North Africa. (n.d.). <https://www.unicef.org/mena/humanitarian-response>

⁷ UN OCHA. (2022). Middle East and North Africa | Global Humanitarian Overview. <http://gho-2022-site.docksal.site/appeals/middle-east-and-north-africa>

⁸ Development Initiatives. (2022). Global Humanitarian Assistance Report. https://devinit.org/documents/1221/GHA2022_Digital_v8_IdH118g.pdf

⁹ UN OCHA. (30/11/2022). Middle East and North Africa | Humanitarian Action. <https://humanitarianaction.info/article/middle-east-and-north-africa-0>

¹⁰ The CALP Network. (2023). Glossary of Terms. <https://www.calpnetwork.org/resources/glossary-of-terms/>

¹¹ Longhurst, D., Harvey, P., Sabetes-Wheeler, R., and Slater, R. (2020). Linking Social Protection and Humanitarian Cash and Voucher Assistance. CALP. <https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/high-level-briefing-paper-cva-en.pdf>

¹² The Cash Learning Partnership. (2020). Linking Social Protection and Humanitarian Cash and Voucher Assistance. Humanitarian Outcomes. <https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/high-level-briefing-paper-cva-en.pdf>

(refugees, internally displaced persons, and other vulnerable populations) from relying on humanitarian CVA to integrating them into state SP programmes or systems (depending on how developed it is), as part of finding durable solutions to displacement. It will be focusing on three countries in the MENA region. Additionally, the study aims to evaluate the impact of such linkages on the resilience of these populations. The research assignment will address the following specific objectives:

- I **Conduct a feasibility assessment to determine the potential for transitioning humanitarian caseloads to social protection systems and establishing connections between humanitarian CVA recipients and SP systems.**
- II **Provide practical recommendations, for policymakers and stakeholders, to overcome challenges, gaps and enabling factors hindering the implementation of linkages between CVA recipients and SP systems.**
- III **Draw on learning from similar contexts where linkages between CVA recipients and SP systems have been successful and assess how they have contributed to increasing recipients' resilience.**

METHODOLOGY

This section first provides a brief overview of the two core terminologies around which this project is centred: cash and voucher assistance (CVA) and social protection (SP). An overview of the report structure and a note on the intended audience follows. This section concludes with an explanation of the feasibility study process and approach to country selection and data analysis.

Before providing an overview of the two primary terms around which this study revolves, it is important to understand why linking CVA and SP is desirable, particularly in the context of the MENA region. It is already well established that the often-protracted nature of conflicts in the MENA region is a contributing factor in the perpetuation of a continuous cycle of vulnerability. For the achievement of sustainable development and durable solutions within this crisis-afflicted region, a more cohesive and comprehensive approach is required to adequately address people's vulnerabilities and build their resilience to deal with future crises.

Simultaneously addressing immediate needs and investing in longer-term solutions to systemic causes of conflict and vulnerability, such as poverty, inequality, and accountability gaps, increases the chances of mitigating the impact of cyclical shocks.¹³ Considering the relatively short-term nature of humanitarian assistance, it becomes even more important for humanitarian and development actors to collaborate, coordinate, and optimize resources to affect systemic changes within local social protection systems while also continuing to deliver essential assistance to those in need. That way, once the cycle of emergency humanitarian assistance draws to a close, the state is reasonably well-equipped to take on the responsibility of ensuring that its people, especially those that are most vulnerable, are provided the required assistance that can aid in their survival.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This report does not claim to offer a comprehensive exploration of all facets related to the feasibility of integrating humanitarian cash and voucher assistance (CVA) with social protection (SP) in the MENA region.

A critical limitation of this study lies in the scope of data collection, which primarily relied on 15 key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted in the focus countries: Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. Scheduling challenges meant that

13 OXFAM. (2019, June). The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: What does it mean for multi-mandated organizations? [Discussion Paper]. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-what-does-it-mean-multi-mandated-organizations>

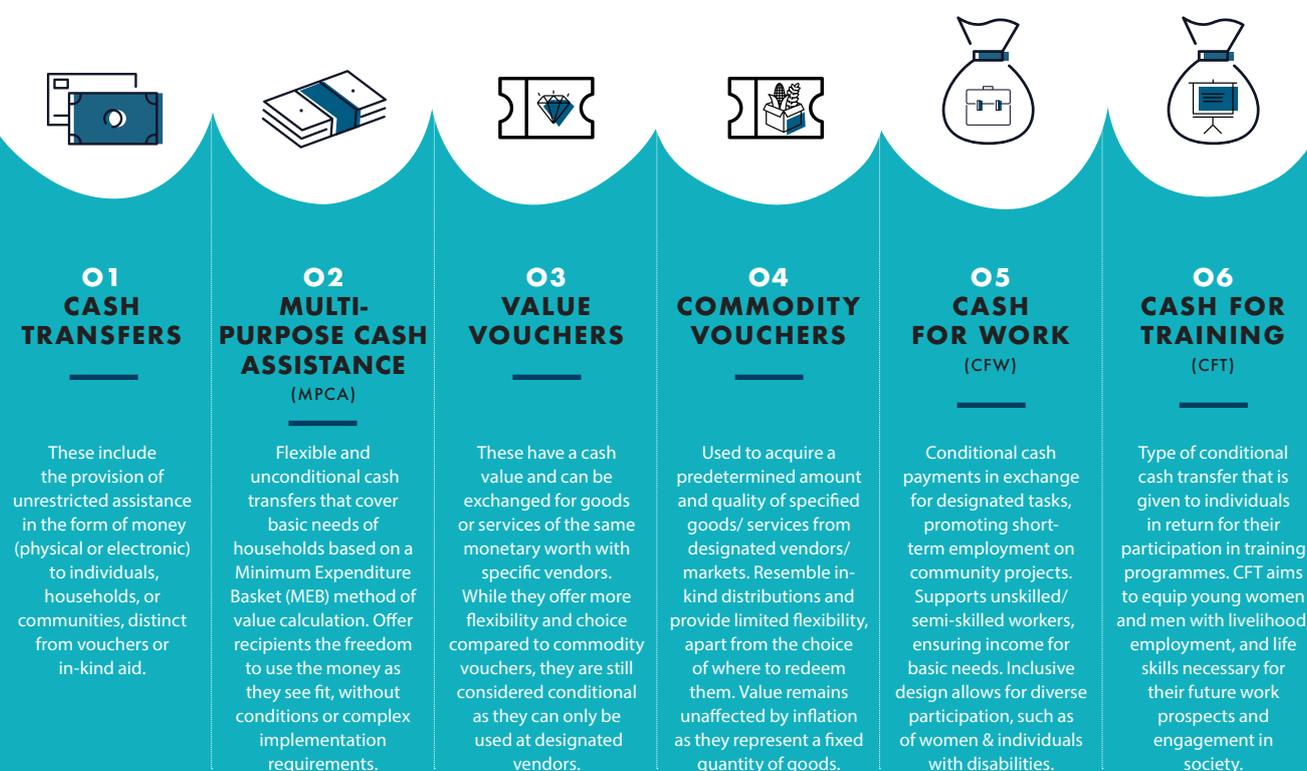
follow-up conversations/interviews with key informants could not be pursued. Furthermore, the study team collected no other primary data due to the limited scope of the Terms of Reference (ToR) for this feasibility study. Consequently, the analysis and recommendations are predominantly drawn from this limited sample of key informant interviews, supplemented by existing secondary literature on humanitarian CVA and SP in these countries.

The insights and recommendations do not claim to represent the entirety of humanitarian, development, and state social protection stakeholders in the three countries. Instead, the primary objective of this report is to stimulate discourse among local, national, and international stakeholders by offering an overview of the opportunities and existing challenges in linking CVA to SP in Iraq, Yemen, and Libya.

DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS

CASH AND VOUCHER ASSISTANCE (CVA)

CVA denotes the direct provision of monetary transfers and/or vouchers for the procurement of goods or services to individuals, households, or group/communities. In the context of humanitarian response, CVA excludes disbursements to governmental entities or other state actors, remittances, service provider stipends, microfinance, and alternative forms of savings and loans.¹⁴ CVA is to be viewed as the broader umbrella term encapsulating a variety of forms and modalities of cash and voucher assistance. These forms are given in the infographic below.^{15,16}



¹⁴ The CALP Network. (2023). Glossary of Terms. <https://www.calpnetwork.org/resources/glossary-of-terms/>

¹⁵ Balmer, L., Alam, S. M. A., and Koirala, B. (2021). Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) Programming: A Step-by-Step Guideline. Plan International. https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/ninja-forms/2/GLO_CVA-Guidelines_May-2021_ENG.pdf

¹⁶ The CALP Network. (2023). Glossary of Terms. <https://www.calpnetwork.org/resources/glossary-of-terms/>

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection (SP) is deeply rooted in the social contract between citizens and the state. In this context, it refers to the implicit agreement between individuals and their governments, wherein citizens yield certain rights and freedoms in exchange for various services and protections. Social protection is a vital component of this agreement, signifying the state’s commitment to safeguarding the well-being of its citizens. It encompasses a range of policies and programmes designed to provide economic security, healthcare, education, and other essential services to individuals and families. The concept aligns with the broader human rights framework, emphasizing the state’s responsibility to create an environment where citizens can lead dignified lives with access to the necessary support systems. It furthermore aims to increase people’s resilience to shocks throughout their lifecycle, through measures focused on improving labour markets, minimizing people’s exposure to risks, and empowering individuals to safeguard themselves against income disruptions and hazards.

In line with the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B)’s definition, an effective social protection ecosystem views social protection programming from a life cycle perspective.¹⁷ It encompasses the various stages of an individual’s life, including early childhood, adolescence, working age, and older adulthood. It focuses on risk identification and mitigation associated with each stage of a person’s lifecycle by implementing strategies, systems, programmes, and instruments within the framework of social protection. The primary objective is to alleviate risks, vulnerability, poverty, exclusion, discrimination, and food insecurity while also being cognizant of vulnerable groups’ particular needs, namely those suffering from chronic malnutrition and illnesses, children, women, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly. Social protection can take many forms, and the primary forms are listed in the infographic provided below.¹⁸

01 SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

This is a system where the government provides financial support to people who are unable to support themselves, such as the elderly, the disabled, and families with children.

SOCIAL INSURANCE 02

This is a system where people contribute to a fund during their working lives, and then receive benefits when they are unable to work, such as due to retirement, disability, or unemployment.

04 LABOUR MARKET PROGRAMMES

These programmes help people to find jobs, improve their skills, and start their own businesses.

SOCIAL SERVICES 03

These programmes provide support to people in need, such as childcare, healthcare, and housing assistance.



¹⁷ SPIAC-B. (n.d.). “Collaboration for Policy Coherence and Development Impact.” New York: Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board. <https://www.socialprotection.org/discover/publications/collaborating-policy-coherence-and-development-impact>.

¹⁸ Asian Development Bank. (2001). Social Protection. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/32100/social-protection.pdf>

REPORT STRUCTURE AND INTENDED AUDIENCE

The central purpose of this report is to furnish the audience with a comprehensive understanding of the current state of humanitarian CVA and social protection within specific countries in the MENA region. It seeks to clarify the prevailing opportunities and challenges associated with establishing a symbiotic relationship between these two modalities of assistance provision. Consequently, the report's structure is tailored to offer concise insights into the existing landscape, delineate potential entry points for advancing linkages, and identify the barriers that inhibit progress in the integration of CVA into SP systems.

This report's primary audience comprises individuals who are already actively engaged with humanitarian CVA or SP systems and possess an advanced comprehension of these domains of work. It is not a theoretical exploration of the diverse terminology and methodologies associated to these, nor is it a comprehensive overview of the components comprising state and how these two schemes operate to deliver aid and support to vulnerable populations.

Therefore, each country section of this report is divided into three parts: (i) a brief overview of the status of CVA and SP within the country context; (ii) feasibility analysis of linking humanitarian CVA with the SP system in the country; and (iii) brief recommendations on the way forward for the relevant stakeholders.

THE STUDY PROCESS

COUNTRY SELECTION

This study focuses on three case study countries in the MENA region. To provide a sound rationale for selecting some countries in the region over others, criteria for selection were developed. In the absence of a universally agreed classification of the countries that constitute the MENA region,¹⁹ the research team opted to only consider those countries in which the CALP Network is actively engaged, i.e. Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria, Türkiye and Yemen. However, after consultation with the CALP Network's team, Egypt and Syria were excluded from further consideration. Syria's exclusion was based on the assessment that the conditions for integrating CVA with the SP system were not feasible in the short- to medium-term, largely due to the ongoing conflict in the country. Egypt, on the other hand, was excluded due to the limited scale of cash programming and of the CALP Network's involvement with the Egypt Cash Working Group (CWG), as well as the nature of cash coordination before the Sudan crisis (in contrast



¹⁹ United Nations. (2020, July). Social Protection Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis in the MENA/Arab States Region. Country responses and policy considerations Regional UN Issue-Based Coalition on Social Protection (IBC-SP). https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/MENA-COVID19-brief-FINAL_v2.pdf

to the other countries under consideration). For the remaining seven countries, a framework for selection was devised that consisted of three factors: (i) **humanitarian and political**, (ii) **operational factors** and (iii) **cooperation and linkage**. Under each factor, several sub-factors were assessed, and a comprehensive review of each country was subsequently conducted under this framework.

Based on a thorough review of each country under consideration against this selection framework, three countries were selected: **Iraq, Libya** and **Yemen**. A thorough desk review revealed that these three countries did not share many similarities between each other according to the aforementioned factors within the framework. Each country represented a relatively different set of challenges and opportunities for the potential linkage of CVA with SP systems. However, they did share similarities with other countries in the region. In focusing on these countries, this report aims to produce learning relevant across different contexts and crisis situations within the MENA region.

DATA COLLECTION

The study is qualitative, primarily relying on structured key informant interviews (KIIs). These interviews were conducted with representatives from various entities, including government bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations operating within the intersecting domains of social protection, sustainable development, and humanitarian assistance activities in the countries of Iraq, Libya, and Yemen.

The interviews were designed to extract insights and information from respondents across a spectrum of thematic areas. These areas included:

- **State policies and governance mechanisms** in place within each respective state to address social protection and humanitarian concerns.
- **Coordination mechanisms and modalities** within the government, among humanitarian and development actors, and between the government and the broader humanitarian development community.
- **Information management:** How data related to social protection and humanitarian efforts is managed, covering topics such as social registries, database management, unique identifiers, and data sharing practices.
- **Eligibility and targeting criteria** used to determine eligibility and targeting recipients, including the evaluation of vulnerability, and targeting methodologies.
- **Delivery mechanisms** employed for delivering assistance, including transfer modalities, complementarities with existing programmes, and the provision of digital financial services.
- **Financing gaps** and resource requirements for effective implementation.
- **Government and humanitarian stakeholder buy-in** for integration efforts.

In total, 15 key informant interviews were conducted across the three countries. These interviews served as a valuable means of gathering qualitative data and insights to inform the feasibility study.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The insights derived from the KIIs were subjected to a rigorous analysis using an analysis framework derived from the thematic areas identified in the interviews. This analysis framework has been expounded upon in greater detail in the following section and has served as the bedrock for the development of sections on individual countries in this report.

ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

When considering the possibility of linking humanitarian cash and voucher assistance (CVA) with a state's social protection (SP) system, there are various components and aspects that need to be accounted for and addressed. Considering the insights that emerged from data collection, it was important to develop a framework that would not only accurately categorize the various aspects that came up but would also allow for enough flexibility so as not to diminish the significance of any individual component relevant to the linking of humanitarian CVA to a state's SP system. The framework categorizes these aspects into three pillars, which can also be referred to as 'levers of integration'. If these levers are moved in a positive direction, then they have the potential to positively advance efforts toward integrating humanitarian CVA with a state's SP system. Even though each pillar or lever can progress independently, their synergy is also crucial for achieving the best outcomes and progress towards the expected result.

LEVERS OF INTEGRATION



01 POLITICAL

FUNCTION

Assessing state/ government readiness and capacity for CVA-SP integration

KEY INDICATORS

Budget and Fiscal Capacity:

Assessing the fiscal capacity of the state to undertake efforts towards the development and capacity enhancement of its social protection systems

Policy Involvement: Understanding government policies and frameworks that regulate its social protection ecosystem and set the rules of engagement between the state and non-governmental and international stakeholders

Positive Signaling: Monitoring and assessing state communications and messaging signaling a commitment to social protection reform and collaboration with relevant stakeholders

Referral Management:

Understanding the intent and extent of participation by the government in managing referrals to and from other relevant actors



02 TECHNICAL

FUNCTION

Evaluating alignment and capacity of CVA processes and tools to facilitate technical integration of CVA to SP

KEY INDICATORS

Data Cooperation: Assessing the existing state of cooperation between CVA actors and state SP systems regarding data sharing

Common Processes and Tools:

Evaluating the similarity of processes and tools between humanitarian/ development actors and the state

Digital Inclusion: Examining the digital readiness of CVA and SP systems, processes and tools as well as their level of inclusion and accessibility

Barriers to Integration: Identifying any barriers that make it technically impractical to integrate CVA activities with state SP systems



03 OPERATIONAL

FUNCTION

Analyzing coordination between stakeholders on long-term strategic vision & planning

KEY INDICATORS

Existence of Consortiums:

Evaluating the presence of large consortiums and working groups focused on cash programming and exploring linkages with SP systems

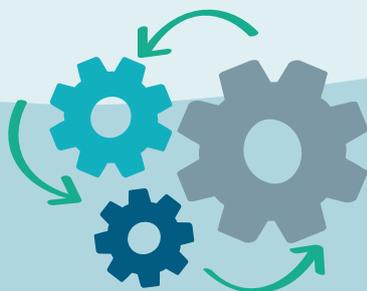
Functional Platforms:

Assessing the functionality of discussion platforms that bring together various stakeholders, including from the humanitarian, development and donor communities as well as the government

Strategic Alignment: Determining whether stakeholders across the spectrum appear to be expressing shared interests in promoting linkages between humanitarian CVA and SP systems

Common Roadmap:

Investigating the existence of a roadmap that includes all stakeholders and presents a holistic approach towards achieving integration outcomes



03

IRAQ



COUNTRY CONTEXT

POLITICAL & SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Profound challenges in both political and socio-economic spheres have marked Iraq's recent history. Since 2013, the nation has grappled with political strife, armed conflicts, and the emergence of ISIS. These multifaceted issues have had severe consequences, particularly for the Iraqi population, resulting in a significant internal displacement crisis. Iraq has recently begun a process of recovery and stabilization from the internal armed conflict that had resulted in a massive internally displaced peoples (IDP) crisis, in addition to a protracted refugee crisis that was born out of the conflict in neighbouring Syria. The strained relationship between the federal government and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) further complicates matters, with disputes arising over issues such as oil resources, territorial boundaries, sovereignty, and budget allocation.²⁰

Strides have been made in reconstructing and rehabilitating areas once under ISIS control,²¹ the humanitarian situation remains daunting. In 2022, the Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) aimed to provide assistance to 991,000 vulnerable individuals. Remarkably, humanitarian partners exceeded these targets, ultimately aiding 180,000 in-camp IDPs, 605,000 out-of-camp IDPs, and 736,000 returnees by year-end.²² This underscores the immense scale and complexity of the humanitarian crisis in Iraq, necessitating continuous efforts and resources to address it comprehensively.²³

SOCIAL PROTECTION CONTEXT

STATE-LED SOCIAL PROTECTION

Iraq's social protection landscape faces substantial challenges, primarily stemming from its volatile political structure characterized by enduring ethnic divisions. However, periods of relative peace have afforded opportunities for capacity-building in social protection services. At the federal level, efforts have been made to provide civil documentation for children both within and outside IDP camps.²⁴ This initiative seeks to reduce the vulnerability of IDP families by ensuring proper identification and access to essential services. Additionally, Iraq has introduced a National Strategy on Early Childhood Development (ECD) and a Refugee Education Integration Policy in the KRI, reflecting efforts to improve education and support for vulnerable populations. Moreover, inter-ministerial coordination groups have been established to facilitate emergency Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) interventions, supported by UNICEF.

Three key ministries govern Iraq's large social safety net (SSN) system: the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), the Ministry of Trade (MoT), and the Ministry of Planning (MoP).

- **MoLSA oversees the contributory pension programme and the non-contributory social assistance schemes (social assistance or social welfare).**
- **The MoT administers the Public Distribution System (PDS), a form of in-kind food assistance.**
- **The MoP collaborates with other ministries in managing information for the PDS and SSN non-contributory programmes, as well as determining Iraq's national poverty line.²⁵**

²⁰ Stockholm International Peace research Institute. (2023, March 17). Iraq in 2023: Challenges and Prospects for Peace and Human Security | SIPRI. <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2023/iraq-2023-challenges-and-prospects-peace-and-human-security>

²¹ UN OCHA. (2022, March). Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan. Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-humanitarian-response-plan-2022-march-2022>

²² UN OCHA. (2023, February 27). Iraq Humanitarian Transition Overview 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-humanitarian-transition-overview-2023-february-2023-enarku>

²³ UN OCHA. (n.d.). Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2022 | Humanitarian Action. <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1083>

²⁴ UN OCHA. (2023, February 27). Iraq Humanitarian Transition Overview 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-humanitarian-transition-overview-2023-february-2023-enarku>

²⁵ Savage, E., and Labs, M. (2021). Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection in Iraq—The CALP Network. CALP Case Study. <https://www.calpnetwork.org/publication/humanitarian-cash-and-social-protection-in-iraq/>

In 2006, Iraq formalized endeavours to alleviate poverty, reaching a milestone with the initiation of the Ministry of Planning's inaugural Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) in 2010. This strategic shift redirected social welfare expenditures from extensive government subsidies for consumption to an augmented investment in human productivity and targeted transfers to impoverished populations. The subsequent PRS, spanning 2018–2022, focused on fostering sustainable income opportunities, empowerment, human capital development, and the establishment of a robust SSN for Iraq.²⁶ Recognizing the distinct needs arising from post-conflict conditions, particularly concerning IDPs and returnees, the strategy aligned with the vision articulated in the Iraq Social Protection Strategic Roadmap 2015–19. This MoLSA-crafted roadmap, published in November 2014 with support from the World Bank, underscored the government's commitment to developing a comprehensive, integrated, and efficient social protection system encompassing safety nets, social insurance, and labour market policies. Another pivotal step was taken in 2014 with the enactment of the Social Protection Law of Iraq (11/2014), introducing reforms such as the use of proxy means testing (PMT) for social assistance eligibility and allocating resources for an expanded cadre of social workers to enhance frontline case management services.²⁷

In line with this poverty reduction strategy, UNICEF, ILO, and WFP have also initiated a Joint Programme with the MoLSA, MoT and MoP that is aimed at expediting social protection reform within Iraq. This programme, spanning 2021–2025, entails drafting Iraq's social protection strategy, executing a reform roadmap, launching, and expanding child-centric and employment-oriented social protection schemes, and establishing a comprehensive national registry anchored by the PDS.²⁸ These same entities, with European Union backing, have also initiated a similar reform programme for the KRI's social protection ecosystem.²⁹

The two major non-contributory programmes of Iraq's SSN are:

Public Distribution System (PDS): This is a significant state-run food distribution programme that has been operational for nearly three decades. MoT-administered, the PDS provides essential commodities such as wheat flour, rice, vegetable oil, and sugar on a per-person ration basis, with an estimated 96% national coverage. Serving as a key form of family identification, the PDS card has been a crucial entitlement in Iraq, remaining largely unchanged despite conflicts and economic challenges. While contributing to a lower poverty rate and positively impacting life satisfaction among the poor, the PDS is quite resource-intensive, absorbing a substantial portion of government spending on social protection, an estimated 1.4% of GDP.³⁰ Reform efforts have focused on the Information Management System, with WFP collaborating with the government on a pilot project to digitize the PDS system. However, reforming the PDS has generally proven challenging, primarily due to the intricate political dynamics surrounding the programme.³¹

Social Safety Net (SSN): This is a non-contributory programme designed to aid vulnerable groups meeting specific criteria, traditionally activated during crises, disasters, or wars. Targeted populations include widows, orphans, the disabled and/or chronically ill, married students, and the elderly. The SSN contributes to enhancing income-earning abilities and human capital accumulation, ultimately mitigating poverty. Currently covering 1.5 million Iraqi households, the MoLSA-initiated programme in 2004, received support from USAID in 2004 and later from the World Bank in 2007. Using PMT targeting methodology based on consumption indicators, eligible households below the poverty line receive monthly payments. Prior to 2015, when registration closed due to budget constraints and economic crises, enrolment in SSN

26 The World Bank, Mercy Corps, and CLCI. (2021). From Alignment to Integration—Lessons from Iraq on Linking MPCA and Social Protection Programming. <https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/Iraq-MPCA-SSN-Integration-Report-5.pdf>

27 Ibid.

28 UNICEF. (2021, September). The Government of Iraq, UNICEF, WFP and ILO partner to reform social protection with support from the European Union. <https://www.unicef.org/iraq/press-releases/government-iraq-unicef-wfp-and-ilo-partner-reform-social-protection-support-european>

29 Basnews. (2022, March). With Support from EU, UNICEF, WFP, ILO Partner with the KRG to Reform Social Protection. <https://www.basnews.com/en/babat/742934>

30 Action contre la Faim. (2023, April). Accessing Social protection in Iraq – Mapping of Programs and Analysis of Barriers. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/accessing-social-protection-iraq-mapping-programs-and-analysis-barriers-april-2023>

31 Savage, E., and Labs, M. (2021). Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection in Iraq—The CALP Network. CALP Case Study. <https://www.calpnetwork.org/publication/humanitarian-cash-and-social-protection-in-iraq/>

programmes could be done through digital or paper-based registration. Efforts are underway, led by UN agencies like UNICEF and WFP in collaboration with government entities, to improve the Information Management System and establish a unified registry system. This system aims to streamline connections among ministries implementing social protection programmes, simplifying documentation for enrolment. However, the outcomes and benefits of this reform programme, developed with UN partners, are yet to be fully realized.³²

The **KRI** operates under a separate social protection legal framework than the Government of Iraq, though most of the programmes are quite similar.

The Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) administers its SSN programme, which stands as the primary non-contributory social protection initiative in the KRI. Before the financial crisis of 2014, the programme had a broader scope, targeting various persons with disabilities (PwDs) and nine vulnerable groups in impoverished households, including older persons, patients over 75 years, widows, separated wives, orphans, families of prisoners with sentences exceeding one-year, divorced women, married students, and girls without parents aged 18 and above. However, the **regional government's social protection activities relied on budget transfers from the Government of Iraq**. Due to irregular and insufficient funding, the programme was curtailed during the 2015 crisis and has since been limited to covering only PwDs.³³

The MoT at the Government of Iraq level oversees the implementation of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in the KRI as well, aligning with the national programme. While the PDS is designed to be universal, concerns have arisen regarding its extensive coverage, prompting discussions among the government and stakeholders. The Government of Iraq is therefore actively pursuing targeting reforms for the PDS, focusing on the most vulnerable and food-insecure households to rationalize benefits. Ongoing discussions are centred on reviewing and redesigning the targeting mechanism to ensure the programme's effectiveness in addressing the needs of the most at-risk populations.³⁴

In 2016, the KRG formulated its Social Protection Strategic Framework (SPSF) as part of Vision 2020, serving as a guide for overhauling the social protection system in the KRI. The strategy identified three primary pillars: social safety nets, pensions and social insurance, and labour market programmes, strategically addressing pressing challenges. These challenges encompassed a small private sector and a growing public sector, leading to substantial public spending on wages and transfers and posing a risk of further expansion. The strategy also tackled issues such as the increasing female labour participation rate, a surge in educated unemployed individuals, particularly among women, and the inefficiency of social assistance spending (with only 11% of the poorest receiving cash transfers despite a 1.3% allocation of non-oil GDP to such transfers at the time). Furthermore, high spending on pensions was noted, even though these schemes did not cover a significant portion of the labour force and a considerable percentage of individuals above 65 lacked pension-related income.

In 2019, UNDP introduced a blueprint for an updated Social Safety Net (SSN) under the 2019 Social Protection Strategic Framework (SPSF), titled 'Policy and Technical Guidelines for a Regulatory Framework'. Developed in collaboration with the KRG's MoLSA, these guidelines proposed a systematic process for designing and implementing a pilot cash transfer programme in 2020. The plan emphasizes poverty-sensitive vulnerability criteria, ongoing household reassessment, and broader reforms in the Social Assistance Law. The targeting system mirrored the CWG's PMT approach. This planned pilot, intended to inform the final revised Social Assistance Law, has faced delays due to the COVID-19 crisis.³⁵

32 Action contre la Faim. (2023, April). Accessing Social Protection in Iraq – Mapping of Programs and Analysis of Barriers. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/accessing-social-protection-iraq-mapping-programs-and-analysis-barriers-april-2023>

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Savage, E., and Labs, M. (2021). Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection in Iraq—The CALP Network. CALP Case Study. <https://www.calpnetwork.org/publication/humanitarian-cash-and-social-protection-in-iraq/>

NON-STATE CVA

In Iraq, CVA strategies are tailored to meet the specific needs of different recipient groups, particularly IDPs and Syrian refugees, with a special focus on the KRI. This customized approach recognizes the unique circumstances and requirements of these vulnerable populations.

MPCA has been integral to the humanitarian response in Iraq, proving successful in aiding vulnerable populations with immediate needs. Over recent years, the CWG members collaborated to standardize the MPCA approach, ensuring efficiency and consistency across humanitarian organizations. In late 2021, the CWG organized a workshop to redefine the MPCA's strategic and operational components, aligning it with longer-term solutions. In 2023, as the humanitarian coordination response was deactivated, existing programmes were adapted to the new transitional context, focusing on durable solutions and development. Although MPCA is now a smaller component, it remains relevant for specific population groups, geographical locations, and integration with other programming for sustainable solutions. The updated guidelines by the Iraq Cash Forum (ICF), formerly the Cash Working Group (CWG), emphasize flexibility to accommodate different approaches, allowing seamless integration of MPCA across diverse contexts.³⁶

The ICF's primary aim is to enhance the quality and efficiency of CVA within the framework of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The ICF actively coordinates the MPCA adjustment, initially formulated by the CWG, to the evolving context. This coordination encompasses various aspects, primarily the development of strategic and operational guidance, provision of technical support, assistance in tool development, integration of pertinent cross-cutting topics, and identification of gaps, along with facilitating referrals as needed.³⁷ The ICF, in this sustainable development phase, will be focusing on three strategic areas: (i) durable solutions, with a special engagement with the livelihoods technical sub-group; (ii) the use of CVA for climate change affected population; and (iii) social protection, with a focus on linkages with MoLSA, alignment with existing SP schemes and shock-responsive social protection.³⁸ In 2023, despite a diminishing funding landscape in Iraq, a comprehensive array of CVA initiatives has been strategically planned. This aligns with the historical scale of CVA programming and leverages the collective experience of humanitarian and development partners in Iraq. Drawing insights from sectoral working groups, activity info reports, and durable solutions reporting, the mapped CVA activities encompass diverse sectors, including business grants, livelihoods grants, cash-for-work initiatives, cash and market-based activities, Cash+, cash for education, emergency cash provisions for food in camps, cash for protection, cash for health, and cash for shelter.³⁹ At the close of the humanitarian response for the year 2022, 12 humanitarian partners were able to reach 52,000 people (out of a total target of 135,000 people) and provide them with MPCA.⁴⁰



³⁶ Iraq Cash Forum. (2023, April). Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance 2023 – Considerations and Recommendations Guidance Note: Iraq. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-cash-forum-multi-purpose-cash-assistance-2023-considerations-and-recommendations-guidance-note-april-2023>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ UN OCHA. (2023, February). Iraq Humanitarian Transition Overview 2023. (February 2023) [EN/AR/KU] - Iraq | ReliefWeb <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-humanitarian-transition-overview-2023-february-2023-enarku>

³⁹ Iraq Cash Forum. (2023, May). Mapping of Sectoral CVA Interventions – Iraq. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-cash-forum-mapping-sectoral-cva-interventions-iraq-may-2023>

⁴⁰ UN OCHA. (2023, February). Iraq Humanitarian Transition Overview 2023. Iraq Humanitarian Transition Overview 2023 (February 2023) [EN/AR/KU] - Iraq | ReliefWeb <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-humanitarian-transition-overview-2023-february-2023-enarku>

LEVERS OF INTEGRATING HUMANITARIAN CVA TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

POLITICAL

The newly inaugurated Iraqi government, led by Mohammad Shia al-Sudani since late 2022, has demonstrated a heightened commitment to reforming its social protection framework compared to its predecessor. Notably, there is a newfound willingness within this government to collaborate with humanitarian and development partners, particularly concerning support provision for the more complex cases, including, in particular, IDPs, people lacking civil documentation and refugees.⁴¹ This collaborative approach extends to lower government levels. However, the pace of reform is slow due to the transitional phase post-conclusion of the 2022 humanitarian response plan, which has necessitated an adjustment period.

At present, the government is still in the nascent stages of charting its course, and clarity in procedural frameworks is a work in progress. The allocation of responsibilities across ministries and directorates remains in the developmental phase. Nevertheless, there is a recurring pattern of openness to dialogue and a willingness to listen to external perspectives. Despite the evolving dynamics, Iraq's social protection system remains vulnerable to external shocks. Consequently, there exists a compelling need to recalibrate the nature of support that humanitarian entities extend to the state, and align on capacity-building objectives, enhancing the state's resilience and responsiveness to shocks and strengthening the social protection infrastructure.

Budget and fiscal capacity: Iraq is perceived as possessing fiscal latitude and a proclivity to allocate its resources towards the augmentation of its social protection framework.

- This conclusion is partly based on the country's classification as an upper middle-income country⁴², mostly driven by its oil-based income sources. Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge the inherent volatility associated with oil-based revenues.
- The government is undertaking initiatives, including public expenditure reviews and fiscal space analyses, with the intent to ensure the durability and sustainability of financial support for its social protection sector.
- Such efforts will further assist in fortifying the nation's social protection system from future shocks.

Policy involvement and engagement: There is definitive willingness from the new Iraqi government to reform its social protection system, signalling a positive direction for transformative change.

- To address issues related to the limited coverage of the SSN, a new social security law has also received support from the international actors within the humanitarian development community. This law aims to expand coverage for all workers and introduce additional benefits, including unemployment and maternity benefits, thereby enhancing the social safety net in Iraq.

⁴¹ As reported by a key informant

⁴² USAID. (n.d.). IDEA. <https://idea.usaid.gov/cd/iraq/economy>

⁴³ UNHCR. (2022, September). Iraq Factsheet.

https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/unhcr-iraq-factsheet-september-2022?gclid=Cj0KCQjwhL6pBhDjARIsAGx8D58SBGK-mldk9-3irt2i9uLeiowzZCHsCee9yrBI5pLW-wSmVq2_dIQaAhj-EALw_wcB

- **With respect to the KRG, while overall efforts towards improving and reforming its social protection architecture are also underway, more needs to be done to support the predominantly Syrian refugee population (nearly 260,000 Syrian refugees) residing within the KRI.**⁴³
 - The gradual withdrawal of humanitarian agencies has significantly impacted refugees in the KRI, leading to worsening conditions in camps. Diminished support has resulted in reduced food rations, limited healthcare access, and challenges in education. The Refugee Education Integration Policy has been a positive step as it has striven to integrate Syrian refugee children into the local education system. However, economic instability prevails among Syrian refugees, with many earning below the minimum wage and facing challenges in securing formal employment. Legal restrictions on employment opportunities have forced refugees into the informal sector, exposing them to exploitative conditions.⁴⁴
- **Engagement between government and other actors is ongoing, albeit in its early stages. The government is receptive to discussions and deliberations on the path forward, however, in this post-humanitarian assistance transitional phase, the government as well as other actors and entities, do appear to require time to come to terms with the new climate.**
- **There is a need for leadership within the transitional phase that can keep all stakeholders, including the government, engaged as well as devise an inclusive roadmap that allocates responsibilities and roles to all relevant stakeholders with the primary aim of advancing the entire the social protection system.**

Referral management: The current government is demonstrating a greater commitment to assisting complex cases, a shift that may not have been as evident in past administrations.⁴⁵

- **Government initiatives involve the coordinated transfer of humanitarian responsibilities to the SSN through collaborative efforts with humanitarian and development organizations.**
- **The MoLSA has launched initiatives with the objective of incorporating IDPs, PwDs, people in rural settlements and other vulnerable groups into the SSN and resolving civil documentation challenges.**⁴⁶
- **Nonetheless, persistent challenges include concerns related to awareness, operational efficiency, and adequately meeting recipient needs.**
 - For instance, recent data obtained from community members in areas with ongoing humanitarian interventions indicated a prevailing sentiment regarding the government’s social support. Key informants were specifically queried about the adequacy and consistency of such support. The findings underscored a general perception of inadequacy, with most respondents deeming the support insufficient. A prevailing concern voiced in most interviews pertained to the assistance falling short of meeting basic needs, particularly for individuals with disabilities. Issues related to the PDS were also raised, encompassing challenges such as insufficient ration baskets, concerns about item quality, and accessibility issues attributed to distance and associated costs.⁴⁷
 - As a key informant pointed out, a significant challenge lies in the lack of awareness among potential recipients about available assistance programmes. This lack of information constitutes the initial hurdle. Compounding the issue is the necessity for recipients to allocate resources for their registration with the SSN. Even when individuals manage to register, there is a risk of delays in receiving assistance, given the government’s scrutiny of their documents.

⁴⁴ Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). (2023, October). “We are just trying to give our children a future”: Self-reliance for Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/we-are-just-trying-give-our-children-future-self-reliance-syrian-refugees-kurdistan-region-iraq-enar>

⁴⁵ Reiterated by several key informants from the protection consortium of Iraq

⁴⁶ UNHCR. (2023, August 24). The Inclusion of Internally Displaced People in Iraq’s Social Safety Net—From short-term humanitarian cash assistance to durable social protection.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/unhcr-iraq-inclusion-internally-displaced-people-iraqs-social-safety-net-short-term-humanitarian-cash-assistance-durable-social-protection-august-2023-enar>

⁴⁷ Action contre la Faim. (2023, April). Accessing Social Protection in Iraq – Mapping of Programs and Analysis of Barriers.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/accessing-social-protection-iraq-mapping-programs-and-analysis-barriers-april-2023>

Recognizing this, several humanitarian initiatives have been undertaken to enhance awareness and knowledge among recipients, encouraging their use of government services. While some progress has been made, there are still obstacles, including crowded directorates and uncertainties about the registration process.

Positive signalling: The new Iraqi government has exhibited a renewed commitment to engage and advance the social protection agenda, marking a notable departure from previous administrations, which had limited involvement in this domain.

- It is noteworthy that none of the interviews with key informants revealed any explicit difficulties or impediments in accessing government and state departments. Additionally, there were no indications of reluctance to engage in cooperation and collaboration efforts.
- However, the absence of a comprehensive roadmap and an inclusive overarching vision that guides all stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, has resulted in a sluggish progress.
- There remains a discernible lack of clarity regarding roles, responsibilities, and operational strategies, which continues to impede the realization of a more cohesive and efficient social protection framework.

TECHNICAL

In Iraq, the current status of its social protection system reveals a need for substantial improvements to enable effective engagement with humanitarian assistance recipients and ensure long-term, shock-responsive support. Issues encompass database interoperability challenges within ministries, resulting in inefficient data management and coordination gaps. However, this does signal an opportunity for humanitarian and development partners to invest resources in assisting the government to build the technical capacity of its SP system. Noteworthy initiatives are already underway to address these shortcomings. UNICEF, ILO, and WFP, with EU funding are collaborating with government ministries to establish a Joint Programme (referred to as the EU-UN Joint Programme) with a multi-year strategy (2021–2025).⁴⁸ This programme aims to develop Iraq's social protection framework, implement reforms, expand child-focused and employment-related social protection schemes, and create a unified national registry. As part of this programme, a social protection coordination committee has also been established to facilitate exchanges between government and humanitarian/ development actors. Additionally, efforts are directed toward digitizing the PDS for improved data management and the establishment of a single registry for eligible individuals.

The sustained humanitarian assistance in Iraq and the lessons and learning that it entailed for humanitarian actors can also serve to benefit the country in this transitional phase. Despite challenges related to humanitarian database unification, there have been efforts to minimize duplication and inclusion/exclusion errors through data sharing protocols and coordination mechanisms. While not without flaws, these efforts have contributed to functional coordination and harmonized assessments in humanitarian operations. Thus, within this reconstruction phase, the humanitarian community can play a significant role in building the state's capacity in a way that fosters sustainable, equitable, and durable interlinkages between humanitarian cash assistance and social protection programming.

⁴⁸ UNICEF. (2021, September). The Government of Iraq, UNICEF, WFP and ILO partner to reform social protection with support from the European Union. <https://www.unicef.org/iraq/press-releases/government-iraq-unicef-wfp-and-ilo-partner-reform-social-protection-support-european>

Data cooperation: In humanitarian response, individual agencies autonomously manage their recipient databases, thereby potentially engendering duplication of efforts.

- Achieving full interoperability and comprehensive data sharing remains a challenge in humanitarian cash assistance programming, despite measures such as harmonized assessment tools and selection processes employing a PMT targeting model, and data sharing protocols to avert replication.
- The reduction in emergency humanitarian financing and the formal conclusion of Iraq’s humanitarian response plan creates an opportunity for humanitarian organizations still active in Iraq to transition their recipient caseloads through active engagement with the government and development partners that are currently working on the reformation of the social protection sector in Iraq.
- Coordinated efforts are already underway to establish a unified registry for the PDS and digitally transform social protection operations in Iraq.

Common processes and tools: The CWG (now ICF)’s extensive work has successfully led the development of several standardized processes and tools, fostering greater coordination among individual cash actors in Iraq, despite persisting challenges of data interoperability and duplication.

- Humanitarian activities in Iraq are currently shifting from MPCA to sectoral cash assistance, aligning efforts with more development-oriented approaches, emphasizing sectoral activities such as cash for health, cash for education, livelihoods grants, etc.⁴⁹
- Humanitarian efforts are evolving from solely targeting displaced and conflict-affected populations to a broader approach, considering social and economic vulnerability in recipient selection.
- However, despite the Government of Iraq’s efforts to align with humanitarian counterparts in adopting a PMT model, persistent challenges exist. The online registration system for the SSN has experienced limited openings, with only two instances and subsequent closure since June 2016 due to fiscal constraints. Consequently, a substantial waiting list, comprising approximately 340,000 individuals, is pending for verification and enrolment by the MoP.⁵⁰ This underscores the need for sustained efforts to overcome barriers and expand the reach of social protection initiatives in Iraq.
- To align with the transitional context and the integration of cash assistance with SP, the ICF in its 2023 technical guidance note has recommended harmonizing the value of MPCA with the existing MoLSA-administered cash-based social assistance programme. Accordingly, MPCA transfer values for regular responses in 2023 have been calculated based on the MoLSA Social Assistance parameters, using the male head of household (HoHH) and female HoHH for a family of 4 and above, resulting in an average value of 300,000 IQD (i.e. US\$230).⁵¹ This strategic alignment is a welcome development, as this step hopes to ensure cohesion between humanitarian and governmental cash assistance efforts, optimizing their collective impact.
- An important step towards developing linkages would involve both humanitarian actors and government counterparts engaging actively in revising these discrepancies and creating platforms for technical discussions on how best to transition caseloads onto the social protection system.

⁴⁹ Finding from KII.

⁵⁰ The World Bank, Mercy Corps, and CLCI. (2021). From Alignment to Integration—Lessons from Iraq on Linking MPCA and Social Protection Programming. <https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/Iraq-MPCA-SSN-Integration-Report-5.pdf>

⁵¹ NORCAP. (2023, February 8). Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket, Minimum Expenditure Basket, Gap Analysis and Transfer Values for Cash Programming—Technical Guidance Note, Iraq 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/survival-minimum-expenditure-basket-minimum-expenditure-basket-gap-analysis-and-transfer-values-cash-programming-technical-guidance-note-iraq-2023>

- Since Iraq is formally within the transition phase, it is also important to effectively utilize the new coordination and discussion platforms to advance these technical discussions, particularly the Durable Solutions Technical Working Group (DSTWG). The DSTWG is now serving as the primary technical and operational platform for advancing durable solutions in Iraq, facilitating collaboration among UN, INGO, and NNGO actors involved in humanitarian, development, stabilization, recovery, and peacebuilding efforts, ensuring close connections with the government, existing entities, and the priority working groups of the UNSDCF.⁵²

OPERATIONAL

Digital inclusion: Several challenges persist, particularly when it comes to the state's social protection regime.

- **Beneficiary lists for both the PDS and the SSN have not been updated in years and neither has the underlying infrastructure of data management been fully digitalized. This does lend itself to significant inclusion and exclusion errors as many that are deserving are perhaps continuing to be overlooked and many that are not deserving of assistance are getting more than they require. This is due predominantly to the fact that the existing recipient lists of MoLSA have not been updated since 2015 and new enrolments have also been suspended since this time.⁵³ Several key informants also echoed this concern during data collection.**
- **Consequently, this lack of database digitization also impedes advancements on harmonizing databases even across government ministries.**
- **Reform efforts are underway, but they will take time and will also require sustained political support. In the near term, these challenges are a significant impediment to any tangible advancements on the linking of humanitarian CVA with Iraq's SP system.**
- **On a positive note, digital payment mechanisms are widespread, even in rural areas, making it easier to manage finances and implement cash assistance programmes. Furthermore, humanitarian actors are experienced in providing assistance to recipients through financial service providers in Iraq. This experience can also be potentially leveraged to open conversations with government counterparts in developing efficiencies and accountability within the social protection system.**

Continuing **barriers to access** include a trust deficit in government social protection schemes, partly stemming from suspended enrolments in the recipient database and perceptions of bias regarding the selection criteria.

- **Some recipients are hesitant to enrol in the state system due to these trust issues, and the government's lengthy verification process that can cause delays in monthly stipend disbursements.**
 - According to findings from a recent study, community members identified several barriers associated with a trust deficit in accessing social protection. These barriers encompass nepotism and administrative favouritism, a lack of transparency in recipient targeting, concerns about the accuracy of the inclusion / exclusion system, biases towards specific population groups, language barriers, and insufficient registration support for PwDs, the elderly, and those who are illiterate.⁵⁴

⁵² UN OCHA. (2023, February). Iraq Humanitarian Transition Overview 2023. Iraq Humanitarian Transition Overview 2023 (February 2023) [EN/AR/KU] - Iraq | ReliefWeb
<https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-humanitarian-transition-overview-2023-february-2023-enarku>

⁵³ Action contre la Faim. (2023, April). Accessing Social Protection in Iraq – Mapping of Programs and Analysis of Barriers.
<https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/accessing-social-protection-iraq-mapping-programs-and-analysis-barriers-april-2023>

⁵⁴ Action contre la Faim. (2023, April). Accessing Social Protection in Iraq – Mapping of Programs and Analysis of Barriers.
<https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/accessing-social-protection-iraq-mapping-programs-and-analysis-barriers-april-2023>

- This is particularly relevant for the complex cases in Iraq, mainly refugees and IDPs, who are currently being assisted by humanitarian partners in obtaining their civil documentation so that they can be enrolled within Iraq's SSN.
- There is a need for streamlined processes and trust-building measures as a critical first step towards developing deeper linkages between CVA and SP in Iraq.

Coordination efforts in Iraq, following the deactivation of humanitarian clusters, appear fragmented and lacking comprehensive leadership, according to some key informants interviewed for this study. While donors and development partners are expected to lead coordination efforts, concerns about inclusivity persist, especially among humanitarian actors. The deactivation of clusters and of the Cash and Livelihoods Consortium of Iraq (CLCI) in 2022, theoretically meant transitioning to a sustainable development framework, however the process lacked adequate planning, resulting in role allocation challenges. This highlights the need for improved coordination between humanitarian and development initiatives and for platforms that facilitate collaboration across both sectors. Ongoing efforts to enhance coordination, especially in the absence of humanitarian clusters, face practicality and efficacy issues.

Iraq's government has initiated committees like the Social Protection Sectoral Coordination Committee to align ministries, humanitarian groups, and development entities. Their objectives encompass easing the transition from humanitarian assistance to development-oriented programming. However, these committees have faced difficulties and held very limited meetings, thus compounding a sense of confusion among partners. NGOs have struggled with the transition due to the absence of robust planning. Competing donor priorities, potentially misaligned with the broader development agenda, given the variability in humanitarian caseloads, further complicate this transition.

Existence of consortiums: The transitional phase coupled with the deactivation of humanitarian clusters has led to the downsizing of humanitarian consortiums, but their roles are still relevant.

- ICF, formerly the CWG, remains operational and continues to collaborate with stakeholders in understanding and implementing best practices in CVA.
- Prior to its deactivation in 2022, the CLCI was playing a significant role in supporting several cash-based interventions in Iraq.
- In this transitional phase, the ICF continues to have the potential to serve as an important forum for collaboration among humanitarian cash actors as well as acting to consolidate the voices of the various actors in discussions and deliberations with the government as well as donors and development partners.

There are several **functional platforms** present within Iraq, with coordination mechanisms developing from a developmental perspective to control for the reduced role of humanitarian platforms.

- Several coordination mechanisms remain, including Area-Based Coordination (ABC) groups formed within the durable solutions coordination mechanism in Iraq, protection platforms run by protection actors, and a legal aid framework. These mechanisms facilitate discussions and coordination among stakeholders, including government entities.
- To adapt to the evolving humanitarian context, a Social Protection Forum was also established in 2018 to facilitate dialogue. However, this forum did not really get off the ground. More recently, a social protection coordination committee was created in 2022 but at the time of writing this report, the committee has met only twice. Urgency is somewhat lacking, despite

these developments but there is reportedly renewed stakeholder commitment to include INGOs and more humanitarian actors within the coming months and to increase the frequency of meetings to at least twice a month.

- The ICF has been actively addressing issues related to financial inclusion and other pertinent topics. It aims to play a role in facilitating dialogue and collaboration among humanitarian organizations, donors, and development actors.

Strategic alignment: Coordination in Iraq is primarily donor-led, with meetings at various levels and shared efforts to close the gaps between different stakeholders.

- The absence of humanitarian clusters exacerbates persistent gaps between lower-level and higher-level meetings, further complicating overall coordination efforts.
- Recently, the UN has shifted its focus to a more development-centred approach for providing assistance. However, ongoing humanitarian needs continue to persist.
- All actors are making efforts to build capacity in social protection services and improve IDPs' civil documentation so that they can be incorporated within the state's SSN. However, there is a lack of an overarching vision that is guiding the work of stakeholders.

A common roadmap: The lack of one is contributing to stakeholder coordination and cooperation challenges in this complex transition from a humanitarian emergency response to a more government-led one.

- The trend towards reduced humanitarian funding in Iraq and a shift towards development-focused interventions has yet to adequately account for recipients' future for whom humanitarian CVA provided support.
- Even with reduced funding, the role of humanitarian entities and CVA remains critical, particularly for the most vulnerable, including IDPs and refugees.
- Government social protection programmes face challenges in reaching vulnerable individuals due to limited awareness and registration complexities, but humanitarian organizations continue to play a crucial role in providing evidence-based solutions and piloting initiatives to attract development funding, particularly for excluded recipient caseloads.



RECOMMENDATIONS

CONTEXTUALIZING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations emphasize the continued potential of the humanitarian presence in Iraq to support the government's sustainable development efforts. One prominent challenge that has emerged from this transitional phase is the sense of ambiguity among humanitarian agencies and organizations about their precise roles and contributions. This uncertainty arises from the absence of a clearly defined framework that delineates the responsibilities of various stakeholders in Iraq, ranging from humanitarian actors to government bodies. Although donors and development partners are increasingly focusing on developmental outcomes, Iraq's social protection system is not yet prepared to absorb the additional caseload of humanitarian recipients. Several factors contribute to this, including: lingering distrust between the population and the government; concerns about the effectiveness and predictability of government programmes; and doubts about their ability to adequately address the needs of the most vulnerable. The humanitarian presence in Iraq, which has accumulated extensive experience, represents a valuable resource that can support the government's efforts. This support extends beyond the mere transfer of technical knowledge to encompass the vital task of mitigating the trust gap between the population and the government. Moreover, humanitarian organizations have an opportunity to explore synergies between humanitarian cash assistance and social protection outcomes. To put it plainly, linkages between CVA and SP are very much feasible and achievable, given the right conditions.

These recommendations acknowledge the need for early engagement with the government, aligning digital solutions with its interests, using existing assessment tools, and strengthening the government's capacity to ensure a smooth transition from humanitarian to government-led initiatives. The proposed collaboration aims to address challenges related to delayed engagement and contribute to a more cohesive and effective approach in navigating Iraq's unique challenges during this transition.

SUGGESTED DIRECTION

Stakeholders leading the sustainable development agenda in Iraq should recognize and leverage the experience and expertise of humanitarian entities remaining in the country, particularly to create synergies for shock-responsive social protection.

The following recommendations have been suggested to advance linkages between humanitarian CVA and social protection systems in Iraq:

Prioritize early government engagement to develop multi-stakeholder cooperation, referral systems, and capacity building. Address challenges related to delayed engagement driven by donor funding decisions. Local actors can assist in steering this conversation between humanitarian actors and the government.

Engage in digital solutions aligned with the government's interests to improve data management and coordination.

Leverage humanitarian organizations' harmonized assessment tool to prevent duplication. Establish data sharing protocols for effective coordination and support the creation of a unified registration system with a local level updating process.

Make efforts to strengthen the government's capacity by reviewing and recommending new processes, sharing best practices from outside Iraq, and involving international NGOs (INGOs) in capacity-building initiatives.

THE ROLE THAT RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS CAN PLAY:

For the **donor community** leading the reform agenda, work on bridging the gap between humanitarian and development assistance rather than reinforcing silos. This can take the form of multi-stakeholder working groups on linking humanitarian CVA to SP, or any sort of deepened cooperation between those different actors.

For humanitarian actors, coordination platforms and relevant INGOs, advocacy for development funding to address caseloads excluded from the national system is also important. In addition to the existing referrals from humanitarian assistance to government SP programmes. Bridging this gap is vital for comprehensive social protection.

For **development partners**, the work being undertaken through the Durable Solutions framework needs to actively engage with the subject of linking humanitarian CVA to SP programming. It is imperative to revitalize initiatives like the SP coordination committee to provide clear direction during this transitional phase. This ensures that the residual humanitarian presence in Iraq is well-guided, and concerted efforts are made to link recipients of humanitarian CVA systematically and sustainably to SP programming.

For the **government of Iraq**, increased coordination with other stakeholders necessitates comprehensive updates to the overarching SP system to foster enhanced operational efficiency, increased transparency in selection and, ultimately, greater inclusion. Emphasizing the collective effort and recognizing the potential role of local actors who are closely connected to the government can be crucial in facilitating collaboration for the humanitarian community with the government.

For **local civil society organizations (CSOs)**, given the current favourable context, raising awareness at the grassroots level so people understand their rights with respect to state social protection can serve to reduce the trust deficit among local populations towards state SP programmes.



O4

LIBYA



COUNTRY CONTEXT

Libya's complex socio-political situation, coupled with ongoing humanitarian crises, presents a challenging landscape for both state-led social protection efforts and non-state humanitarian interventions. The nation is at a crossroads, balancing the need for stability and recovery with the urgent requirements of vulnerable populations.

POLITICAL & SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Internal political unrest, armed conflicts, and political fragmentation characterize Libya's turmoil.⁵⁵ The UN recognizes one government, but the country effectively operates under two separate governments, leading to institutional chaos and a lack of stability. There is a clear stalemate between competing political actors (GNS to the East and GNU to the West). This has hindered efforts to establish peace and hold elections that could pave the way for overcoming the political crisis, however, there has been a decrease in violent armed clashes since mid-2022, offering a glimmer of hope for the nation's stability.

The Libyan economy heavily relies on central planning and oil revenues, making it vulnerable to fluctuations in oil prices and global economic conditions. This dependence has contributed to the country's economic challenges. At the same time, Libya is grappling with multiple humanitarian crises, including an IDP crisis linked to the political situation, with around 135,000 people still identified as IDPs as of August 2022.⁵⁶ Due to its proximity to Europe, Libya has also been contending with a sizable population of migrants and refugees, hosting approximately 650,000 migrants and refugees.⁵⁷

SOCIAL PROTECTION CONTEXT

In Libya, a robust framework for social protection is enshrined in legislation, particularly within the context of the MENA region. The Libyan Constitutional Declaration, finalized in August 2011, explicitly acknowledges the right to social protection for all citizens. Article 5 of this declaration underscores the state's commitment to safeguarding children, mothers, and older persons, ensuring their protection and care, with a specific focus on children, young people, and individuals with disabilities. However, the social protection system has faced significant challenges over the past decade due to ongoing conflict and administrative division between the Western and Eastern regions. Despite the presence of 12 active social assistance programmes and an acknowledgment of the population's substantial need for financial support (70%), these programmes have limited coverage. Notably, the largest scheme, Basic Assistance, extended its coverage to only 3.3% of the population in 2020, underscoring the existing gaps in the social protection landscape.⁵⁸

Primary stakeholders engaged in social protection policy formulation and the execution of the most expansive programmes, measured by coverage, include the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), the Social Solidarity Fund (SSoIF), the Social Security Fund (SSF), and the Ministry of Finance.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ UNICEF. (2023). Humanitarian Action for Children. <https://www.unicef.org/media/131901/file/2023-HAC-Libya.pdf>

⁵⁶ IOM. (2022, August). Libya | Displacement Tracking Matrix. <https://dtm.iom.int/libya>

⁵⁷ UNICEF. (2023). Humanitarian Action for Children. <https://www.unicef.org/media/131901/file/2023-HAC-Libya.pdf>

⁵⁸ Hammad, M., and Mohamed, N. (2022). A Mapping of Libya's social protection sector. International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG). https://ipcig.org/sites/default/files/pub/en/WP194_A_mapping_of_Lybia_s_social_protection_sector.pdf

⁵⁹ Ibid.

STATE-LED SOCIAL PROTECTION

MOSA oversees the Social Security Fund which oversees contributory schemes and programmes such as old-age pensions, total and partial insurance, and short-term benefits for self-employed workers. The Social Solidarity Fund established in 1998, is responsible for distributing non-contributory benefits, such as the Basic Pension grant for low-income families. Prior to the establishment of the SSoIF, both contributory and non-contributory benefits were the responsibility of the SSF as per Social Security Law No. 13 of 1980.⁶⁰

The SSoIF's Basic Assistance Department administers the Basic Assistance programme. Established under Law No. 13 of 1980 and further detailed by Law No. 16 of 1985, this cash benefit is a legally supported financial aid for vulnerable groups as well as those incapable of working. The programme disburses monthly grants: a recent adjustment through official decree increased the standard allowance from 450 Libyan Dinar (LYD) to variable amounts based on household size, i.e., 650 LYD for one-member households, 750 LYD for two-member households, and 850 LYD for households with three or more members. The programme imposes specific eligibility criteria for participation: (i) it is exclusively available to Libyan citizens residing within Libya, with no stable income or a net income below the Basic Assistance threshold; (ii) eligibility extends only to individuals without a capable and legally obligated breadwinner to support them; (iii) targeted individuals must lack savings or capital that could be utilized for their needs; (iv) recipients are required to be unable to work or attend training courses. Lastly, applicants must not be recipients of any SSF grants, pensions, or military benefits.⁶¹

Political fragmentation and the ensuing conflict in Libya have affected both systems. There also appears to be a lack of coordination and clarity within the social protection sector, with significant overlaps in the mandates of MOSA and SSoIF, and a lack of a common policy to organize the sector.⁶² Some notable overlaps can be observed, particularly in their PwD Affairs Departments. Both departments share mandates of providing PwD identification cards, equipment, and planning rehabilitation programmes. SSoIF is primarily responsible for issuing identification cards, while both entities are involved in operating care centres, with the SSoIF mandated to run them and MOSA overseeing their operation. Additionally, there is a parallel responsibility in crisis situations, where the MOSA's Humanitarian Affairs Department assesses the compensation value and provides it, while the SSF supervises the implementation of the Disaster Compensation Benefit.⁶³

The absence of clear legal status for migrants and refugees, coupled with a lack of recognition of refugee status, presents significant barriers to protecting them.⁶⁴

NON-STATE CVA

Since the end of 2021, there has been a decline in the number of individuals requiring immediate life-saving assistance.⁶⁵ Therefore, humanitarian organizations have shifted their focus towards mitigation and risk reduction strategies. Collaborating closely with development partners, they have embraced the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding (HDP) Nexus approach. Rather than issuing a new Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2022, the 2021 HRP was continued to address residual humanitarian needs until the end of 2022. This step reflects a transition from emergency programming to a more extended period of recovery and development in Libya. The emphasis has been on enhancing monitoring and

60 Hammad, M., and N. Mohamed. 2022. "A mapping of Libya's social protection sector." Working Paper, No. 194. Brasilia: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth. https://ipcig.org/sites/default/files/pub/en/WP194_A_mapping_of_Lybia_s_social_protection_sector.pdf

61 REACH. (2022, March). Blueprint Initiative – Social Protection Systems for Children: Overall Findings Report – Libya. https://repository.impact-initiatives.org/document/reach/044fd14f/LBY2106_Blueprint-Initiative_Overall-Findings-Report.pdf

62 Ibid.

63 Hammad, M., and N. Mohamed. 2022. "A mapping of Libya's social protection sector." Working Paper, No. 194. Brasilia: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth. https://ipcig.org/sites/default/files/pub/en/WP194_A_mapping_of_Lybia_s_social_protection_sector.pdf

64 UN OCHA. (2022). Libya | Global Humanitarian Overview. <http://gho-2022-site.docksal.site/libya>

65 UN OCHA. (2022, December). Libya Humanitarian Overview – 2023. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/libya/libya-humanitarian-overview-2023-december-2022>

response mechanisms to implement effective contingency measures, addressing remaining humanitarian needs, and minimizing vulnerabilities in the evolving context.⁶⁶

As a component of the transition strategy, there is now a concerted effort to enhance and facilitate the execution of the HDP Nexus. This includes a specific emphasis on the Collective Outcomes related to Migration Management and Durable Solutions for IDPs, in alignment with the National Durable Solutions Strategy and Plan, under the guidance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2023–2025).

Despite humanitarian actors' acknowledgement of the need to facilitate the transition to the humanitarian-development nexus programming by potentially transferring the humanitarian caseload to the national social protection system, there remain certain marginalized groups, including those affected by displacement, that may not fully benefit from such government schemes and may continue to rely on humanitarian CVA. Therefore, the Cash and Markets Working Group (CMWG) partners disbursed MPCA to 20,991 individuals in need (particularly migrants, refugees and IDPs), as of December 2022.⁶⁷

However, the operating context in Libya is a challenging one for humanitarian entities. They confront persistent bureaucratic and administrative impediments, encompassing hurdles in the renewal of visas for international staff and impediments in accessing the Libyan financial system. These obstacles hinder the organizations from executing international financial transactions, establishing local bank accounts, and withdrawing cash. These constraints have resulted in the delayed provision of essential aid to vulnerable populations throughout Libya.⁶⁸

LEVERS OF INTEGRATING HUMANITARIAN CVA TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

POLITICAL

The Libyan government's approach to social protection has been evolving, shifting from universal subsidies to targeted social assistance due to budget constraints that have been reflected in the suspension of some cash assistance programmes. This evolution prioritized social assistance over pension initiatives. While there is a genuine interest in expanding coverage to encompass various population segments, fluctuating oil revenues have made social protection funding unpredictable. Much of the government's limited expenditure is allocated to wages and universal subsidies, hindering the development of a comprehensive social protection framework. Fragmentation in Libya's social protection landscape leads to inefficiencies and duplication, without a common strategy or policy. Efforts and initiatives to address these issues have not yielded tangible results yet.

Libya's recognition of the importance of foreign workers is evident in its efforts to explore regularization and formalization processes for undocumented labourers, reinforced by labour migration agreements with neighbouring countries. However, state-led stakeholder coordination remains a challenge, with multiple organizations independently implementing similar programmes. Currently, the government predominantly refers cases to humanitarian organizations, although preparations are being made for a gradual transition of recipients into the state's social protection systems. The government's overarching objective is to

⁶⁶ UN OCHA. (2022, December). Libya Humanitarian Overview – 2023. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/libya/libya-humanitarian-overview-2023-december-2022>

⁶⁷ Cash and Markets Working Group (CMWG). (2023, February). Revised Approach to Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance for Libyans, 2023. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AuLNJtFrq4TzRPM2TvzYnd-q0L_W6MJE/view

⁶⁸ USAID. (2023, April). Libya Assistance Overview – Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-04/USAID-BHA_Libya_Assistance_Overview-April_2023.pdf

protect both its citizens, including those abroad and members of the diaspora with political significance. Implementation challenges include duplicated objectives among different entities administering cash assistance programmes, sporadic benefit distribution, and incomplete support for vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, families of martyrs, missing persons, and amputees. These complexities underscore the ongoing efforts and complexities within Libya's evolving social protection landscape. This is likely to become more challenging while Libya is grappling with the effects of the floods that impacted the north-east region in September 2023.

Budget and fiscal capacity: The government has historically prioritized universal subsidies over targeted assistance for vulnerable populations but is now trying to use its limited resources to develop the latter.

- Due to budget constraints, several cash assistance programmes have been suspended, impacting coverage for those in need. Consequently, the government has shifted its focus from pension programmes to social assistance.
- The government's limited expenditure is predominantly allocated to wages and universal subsidies, posing obstacles to the establishment of robust social protection systems.
- The SSolF generates its own revenue, increasing its autonomy in delivering social assistance. How a non-contributory social assistance programme manages to generate revenue is still unclear and merits a deeper analysis. These dynamics underscore the evolving landscape of government budgeting and fiscal capacity.
- The shift towards broader social assistance programming is a positive development and potentially opens the door for other stakeholders, particularly the humanitarian cash actors, to engage with the government on identifying opportunities for harmonizing approaches.

Policy involvement and engagement, Libya's social protection landscape is characterized by a multitude of fragmented programmes, resulting in inefficiencies and programme duplication. However, a draft of the Social Protection law is under discussion.

- The absence of a common strategy or policy for sector organization has led to overlapping mandates among government entities.
- To address these challenges, the government has sought assistance from the World Bank to reform social safety nets, encompassing system development and programme enhancements. These reforms aim to enhance coverage, target specific population segments, and support labour market reforms. The outcome of this collaboration has resulted in the development of a draft social protection policy that may be passed at some point soon.
- Efforts are underway to establish a social registry to improve programme coordination, efficiency, and coverage, potentially bolstering accountability within the social protection domain.
- Recent acknowledgement of foreign workers' significance has led the government to explore regularization and formalization of undocumented labourers. Labour migration agreements with neighbouring countries, such as Egypt and Niger, demonstrate a commitment to effective labour migration management and the preservation of labour protection standards, indicating progress in this sensitive area.
- Challenges persist in state-led stakeholder coordination. Government coordination remains limited, with multiple organizations independently implementing similar programmes, often without effective collaboration.

Referral management remains a one-sided process.

- The Libyan government has usually been referring cases to humanitarian organizations rather than the other way around, which does not bode well for developing a shock-responsive social protection system.
- There is a potential opportunity for humanitarian actors to invest more in developing a sustainable referrals system that can be utilized later on to refer cases to government SP systems in the future.

Positive signalling: The government has been making concerted efforts on reforming and upgrading its SP system, but it has not yet reflected in improved coordination with humanitarian actors in Libya.

- The development of the country's first national social protection policy evidences this.
- The government's National Economic and Development Board has been regularly engaged with donors and other development partners in policy discussion and it also has a strong mandate to move ahead with legislation on social protection related matters. This board, as gleaned from key informants, has also been diligent in cascading its discussions and agreements to lower levels of government for effective implementation.
- However, the government of Libya has still shown categorical opposition to the inclusion of refugees and those it considers to be illegal migrants in any social protection programming. This opposition may also have a negative impact on any harmonization between government and humanitarian organizations' recipients, particularly if there are refugees and migrants (deemed illegal by the state) being assisted in humanitarian caseloads. The existence of two parallel political regimes operating within Libya further compound these challenges.

TECHNICAL

The ongoing conflict in Libya has resulted in a significant dearth of consolidated recipient data across the country's regions. Ambiguities in the division of responsibilities between the SSOLF and MOSA underscore the challenges in the SP system, causing confusion among service users. Inadequate data sharing mechanisms, particularly regarding PwDs, result in a lack of a common registry and coordination. Referral pathways are limited. These challenges impede efficient service delivery and coordination between the MOSA and SSOLF.⁶⁹ For example, to register for the Basic Assistance programme, prospective recipients must physically go to MOSA's municipal offices to register themselves. Furthermore, the timeline for registration is not standardized, taking anywhere from one to six months, and in some cases even longer.⁷⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated data collection, relying heavily on reports and surveys. Effective coordination within the humanitarian community faces persistent data harmonization and information management system challenges, hindering efficient information exchange. Various ministries independently operate their recipient databases, risking duplication, and reduced interoperability. International actors have made some efforts to assist the government in improving data accuracy, but their efforts require greater collaboration.

⁶⁹ REACH. (2022, March). Blueprint Initiative – Social Protection Systems for Children: Overall Findings Report – Libya. https://repository.impact-initiatives.org/document/reach/044fd14f/LBY2106_Blueprint-Initiative_Overall-Findings-Report.pdf

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Libya's centralized economic system and limited financial inclusion impact migrants and refugees' access to financial services. While virtual money has emerged due to liquidity issues, regulatory barriers and a lack of digitalized systems pose challenges. Administrative hurdles and registration processes have led to unequal accessibility across regions and population groups, affecting IDPs and returnees. Efforts are underway to address these disparities and enhance social protection for informal sector workers under Libya's cooperation framework.

Data cooperation: There is a substantial dearth of centralized recipient data across the country's diverse regions.

- A deficient monitoring and evaluation framework, limited process and impact evaluations, and the absence of computerized databases with interoperability exacerbates this data gap impeding the exchange of critical information among humanitarian actors.⁷¹ Consequently, several programmes persist without a comprehensive understanding of their current relevance.⁷²
- The absence of coordination mechanisms related to data harmonization, information management systems, and consolidated social registries poses persistent obstacles to efficient information exchange within the humanitarian community.⁷³
- The government's social protection system is also fragmented, with different ministries working in silos, leading to duplication risks.

Developing common processes and tools: Observable progress has remained elusive thus far.

- As a notable example, the CMWG and MOSA's SSF employ different methods for determining programme eligibility, with the CMWG using a scorecard approach and MOSA and SSF primarily relying on categorical or means-tested targeting.
- The CMWG has recently updated the Cash Transfer Value (CTV) for the humanitarian response in Libya, amounting to LYD 580 per household. The value has been determined based on expenditure analysis using the most recent data from the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) of the Libyan population. This flat rate applies universally, regardless of household size or displacement status, aligning with the highest reported household expenditure among the bottom 20% of the surveyed population. The decision of the CMWG to adopt the fixed rate aims to streamline administration, mitigate tensions among cash recipients, and enhance cost efficiency. This revised CTV is approximately 70% of SSOLF's Basic Assistance Grant.

Digital inclusion remains a significant challenge across the board.

- Despite high mobile phone penetration, poor internet access and connectivity has hindered the growth of digital financial services and electronic payment modalities. This hampers the efficacy of efforts targeted at modernizing the delivery mechanisms of cash assistance for both CVA and SP actors.
- The system is also exclusionary, as migrants and refugees are largely excluded from the financial system.⁷⁴

71 CMWG. (2022). Linkages between Cash Assistance and Social Protection: Libya Cash and Markets Working Group Strategy. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DsLvm3VZUKmhPKvGm3n5QgkMPjNXfEL/view>

72 Hammad, M., and Mohamed, N. (2022). A Mapping of Libya's Social Protection Sector. International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG). https://ipcig.org/sites/default/files/pub/en/WP194_A_mapping_of_Lybia_s_social_protection_sector.pdf

73 Libya Cash and Markets Working Group. (2022). Linkages between Cash Assistance and Social Protection. <https://response.reliefweb.int/libya/cash-and-markets-working-group>

74 World Bank. (2020). Libya Financial Sector Review. © World Bank, Washington, DC. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/36789> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

Further **barriers to access:** Administrative hurdles and registration processes in Libya have excluded certain groups, leading to unequal access to social protection services.

- Disparities are notable in geographical areas and among specific communities like IDPs and returnees. IDPs often struggle to access benefits.
- The absence of civil documentation also hinders vulnerable populations' access to social protection. Eligibility criteria for social protection, especially non-contributory schemes, vary for informal sector workers.
- It appears that the government is making efforts to address these issues and challenges, the purported reform initiatives are still in their early stages.

OPERATIONAL

With regards to consortiums and coordination mechanisms, on the humanitarian cash assistance front, the CMWG, established in 2016, has been serving as a technical platform to facilitate the coordinated and harmonized execution of MPCA and sectoral cash-based interventions. Furthermore, and similar to Iraq, the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for 2023–25 has also marked a shift from humanitarian emergency assistance to a more developmental oriented approach. Under this framework, collaboration between the government and international actors has been ongoing, (such as the UN-led sub-working group on social protection), along with initiatives by the National Economic and Social Development Board, and the Reconciliation and Peace Building Assessment (RPBA) led by prominent donors operating in Libya.

While there's a growing recognition of the need for improved coordination within Libya's social protection landscape, NGOs have sometimes faced challenges in engaging directly with the government due to negative perceptions, thus impacting collaboration. The transformation of non-state actors' responses from a purely humanitarian focus to a development-oriented approach is becoming increasingly evident, with collaborative efforts between the government and international partners potentially leading to lasting enhancements in Libya's social protection systems. However, coordination challenges extend to interactions between government agencies and ministries, highlighting the importance of improved communication and strategic planning mechanisms for a unified vision.

Existing consortiums and functional platforms: The coordination and collaborative processes involving the government and international development entities are underway under the aegis of the sustainable development framework agenda.

- These processes encompass the UN-led sub-working group on social protection and initiatives led by the steering committee of the National Economic and Social Development Board that includes relevant ministers. Collectively, these initiatives represent a collaborative effort to tackle the social protection challenges prevailing in Libya.
- There is not enough information on the practical steps and initiatives that are being undertaken through these platforms to transform and upgrade the social protection system in Libya.
- The CMWG continues to serve as a valuable technical platform. Its primary objective is to facilitate the coordinated and harmonized implementation of MPCA and potential sector-specific cash interventions, it may also have the potential to take on a convening role in the transitional phase from humanitarian to development.

Strategic alignment: at a strategic level, there is an observable trend towards the integration of humanitarian assistance into developmental social protection systems, reflecting a strategic shift towards sustainability.

- This evolving paradigm is also reflected in the transition from humanitarian emergency assistance to the sustainable development cooperation framework.
- There is a growing acknowledgment within Libya's social protection landscape of the compelling imperative for enhanced coordination and harmonization among diverse agencies and ministries.
- Externally the Libyan government is proactively soliciting support from the international community, particularly in the context of labour market reforms, underscoring its readiness to engage with external assistance.
- However, NGOs confront a distinctive challenge within the Libyan context. They are at times perceived as intelligence entities, as a key informant observed, which can pose obstacles to direct engagement with the government. This perception may exert a negative influence on collaboration and coordination endeavours.
- Donors are the predominant mediator in interactions between NGOs and national institutions, potentially affecting the operational efficiency of humanitarian activities.

The development of a common roadmap: The shift from a purely humanitarian response to the Libyan crisis towards a development-oriented approach needs to be further accounted for.

- Under the changed modalities in the developmental approach, stakeholders need to reorient their strategies and plans to support the state's social protection system to affect sustainable change.
- In the case of Libya, while there are initiatives that are taking place to this end, a better understanding on the direction that the government wants to take may not become apparent until the social protection policy (still in a draft form) is passed.
- That is a crucial first step towards assessing the steps that external humanitarian and development stakeholders can take to advance the linking of humanitarian CVA with SP programming in Libya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CONTEXTUALIZING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations underscore the need for a careful and phased approach, considering the current fragmented and perhaps neglected state of Libya's social protection system. It emphasizes the importance of improved coordination, integration, and expansion of coverage to address challenges in aligning CVA and SP systems.

Libya's social protection landscape exhibits fragmentation, with limited interaction, let alone integration, with the humanitarian cash assistance system. Notably, the government has shown an increasing commitment to reform and strengthen its social protection system. However, a substantial point of contention remains the government's resistance to incorporating vulnerable non-Libyan populations,

particularly refugees and migrants living in precarious conditions. Paradoxically, this group constitutes most recipients of humanitarian assistance programmes. Consequently, the inclusion of specific population segments represents a significant challenge in the ongoing dialogue between humanitarian entities and the government. Additionally, discussions with key informants have also revealed that prominent donor organizations operating in Libya are not extensively engaged with humanitarian agencies and NGOs. These donors, much like their counterparts in Iraq, seem predominantly inclined toward achieving development-oriented objectives.

There should be a focus on some essential steps that include enhancing labour protection, developing comprehensive systems, and tackling the challenge of including vulnerable non-Libyan populations. Lastly, advocacy for shock-responsive social safety nets acknowledges the need for adaptability in the face of potential crises, providing a pathway to develop more robust systems.

SUGGESTED DIRECTION

Given the current context, a phased and patient approach to aligning CVA and SP systems in Libya is the most judicious course of action. The following recommendations have been laid out to move the needle on greater linkages between the two systems.

Prioritize efforts to improve coordination and integration between cash assistance and social protection in Libya by firstly addressing the challenge of incorporating vulnerable non-Libyan populations into the social protection dialogue. These first steps towards a dialogue on inclusion can encapsulate discussions on increasing labour protection, especially for the population working in informal settings.

Advocate for the incorporation of shock-responsive social safety nets into Libya's cash assistance framework, recognizing the importance of adaptability in the face of potential crises.

THE ROLE THAT RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS CAN PLAY:

Humanitarian cash actors and **donors** should aim to establish a consistent platform for engagement with government counterparts, thus leveraging the increasing willingness of government to engage with external stakeholders. Such a platform bears the potential to enhance knowledge sharing, address exclusion issues and improve perceptions of NGOs, while fostering collaboration with the government in Libya.

Donors have a vital role to play, notably the EU through its bilateral funding, and could leverage their position to work jointly with the government to find entry points for alignment regarding the draft social protection policy, and increased collaboration between stakeholders toward integration of humanitarian CVA into SP.

Development partners, despite the transition towards the UNSDCF and a durable solutions approach, need to encourage active participation of humanitarian CVA actors in the various sub-working groups so that Libya's several vulnerable population groups continue to receive the required assistance. They also need to provide humanitarian actors with the opportunity to continue engaging with the government through more formalized channels to advance the conversation of harmonizing CVA with SP as well as potentially advocating for the inclusion of non-Libyan marginalized segments within state social protection systems.

The **Libyan government** should maintain the momentum around the development of its first social protection policy. The timely passing of the policy will also serve to provide international entities with a clearer picture on the potential entry points for the reformation and capacity building of the SP ecosystem, thus opening more doors for collaboration and engagement between the government and relevant stakeholders.

05

YEMEN



COUNTRY CONTEXT

The complex and fragmented political landscape in Yemen, along with the devastating impact of the ongoing conflict, has placed immense strain on social protection systems. Effective social protection and humanitarian assistance is needed to support the millions of Yemeni civilians in dire need.

POLITICAL & SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The ongoing conflict in Yemen has left a trail of devastation, both politically and socio-economically. This crisis has resulted in the loss of countless lives and also brought about the collapse of vital social protection institutions, intensifying the suffering that the Yemeni population have experienced. Complicating matters further, Yemen's political landscape is deeply fractured, with separate governments operating in Aden and Sanaa. Territorial fragmentation between Houthi rebels and the pre-existing Yemeni Government further exacerbate these complications. This political division has presented significant obstacles to humanitarian operations and coordination efforts. The absence of an active truce since October 2022⁷⁵ has intensified the volatile security situation, hindering access to emergency and support services for those in need.

Given the above, the humanitarian crisis in Yemen is multifaceted, characterized by a protracted violent civil war and a substantial internally displaced persons (IDP) crisis, leaving over 3 million people displaced from their homes.⁷⁶ Economic hardships, including currency depreciation and macroeconomic instability, have eroded purchasing power, deepening poverty and vulnerabilities. The deterioration of public services and infrastructure has left most of the population with limited access to basic necessities such as food, water, healthcare, and electricity. Furthermore, public sector employees have endured prolonged periods without pay, compounding the already dire humanitarian situation. As of 2023, approximately 17.7 million individuals are in dire need of protection services,⁷⁷ with legal and civil documentation challenges adding to the risks faced by the vulnerable population.

SOCIAL PROTECTION CONTEXT

STATE-LED SOCIAL PROTECTION

The conflict has severely impacted Yemen's state-led social protection mechanisms. Two main systems have historically operated in the country: the Social Welfare Fund (SWF), established in 1996, and the Social Fund for Development (SFD), established in 1997.

Social Welfare Fund (SWF): Among the social assistance initiatives in Libya, the SWF stood as the most significant programme in the country, surpassing several smaller and fragmented programmes. In 2014, the SWF's cash transfers extended to 1.5 million recipient households, constituting 29.1% of the population—a notable rise from the 12.4% recorded in 2005. Despite its extensive coverage and enhanced precision in targeting, facilitated by the adoption of a PMT approach, factors such as the inadequacy of its transfer value, targeting errors (both inclusive and exclusive), and deficiencies in the systems for payment, grievance redress, and monitoring have constrained SWF's impact.⁷⁸ In the wake of the conflict, SWF suspended its operations in 2015. To ensure the continuity of cash transfers to the 1.5 million SWF recipients and sustain the social protection framework, UNICEF, supported by the World Bank, intervened and commenced with

⁷⁵ Robinson, K. (2023, May). Yemen's Tragedy: War, Stalemate, and Suffering. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/background/yemen-crisis>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ UN OCHA. (2022). Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview. Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-december-2022-enar>

⁷⁸ Ghorpade, Yashodhan; Ammar, Ali. 2021. Social Protection at the Humanitarian-Development Nexus: Insights from Yemen. Social Protection and Jobs Discussion Paper; No. 2104. © World Bank, Washington, DC. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/35421> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

the provision of emergency cash transfers (ECT) to recipients. While adhering to the SWF parameters, modifications were introduced to the cash delivery model to facilitate operations in a high-risk environment under the project titled Emergency Crisis Response Project (ECRP). These adjustments involved using banks and microfinance institutions for the secure disbursement of cash.⁷⁹

Social Fund for Development (SFD): While the SFD has a lesser scale than the SWF, it is considered better positioned to align with humanitarian responses on account of the fact that it has managed to remain functional and active even during the conflict⁸⁰ and it also manages to maintain its operational autonomy, despite the political fragmentation in Yemen.⁸¹ The Cash for Work programme, a significant initiative managed by the SFD, was initiated in 2008 in response to the global food crisis. It served as a shock-responsive mechanism designed to complement the SWF programme, specifically targeting temporary poverty rather than chronic poverty. Despite its role as a safety net programme, its coverage remained relatively limited, reaching only 2% of the national population and 3% of the rural population in 2014.⁸² In addition to Cash for Work, the SFD implemented various programmes, including the Community and Local Development Program (incorporating labour-intensive public works), the Cash for Nutrition programme, and the Small and Micro Enterprise Development Program. SFD's Cash for Work programme has been leveraged to address the emerging threats of poverty and food insecurity, responding to events like the desert locust crisis in 2020. The SFD's Cash for Nutrition programme has also been expanded to counter the rise in malnutrition in targeted districts. The SFD has sustained its programmes through donor support, including funds from the International Development Association (IDA).⁸³

However, both these systems have not been updated to reflect the current needs of the population, and transfer values and recipient lists remain outdated. Considering the complex nature of the crisis, modifying these lists requires securing approval from various government stakeholders, a process complicated by the political intricacies associated with the conflict. Likewise, if adjustments, such as top-ups, are introduced to mitigate shocks, clear communication is imperative to convey the temporary nature of the changes to recipients. Therefore, engagement with these systems must be approached in a manner that allows for their eventual transition back to the Government of Yemen after the conflict concludes.⁸⁴

NON-STATE CVA

Over the past several years, the deterioration and contraction of several government-run assistance initiatives in Yemen have coincided with the escalating prominence of numerous humanitarian assistance programmes. These programmes have been executed by UN agencies, international and national NGOs, as well as local and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). Until recently, fragmentation has characterized these efforts, but there has been increased focus on harmonization. Notably, this harmonization centres around the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) and the newly established Cash Consortium of Yemen (CCY). The RRM, spearheaded by UNFPA and co-led by IOM, serves as a first-response system, while the CCY operates as a secondary tier, offering integration possibilities with social protection systems. Both the RRM and CCY utilize a unified enrolment system for vulnerable individuals, aligning with WFP's General Food Distribution enrolment mechanism. While these systems aim to develop interoperable mechanisms, large-scale programmes like Care's Multisectoral Humanitarian Response Program (MHRP) also incorporate cash transfers. Additionally, several programmes adopt a cash plus approach, linking cash interventions with livelihoods, nutrition, and protection initiatives.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Nimkar, R. (2021). Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection in Yemen – CALP Case Study. <https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CalP-Yemen-Case-Study-WEB-1.pdf>

⁸⁰ Ghorpade, Yashodhan; Ammar, Ali. 2021. Social Protection at the Humanitarian-Development Nexus: Insights from Yemen. Social Protection and Jobs Discussion Paper; No. 2104.

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⁸¹ 'Operational autonomy' was a term explicitly used by a key informant when explaining the operations of the SFD.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Nimkar, R. (2021). Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection in Yemen – CALP Case Study. <https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CalP-Yemen-Case-Study-WEB-1.pdf>

⁸⁵ Ibid.

For the year 2022, seven UN agencies, 34 INGOs and 68 national NGOs (NNGOs) provided CVA (including sectoral cash assistance and MPCA) for a total amount of 325 million USD.⁸⁶ Observing the humanitarian response further revealed that, theoretically, the collective outreach of humanitarian and development initiatives covers nearly the entire Yemeni population. However, the absence of adequate monitoring and data sharing between organizations makes it challenging to ascertain the proportion of households benefiting from multiple programmes. Without comprehensive household surveys or integrated recipient databases, the level of duplication across programmes appears to be pervasive. Therefore, improved coordination among humanitarian and development agencies holds substantial potential for reducing inclusion and exclusion errors.⁸⁷

LEVERS OF INTEGRATING HUMANITARIAN CVA TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

POLITICAL

In Yemen, the government's involvement in SP largely relies on donor funding due to a lack of government fiscal space for such initiatives within the current context of protracted conflict and political challenges. The country faces limited coordination capacity and a lack of comprehensive national approaches to integrate humanitarian CVA into a SP system. The willingness of the Yemeni government to engage in longer-term solutions varies between the North and South, with technical capability existing but cooperation being limited in the North, and capacity often questioned in the South due to political differences. There's an ongoing debate regarding the feasibility of developing a SP system amidst Yemen's volatility, fragility, and conflict, with differing opinions on whether resolving security issues is a prerequisite for integration. The SFD is viewed as a reliable partner due to its operational independence from conflict parties. However, barriers to access persist, including the absence of a referral system between humanitarian and social protection actors, restricted data sharing, and access challenges in areas beyond humanitarian control. Overall, the political stalemate and lack of mutual recognition further impede dialogue and coordination between humanitarian and development efforts in Yemen, with varying levels of acceptance of cash assistance in different regions.

Budget and fiscal capacity: Within the current context of political fragmentation, government institutions engaged in SP have mostly been relying on donor funding.

- **There appears to be an absence of a dedicated fiscal allocation from the government for SP programming.**

Policy alignment and engagement: Amidst the protracted conflict, a comprehensive national strategy for integrating humanitarian CVA into the SP system is notably absent.

- **The willingness of the Yemeni government to engage in longer-term solutions varies by region; the North possesses technical capabilities, but cooperation is limited, and the South's capacity often faces scrutiny. The political divide further hampers the development of a consistent reform approach, as neither authority recognizes the other.**

⁸⁶ UN OCHA. Yemen – Cash and Voucher Assistance Snapshot (CVA) (January – December 2022). <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-cash-and-voucher-assistance-snapshot-cva-january-december-2022>

⁸⁷ Ghorpade, Yashodhan; Ammar, Ali. 2021. Social Protection at the Humanitarian-Development Nexus: Insights from Yemen. Social Protection and Jobs Discussion Paper; No. 2104. © World Bank, Washington, DC. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/35421> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

- There is an ongoing debate about the feasibility of establishing Yemen's SP system amidst high volatility and conflict. Some argue that resolving security concerns is a prerequisite, while others see a narrow opportunity, as long as key institutions like the SFD remain operational.
- Some key informants view the SFD as a capable and independent partner with the potential to bridge the gap between humanitarian aid and social protection but that may be a view that not all stakeholders operating in Yemen share.

Referral management: There is no established referral mechanism for transferring recipient caseloads onto social protection programmes, including the SFD.

- That being said, referrals are still made to agency databases, but often on the basis of influence exerted by informal networks as well as other ad hoc political considerations.

Positive signalling: There does not appear to be much willingness or appetite for change and transformation at the upper echelons of either governments in Yemen.

- Some key informants from the humanitarian development community, at the operational level of the government, identified that there are government entities that continue to positively engage with international stakeholders and aspire to improve their capacity and ability to perform their functions, including the SFD.
- Therefore, a noticeable juxtaposition exists within the government: one layer instils scepticism and disinterest, while another layer fosters optimism for a better future of social protection.

TECHNICAL

Yemen faces significant challenges in managing data for its social protection programmes, marked by outdated recipient lists, political complexities, and difficulties in data updates, all of which impede programme effectiveness. Achieving data interoperability among various organizations' systems is essential for coordination, but consensus on this issue remains elusive, with not all organizations open to cooperation. The absence of a unified registry, tax IDs, and national IDs further complicates social protection efforts, particularly without a political resolution. Collaboration between humanitarian actors and the government encounters obstacles such as blocked databases, outdated recipient lists, and scepticism, hampering closer cooperation. Establishing a comprehensive social protection programme faces hurdles related to political sensitivities and a lack of harmonization. To achieving data interoperability, increased consensus and openness among organizations is crucial.

Data cooperation: Yemen faces significant challenges concerning data and recipient lists for social protection programmes. In addition to what's mentioned above:

- Outdated lists, political sensitivities, and difficulties in updates and lack of harmonization hinder the efforts to establish comprehensive social protection programmes.

Common processes and tools: Harmonization is strong within humanitarian stakeholders, but further integration remains limited.

- The CCY operates with a unified recipient management system, employing standardized tools, transfer values, and methods to ensure effective assistance.
-

- Efforts are being made to harmonize MPCA tools, spearheaded by the CMWG. This involves identifying existing tools, setting minimum standards for vulnerability criteria, selection, and monitoring tools.
- Harmonized socio-economic vulnerability indicators for MPCA recipients are also being established, though full tool harmonization remains challenging due to differing mandates of partner organizations. Discussions favour PMT, but household composition and vulnerability criteria remain significant considerations.
- Humanitarian organizations are also exploring the transition to cash plus programming, combining cash interventions with livelihood support. Targeting in Yemen is evolving, extending beyond newly displaced IDPs.
- The SFD has shifted toward geographic-based targeting to enable itself to provide continuous support for specific vulnerable groups.
- However, integration opportunities have been limited due to resistance in modifying the SWF's approach and accompanying political deadlock, leading to operational disparities. While stakeholders and international coordination appear to align on delivery targets, inefficiencies and duplication concerns continue to persist.

Digital inclusion has been severely hampered by the conflict in Yemen.

- The crisis has severely impacted the economy, resulting in currency devaluation, reduced government revenue, and soaring commodity prices, aggravating food insecurity and economic hardship. Economic competition between the governments in the North and South has further fragmented economic institutions and monetary policies. In this challenging environment, money exchangers have been playing a vital role in facilitating financial transactions, particularly in areas where traditional banks have limited reach.
- Despite the conflict, delivery mechanisms for cash assistance include various methods, including over-the-counter cash, voucher systems, bank transfers, and cash agents, offering flexibility in serving even remote areas.
- While digital payment options are being explored, they face infrastructure, social, and trust-related challenges.
- Promoting financial literacy and enhancing financial inclusion are critical, given that many Yemeni recipients lack digital financial tool skills and financial knowledge.

Barriers to access persist, both related to political and security concerns and limitations and also regarding the lack of civil documentation and other technical issues around assistance provision.

- Travel permit denials and movement restrictions, especially in the territories controlled by the government in Sanaa, severely hamper efforts to administer cash. On the other hand, security concerns predominantly impact regions controlled by the internationally recognized government in Aden.
- The introduction of mahram requirements⁸⁸ by the Houthi rebels has exacerbated these challenges, particularly for women, limiting their access to vital services, education, and economic opportunities.
- Additionally, delays in approving sub-agreements have resulted in postponed humanitarian initiatives and essential services, compounding the multifaceted challenges confronting the Yemeni population.

⁸⁸ A Mahram is a close blood relation of a Muslim female (with whom the female is not permitted to enter a marriage according to Islamic law). According to some schools of Islamic jurisprudence, a Muslim woman is not permitted to travel unless she is accompanied by her Mahram.

- Many recipients, including IDPs, lack national IDs, further complicating their access to social protection programmes.
- Additional barriers, as mentioned earlier, encompass restricted access to conflict-affected areas, inaccurate recipient lists, and the exclusion of vulnerable populations.

OPERATIONAL

The Cash Consortium of Yemen (CCY) and the CMWG (which is led by UN-OCHA), primarily oversee humanitarian efforts – especially cash assistance programmes – in Yemen. The CMWG plays an important role in facilitating coordination for MPCA. Several humanitarian organizations operate in both northern and southern Yemen, notably through the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) for cash assistance to newly displaced IDPs. However, coordinating between humanitarian and development programmes faces challenges. Donor coordination in Yemen is complex due to resource constraints and a lack of structured coordination, though some donors, like FCDO and ECHO, are increasingly emphasizing the transition from short-term humanitarian cash assistance to long-term social protection mechanisms in crisis-affected regions.

Collaboration with the Yemeni government to link cash assistance to social protection systems is limited and depends on funding availability. Trust issues with government institutions and political influence persist. Discussions about transferring CVA programmes to the government are ongoing but face concerns about readiness and capacity. As development funding interest grows, there is recognition of the need to empower government institutions for programme delivery beyond emergency activities. The CMWG has initiated discussions with social protection actors, but the landscape is fragmented, and interaction between humanitarian and development actors is limited within the existing social protection system led by UNICEF and the World Bank. The absence of a clear implementation framework or roadmap for linking humanitarian and state-led social protection systems in Yemen remains a significant concern and barrier to effective harmonization of CVA with SP.

Existing consortia: The Cash Consortium of Yemen (CCY) and the CMWG oversee the coordination and alignment of humanitarian efforts in cash assistance programmes.

- The CMWG continues to play an eminent role in facilitating coordination among various stakeholders engaged in MPCA, including international NGOs and consortia.
- Humanitarian organizations like the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have established a presence in both northern and southern Yemen. IOM, for instance, leads the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), primarily delivering cash assistance to those who have recently become IDPs.

Functional platforms: Coordination between humanitarian and development programmes appears to be encountering significant obstacles.

- Donor coordination in Yemen, involving agencies such as FCDO, ECHO, and BHA, faces challenges due to resource constraints and a lack of structured coordination, despite recognition of its importance.
- Yemen's donor coordination, facilitated by mechanisms like the cluster approach and the RRM, appears relatively robust compared to neighbouring countries.

- The establishment of platforms discussing the linkage of CVA to social protection systems is limited, primarily due to concerns about the readiness and capacity of working groups in Yemen.
- The CCY initially considered referring recipients to organizations like WFP or the SFD for longer-term social protection, although these referrals did not materialize due to a lack of convergence on the matter by consortium members.

Strategic alignment between stakeholders, including donor entities, do appear to be facing barriers and impediments in effectively engaging with the government, particularly at the higher levels of governance.

- Donors, like FCDO and ECHO, are increasingly acknowledging the shift from short-term humanitarian cash assistance to longer-term social protection strategies in Yemen and crisis-affected regions. These donors are actively seeking reports and data on social protection CVA to facilitate sustainable solutions.
- Collaboration with the Yemeni government for linking cash assistance to social protection systems remains constrained. The willingness of government authorities, particularly in the North, to engage in such partnerships often hinges on the availability of substantial funding.
- Scepticism regarding government institutions and concerns about political interference in recipient selection pose hurdles to programme coordination. Concerns about government readiness and management capacity contribute to hesitancy in the handover process.
- The uncertainty surrounding the influx of development funding in Yemen has prompted greater interest in coordination and cooperation. While humanitarian organizations traditionally had limited interaction with state actors, focusing primarily on emergency interventions, there's now a growing recognition of the importance of empowering government institutions for broader programme delivery beyond emergency contexts.

No **common inclusive and holistic roadmap** exists. Instead, scattered initiatives led by individual or a small group of entities characterize the landscape.

- The CMWG has commenced dialogues with social protection stakeholders to investigate possible collaboration opportunities.
- The existing landscape is fragmented, and there are limited connections between humanitarian and development entities within the prevailing social protection framework.
- The absence of a well-defined implementation framework or roadmap for establishing links between humanitarian and government-led social protection systems in Yemen is a substantial concern. This lack of clarity poses a significant challenge to any efforts made towards linking CVA to SP programming in Yemen.



RECOMMENDATIONS

CONTEXTUALIZING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations highlight the critical need for enhanced coordination mechanisms to overcome existing fragmentation and create an environment conducive to potential linkages between CVA and SP systems in Yemen.

The existing landscape in Yemen reveals a conspicuous absence of robust coordination and alignment among humanitarian cash actors, including consortia such as the CCY, and development and donor organizations. Multi-mandate entities like WFP and UNICEF are actively involved in managing and supporting the government's primary social protection programme, namely the SFD. Their current priorities do not appear to emphasize the exploration of potential entry points for forging connections between CVA and SP systems in Yemen. Additionally, the recipient databases for these social protection initiatives remain outdated, posing a significant hindrance to meaningful discussions with humanitarian partners on data interoperability and caseload referral management.

There seems to be a notable absence of firm commitment or willingness on the part of the government to undertake comprehensive reforms of the broader social protection system within Yemen. Furthermore, even within the humanitarian cash actors' sphere, insufficient complementarity and harmonization are evident, further exacerbating fragmentation. With resource constraints also affecting emergency assistance efforts, stakeholders operating within Yemen need to draw on insights, learning, and experiences from countries in the region, including Iraq, on how best they can prepare themselves for any future transitional phase, provided the security and political situation within the country stabilizes.

The factors identified, such as flexible programme design, coordination, harmonization, and the establishment of standards, aim to address current challenges and pave the way for effective collaboration. Investment in obtaining identification documents and capacity building for local authorities further strengthens the foundation for a coordinated and harmonized approach in the humanitarian and development sectors.

SUGGESTED DIRECTION

Efforts should focus on enhancing coordination mechanisms among humanitarian and development stakeholders to avoid fragmentation and create a conducive environment for potential linkages between CVA and SP systems in Yemen.

The following recommendations have been suggested to advance linkages between humanitarian CVA and social protection systems in Yemen:

Recognize the dynamic nature of the situation in Yemen, and urge organizations to **remain flexible in programme design and adapt effectively to changes.**

Emphasize greater coordination and harmonization among humanitarian actors, particularly regarding cash transfer programmes and their operational modalities.

Establish minimum fiduciary standards and a common understanding of aligning data protection and privacy standards to facilitate cooperation among different humanitarian and development programmes.

Invest further in helping vulnerable individuals obtain identification documents, essential for protecting their rights and accessing social protection programmes.

Advocate for investment in capacity building of local authorities and organizations through training programmes and workshops, identifying sectors of engagement with respective ministries as entry points for capacity building within the government on social protection.

THE ROLE THAT RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS CAN PLAY:

Within the **humanitarian community**, greater efforts need to be made in engaging internally as well as with the donor community and development partners to build partnerships, develop a common or an interoperable database, and overcome impediments towards developing a collective voice and strategic vision for Yemen.

The **donor community** should also make a concerted effort to expand its partners in the country, instead of collaborating with selected multi-mandate partners. The donor community can also utilize its influence to formalize a regular engagement platform with government counterparts that is inclusive of the voices of different stakeholders operating within Yemen.

For **national state actors**, relying on and giving autonomy to actors such as the SFD could enable increased cooperation with various stakeholders. While the current situation does not allow for a unified national strategy for social protection, local authorities should try to engage with NGOs and donors, notably to work on issues such as civil documentation.



ANNEX

LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

ORGANIZATION	COUNTRY
DRC	Iraq
ECHO	Iraq/ regional
ICF	Iraq
ILO	Iraq
IRC	Iraq
UNICEF	Iraq
CASHCAP	Yemen
ECHO	Yemen/ regional
DRC	Yemen
IOM	Yemen
SFD	Yemen
WORLD BANK	Yemen
IOM	Libya
UNHCR	Libya
WORLD BANK	Libya

