



# **ALIGNING HUMANITARIAN CASH ASSISTANCE WITH NATIONAL SOCIAL SAFETY NETS IN REFUGEE SETTINGS**

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## **KEY CONSIDERATIONS AND LEARNING**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


The purpose of this document is to share learning and considerations on how operations have or could progressively align humanitarian cash assistance for refugees to national social safety nets (SSN) and the criteria used to take decisions at each step of this process. It is based on information collected from Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Greece and Mexico as well as ongoing discussions on the topic. It also builds on the [UNHCR Mapping of Social Safety Nets for Refugees – Opportunities and Challenges](#).

The document reviews some of the pre-conditions for alignment of cash assistance as well as the considerations for alignment in different types of situations, including where the government has no or limited capacity; the government has some capacity and/or is supported by a development actor for the development of and funding for social assistance; and, lastly, where the government has the capacity and provides social assistance to its nationals but might be reluctant to incorporate refugees in the same system. The main findings and recommendations are presented below. The direction provided in this document must be considered in light of the varied and specific opportunities and challenges that each context presents.

### PRE-CONDITIONS FOR ALIGNING CASH ASSISTANCE WITH NATIONAL SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

When considering alignment of humanitarian cash assistance with social safety nets in refugee settings, the first step is to map the access of non-nationals to basic rights, including but not limited to documentation, access to land and employment, freedom of movement, access to education, and financial and other services. Social assistance is only one component of social protection and should therefore not be considered in isolation. In contexts where refugees and others of concern to UNHCR do not enjoy their rights at par with nationals, full alignment of all the elements of cash assistance may

not always be appropriate. Humanitarians must justify if they are not working with existing social protection systems. In these contexts, alignment should be preceded and/or accompanied by advocacy. The starting point is, however, including in these situations, alignment of some of the elements in the cash assistance to the extent possible. UNHCR and partners must build a refugee “business case” in order to convince the host government of the positive impact refugees can have on the country’s development and economy.

 In addition to the main document to follow, key considerations for assessing the feasibility of aligning cash with national social safety nets are presented in a more detailed set of questions in Annex 1.

Alignment of the relevant elements of cash assistance, if inclusion is not possible, should be the starting point. Humanitarians must justify if not considering and working with the national social protection system.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALIGNMENT

If refugees cannot access the national system, alignment of cash assistance should always be considered. However, the elements of alignment may differ from context to context. In some settings, alignment of the transfer value and the targeting approach may be appropriate while the transfer mechanism is not and vice versa. The starting point should be to align – or use the existing mechanisms – to the extent possible, taking into account the specificities of each context. This document sets out the broad direction for alignment but does not go into all required specifics that may need to be considered at the country level.

## Contexts with weak social safety nets

- ➔ Even where the national social safety nets are weak, alignment of cash assistance – and ideally inclusion – should be considered at the onset of the interventions. Humanitarians should justify if not working with the national social protection systems.
- ➔ Targeted, limited and time-bound cash assistance should be considered, ideally through transitional cash that mirrors the national social safety nets, coupled and adapted with other services provided by development or humanitarian actors. Investment in livelihoods is key in order to avoid protracted refugee crises.
- ➔ As an example, review a summary [here](#) of how the transitional safety networks, which was set up by UNHCR Cameroon in 2018.
- ➔ Robust data is required in the alignment process, in particular when aligning – for example – with the social registry or the targeting approach.
- ➔ Aligning targeting approaches can be challenging as the system in place may be costly and require significant capacity, data and resources, which humanitarians may not have.
- ➔ Lessons learned from humanitarian cash assistance, such as transfer mechanisms or the use of innovative technologies, can be transferred to the national system in situations where it is being developed or strengthened.





### When social safety nets are available but need expansion

- ➔ Alignment of cash assistance should always be considered in these situations as it may enhance opportunities for future inclusion and the start of a transition from aid to development and self-reliance.
- ➔ Alignment must be gradually introduced and implemented hand in hand with clear communication strategies targeting the communities to avoid abrupt changes to their household economy. Cash assistance to host communities should be considered.
- ➔ Even where inclusion of refugees in the national social safety net is possible, the coverage of vulnerable refugees is often limited, and continued cash assistance as a transition by humanitarian actors should be considered.
- ➔ Advocacy efforts towards donors and development actors should be foreseen to secure additional funds allowing for increased numbers of refugees accessing the national system.

### Social safety nets are functional and available to nationals

- ➔ Always consider alignment (if inclusion is not possible), in situations where the social safety nets are available, to an extent, to non-nationals.
- ➔ Be prepared to assist refugees in the inclusion process. Social assistance is often applied for in these situations; a process in which non-nationals may require support from humanitarian or development actors, or the authorities themselves.
- ➔ Advocate for non-nationals' access to recognised identity credentials. A main challenge for refugees to be included in national social protection systems relates to the lack of recognition of their ID cards; a common obstacle also to financial inclusion.
- ➔ Recognise that inclusion is a time-consuming activity, requiring a significant amount of advocacy. Social policies, in particular in relation to non-nationals, are often held hostage by political agendas and their implementation is subject to change when a new government is elected.
- ➔ In situations where non-nationals do not yet access the national social safety net, humanitarians should not completely design parallel structures due to the difficulties to adapt when the inclusion opportunity presents itself. In these situations, try to align – even if it is only one of the cash assistance elements.
- ➔ The work on the alignment of cash assistance with the national social protection systems requires close partnership and coordination with all relevant stakeholders, notably the government, donors, and humanitarian and development actors.

➔ In addition to information in the main document, Annexes 2 and 3 present decision trees that can guide decisions in terms of alignment of humanitarian cash assistance with national social safety nets in the above-mentioned contexts.

# INTRODUCTION

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The purpose of this document is to share learning and considerations on how operations have or could progressively align humanitarian cash assistance for refugees to national social safety nets and the criteria used to take decisions at each step of this process.

The document considers the following questions:

- ① **What are the objectives, outcomes and added value for UNHCR refugees and others of concern motivating the alignment of cash assistance with national social protection systems?**
- ② **What are the major steps involved in an overall process of alignment to inclusion?**
- ③ **What are the criteria used to determine when, how and to what degree alignment is made?**
- ④ **What are the specific protection concerns and risks that need to be considered, and what are the UNHCR core activities and/or government capacity building activities that should be considered to meet these concerns?**

These considerations are important in all operational contexts, irrespective of the degree to which governments are currently able to provide social support. With an increase in the frequency, complexity and duration of humanitarian crises, the capacity of the humanitarian system to respond to them has reached its limits. In many countries problems are compounded: chronic poverty is combined with conflict, natural disasters and displacement, whether internal or cross-border refuge. These developments underline the need for closer collaboration between humanitarian, national and development systems and the strengthening of long-term support measures to both displaced communities and nationals alike.

The increased use of cash assistance as part of both humanitarian and development assistance is opening up new opportunities for linking temporary, even if increasingly long-term, humanitarian assistance with national social support services.

In addition to increased efficiency, alignment with wider national social safety nets and social protection systems can offer more appropriate tools for managing protracted displacement and at the same time facilitate the phasing out of humanitarian aid, when longer-term support is required. Donors are placing an increased emphasis on comprehensive and coherent approaches that leverage the humanitarian-development nexus. The European Commission proposed in recent guidance: “any operational instruments used in crisis contexts are similar to those used in social protection. The clearest overlap, and where most of the evidence to date is based, concerns cash transfers”.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, there is a sense that “practitioners should be required to justify if they are not working with existing social protection systems, programmes, or approaches to support a crisis response”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2018). *Providing Social Protection across the Humanitarian-Development Nexus (SPaN)*. Guidance note, p.15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.



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## WHY ALIGNMENT?

Social protection encompasses a whole range of activities and services, many that are similar to, if not the same as, those used in humanitarian programming. This note will focus on two types of social assistance, namely social transfers in cash and public works programmes in cash – cash for work. However, full alignment of humanitarian cash assistance with these social assistance instruments will only be fully effective if active labour market and social policies include the forcibly displaced so that they have, or will eventually have, access to basic services and rights, including but not limited to health and education.

The more displacement is protracted, the more humanitarian objectives should align with social protection objectives. Humanitarian aid

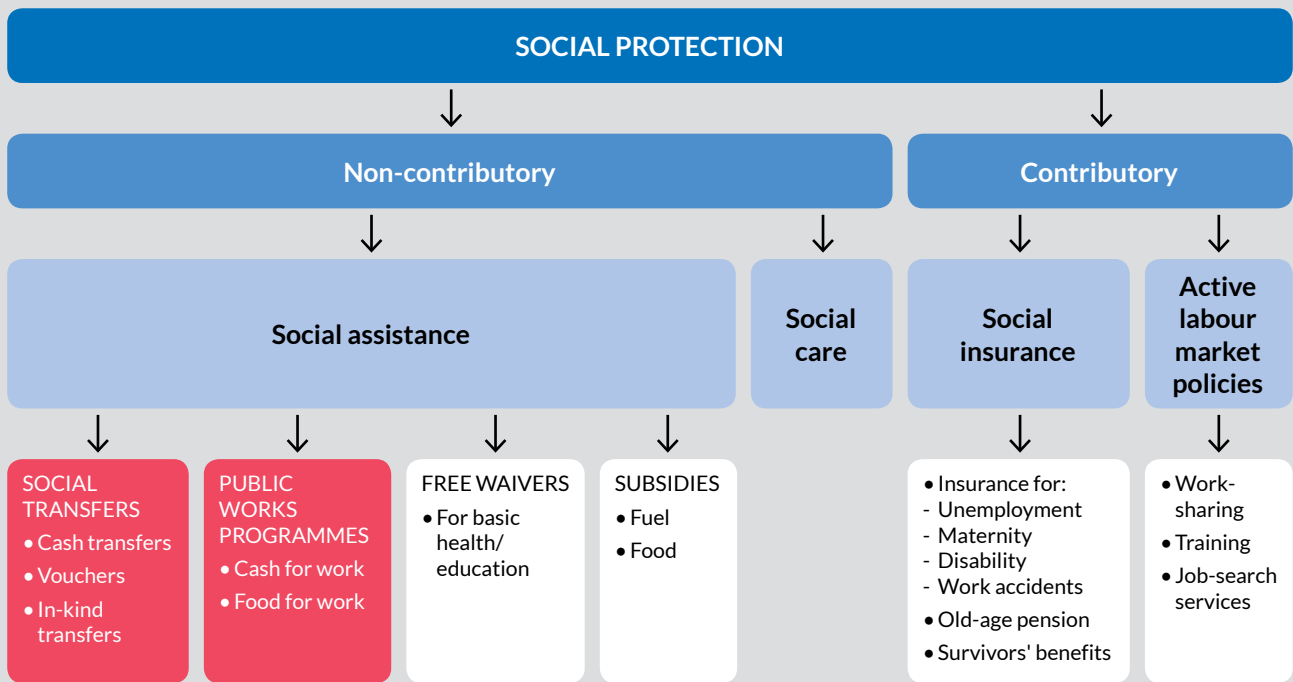
is increasingly more targeted; emphasis is on durable solutions and self-reliance. It is also acknowledged that economic inclusion, the basic requirement for enabling people to meet their own basic needs in a dignified manner, must start from the very beginning of a refugee influx.<sup>3</sup> With the increased use of cash transfers to deliver aid, financial inclusion is progressively more of a concern for humanitarian aid organizations. Financial inclusion has also been identified as one key enabler of other developmental goals in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>4</sup> While none of the SDGs explicitly consider access to financial services, financial inclusion is a target in seven SDGs and facilitates the achievement of many others. As a result, and as the below diagram explains, humanitarian objectives no longer simply correspond with social protection objectives but the two are increasingly aligned. As a consequence,

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR. (2018). *Refugee Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion 2019-2023 Global Strategy Concept Note*.

<sup>4</sup> UNCDF. (2018) *Financial Inclusion and the SDGs*, and J. Sachs. (2012). *From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals*.

**Figure 1: SOCIAL PROTECTION**

Source: Oxford Policy Management

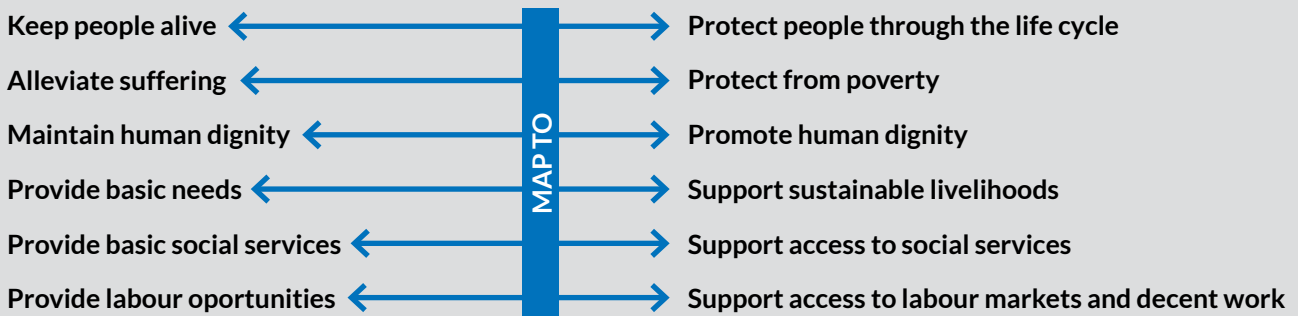


**Figure 2: HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES**

Source: European Commission – Providing Social Protection across the Humanitarian-Development Nexus

**HUMANITARIAN OBJECTIVES**

**SOCIAL PROTECTION OBJECTIVES**



the challenges and, therefore, the type of support needed by the host population and the people affected by humanitarian crises converge. Peaceful coexistence in displacement settings is often at best fragile with competition for employment that is in short supply. The perception that one group is receiving aid while the others are left to fend for themselves can easily break this delicate balance.

The decision to align with national systems should not come as an afterthought or be considered

only once financing starts to dwindle, despite there being no imminent possibilities for return. Instead, it should be part of an overall response strategy, starting from preparedness. Depending on the context, objectives may vary from a full handover to the government to a partial inclusion of some refugees into the national systems. The timeframe for achieving these objectives also varies significantly – in some contexts, partial alignment without any inclusion may be a reality for years to come.



Alignment with national systems and the inclusion of refugees and others of concern in them is a common practice in UNHCR in health, education, and water, hygiene and sanitation, for example. Also, in livelihood programming, refugees and others of concern increasingly attend national training facilities instead of the service being provided by humanitarian partners. Social assistance merely continues these already adopted best practices.

Yet, the majority of national social safety nets are not accessible to non-nationals. When refugees are granted partial access to social safety nets, full access is often limited due to restrictive legal frameworks. Governments rarely have capacity, tools and processes in place that can be adapted to the impacts of mass displacement shocks. Complex targeting across multiple safety nets, coordinated by numerous ministries, makes coordination, data analysis and accountability challenging.

Funding of humanitarian and government safety nets often differ in terms of duration, political requirements, objectives and conditions, making alignment challenging. Refugees do not always have access to national services. The diagram below presents a typology of options for shock-responsive adaptation, which can also be considered as various ways in which to relate refugees to the national social protection systems. The best course of action may be implementing a combination of these options.

## UNHCR AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

UNHCR engages in social protection as a means to contribute to the SDGs, notably to the commitments to leave no one behind and extend social protection coverage for all, including displaced people. UNHCR promotes an enabling protection environment where the legal, policy and administrative framework of the host country provides refugees with freedom of movement and residence, permission to work, and access to basic services and social safety nets as members of the communities where they are living. Leaving no one behind is essential.

UNHCR can support governments and partners to strengthen their capacity in terms of civil registration, protection of refugee rights and support to essential services. Increasingly, UNHCR will work to extend shock-responsive social safety nets to include forcibly displaced people whilst helping to protect national social safety nets from the impact of mass displacement. The below diagram details UNHCR's priorities in terms of engagement in the area of social protection.



Source: Oxford Policy Management



# PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS THAT LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND



## UNHCR and Social Protection

### MAKING SOCIAL PROTECTION INCLUSIVE AND PROTECTION SENSITIVE

#### Technical assistance to national governments:

- Facilitate access to social welfare services for displaced persons.
- Take into consideration protection concerns of persons with specific needs (including child protection and gender considerations).

- Strengthen coexistence with nationals and integration (including facilitating contribution to the formal economy, remittances etc.)
- Ensure data protection. Strengthen the link between social assistance and complementary protection activities and referral.

### STRENGTHENING NATIONAL SYSTEMS AND CAPACITY

**Capacity strengthening of national governments** to improve the quality of essential services accessible to both displaced people and nationals: training; staffing, infrastructure and material; monitoring systems.

**Advocacy with donors and development actors** to support national systems and delivery of essential services.

#### Preparedness and contingency planning ahead of shocks:

- Help build humanitarian mechanisms into national social safety nets allowing scale up of support around disasters and crisis to displaced and host families.
- Advise governments on measures that mitigate the impact of displacement on national social services.

### SUPPORTING GOVERNMENTS ON CIVIL REGISTRATION, NATIONAL REGISTRY, AND TARGETING

#### Technical support on civil registration:

- Diagnosis of systems requirements to register displaced people.
- Provision of systems such as UNHCR's registration software proGres and the cash management system *CashAssist*.

**Contribution to protection sensitive targeting** to Advise on the specific vulnerabilities of refugees to be considered when targeting social assistance such as the lack of documentation and links between protection issues and poverty.

### ADVOCATING FOR REFUGEE RIGHTS AND PROVIDING EVIDENCE FOR INCLUSION

#### Advocate for refugee rights and the benefits of inclusion:

- Build a business case to incentivize governments to take on non nationals using evidence and best practice.
- Advise governments on key measures to put in place to mitigate impact of displacement on national social services.
- Advocate for a legal framework ensuring displaced rights, including the right to work, financial inclusion, access to services and non-discrimination.

#### Build evidence on positive outcomes of refugee contribution to national systems:

- Mapping of countries favorable to provide access to national social protection to displaced persons.
- Collect evidence and good practice to encourage uptake of the approach by other countries.
- Collect evidence of contribution of refugees to the national economy, taxation and social service systems.

### ALIGNING UNHCR'S HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE WITH THE NATIONAL SYSTEMS

#### Mirror existing national systems to design, target and deliver monetized humanitarian assistance:

- Vertical expansion: top-ups to current beneficiaries.
- Horizontal expansion: temporary inclusion of new beneficiaries.
- Piggybacking: using part of an established social protection system to deliver assistance.
- Shadow alignment: developing a parallel humanitarian response that aligns with current social protection systems. Collect evidence and good practice to encourage uptake of the approach by other countries.

#### Advocate for a basic needs approach, linking multi-sectoral cash assistance with the provision of essential services:

- Advocate for national systems that support both poverty reduction and protection outcomes.
- Include monitoring of refugees and host families' well-being.

#### Complement national social protection systems when they do not cover the basic and protection needs:

- Use humanitarian cash to top up the national social safety nets.
- Subsidize access to specific social services.
- Provide specific protection services not covered by family services in the national social welfare system.

#### Use locally-led or private-sector mechanisms to complement and/or replace humanitarian assistance and local safety nets

- Civil solidarity and micro-finance networks.
- Private health insurance schemes.
- To enhance livelihoods and employment opportunities.
- Leverage private sector for access to sustainable livelihoods.



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## KEY PRECONDITIONS FOR ALIGNMENT

### Pre-conditions for aligning cash with national social safety nets

In order to fully leverage the possibilities of accessing and/or aligning with national social assistance mechanisms in the immediate, medium or long-term, the first step in the process is to map the access of non-nationals, mainly refugees but also asylum-seekers, to basic rights, including but not limited to documentation, access to land and employment, freedom of movement, access to education, and financial and other services.

Social assistance is only one component of social protection and should therefore not be considered in isolation. In contexts where refugees and others of concern to UNHCR do not enjoy their rights at par with nationals, alignment of all elements of the cash assistance may not always be appropriate. While pursuing alignment to the extent possible, humanitarians must justify if they are not working with existing social protection systems. Partial alignment may aggravate delicate situations further, especially if the displaced populations are targeted

using the same criteria as nationals but provided a greater amount of resources. Existing systems can be used as a base when designing cash assistance programmes and at the same time include additions, which could gradually be removed in line with increased opportunities for alignment and future inclusion.

In situations where refugee rights are restricted, alignment is preceded and/or accompanied by advocacy. UNHCR, together with its partners, promotes the adoption of practices and policies that protect the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. To achieve this goal, it is crucial to engage with a wider range of actors, including development actors, donors and other stakeholders, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees and the Sustainable Development Goals. While this work is necessary to ensure the preconditions for aligning humanitarian cash assistance with national social safety nets, it is also a part of a wider set of processes, which helps strengthen refugees' self-reliance and resilience.



Key considerations for assessing the feasibility of alignment are presented in a more detailed set of questions in Annex 1.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALIGNMENT

### Contexts with weak social safety nets

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- ➔ **Even where the national social safety nets are weak, alignment of cash assistance – and ideally refugee inclusion – should be considered at the onset of the interventions. Humanitarians should justify if not working with the national social protection systems.**

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- ➔ **Targeted, limited and time-bound cash assistance should be considered, ideally through transitional cash that mirrors the national social safety nets, coupled and adapted with other services provided by development or humanitarian actors. Investment in livelihoods is key in order to avoid protracted refugee crises.**

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- ➔ **As an example, review a summary [here](#) of how the transitional safety networks, which was set up by UNHCR Cameroon in 2018.**

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- ➔ **Robust data is required in the alignment process, in particular when aligning with the social registry or the targeting approach, for example.**

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- ➔ **Aligning targeting approaches can be challenging as the system in place may be costly and require significant capacity, data and resources, which humanitarians may not have.**

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- ➔ **Lessons learned from humanitarian cash assistance, such as transfer mechanisms or innovative technology, can be transferred to the national system in situations where it is being developed or strengthened.**

When the government has low capacity to provide social assistance and available tools for such purpose are limited if not non-existent, alignment with and the facilitation of social safety nets should still be considered as part of the solutions and self-reliance strategies. In protracted settings, where host populations may also live in poverty or in extreme poverty, long-term assistance to

non-nationals only is both unsustainable as well as easily perceived as unfair. Assistance that allows for living standards higher than those in the country of origin is also likely – when expected to continue indefinitely – to discourage return even if it was an option. Yet, in emergency situations, refugees often need additional cash assistance at the onset to cover their immediate basic needs, including for example emergency shelter. Additional assistance may also be required when refugee rights are restricted.

In countries such as Niger, Chad, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo, social assistance, if available at all, is in general provided with support from international organizations such as the World Bank. Funding is for the large part multi-year and significant enough to cover a number of priority regions. Niger, for example, received an additional US\$ 80 million towards the end of 2018 to support three deprived refugee-hosting regions. In similar situations, or when there is a high probability of the implementation of similar projects in the medium-term, operations should take alignment and eventually inclusion into consideration from the onset of an intervention. In addition, engagement with both development actors and the respective governments is necessary to ensure displaced populations will be considered in the setup of these new programmes.

In these World Bank-funded projects, assistance is generally provided to selected households in prioritized communities for a period of two years. This support is therefore targeted, limited and time-bound. In Niger, the monthly amount has been set at 10,000 CFA but recently increased to 15,000 CFA. These amounts correspond to US\$ 17 and US\$ 26 respectively, with the latter being in line with the national poverty line of US\$ 0.90 per person per day.

These amounts are insufficient to cover basic needs as a whole, but will enable families to manage once they have access to some earning opportunities. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to engage in livelihood preservation and creation from the onset of the emergency, and already at the preparedness state engage with a wide arrange of ministries, including the ministry of agriculture in countries where reliance on subsistence farming is still prominent, to ensure refugees have the right to work and can access (rental) land.



## EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

### NIGER

Social protection in Niger is extremely weak. The only exception is the social safety net project that was established in 2007 with World Bank funding and expert support. The project's aim is to support food insecure households. It targets only Nigerien households. UNHCR collaborated with the SSN to support returnees in 2011.

While the project was meant to be the start of an integrated social safety net system, it struggled to be fully mainstreamed in the government structure. The project is now moving into its second phase. A major change is the expanded scope in order to include also vulnerable populations suffering from shocks, including displacement. This is a first step towards an adaptive social protection system. Further expansion of the scope of the programme including refugees now depends mainly on available funding.

The FY18-FY22 Country Partnership Framework presents its programme for Niger. The proposed strategy is made possible by a significant increase in resources. It sets out a strategy for achieving a crucial change of trajectory financed by a doubling of resources relative to the previous programme. It draws on new sources of financing available under the International Development Association (IDA) 18, including enhanced country allocation with additional resources from the Risk Mitigation Regime, and potential access to the Refugees Sub-Window, the Regional Integration Window and other IDA windows. The IDA resources available in IDA 18 could be over USD 1 billion, which represents an unprecedented opportunity. The IDA 18 Sub-Window for Refugees aims to assist in the management of forced displacement situations in insecure environments that go beyond humanitarian interventions, with a focus on short-term opportunities for self-reliance, capacity-building at local level and preparation for an eventual recovery. In terms of cash, it includes cash grants for livelihoods.



After the immediate emergency, before the situation becomes protracted, humanitarian organizations can and should prepare for more sustainable solutions, which include the incorporation of displaced populations in the national systems, ideally coupled with increased rights, such as access to land, and the right to work and invest in livelihoods. In Cameroon, for example, this is done through a [transitional social safety net](#).

The transition from humanitarian assistance to transitional social safety nets must be coupled with the adaptation of service provision and, ideally, development investments. It should be gradual, resources permitting. Those considered eligible for humanitarian cash transfers, whether blanket or targeted, should receive information about the upcoming transition and in the period in-between, when the transfer value should be slowly adjusted downwards until it is in line with the national value.

In the event that refugees are not included in the national social safety net and the inclusion is not foreseen in the medium term, this gradual alignment and thereafter support – that is in line with the national programme – will equally achieve the above-mentioned benefits. It will also facilitate a smooth exit, before a reduction in funding requires drastic and immediate changes to the assistance provided.

If national systems are being developed simultaneously, those non-nationals who do not have the capacity to become self-reliant in the immediate term may be able to benefit from the social safety net support in the medium term. In addition, lessons learned from the humanitarian intervention can facilitate and speed up the development of the national system, e.g. delivery mechanisms would already have been tested.

In sum, in low-income countries national social assistance or safety nets are not a supplement to (international) humanitarian assistance. But by leveraging the opportunities, the expansion of the availability of social safety nets globally, it is possible to further advance the quest for predictable and sustainable solutions for forced displacement, when it has already happened.

## TARGETING

Targeting approaches in countries where the national system is externally funded, including but not limited to Cameroon, Niger and Chad, are not uniform but generally follow the same logic and rely on a combination of targeting approaches.

In the first instance, certain areas are targeted based on national poverty data. From these regions or areas, the most vulnerable communities or

## EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

### CAMEROON

In Cameroon, the components of a transitional social safety net are the following:

- **Multi-purpose cash grants for basic needs:** UNHCR provides monthly cash transfers to enable targeted families to meet their immediate needs. The amount of this transfer is set to be equal to the national social benefit payment of 10,000 francs.
- **Livelihood support:** Families also receive a larger annual cash grant to invest in livelihoods activities of their choice. The livelihood grant is complemented with training and support.
- **Protection and referral to social services:** During the transition period, UNHCR ensures that individuals in need for further assistance are referred to appropriate services and aid.
- **Alignment with national social protection:** UNHCR's approach is complementary to the national, IDA18 and World Bank supported social protection programme. It provides the same transfer value for the same duration of two years and applies a similar targeting approach. This harmonised approach ensures that families supported by UNHCR receive the same amount of assistance as the refugees and Cameroonians supported through the national social safety net. This is perceived as fair by local authorities, refugees and Cameroonians alike, thereby reducing tension between refugees and the local host population, many of which also live in similar conditions of extreme poverty.

villages are then selected. These communities themselves identify the most vulnerable households, who can be either nationals or non-nationals, depending on the context. Families should bring their situation to the attention of the village elders or community leaders. Members of the community are also able to nominate families, who might not be in a capacity to do this themselves.

At the final stage, proxy-means testing is normally used to confirm if the identified households are indeed eligible. Variables considered include access to land, dependency rate, assets, and type of roof and floor, among other criteria. In the end, a limited percentage of those in need, i.e. living under the poverty line, are supported with cash and/or livelihood creation. Additional categorical criteria may also be included at times. Usually there is also a limit on the percentage of community members that can at any point receive this support.

In countries and areas where detailed household data is available, proxy-means testing may take place before community verification of the list, as is the case in Chad, for example.

Despite including a number of stages, this targeting approach has a high error rate, both regarding household inclusion and exclusion, and could create room for corruption, favouritism and fraud. However, as will be discussed in greater detail below, even countries with more developed social safety nets rely on self-identification (application) for social assistance with a complementary referral mechanism to ensure extremely vulnerable cases – mainly children and elderly people – are considered for support.

For transitional safety nets to follow the same targeting mechanisms or a similar approach, if at all appropriate, robust data on the displaced population is needed. Targeting for social assistance and livelihoods may differ. In displacement settings, community cohesion is likely to be weaker than in host communities, and therefore community targeting is ideally complemented with referrals by other organizations and agencies operating in the area. Where there are additional, status-based vulnerabilities identified among refugees and others of concern, referral to complementary services must be considered.

## When social safety nets are available but need expansion

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- ➔ **Alignment of cash assistance should always be considered in these situations as it may enhance opportunities for future inclusion and the start of a transition from aid to development and self-reliance.**
- ➔ **Alignment must be gradually introduced and implemented hand in hand with clear communication strategies targeting the communities to avoid abrupt changes to their household economy. Cash assistance to host communities should be considered.**
- ➔ **Even where inclusion of refugees in the national social safety net is possible, the coverage of vulnerable refugees is often limited, and continued cash assistance as a transition by humanitarian actors should be considered.**
- ➔ **Advocacy efforts towards donors and development actors should be foreseen to secure additional funds allowing for increased numbers of refugees accessing the national system.**

In middle and low income countries where national social safety nets exist but are not yet robust with a wide coverage, alignment of humanitarian cash assistance with national standards may allow for mainstreaming and integration in the medium and long term. It may also open up for opportunities for further transitioning from aid reliant survival to self-reliance and livelihoods.

In conflict situations with high levels of poverty – where host communities are being equally or even more deprived than refugees – equal and equitable assistance both to refugee and host communities facilitates community cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

In operational contexts where national assistance is lower than that provided by humanitarian agencies, gradual approaches with clear communication strategies are necessary to avoid abrupt changes and to allow refugees and others of concern to adjust their household's economies so that they can manage the transition, either in terms of the value



of the grant or in case of phasing-out due to more restricted targeting or prioritization of funding.

In contexts where refugees, asylum-seekers and/or other non-nationals do not have the right to work and/or access land, are not able to move freely or do not have documentation that is considered equal to a national ID card or similar, alignment of the transfer value with the national system may not be appropriate as the value of the support assumes access to income-generating activities and other sources, such as subsistence farming, to meet basic needs. Where these additional economic means cannot be accessed (legally), external support will need to compensate for their absence. In such situations, other elements than the transfer value could be aligned, such as the transfer mechanism.

In situations where social safety nets are available and to an extent available for non-nationals, especially refugees, alignment is especially relevant. For example in Nigeria, which has ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, the national legal framework is conducive for the inclusion of refugees in national systems and there is political will to include them also in national programmes. Refugees have access to national education and health systems, and the right to access farmland. Due to limitations in available documents and/or the official recognition of refugee IDs, most refugees can access financial services only partially. Equally, not all foreign degrees and other administrative documents are recognized.<sup>5</sup>

In such a context, governments must be encouraged to fulfill their responsibilities, while humanitarian assistance is provided as an immediate response to ensure conditions do not deteriorate further.

In Nigeria, the government's programmes include the National Social Investment Programme, a conditional cash transfer programme providing US\$ 6 per person per month or US\$ 30 per family, and the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme. In addition, the country benefits from a World Bank-supported National Social Safety Nets Project, which aims to expand the coverage of the national systems supporting poor and vulnerable

households. The total value of the World Bank support to this intervention is US\$ 1.8 billion.<sup>6</sup>

Humanitarian organizations must work in collaboration with development agencies to strengthen the capacity of the government and support the development of a national social registry, national support programmes and delivery mechanisms, and facilitate collaboration between the state and federal levels. In the short term however, emergency support must be provided to both displaced non-nationals and host community households.

To be effective, alignment of assistance must be accompanied with high level advocacy, coordination and communication with national authorities and development actors on all levels. It therefore requires high management commitment and engagement.



Please see in Annex 2 a decision tree that can guide decisions in terms of alignment of humanitarian cash assistance with national social safety nets.

## Social safety nets are functional and available to nationals

- ➔ **Social safety nets are functional and available to nationals**
- ➔ **Always consider alignment (if inclusion is not possible), in situations where the social safety nets are available, to an extent, to non-nationals.**
- ➔ **Be prepared to assist refugees in the inclusion process. Social assistance is often applied for in these situations; a process in which non-nationals may require support from humanitarian or development actors, or the authorities themselves.**
- ➔ **Advocate for non-nationals' access to recognised identity credentials. A main**

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR. (2018). *Refugee Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion 2019-2023 Global Strategy Concept Note*.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank. (2018). *Aspire: The Atlas of Social Protection – Indicators of Resilience and Equity: Social Assistance/Social Safety Nets*.

**challenge for refugees to be included in national social protection systems relates to the lack of recognition of their ID cards; a common obstacle also to financial inclusion.**

- ➔ **Recognise that inclusion is a time-consuming activity, requiring a significant amount of advocacy. Social policies, in particular in relation to non-nationals, are often held hostage by political agendas and their implementation is subject to change when a new government is elected.**
- ➔ **In situations where non-nationals do not yet access the national social safety net, humanitarians should not completely design parallel structures due to the difficulties to adapt when the inclusion opportunity presents itself. In these situations, try to align – even if it is only one of the cash assistance elements.**

In middle and high-income countries, support provided by humanitarian agencies is and should be only temporary, put in place until governments are willing and able to assume their responsibilities. Long-term provision of support significantly more elevated than available to the recipients in their country of origin, what they might earn when working and that of the resources made available to the national poor, could act as disincentives to work and become a source of friction with the host community. Also, inclusion into the national system, once used to higher level of support, will force recipients to make abrupt changes that can lead to negative consequences such as negative coping strategies.

Alignment in the medium term may put asylum-seekers and refugees at par with nationals, without compromising their capacity to cover for their basic needs. In most of the national programmes in middle and high-income countries, access to social safety nets is not automatic. Refugees need to apply for the scheme; eligibility is assessed on a case-by-case basis. Adopting similar processes already in place for asylum-seekers and refugees supported by humanitarian organizations can facilitate integration and encourage learning the language of the host country and other similar activities that support medium and long-term self-reliance. Achieving refugee inclusion, however, takes time and the resources available are often not

sufficient to meet all the refugees' needs. In these situations, a transitional safety net arrangement may be considered. As it is the case for any citizen or a recognised refugee, asylum-seekers are also able to access information, support and guidance to manage these processes.



The decision tree in Annex 3 goes through, at a high level, the considerations for alignment and potential integration of refugees and others of concern in the national social protection systems in these situations.

Even in middle-income countries, governments may not have the resources available to provide support to all eligible nationals. In such situations, it is unlikely that they would open the programme for non-nationals, unless additional, earmarked funds are made available for this specific purpose.

In Greece, with funding from the European Commission through the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), UNHCR has supported the Greek government by providing accommodation and cash assistance on a monthly basis to asylum-seekers and those who have expressed their interest in applying for asylum (police note holders). Under the scheme, only asylum-seekers who have arrived in Greece after 1 January 2015 are entitled to receive accommodation and cash assistance. This cut-off date was jointly agreed upon with the donor, DG ECHO, in order to keep the beneficiary numbers in line with available resources. While many countries limit the right to work until the need for international protection has been confirmed, in Greece both asylum-seekers and refugees have the right to work. The Social Solidarity Income programme is made available to Greek nationals and legal aliens (refugees and migrants) but does not include asylum-seekers.

## EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

### GREECE

Since the significant increase in the number of new asylum-seekers arriving to Greece in 2015, UNHCR has supported the government of Greece by providing accommodation and cash assistance with funding from DG ECHO. As of 2019, the programme will be funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG Home), which has expressed its preference for funding the authorities directly rather than supporting a UNHCR intervention beyond what is necessary to guarantee continuous provision of material support.

UNHCR Greece is currently working with donors and authorities to transfer this programme to the state. The longer-term objective of the transition is that Greece will be able to support asylum-seekers both in line with the EU directive but also in accordance with the best practices from other EU member states. The country already has experience in running an application platform and monthly payments for a social support grant, but this programme is not available for asylum-seekers.



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Elsewhere in Europe, the level of support to asylum-seekers in cash or vouchers is dependent on not only whether they live in catered or non-catered accommodation but also on the ability of the individual or household to support themselves. For example, in Sweden, which is perceived as having a relatively generous support programme, asylum-seekers who are able to provide for themselves must pay for their own accommodation. Those who are unable to manage without external support are entitled to housing, food and/or a cash allowance. The maximum amount made available to asylum-seekers is lower than what a Swedish national or a recognised refugee on welfare receives. The values are also different for adults and children, with children, unaccompanied or not, receiving a lower amount.<sup>7</sup>

While the assistance made available to asylum-seekers is worth less than the social security

benefits for nationals and recognised refugees, these are also dependent on the individuals' ability to provide for themselves. In Finland for example, like in most of other European Union (EU) countries, eligibility is dependent on one's income (e.g. salary, income from rented property or pensions from another country) and assets, and the income and assets of the spouse. People with income or assets may be excluded from assistance altogether or receive a reduced amount.<sup>8</sup>

In general, monetary or material support to asylum-seekers is not automatic in EU member states; asylum-seekers are expected to apply for it. Application is usually done online but can also be completed manually. Payments are mainly done through pre-paid ATM cards, as asylum-seekers are rarely able to open accounts.

<sup>7</sup> D. Hodali, A. Prange. (2018). *Asylum Benefits in the EU: How member states compare*.

<sup>8</sup> Migri. (2018). *Vastaanottoraha*.



## EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

### MEXICO

The Mexican government spends about 1.6% of its budget on the Prospera programme, which reaches more than six million households (from a total population of about 131 million people).

In Mexico, the humanitarian minimum expenditure basket (MEB) has been estimated higher than the maximum value provided by Prospera for the same purpose. Prospera is a conditional, targeted programme aimed at supporting the most vulnerable to graduate out of poverty. In addition to cash transfers for basic needs, it includes components on health, education and livelihood support. Enrolment in the programme is conditional and requires regular visits to health facilities and education attendance, among others. Both services are provided by the state and are available in the areas targeted by the programme. Assistance can be suspended when recipients of the assistance do not meet the conditions or do not longer meet the criteria.

Targeting happens in two stages using geographical and proxy means testing. Individual household data is collected to have sufficient information available for the calculations.

The payment structure is quite complex and the final amount depends on household composition, education and health needs, among other criteria. The maximum amount of monthly benefits is MXN 1,825 if there are no high-school scholarship holders in the household and MXN 2,945 if there are. In addition, if there are elderly people in the household, the amount will increase by MXN 370 per elderly person. Amounts are slightly lower in rural settings.

Money is paid bi-monthly or every three months depending on the number of requirements applied for the household's transfer. Cash is paid either directly in hand, to bank accounts, or using pre-paid cards or debit cards depending on the recipient and their degree of financial inclusion.

Mexico and other countries in Latin America are in a similar situation. Yet, many middle-income countries are often excluding legal aliens, including refugees, from their welfare programmes. Mexico's Prospera programme is well known and currently supports over 25 million people on a monthly basis. Prospera is a conditional cash transfer programme targeting Mexicans living below the so-called minimum well-being line. Refugees have access to economic and social rights – they have the right to work and can access both education and health services. However, refugees struggle with inclusion in Prospera partly due to problems to get their documentation recognised. The law also provides for adequate reception conditions, but this requirement is not generally met.<sup>9</sup>

In this context, it is in the interest of UNHCR to align, immediately or in the medium term, with the cash transfer values – and other elements – in the national system, as the Prospera and other national support together with self-reliance are the only feasible exit strategy for humanitarian actors. Again, given the high income discrepancies in the country, providing refugees and asylum-seekers grants higher than those made available to nationals is likely to increase xenophobia and cause unnecessary conflicts between communities. Yet, refugees and asylum-seekers may be in need of a higher amount as it may take extra time for examples to find a job or learn a language.

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<sup>9</sup> UNHCR. (2018). *Refugee Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion 2019-2023 Global Strategy Concept Note*.

# ANNEX 1

## Key considerations for assessing feasibility of alignment

Key questions for assessing the feasibility of using SSN programme to deliver assistance to refugees and others of concern (adapted from UNICEF)

Individuals to be reached	Needs to be covered	Payment mechanism	Accompanying measures
<b>PRELIMINARY NEEDS ASSESSMENT</b>			
Which areas are refugees living in? What are the characteristics of (most) concerned individuals/households?	What are the (financial/ material) needs of refugees? Are these needs temporary, or recurrent/long-term?	Are cash transfers appropriate to meet the needs of affected individuals?	What accompanying measures are necessary?
<b>KEY ASPECTS TO CONSIDER</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the SSN programme have good coverage of the geographical areas most refugees reside in? If not, how easy would it be to expand the programme to concerned areas?</li> <li>Are there legal barriers for enrolling refugees in the programme? If not, how easy would it be to expand the programme to concerned households?</li> <li>Can refugees choose their place of residence in law, policy and practice?</li> <li>Can refugees access bank services and loans in law, policy and practice?</li> <li>Can refugees own or rent land for agriculture in law, policy and practice?</li> <li>Are refugees allowed to work in law, policy and practice?</li> <li>Do refugees have the freedom of movement in law, policy and practice?</li> </ul>	<p>Do the SSN programme objectives align with the specific objectives of the humanitarian response?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If so, what do reviews and evaluations tell us about the appropriateness of the programme design to meet objectives?</li> <li>If not, which aspects of the design may still be useful to meet humanitarian objectives?</li> </ul>	<p>Are there robust administrative systems with good capacity to deliver timely and accurate payments? Can this capacity be supported? Are payment distribution networks functioning after the emergency?</p> <p>Is the delivery mechanism accessible to non-nationals (voucher/ATM card/SIM card delivery)?</p>	<p>Does the programme include any complementary services (e.g. education and health)? Can this capacity be supported? Do refugees access complementary services at par with nationals?</p>
<b>EXTENT TO WHICH THE PROGRAMME COULD BE USED</b>			
<p>Targeting criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Could the same enrolment criteria be used for refugees?</li> <li>Could enrolment criteria be relaxed to include groups affected by displacement-induced trauma or having vulnerabilities caused by the displacement (e.g. child-headed households, elderly people living on their own)?</li> </ul> <p>Database:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the programme underpinned by a social registry / single registry?</li> <li>What personal identifying documents are required and accepted?</li> <li>What personal identifying data is recorded (biometrics, name, address, national ID number, phone number/SIM, specifically assigned registration number) and can refugees provide the minimum required?</li> <li>Is beneficiary data and account information stored in an electronic information management system? Who can access the system?</li> <li>Does this contain information on other social protection programme accessed by beneficiaries? Does it contain data on non-beneficiaries?</li> <li>How reliable is the programme database? How often is this data updated?</li> <li>How is data protected?</li> </ul> <p>The enrolment process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does the enrolment of beneficiaries take place, is it on a rolling basis or only at certain times?</li> <li>How well do people understand the application process and how decisions are made; is there any evidence of political bias, or corruption, in the registration and approval process; or of any delays / bottlenecks?</li> <li>How easy and fast would it be to run a new enrolment campaign, in existing programme areas and/or new areas?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are the current transfer value and frequency adequate to cover needs?</li> <li>Are there any procedures/ SOPs for modifying the programme in the event of a crisis?</li> <li>Could the transfer value be topped up if needed? How fast is the decision process likely to be?</li> <li>Could the frequency of the transfer be increased if necessary? How fast is the decision process likely to be?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can refugees access the delivery system in use?</li> <li>Can the current delivery system be used as it is?</li> <li>Can the payment distribution network be expanded to cover new areas?</li> <li>Could different delivery mechanism be incorporated (voucher/ ATM card/SIM card delivery)?</li> <li>Can the processes be modified to accommodate people with additional support needs or who are not familiar with the system?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can current complementary services be accessed by refugees?</li> <li>Can the existing complementary services be used as they are?</li> <li>Does the programme have the capacity to take on an additional caseload, or can this capacity be supported?</li> </ul>

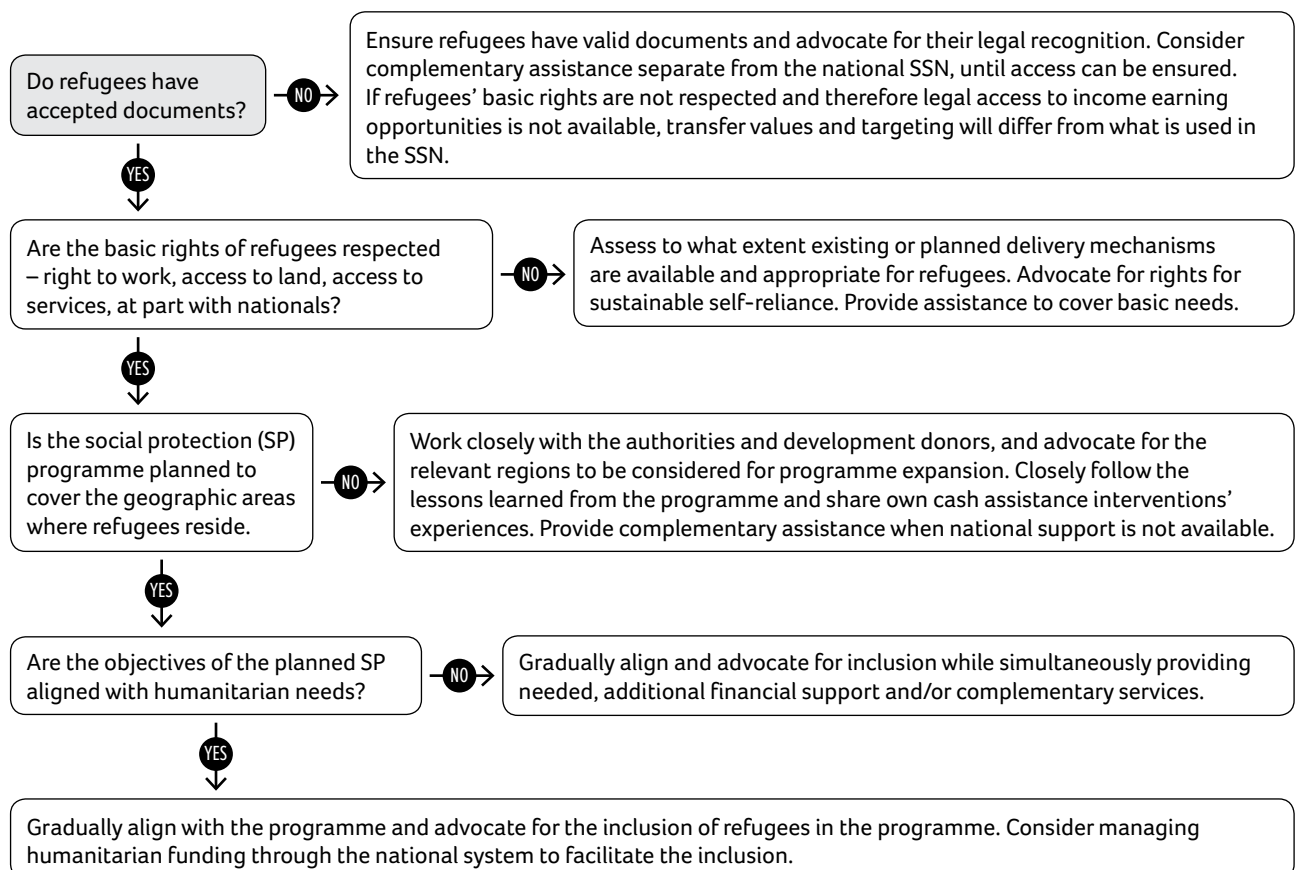
Individuals to be reached	Needs to be covered	Payment mechanism	Accompanying measures
<b>EXTENT TO WHICH OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE OVERALL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM COULD BE USED</b>			
What are the opportunities and risks associated with using the national system, in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timeliness of the response;</li> <li>• Adequate coverage of refugees;</li> <li>• Adequate coverage of needs?</li> </ul>	Are there any opportunities to help strengthen the national system (specially in case of recurrent/long-term needs)?  Are there any risks that linking will overburden/do harm to the social protection programme/system? If so, could they be mitigated?	Are there restrictions preventing a humanitarian entity from transferring funds to the government?  If so, could an alternative set-up be envisioned (e.g. humanitarian organisations directly paying transfers, but relying on the system)?	Does the organisation in question have the required setup/resources to effectively deliver, for example, transitional social safety nets to facilitate alignment and ideally, integration?  If not, can additional resources/support be mobilised?

Additional questions for deciding whether or not to link with the national system to deliver assistance to refugees and others of concern

Humanitarian response	System building	Administrative feasibility	Internal capacity
What are the opportunities and risks associated with using the national system, in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timeliness of the response;</li> <li>• Adequate coverage of refugees;</li> <li>• Adequate coverage of needs?</li> </ul>	Are there any opportunities to help strengthen the national system (specially in case of recurrent/long-term needs)?  Are there any risks that linking will overburden/do harm to the social protection programme/system? If so, could they be mitigated?	Are there restrictions preventing a humanitarian entity from transferring funds to the government?  If so, could an alternative set-up be envisioned (e.g. humanitarian organisations directly paying transfers, but relying on the system)?	Does the organisation in question have the required setup/resources to effectively deliver, for example, transitional social safety nets to facilitate alignment and ideally, integration?  If not, can additional resources/support be mobilised?

## ANNEX 2

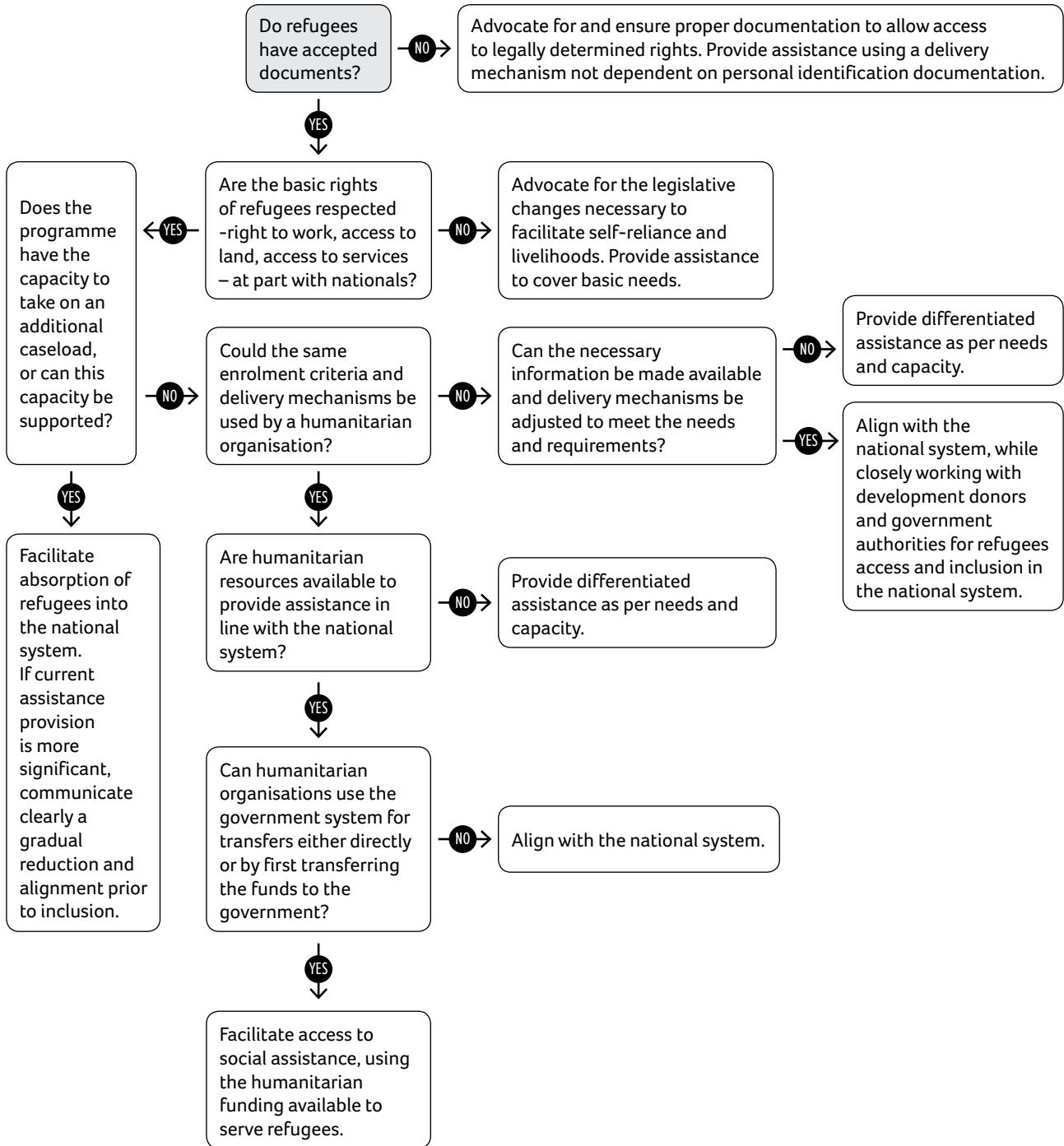
### Decision tree for alignment of humanitarian cash assistance with national social safety nets when social safety nets are available but need expansion





# ANNEX 3

## Decision tree for alignment and potential integration of refugees in national social protection systems when social safety nets are functional and available to nationals









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## MORE INFORMATION

UNHCR Global Cash Operations,  
Division of Programme Support and Management,  
UNHCR Geneva, [hqcash@unhcr.org](mailto:hqcash@unhcr.org)



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The UN Refugee Agency