



# Connecting the Missing Link: Cash-Based Interventions for Protracted and Transitional contexts in the Middle East and Northern Africa region

*Research Brief*

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Cover photo: IOM Staff carry out a distribution of pre-loaded ATM cards to a group of migrant workers from Sierra Leone in Beirut, Lebanon. The cash-based intervention activity helps vulnerable migrants with a monthly balance of 400,000 LBP for three months which is topped up electronically. © IOM 2020/Muse MOHAMMED

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# **Connecting the Missing Link: Cash-Based Interventions for Protracted and Transitional contexts in the Middle East and Northern Africa region**

Research Brief

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# INTRODUCTION

While humanitarian cash-based interventions (CBIs) are a well-established tool for meeting emergency food security and basic needs, there is a growing interest in exploring the uses of CBIs across sectors and programmes to help achieve more sustainable outcomes, and to understand their impacts within the Humanitarian Development Nexus (HDN).<sup>1</sup> Against this backdrop, this research, prepared for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) by Neetu Mahil, has been conducted focusing on protracted and transitional contexts in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. This research explores how CBIs can be used to reduce the need for humanitarian response, by promoting linkages to social protection systems or through early recovery and livelihoods interventions, and reducing the impact of disruptions from the ongoing

COVID-19 crisis on the financial and socio-economic well-being of migrant, displaced, and host communities in Libya, Sudan, Lebanon, Jordan, Northwest Syria,<sup>2</sup> Iraq, and Yemen. This research examines the available evidence and examples of pathways for achieving more sustainable outcomes using CBIs, which include: linking to or strengthening social protection systems, either national or humanitarian, which provide vital safety nets for people experiencing shocks; early recovery and livelihoods interventions that aim to help affected populations access income and protect assets through training and capital support; and market system strengthening interventions that aim to holistically improve the functioning of markets through the increase or creation of goods, services, or jobs.

## KEY FINDINGS

**CBIs play a critical role in the pathways from emergency programming to more sustainable solutions explored in this research, while markets across the MENA region have been incredibly resilient even in the face of impacts from COVID-19.** CBIs are a highly versatile and effective tool as they can effectively meet the emergency and basic needs of vulnerable populations, can be suitable to meet protection, shelter, and reintegration needs, and have been integral to COVID-19 responses around the world. If provided in a regular predictable manner, they can provide a vital humanitarian safety net for people excluded from social protection systems and decent employment opportunities, and be the link between humanitarian response and social protection. By meeting the consumption needs of participants, CBIs

are also a critical component in effective early recovery and livelihoods and market strengthening interventions.

**Although social protection systems exist to some degree in most of the countries evaluated in this research, they do not tend to be shock responsive, dependably inclusive of refugees or migrants, sufficiently funded, nor developed in terms of implementation capacity to be reliable pathways in terms of humanitarian exit strategies.** In contrast, humanitarian actors have been highly responsive to the needs of populations impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, implementing programmes quickly and expanding the reach and scale of interventions. In the short to medium term,

humanitarian actors must continue to aid vulnerable households, especially those who are excluded from social protection programmes, while also working to address the underlying barriers that challenge households' abilities to meet their own needs, to ensure they are less reliant on national or humanitarian social protection over time. In the ways that humanitarian CBIs are designed and delivered, there are opportunities<sup>3</sup> to piggyback and align with social protection systems, and vice versa. Despite the various pathways and examples of linkages between social protection and humanitarian CBIs, whether linkages are made and how, must be carefully considered to ensure vulnerable groups have their needs met in comprehensive, timely, and safe ways.

**To effectively substitute for income and gaps in social protection programmes, especially for vulnerable migrants, IDPs, refugee, or asylum seekers, who tend to have fewer pathways for employment and social safety net support, cash assistance must be provided regularly and predictably over multiple months.** Having impact in terms of households' ability to comprehensively meet their needs, repay debt, save, or invest in productive assets to break the cycle of vulnerability can require providing more rounds or months of cash assistance to fewer households if budgets are limited, although this can be difficult in contexts where emergency needs are pervasive. Ultimately there can be challenging trade-offs between reaching scale and having impact, and each IOM Mission must determine priorities and appropriateness for their context.

**Humanitarian organizations are increasingly understanding that in addition to meeting needs, they must also design and implement programmes that reduce needs, especially as needs remain pervasive in protracted contexts, humanitarian funding becomes more**

**stretched, and exit strategies to national social safety net systems remain unreliable.** Vocational trainings are typically not effective in isolation and more effective when paired with apprenticeships or follow-on support from mentors or trainers. Combining CBIs with job and skills trainings, financial literacy classes, apprenticeships and other economic opportunities can ensure that humanitarian assistance leads to more sustainable outcomes for vulnerable groups who have lost their livelihoods. CBIs can improve the chances of success for livelihoods trainings by reducing the barriers to participation, or by meeting the consumption needs of business grant recipients who are in turn more likely to use business grants funds for their intended objectives instead of using cash grants to meet their basic needs.

**A core challenge remains the extensive shortage of decent jobs for the people who need them.** This is true across countries and never more than now as these countries face multiple economic and financial crises. Many jobs in the MENA region also tend to be in the public sector, which are scarce and typically reserved for nationals. Creating opportunities for self-employment is important for those who are not eligible for public sector employment or who face other constraints and barriers, such as women, migrants, and refugees. Business trainings focused on self-employment are better suited for vulnerable groups such as migrants, IDPS, refugees, and asylum seekers, traditionally excluded from labour opportunities. To have impact, longer and more comprehensive trainings with a combination of services are more effective, while measuring and seeing impacts typically requires a longer time horizon. A promising and important area of work which combines livelihoods training and complementary support models is the market strengthening value chain development approach.

# COUNTRY ANALYSIS

## LEBANON

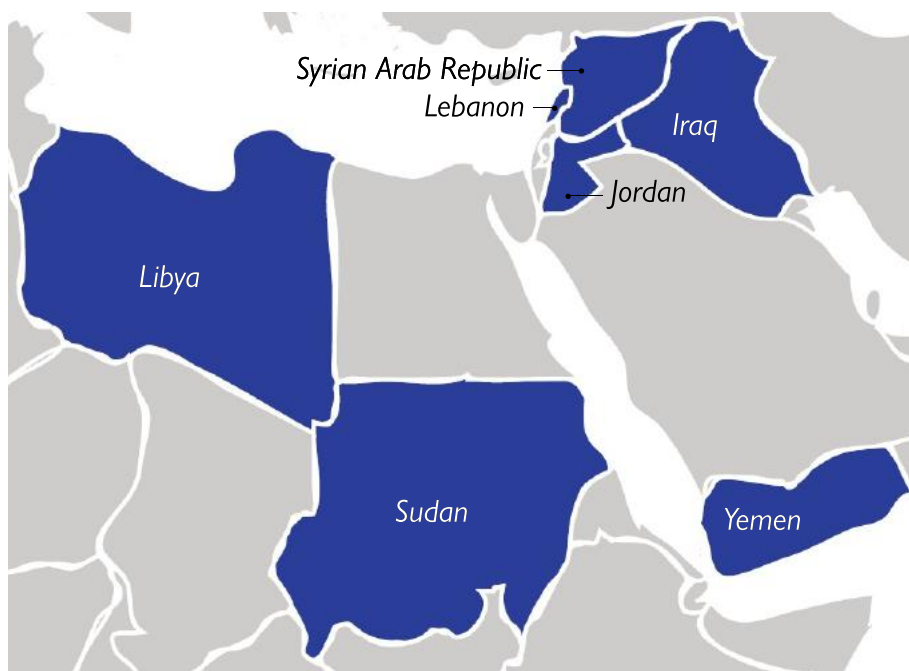
Lebanon is undergoing severe difficulties, underpinned by a range of protracted crises, spanning economic collapse, political paralysis, and unprecedented destruction to Beirut Port and environs, all of which occurring alongside COVID-19. Economic conditions have deteriorated dramatically over the past year, with the Lebanese state incapable of providing necessary safety nets to cover the rapid spread of poverty in country. Humanitarian aid is reaching a significant number of refugees and vulnerable Lebanese with monthly transfers, which are largely keeping pace with inflation.

## JORDAN

With high levels of poverty, structural unemployment, and inequality, Jordan is a developed country struggling to meet the needs of its own population and those of refugees. IOM co-chairs the Basic Needs Working Group and is a member of the Common Cash Facility in Jordan. The latter acts as a common platform to deliver cash assistance to vulnerable populations. The platform provides a secure and efficient cash transfer mechanism that links with UNHCR's registration data, increases accountability and reduces costs through jointly negotiated agreements with financial service providers. IOM's CBI approach is well developed and aligned to best practice.

## NORTHWEST SYRIA

Syria remains one of the most complex humanitarian crises characterized by ongoing hostilities that have resulted in massive human suffering, widespread destruction of public infrastructure, and displacement. The devastating economic situation ravaged by the decade of war and compounded by COVID-19 pandemic has further eroded livelihoods, strained coping strategies and exposed a large section of the population to food insecurity. Multi-purpose/multi-round cash assistance to meet the emergency needs of the population aligned with coordination mechanisms remains critical to build resilience of the people and community.



## IRAQ

Iraq is a fragile, post-conflict country, and has experienced budget deficits related to the precipitous drop in oil prices and COVID-19, and structural issues. Iraq is the largest IOM mission in the MENA region and meets needs across a range of outcome areas including basic humanitarian needs, protection, early recovery, durable solutions, stabilisation and migration management and policy. Iraq has a social protection architecture, but the ongoing political uncertainty and economic status hinders the Government's ability to fully utilize it. In the absence of adequately funded social protection safety nets, the Government of Iraq is supported by international actors.

## LIBYA

Libya, with some of the highest unemployment rates and the youngest population in the MENA region, is an extremely challenging operational context with prolonged instability, hard to reach areas, restrictions on the use of cash delivery mechanisms for particular groups such as migrants, as well as a severe economic crisis with fluctuating levels of inflation, currency shortages, and capital controls.

## SUDAN

Sudan, still affected by conflict, mass refugee influxes, international sanctions and in political transition, is reeling from hyper-inflation, liquidity challenges and shortages of basic imported commodities such as wheat, fuel, and sorghum. The national social safety net programme is currently piloting transfer delivery mechanism, which links mobile accounts with e-wallets, but these transfers are modest and limited to Sudanese nationals.

## YEMEN

Yemen, as one of the world's poorest countries, is ill equipped to deal with its manifold crises including conflict, floods, disease outbreaks, widespread malnutrition, and the fragile economic situation. Yemen's Social Welfare Fund (SWF) currently provides monthly assistance to chronically poor households, but the transfers are modest and likely do not meet the full consumption needs of recipients.

# TECHNICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The design and delivery of interventions must be driven by the overall programmatic outcomes and objectives a programme seeks to achieve, contextual factors, and by the needs on the ground.

If the objective is to meet the **emergency basic needs** of households, **unconditional cash transfers** are cheaper and faster than Cash-for-Work (CFW) schemes and so allow programmes to reach a higher number of vulnerable households. Whereas CFW schemes can be appropriate in post disaster recovery, contexts where unemployment is high, or for groups excluded from labor markets such as IDPs, people with disabilities, refugees, and migrants—the evidence on pathways from CFW to more permanent employment is weak. Using value chain analysis and labour market assessments to inform the design of CFW enables this type of intervention to contribute to solutions that also can strengthen markets.

If the aim of the programme is instead to **reduce needs through long-term employment, labour market assessments and value chain analyses** should inform the types of interventions most suitable for potential beneficiaries, linking them to the demand for skills, goods, and services in the marketplace, while tailoring programme interventions based on the specific constraints individuals and businesses face, including legislative and policy barriers that prohibit the inclusion of particular groups into the labour market.

**Vocational trainings**, which are generally more suitable for those allowed to **participate in labour markets**, are most effective when coupled with apprenticeships in high growth sectors and cash assistance that meets the consumption needs of



*Affected populations benefit from Cash-for-Work programme in Lebanon. © IOM 2020*

participants during the programme. Since decent jobs are scarce especially for non-nationals such as migrants and refugees, assessment-informed business trainings and support focused on self-employment are more effective, but require more capital, time and comprehensive and highly tailored support that addresses individual barriers and constraints to be successful. There are not one size fits all approaches.

In exploring possible and appropriate **linkages between humanitarian and social protection systems**, it is important to work with governments wherever possible to strengthen and make social protection systems more inclusive and advocate for the inclusion of highly vulnerable groups into labour markets.

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<sup>1</sup> While CBIs can contribute to reducing drivers of conflict and violence, the potential linkages to peace outcomes are not specifically explored as part of this research report. Reference to the Nexus in this report is limited therefore to the HDN and not the Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus (HDPN).

<sup>2</sup> This report is limited to the northwest region of the Syrian Arab Republic, which is currently contested territory, and does not cover the full geographical area of the Syrian Arab Republic which includes territory controlled by the Government of Syria (GoS). This report will refer to this region as NW Syria.

<sup>3</sup> This lends itself naturally to IOM's TRD portfolio, which aims to create environments conducive to more functional national social safety net systems by building labour market and reducing caseload.



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**The full Outcome Report is available upon request,  
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