

Summary of Findings: Impact of Cash Based Interventions (CBI) on Protection Outcomes

September 2018 – April 2019

Children account for 2.5 million (almost half) of the Syrian refugee population, and child protection remains a core element of UNHCR's protection response.

UNHCR has been promoting research projects aimed at assessing the contribution of different cash assistance modalities for enhancing child protection outcomes and improving the well-being of refugee children and their households. UNHCR cash assistance programs in the MENA region are some of the largest and most advanced cash programs in the world.¹ UNHCR distributed over US\$ 230 million in cash assistance across the region in 2018, reaching some one million individuals. CBI represent an important component of a much broader and integrated network of activities and services provided by UNHCR to provide protection and assistance to the most vulnerable. Existing vulnerability assessment tools such as the Vulnerability Assessment Framework in Jordan (VAF), Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR) and Egypt Vulnerability Assessment of Refugees (EVAR) used for identification of vulnerability focus mainly on socioeconomic factors, with limited weight given to specific protection needs such as child protection or prevention, risk mitigation and response to sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). Separate pathways for CP and SGBV referrals have been developed to address the need to include families provided with child protection case management services among beneficiaries of cash assistance programmes. The region has a critical mass of data that can be analysed to better understand the impact of cash transfers on mitigating protection risks among children.

Drawing on this evidence base, UNHCR has a comparative advantage in effectively delivering CBI as a protection tool that is informed and optimised based on robust protection data, and is well-integrated into complementary protection interventions, including case management and other assistance services.

The following are the results from multi-country research launched in 2018 on refugee data in Egypt, Jordan and

Lebanon to study the impact of CBI on child protection outcomes. MENA Protection Service and the CBI Unit recently finalized this research project that aimed to demonstrate the impact of cash assistance modalities as a key protection tool to prevent and respond to child protection risks.

These studies were initiated in recognition of the fact that socio-economic vulnerability can increase significantly as the displacement of refugees becomes more protracted, leading to an array of protection concerns, including significant protection risks for children. The Syria crisis was identified as a particularly opportune context to examine as Syrian refugees are contending with increasing socio-economic vulnerability linked to increased indebtedness, the depletion of savings and limited livelihoods opportunities—a situation that has increased the vulnerability of women, girls, men and boys to a broad range of protection risks and negative coping strategies. In Jordan, for instance, 82% of Syrian refugees now live below the poverty line, and 79% resort to harmful coping strategies such as child marriage and child labour.² Similarly, Lebanon has witnessed a sharp rise in a spectrum of severe negative coping strategies among displaced Syrian families, from 28% in 2014 to 67% in 2015, which include begging, the removal of children from school, child marriage, the worst forms of child labour and even survival sex.³ As of 2018, nearly all (96%) of displaced Syrian families in Lebanon rely on some form of negative coping strategy to meet their basic needs.⁴

Noting the strong nexus between poverty and protection, the research in Lebanon focused on examining the impact of cash assistance as a key tool to prevent and mitigate child labour. While in Jordan and Egypt, the studies aimed to identify dynamics contributing to children's exposure to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect (coded in UNHCR's proGres-database as "LP-AN")⁵, with a view to identifying profiles that are more susceptible to child protection risks. The studies have generated an invaluable analysis of household (HH)

¹ UNHCR Cash Report <https://www.unhcr.org/5c5c5acc4.pdf>. The Syria and Iraq situations account for six of the ten largest UNHCR cash assistance programmes in the world (1. Lebanon, 2. Jordan, 4. Turkey, 7. Egypt, 8. Syrian Arab Republic, and 9. Iraq).
² Care International, 7 Years into Exile: How urban Syrian refugees, vulnerable Jordanians and other refugees in Jordan are being impacted by the Syria crisis, June 2017, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2017%20CARE%20Jordan%20Syrian%20refugees%20Summary%20final%20web%20%28revised%29%2016062017.pdf>.
³ Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-16, available at: http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/01/20151223_LCRP_ENG_22Dec2015-full-versionoptimized.pdf.
⁴ Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017- 2020 (2018 update), available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/LCRP2018_EN_Full_180122.pdf
⁵ LPAN: UNHCR ProGres-database needs code denoting children facing protections risks of Violence, exploitation, Abuse and neglect

copied strategies and the exposure of children to risks or incidents of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. This results of these studies provide evidence of the need to strengthen identification of children at risk, to harmonize referrals and to standardize cash assistance

with protection-centred data, and to develop technical guidance on the design of UNHCR CBI, along with complementary protection interventions and services, to contribute to enhanced protection for children involved in child labour or facing other protection risks.

Data Collection and Analysis

All three countries used a mixture of quantitative (HH survey data) and qualitative techniques (focus group discussions (FGDs), desk reviews and key informant interviews (KIIs)) for data collection and analysis. In Lebanon, the quantitative data used was taken from four data sources of families receiving different types of assistance: 1) regular multipurpose cash (MCAP); 2) one-off cash assistance as part of a response to protection incidents (PCAP); 3) one-off emergency cash assistance (ECA); and 4) protection services. In Egypt and Jordan, data sources were household data⁶ and

case management information (urgent cash assistance (UCA) data, Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS) data as well as from RAIS⁷ and proGres⁸ databases) to identify and profile those households that are more susceptible to child protection risks. In Jordan, this was analysed with a view to develop a CBI tool to be integrated into Best Interest Procedures to clarify where CBI would be appropriate in addressing child protection concerns in line with the Do No Harm principle, recognizing that CBI can sometimes produce unintended consequences.⁹

Key Findings

• One-refugee approach

Both Egypt and Jordan recommended the one-refugee policy and support. Egypt is already en route to implementing the recommendation of the one-refugee approach, i.e., aiming to support humanitarian interventions targeting all refugees irrespective of their country of origin and to apply the same standards, thereby aligning assessments, assistance and modalities being rolled out in 2019.

• Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) analysis

All three studies found children living within female-headed households (FHHs) were at a higher risk of vulnerability to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation than other HHs, with boys being more susceptible than girls, particularly as the older boys in the HH faced the likelihood of being sent to work. It might be that the nature of abuse and exploitation against girls is more of a hidden nature as they are involved in domestic chores and hence not captured by the studies on child labour in public settings. Moreover, Principal Applicants (PAs) of families with children identified registered with the LP-AN specific needs code have lower educational attainment in Jordan and no income generating occupation. In Jordan FHHs receiving cash assistance over time experienced a decrease in vulnerability

• Time elapsed since arrival

All three studies found that the duration of stay since arrival in the host countries plays a role in heightened vulnerability. Children who had just arrived in the host country are prone to exposure to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation/child labour. In Jordan children experiencing violence, abuse or neglect are nearly 12% more likely to have an informal arrival status (i.e. entered through unofficial entry points) than families in the random group. A higher percentage of cases having experienced violence, abuse or neglect were recorded in 2013, shortly after they entered Jordan.

⁶ In Egypt this consisted of data collected previously through HH survey (EVAR) and BIA data from child protection case management; In Jordan this data was collected from ProGres, the refugee Registration database, RAIS (inter-agency coordination platform) and BIA data from child protection case management.

⁷ RAIS (inter-agency Refugee Assistance Information System)

⁸ proGres: UNHCR's Profile Global Registration System used for refugee registration

⁹ For instance, field consultations confirm that community perceptions that all UASC are automatically eligible for cash assistance can actually incentivize high-risk behavior, such as refugee children leaving intact families to claim such assistance, along with potentially incentivizing high-risk movements by UASC and other children to countries of asylum if there are community perceptions that cash assistance is automatically available to all children of a particular profile.

- **Impact on structural drivers**

In all the three studies there was no direct, one-to-one link between CBI and child protection risks, but all studies found that cash has an indirect impact on mitigating structural drivers of child protection issues when part of a multifaceted response by improving access to services such as education, health, psychosocial support. In Lebanon, where the structural drivers identified for child labour include debt, size of HH, lost years of education, overcrowding in schools, age and gender characteristics (older/male children more at risk), living in FHHs or in HHs with a member having a disability, and the situation of children being unaccompanied or separated, it was found that cash increased access to skills development for caregivers and improved the supply side of schooling interventions (i.e. by increasing access and improving the quality of education provided). It was also noted that conditional cash assistance was more effective in addressing child labour than MCAP. In Egypt, almost all respondents (99%) claimed that they used UNHCR cash assistance to purchase food or to pay for rent (92%).

- **Impact on child well-being**

All three studies showed that CBI led to an increase in spending for food and better dietary diversity for children. CBI was also shown to have an inverse relationship with negative coping strategies by reducing stress within a HH, decreasing engagement in the worst forms of child labour like survival sex, and diminishing the risk of exposure to violence, abuse and neglect, thereby increasing the safety of children. In Jordan, the study found that removing HHs from MCAP exacerbates child neglect and trauma, as CBI had been reducing the psychological stress of parents having to eke out funds to fulfil basic needs. Furthermore, CBI was found to mitigate the severity of child labour, including the total number of hours worked. In Lebanon, for instance, HHs sent children to work for fewer hours as a result of receiving MCAP. In Egypt, data analysis showed that receiving cash decreased the likelihood of HHs using negative coping strategies. Ten percent of households not receiving cash assistance spent from their savings, while this figure was likely to be less than half if they received cash assistance. Hence cash assistance led to savings and asset formation. The most significant impact was observed among unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) who reported that cash allowed them to move to more physically secure areas, led to fewer incidents of violence, and allowed them to pay for their own food and transport, thus rendering them less susceptible to exploitation by others.

- **Schooling**

In Egypt, the study found that the high cost of education was cited as a reason for not attending school (38%). Violence, abuse and neglect was prevalent in HHs with lower education and among lower income earners. In Lebanon a positive correlation was found between HHs receiving MCAP and school enrolment rate within the HH. The provision of CBI led to an increased household income which in turn led to increased expenditure on education and associated costs (fees, materials, transportation, uniforms, shoes). Conversely, a discontinuation of cash assistance led to withdrawal of children from school thereby compromising long-term pathways to human capital accumulation.

- **Child marriage**

Only the study in Jordan examined the impact of CBI on child marriage. It found that MCAP might reduce vulnerabilities leading to child marriage and that a sustained amount of MCAP might delay the age of child marriage, but this area requires more research in order to be corroborated.

- **Amount of CBI provided**

All three studies concluded that the amount of transfer of MCAP was not enough to meet the beneficiaries' basic needs and had to both be complemented with additional funds and effectively integrated with other protection services, including case management, in order to have the most significant impact. In that sense, the cash received was helpful in meeting basic needs but not adequate when used alone. In Egypt, the study found that the impact of MCAP helped make children less vulnerable to incidents of violence, worst forms of child labour, including survival sex, etc. In Lebanon, receiving MCAP in

isolation from other interventions did not reduce child labour. However, in the presence of receiving supplementary assistance from other agencies, the impact of the assistance became statistically significant.

- **Duration of cash transfer**

In Jordan, one-off UCA had no effect (positively or negatively) overall in children's exposure to violence, abuse, or neglect. However, receiving MCAP over a longer time period was correlated with a decrease in the number of protection incidents reported. An exclusion from cash assistance, however, led to HHs withdrawing children from school as a first coping strategy. Moreover, it led to more violence against children due to an overall increase in psychological stress levels in the HH.

- **Impact of MPC on debt**

In Egypt, the most significant impact was observed among UASC who reported that, with cash assistance, they were able to pay for their own food and transport rather than becoming indebted, thus rendering them less susceptible to exploitation by others and at risk of violence. In Jordan and Lebanon, resorting to child labour was observed as a coping strategy against increasing indebtedness, especially among UASC, thereby raising an important concern about protection risks attached to accessing capital. In Lebanon, beneficiaries of MCA were found to be at a lower risk of indebtedness, which is a major structural driver of child labour.

- **Access to social networks**

Across the three countries, the studies found that, compared to refugees of other nationalities, Syrian and Iraqi refugees had better social networks which positively impacted their ability to leverage the cash assistance they received.

- **Impact on violence against children**

Across the three studies, MCAP led to mitigation of violence against children. In Lebanon, MCAP reduced the need for children to engage in child labour, thus making them less at risk of physical and sexual exploitation. In Jordan, MCAP appears to have an impact on decreasing family violence, but this requires further validation. In Egypt, MCAP reduced violence at home as children could afford to contribute to rent payments, and hence not forced to do household chores in their own house to offset living costs. It also allowed UASC to move to safer neighbourhoods thereby mitigating their exposure to places where they could become victims of exploitation and violence.

- **Conditional vs. unconditional cash transfers**

Studies in Egypt and Lebanon both found that conditional cash assistance contributes to greater positive impacts on a child's welfare, especially with respect to access to health and education. It was recommended to implement cash assistance with conditions attached for refugee children in Egypt to ensure a sustained outcome of keeping children in school as part of a broader protection and assistance strategy. By attaching conditions to cash assistance, the study indicated that follow up was required on monitoring the recipients to ensure that recipients remained as a part of the regular education system or linked to vocational training or other options leading to livelihoods.

Conclusions

All three studies indicated that CBI in isolation is not optimum, but that CBI in combination with other services provided in a sustained manner reduces vulnerabilities and has a positive impact on children's well-being, development and on human capital accumulation. They concluded that the impact of CBI would be enhanced with inclusion of protection indicators in the targeting formula as well as in the post distribution monitoring. The results also indicated that income

generating initiatives, especially for caregivers and women, as well as supply side interventions related to schooling, and building community awareness would be instrumental in optimising the CBI response to mitigate child labour. Hence, CBI alone may not prompt effective behavioural change to ensure successful outcomes for better education or health of children. Likewise, accompanying services may need their own additional inputs in the form of infrastructure support to improve their quality and availability to recipients. Complementing cash transfers with programmes to improve access and quality of services aims to fill the gaps left by CBI alone to augment the income effects and result in a greater, positive impact on the welfare of children.