

SOCIAL PROTECTION & CHILD PROTECTION:

Working together to protect children
from the impact of COVID-19 and beyond



THE ALLIANCE
FOR CHILD PROTECTION
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION



Save the Children

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Social Protection and Child Protection: Working together to protect children from the impact of COVID-19 and beyond

Coordinated by: The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

Co-sponsors: UNICEF and Save the Children

Endorsing agencies: ChildFund Alliance, International Federation of Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Maestral International, Plan International, Proteknôn Foundation for Innovation and Learning, War Child Holland, World Vision International and Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children.

Intended Audience: UN and multilateral development agencies, regional bodies, national governments, and donors

Objective: Lay out key arguments for close collaboration across SP and CP to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on children and families.

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INTRODUCTION: THE MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND PROTECTION AND WELL- BEING OF CHILDREN

Socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and how it links to the protection of children

In less than a year, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the global economy, triggering the deepest global recession in decades, including estimates of up to 150 million people being pushed into poverty.¹ Without urgent action to protect families, the number of children living in monetary-poor households could soar up by 117 million in 2020, according to new projections as of 29 June 2020. The total number of children living in poor households globally could reach just over 700 million in the absence of any mitigating policies.² This unprecedented socio-economic crisis has already rapidly exacerbated root causes of some of the biggest threats to child survival and well-being such as hunger, reduced access to health, education, social, and child protection services. In 2020, the pandemic has already led to the death of an additional 10,000 children each month due to lack of access to food, and an estimated 37 million may face hunger by the end of the year.³ Similarly, up to an additional 1.16 million under-five deaths could occur in six months due to reductions in routine health service coverage levels.⁴

This unprecedented socio-economic crisis has already rapidly exacerbated root causes of some of the biggest threats to child survival and well-being.

¹MSN. (2020). [World Bank chief warns extreme poverty could surge by 100 mn](#), August 20; World Bank (2020). [COVID-19 to Add as Many as 150 Million Extreme Poor by 2021](#), October 7th

² UNICEF (2020) [Child poverty and COVID-19](#).

³ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO. (2020). [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020: Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets](#).

⁴ Robertson, T. et al. (2020). [Early estimates of the indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on maternal and child mortality in low-income and middle-income countries: A modelling study](#). *The Lancet Global Health*, 8(7), 901-908.

School closures (which have affected 1.62 billion students), combined with wage cuts, loss of jobs, and declining new employment opportunities are fertile ground for spikes in hazardous and exploitative forms of child labour.⁵ According to *COVID-19 and child labour: A time of crisis, a time to act*, child labour decreased by 94 million since 2000, but that gain is now at risk, and millions more children are at risk of being pushed into child labour as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, the pandemic has also shone a spotlight on and exacerbated a so-called shadow pandemic, of gender-based violence. UNFPA predicts 15 million additional cases of gender-based violence for every three months of lockdown.⁶ Domestic lockdowns and school closures have exacerbated the risk of exposure to violence for women and children. Whilst the drivers of violence are complex, the evidence does point to the relevance of poverty-related stress. In a survey of more than 17,500 parents and 8,000 children across 37 countries, 19% of households in which violence was reported by children had lost all or most of their household income due to COVID-19, compared to 5% when there had been no loss of income. Violence in the household reported by children was double the rate when schools were closed (17%) compared to when schools were open and the child was attending in person (8%).⁷

In fact, for children experiencing abuse, schools often serve as one of the only places they can access support from trusted peers and adults outside their immediate family. The situation is particularly concerning for certain groups, such as those who are displaced or living in residential care: the closure of the former caused by COVID-19 implies a sudden shift to family-based care without the preparatory work required to ensure the best interests of the child are maintained.⁸ On the other hand, it can be expected that the number of children at risk of separation and in need of alternative care will increase – both during the crisis, where the disease, as well as the associated containment measures, may lead to separation of children from families and as a result of the long-term socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis on families' capacity to care.⁹ What's more, evidence from previous pandemics suggests a sharp increase in other forms of child protection risks, such as early and adolescent pregnancy, child marriage, female genital mutilation, family separation and abandonment, psychological and physical violence, as well as sexual abuse.¹⁰ It is estimated that up to 2.5 million additional girls will potentially be forced into marriage by 2025.¹¹ Recent research from the Gender and Adolescence

Domestic lockdowns and school closures have exacerbated the risk of exposure to violence for women and children.

⁵ Highest estimates as of 5 April 2020. See: UNESCO. (2020). *Education: From disruption to recovery*.

⁶United Nations Population Fund. (2020). *New UNFPA projections predict calamitous impact on women's health as COVID-19 pandemic continues*.

⁷ Edwards, Jess. (2020). *Protect a Generation The impact of COVID-19 on children's lives*. Save the Children International.

⁸Goldman, P., van Ijzendoorn, M. H. & Sonuga-Barke, E. J. S. (2020). *The implications of COVID-19 for the care of children living in residential institutions*. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 4, 12.

⁹ Better Care Network, The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, and UNICEF and Inter-agency Task Force (2020). *Technical Note on the Protection of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Children and Alternative Care*.

¹⁰ Bakrania, S. & Subrahmanian, R. (2020). *Impacts of Pandemics and Epidemics on Child Protection Lessons learned from a rapid review in the context of COVID-19*. *Innocenti Research Brief*. UNICEF OoR-Innocenti.

¹¹ Save the Children (Oct 2019) *Global Girlhood Report* – How COVID-19 is putting progress in peril

Global Evidence programme highlights the acute mental distress that COVID-19 has placed on children.¹² In this unprecedented context, children and families are not getting the support and services that they need, including child protection services. 70% of respondents in the aforementioned survey who suffered economic losses due to the pandemic said they had not received government support.¹³

To respond to the challenges brought to the fore by COVID-19, many governments have launched measures to mitigate the immediate impact of the pandemic on individuals, families, and children - many of the most critical have been through social protection systems. The United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence against Children issued an Agenda for Action that calls for a focus on social and child protection systems with special attention to the most vulnerable children.¹⁴ Yet globally, two out of three children have no access to any form of child or family benefit, and coverage is lowest where child poverty is highest.¹⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how critical social protection coverage is, and governments around the world have acted to put social protection measures in place to support the most vulnerable. A total of 200 countries/territories have planned or put in place over a thousand social protection measures, though many are temporary.¹⁶ Even so, we still see some 600 million children (this is a conservative estimate) not covered by any schemes.¹⁷ There is also little data indicating how refugees and displaced populations benefit from such measures, or to what extent they are linked with child protection services or outcomes (for an example, see Annexe 1 Case Study 4). Moreover, many of the most fragile countries still have limited national measures in place.¹⁸ Children urgently need sustainably financed social protection systems linked to properly resourced child protection services.

¹² Jones, N., Małachowska, A., Guglielmi, S., Alam, F., Abu Hamad, B., Alheiwidi, S. and Yadete, W. (2020) '[I have nothing to feed my family...](https://www.odi.org/publications/17297-i-have-nothing-feed-my-family-covid-19-risk-pathways-adolescent-girls-low-and-middle-income)' Covid-19 risk pathways for adolescent girls in low- and middle-income countries. Report. London: Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence <https://www.odi.org/publications/17297-i-have-nothing-feed-my-family-covid-19-risk-pathways-adolescent-girls-low-and-middle-income>

¹³ Edwards, Jess. (2020). [Protect a Generation The impact of COVID-19 on children's lives](#). Save the Children International.

¹⁴ United Nations (2020). [Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence against Children – Agenda for Action](#). April 2020

¹⁵ UNICEF Social Protection Global Framework, 2019

¹⁶ Gentilini, U. et al. (2020). [Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A Real-Time Review of Country Measures](#). The World Bank.

¹⁷ Wright, Y. (2020). [Children on the Frontline of the COVID and Climate Crisis: Urgent need to protect children from poverty with universal child benefits](#). Save the Children International.

¹⁸ Ibid.

What is Social Protection (SP)?

Social Protection is “a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life-course, with a particular emphasis towards vulnerable groups.”¹⁹ In line with widely acknowledged functions of social protection, a robust Social Protection system should protect, prevent, promote, and transform individuals and societies to achieve their full potential. Social protection systems should address both economic and social vulnerability. Child-sensitive social protection refers to the objective of ensuring that social protection systems and interventions are designed with the rights and needs of children at their core (see Figure below and Annexe 1 Case Study 1).^{20,21} Social protection programmes are designed to address chronic poverty, social exclusion, and vulnerability, and are a critical risk management tool for families, particularly to enhance their capacity to cope with and recover from crisis. However, gaps remain in their coverage. This is particularly so in contexts of migration and forced displacement, conflicts and crises settings, and or where social protection systems are nascent. Complementary programmes, including via the direct delivery of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) can help the excluded groups such as undocumented migrants, refugees, unaccompanied children, women, and others to meet their immediate needs. Such programmes can be designed in ways that facilitate the inclusion of the most vulnerable in social protection programmes and at the same time, support the strengthening of social protection system in the country.

The long-term vision is to achieve adequately financed, effective, and inclusive shock-responsive social protection systems. These systems should not only support an ongoing social contract between a government and its citizens to protect them against risks experienced throughout their life course (regardless of whether there is a humanitarian crisis or not) but also to respond to covariate shocks.²² Ensuring closer coordination between humanitarian and national systems offers opportunities to address the rights of excluded groups in the short and longer-term.

Child-sensitive social protection refers to the objective of ensuring that social protection systems and interventions are designed with the rights and needs of children at their core.

¹⁹ Definition developed by SPIAC-B as part of Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessments (ISPA) tools development. SPIAC-B is an interagency coordination mechanism composed of representatives of international organizations and bilateral institutions to enhance global coordination and advocacy on social protection issues and to coordinate international cooperation in country demand-driven actions.

²⁰ See also the [joint statement ‘Advancing Child-Sensitive Social Protection’](#), which aims to build greater consensus on the importance of child-sensitive social protection. It lays out the particular vulnerabilities that children and families face, the ways that social protection can impact children even when not focused on them, and outlines principles and approaches for undertaking child sensitive social protection.

²¹ See also “[A call for action for governments to expand children’s access to child-sensitive social protection in the wake of COVID-19](#)”

²² Covariate shocks are those that affect a group of individuals or households, such as natural disasters, an economic recession, pandemics, conflict, forced displacement, etc.

The arguments made in this paper on why and how to leverage social protection towards child protection outcomes apply to both government social protection systems, as well as humanitarian cash and voucher assistance.

A child-sensitive social protection system



Source: UNICEF's Global Social Protection Programme Framework, 2019

What is Child Protection?

Child protection is the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children.²³ In emergencies, protective factors surrounding a child are diminished while risk factors increase. Insecurity or crisis places children at risk of family separation, child marriage, exploitation, and violence, while caregivers struggle to identify the means to care for their children. This can cause a multitude of dire consequences with families potentially being forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as child labour, child marriage, and family separation. Associated stressors can compromise children's cognitive, emotional, social, and linguistic development as well as health and education outcomes, ultimately undermining attempts at breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

COVID-19 has led to severe economic stressors such as a reduction in household income, increased debt, and the illness or death of breadwinners, subsequently increasing risks to children while creating additional barriers to accessing protective services. Knowing the risk of experiencing certain forms of violence, exploitation, and abuse increases for monetarily poor children,²⁴ it is essential to take steps to secure family finances to keep children safe and protected. To do so, we must work across the socio-ecological model and strengthen child protection systems.²⁵ This includes ensuring child protection is incorporated into the design, implementation, and evaluation of social protection mechanisms. This may include, for example, ensuring linkages with the social welfare workforce, strengthened referral pathways, provision of parenting programmes, information sharing on preventative and mitigating measures, linkages with community-level child protection mechanisms, etc. Overall, social protection serves as a critical element in a broader strategy to ensure the protection of children.

We must work across the socio-ecological model and strengthen child protection systems.

²³ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019). [The Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).

²⁴ Save the Children Sweden (2011). [A Focus on Child Protection within Social Protection Systems Transforming Children's lives](#).

²⁵ See: The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2020). [Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic, Version 2](#), (May) and [2.2 billion children: How do we ensure their protection and well-being amidst an infectious disease outbreak? A background paper for the 2020 Annual Meeting for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) (October)



WHY BRING SOCIAL PROTECTION AND CHILD PROTECTION TOGETHER?

The work of social protection, as discussed above, is not just to reduce monetary poverty. It also addresses social vulnerabilities (due to personal characteristics or social dynamics such as disability, gender, age, sex, race, or any other form of identity or experience linked to discrimination, exclusion and or exploitation). These vulnerabilities often impede children from achieving their full potential. Conceptually, programmatically, and operationally the two sectors (social protection and child protection) have much in common. Social protection is one of the major social sectors within governments, often working at the national scale, that provides a unique opportunity for the child protection sector to leverage results for children. Inversely, child protection has much to offer social protection programming, with expertise in particular areas to support shared goals of addressing social vulnerabilities and promoting child rights and well-being. For example, child protection expertise on the identification of risk and protective factors linked to negative outcomes for children can inform the design of social protection systems that prevent harm to children. The social service workforce can also support social protection actors in the identification of vulnerable groups and their referral to adequate, quality services.

This policy brief outlines **three strategic reasons** why child protection actors should engage in leveraging social protection towards child protection outcomes and vice versa:

1. The **evidence indicates that social protection can offer much in support of child protection outcomes**, as outlined below. Given this evidence base and the scale of social protection systems in many contexts, integrating child protection outcomes in policies, programmes, and operations of social protection systems will help achieve results for children sustainably.

2. Second, there are **clear synergies to be had from finding ways to link, or where appropriate, integrate, social protection and child protection systems and mechanisms** to deliver better results for children. There are many entry points for this, from capitalising on established coordination mechanisms to drawing on institutional platforms such as Social Protection Management Information Systems or Child Protection Information Management Systems to identifying children and families who need support.
3. Third, **consistently bringing together expertise from both sectors yields substantially better results for children.** For example:
 - draw on child protection expertise and learning for better risk mitigation and response to child protection issues in existing social protection programmes (, including enhanced case management for existing social protection participants);
 - draw on social protection expertise in reaching recipients at scale; and
 - draw on experience in integrated, multi-sectoral programming from both sectors.

This rationale summarises the key entry points at a high level, based on much work done by both sectors in the past.²⁶ However, progress in terms of synergies and opportunities at the country level is highly inconsistent.

Challenges to the integration of SP and CP

It is important, however, to recognise that there are barriers to bringing these two sectors together, particularly in some humanitarian contexts. Many programmes are designed as stand-alone interventions and not in combination with other programmes and sectors, fearing the overload of social protection programmes with too many objectives. Some practitioners are particularly concerned about integrated programming and the risks and sensitivities that protection issues can involve and the need for robust protection-relevant analysis and coordination as well as data protection. The aim of this policy brief is not to ignore these concerns, but rather to illustrate practical ways in which the sectors can pull together to deliver greater results for children, without suggesting that either sector can deliver everything alone.

²⁶ UNICEF (2019). Activities, tools and resources to support implementation of UNICEF's 10 action areas in Social Protection. P.60

EVIDENCE ILLUSTRATING HOW SOCIAL PROTECTION APPROACHES CAN CONTRIBUTE TO CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

A. Address risk and protective factors linked to child protection negative outcomes (prevention)

Social protection can contribute to the reduction of risk factors, and strengthening protective factors related to child protection issues, including violence, risky sexual behaviours, child marriage, and child labour especially when combined with links to other services.

- A review of rigorous evaluations of cash transfers indicates that cash transfers can address several different sectoral outcomes with relevance to child protection, including reducing monetary poverty, increasing women's empowerment, and improving school enrolment and attendance, amongst other key outcomes.²⁷ Evidence suggests that this can be enhanced when provided with links to other services and efforts to address unequal gender norms and power dynamics.
- Social protection can contribute to child protection outcomes by addressing some of the different **drivers** of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence.^{28,29} For example, a mixed-methods review of cash transfers and intimate partner violence indicates that in over 70% of 22 rigorous studies reviewed, cash transfers reduced Intimate Partner Violence, though it is important to note

²⁷ Bastagli, F. et al. (2016). [Cash transfers: what does the evidence say?: A rigorous review of programme impact and of the role of design and implementation features](#). ODI.

²⁸ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019). [CPMS Pillar 4: Standards to Work Across Sectors](#). *Child Protection Minimum Standards*.

²⁹ Mishra, A. & Battistin, F. (2019). [Child Outcomes of Cash Transfer Programming: A synthesis of the evidence around survival, education, and protection in humanitarian and non-humanitarian contexts](#). Save the Children.

that this evidence largely came from development contexts and there are still many research gaps.³⁰ In addition, social protection can in some contexts reduce risky sexual behaviours, reduce early sexual debut, transactional sex and exploitation, and unsafe sex.³¹ Emerging evidence also suggests that social protection can have gender-transformative potential, including increasing gender-equitable attitudes through a cash plus approach³² which aims to [address long-term gender equality relevant outcomes](#).³³ However, ‘a do no harm approach’ is fundamental. While recognising the potential that social protection programming offers for protection outcomes, we must recognise the importance of a systematic and rigorous risk mitigation approach to ensure that rolling out social and child protection programmes does not expose participants or vulnerable and marginalised people around them to further risks.

- Evidence on pensions in low- and middle-income contexts from the same review indicates that children and adolescents growing up in recipient households benefit from increased school attendance and demonstrate a reduced incidence of sexual exploitation.³⁴ Poverty-related stress has been identified as a key driver, alongside social norms, of multiple child protection issues. For example, evidence suggests that cash transfers may play a role in reducing early marriage and child labour when poverty is a main driver.³⁵ On child marriage, the current evidence base is variable and not currently available in humanitarian contexts: whilst rigorous evaluations of social protection programmes in some cases showed a reduction in child marriage, for many the current consensus is that integrated programming, combining cash transfers with other components, is more promising. In addition, while there is some indication that cash transfer programmes can reduce the likelihood and intensity of participation in child labour, which has been shown to positively impact school enrolment and attendance,³⁶ the evidence also points to the need for careful design and attention to drivers.³⁷ Social

³⁰ Buller, A. M. et al. (2018). [A Mixed-Methods Review of Cash Transfers and Intimate Partner Violence in Low and Middle-Income Countries](#). *The World Bank Research Observer*, 33(2), 218-258.

³¹ Bastagli, F. et al. (2016). [Cash transfers: what does the evidence say?: A rigorous review of programme impact and of the role of design and implementation features](#). ODI.

³² Palermo, T. Chezhen, Y., Balvin, N. et al. Examining determinants of gender attitudes: evidence among Tanzanian adolescents. *BMC Women's Health* 20, 195 (2020).

³³ UNICEF OoR-Innocenti. (2020). [Age-Sensitive Social Protection: A conceptual framework](#).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Save the Children International. (2020). [The Effectiveness of Cash Transfer Programming for Children](#).

³⁶ International Labour Organization. (2020). [Brief: COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy Immediate responses and policy challenges](#).

³⁷ Jacobus de Hoop and Valeria Groppo, (2020) [How Do Cash Transfers Affect Child Work and Schooling? Surprising evidence from Malawi, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia](#), UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti.

protection programmes have also been linked to a reduction in family separation/child relinquishment to institutional/residential care and support of family reintegration.³⁸ Where social protection programmes have targeted households with children with disabilities, positive impacts on the overall well-being of children were observed.³⁹

Social protection can therefore contribute to the reduction of some key drivers of child protection issues, while child protection is, in turn, supportive of social protection objectives. While social protection is not a silver bullet, evidence is clear on the importance of working toward stronger linkages between both systems, given their complementarity.

Cash *plus*, a key component of social protection systems, is widely viewed as a potentially promising avenue, as it entails providing regular transfers in combination with additional components or linkages. This is done either by intentionally supporting further behaviour changes or by addressing supply-side constraints. Examples include the provision of information (such as through social norms and behaviour change or sensitization meetings), provision of additional benefits and support (such as supplementary feeding or psychosocial support), provision or facilitation of access to services (such as through health insurance or setting up Village Savings and Loan Associations), building capacity to deliver specialized GBV and Child Protection services and incorporating referral systems, and implementation of case management (See Annexe 1 Case Study 2). Further research is needed on what the most effective combination of ‘plus’ components might be to deliver better child protection outcomes with cash programming.

B. Provide support to caregivers towards child protection outcomes

Well-designed and implemented social protection that takes ‘care’ work into consideration is also vital to enhance both children’s and women’s rights, and merits further attention. COVID-19 has only highlighted and exacerbated the existing global crisis of ‘care’ – particularly for women and girls - and the need to provide additional support and resources for caregivers to support both children

Social protection can therefore contribute to the reduction of some key drivers of child protection issues, while child protection is, in turn, supportive of social protection objectives.

³⁸ Ferguson, M. & Moret, W. (2018). [ASPIRES Family Care Process Assessment: Cash Transfers for Family-Child Reintegration and Prevention of Separation](#). USAID, FHI360 & ASPIRES.

³⁹ UNICEF Syria. (2019). [Cash transfer programme for children with disabilities in Rural Damascus and Tartous governorates](#).

and the caregivers themselves (See Annexe 1 Case Study 5).⁴⁰ For example, this can include:

- Universal child benefits and adequate wages to help families provide for and care for young children;⁴¹
- Gender-responsive social protection support for caregivers, including social assistance;⁴²
- Sufficient paid leave to all parents and guardians, in both the formal and informal economies, to meet the needs of their young children. This includes paid maternity, paternity, and parental leave, and leave to care for sick young children;
- Supporting access to accessible, affordable, and quality childcare. For example, adjustments to employment guarantee schemes to ensure the provision of safe, quality childcare alongside economic empowerment for parents of all genders. Where they don't, this can result in unintended negative consequences, including lower female employment participation, parents being forced to resort to unaffordable private-sector care options, and poor quality or even dangerous care provision for children.

C. Increase access to services that support protection outcomes

In addition, the evidence and learning from social assistance, social insurance, and social care services indicate that social protection can increase access to key services and support in response to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence. For example, social assistance and health insurance can increase health service utilization for children and mothers. This is key for ensuring that children and women get the care to which they are entitled. Health services can also offer another entry point for providing key information, resources, and referral mechanisms for child protection issues, just as access to schools provides a potential pathway to a protective environment as well as a place to learn. Another direct way of increasing access to Child Protection and GBV services is to strengthen the capacity of Social Protection frontline workers (for example, colleagues distributing cash in a cash transfer programme) to provide referrals. Inclusive, accessible, and quality community-based services must be available, in addition to social protection, to support families and children.

⁴⁰ Gromada, Anna; Richardson, Dominic; Rees, Gwyther (2020). *Childcare in a Global Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on work and family life*. Innocenti Research Briefs no 2020-18, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Florence

⁴¹ UNICEF and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (2020). [Universal child benefits: Policy Issues and Options](#)

⁴² Bull, G., Grown, C. Guerhazi, B., Rutkowski, M., Utamchandani, M. (2020), [Building back better means designing cash transfers for women's empowerment](#). World Bank Blog



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the rationale, evidence, and success of social protection initiatives in supporting child protection outcomes, and in accordance with the Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence against Children Agenda for Action⁴³, the following recommendations represent a call for strong mobilization and uptake by governments, UN and multilateral development agencies, regional bodies, donors, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

Financing, Policy & Coordination

- **Urgently include child protection components into social protection projects and put in place ambitious but feasible measures for financing expanded coverage in the recovery phase from COVID-19**, such as universal child benefits – with the goal of working towards the progressive realization of universal coverage.⁴⁴ Specifically, develop costed, multi-year plans to achieve a progressive expansion in the coverage of social protection schemes for children, aiming towards programmes with clear linkages to child protection systems and child protection-relevant goals. For example, it is estimated that in LICs, providing a universal child benefit to all children aged 0-14 would require a minimum of 2% of GDP, whilst working towards this by targeting the youngest children (ages 0-4) would cost approximately 0.7% of GDP.⁴⁵

⁴³ United Nations (2020). [Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence against Children – Agenda for Action](#). April 2020

⁴⁴ For more information and recommendations on moving towards Universal Child Benefits, please see: [A Foundation to End Child Poverty: How Universal Child Benefits can build a fairer, more inclusive and resilient future](#)

⁴⁵ ODI/UNICEF (2020) Universal child benefits: policy issues and options. London: Overseas Development Institute and New York: UNICEF

- **Join forces to influence policy:** Map and assess policy and programme landscape jointly to identify gaps and opportunities to embed a more integrated approach in social protection and child protection systems/responses, including learning from the social protection COVID-19 response. The development of national policies or strategies for social protection can serve as an entry point to promote child protection in the design of social protection, and indeed the inverse, with child protection strategies or policies offering an entry point to further the goal of expanding coverage towards universal social protection, including extending benefits to include refugees, migrants (including children on the move), displaced populations, and other vulnerable groups. Further, **donors and multilateral institutions should work internally to strengthen policies that foster the integration of social protection and child protection.** Gaps and opportunities should be identified, as well as policies to be implemented internally and with recipient governments and CSOs. There is an opportunity to use COVID-19 funding to strengthen policy reform within institutions and implementing agencies.
- **Joint planning and coordination between relevant Social Protection and Child Protection departments and coordination groups:** Work together to identify the contribution of different actors and services towards coordinated and integrated programming.⁴⁶ For example, joint planning and design of social assistance programmes can ensure that child vulnerability and risk drivers are considered, and child protection outcomes are embedded in the design. This could be done through social protection or humanitarian coordination mechanisms depending on the context, such as clusters or areas of responsibility (AoR), or social protection coordination meetings.

Programme Design & Implementation⁴⁷

- **Ensure safeguarding, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse policies and protection mainstreaming, and the participation of children and other programme participants in the process.** This is crucial to ensure that no further harm is imposed on vulnerable children and their families and that we are accountable and responsive to the needs of the communities we are trying to reach, particularly with challenging child protection objectives in mind.

⁴⁶ The Cash Learning Partnership (2019). [Tipsheet for Cash Working Groups \(CWG\) and Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups \(ICCG\) Supporting the Linkages between Humanitarian Cash and Voucher Assistance and National Social Protection Systems.](#)

⁴⁷ See practical steps here: [UNICEF's action areas in supporting child-sensitive social protection systems](#)

- **Ensure a focus on Child Protection at the design stage of COVID-19 social protection projects.** The voices of the most vulnerable children, their caregivers, women, and marginalised groups, as well as directly affected populations more broadly, should be included in the design and implementation of child-sensitive social protection programmes and promote social accountability mechanisms (See Annexe 1 Case Studies 1 and 3).⁴⁸ Local child-focused CSOs and grassroots women’s rights organisations can be key in understanding context and identifying and reaching particularly vulnerable groups.
- **Support the development of a systems approach, including designing holistic integrated programming.** Though they often sit in the same Ministry at country level, for social protection programmes to achieve child protection outcomes and vice versa, holistic and integrated programming with other child protection services such as case management and psychosocial support is required. **This should include investment in the workforce who deliver Child Protection and Social Protection services.** For integration to work, financial support is required to implement changes at an operational level. Vacancies must be filled, and there must be increased capacity-building along with training on Integrated Management System and Child Protection, to enhance skills that would allow for more collaboration.

Monitoring & Evaluation

- **Build on learning from existing innovative and successful pilots of child and gender-responsive social protection models, particularly in support of child protection outcomes.** These pilots should be rigorously evaluated where appropriate, to better understand the impact that different Cash Plus components and other innovative programmes may have on overall results for children, including key operational learning to inform the scale-up on a national level.
 - Develop clear monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure accountability for child-sensitive project implementation with communities. Existing programmes should address the evidence gap in how social protection programmes could leverage child protection outcomes, setting baselines and looking to measure impacts against key outcomes.

⁴⁸ The importance of listening and learning from children and CSOs is reiterated here: United Nations (2020). [Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence against Children – Agenda for Action](#). April 2020

- **Gather sex, age, and disability disaggregated data** to enable analysis and inform theories of change that support child protection outcomes in social protection work across stable, fragile, and humanitarian contexts.⁴⁹
- **Plan for safe and efficient storage and sharing of recipients' data** through the development and roll-out of information management systems and technology infrastructure.
- **Study and analyse the key bottlenecks and accelerators to aligning social protection and child protection services in humanitarian and fragile contexts** to determine programme and policy options in such contexts, especially in contexts of conflict, forced displacement, and migration.

Take a systems-wide approach

- **Ensure that lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic are learned, and design social protection programmes and systems to be child-sensitive, gender-responsive, inclusive, and shock-responsive.** This will encompass a wide range of actions, including measures such as:
 - Strengthen and keep up-to-date social registries that can quickly identify and reach households in need in the event of a shock, including referrals of children and families identified through child protection case management;
 - Put forecast-based action systems in place that can scale-up support in anticipation of future shocks to help prevent households from needing to engage in harmful, negative coping mechanisms particularly those affecting children's nutrition, access to school, and exposure to violence, family separation, child labour and child marriage;
 - Allow for design flexibility to ensure that social protection programmes can respond to the ever-changing risk factors and circumstances that vulnerable children face throughout their life cycles. For example, ensure there are preparedness plans with agreed procedures for all programmes to flex and respond in the event of different shocks; and strengthen the digitisation of payment mechanisms in an inclusive manner, not only to increase financial inclusion of households but also to ensure that the most vulnerable can be reached even in the event of large shocks;
 - Ensure that the needs of marginalised groups (including on the grounds of gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality, HIV/AIDS

⁴⁹ Igoe, M. (2020). [Is World Bank fast-track COVID-19 funding reaching the most vulnerable?](#) Inside development, World Bank. 12 October 2020

status, age, and any other characteristic) are considered in every aspect of programme design, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation. For example, with gender, including analysis of gendered risks and needs at the beginning of programme design – including specific and gendered child protection risks -; consideration of key design choices from targeting to delivery modality from the perspective of people of all genders; and review of options for linkages to gender-responsive child protection services that meet their specific needs.

ANNEXE 1. CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1: Comprehensive Child Sensitive Social Protection

Save the Children's Child-Sensitive Social Protection Pilot (CSSP) model in Somalia is the most comprehensive scheme in Somaliland. It offers a regular income guarantee to families through a monthly cash benefit, with the goal of expanding it into a comprehensive child benefit and building the capacity of Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Family MESAF to invest in all children across Somaliland.⁵⁰

See the [full case study description](#).

CASE STUDY 2: Cash Plus programmes and protective outcomes for children

Cash Plus programmes have proven to have positive child outcomes, including child protection, both in development and humanitarian contexts. For instance, in 2018, Save the Children implemented a multi-purpose cash transfer 'Plus' programme in response to the influx of Venezuelans into Colombia. The programme aimed at covering vulnerable households' basic needs and preventing them from resorting to negative coping strategies, which notably affect the protection and nutritional status of children. In addition to the monthly transfer of multi-purpose cash grants, Save the Children provided beneficiaries with Child Protection and Nutrition support, consisting of Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) activities and provision of recreational and psychosocial support through child-friendly spaces and case management. Results from the programme highlighted the effectiveness of Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance as a tool to tackle the financial causes of shelter, WASH, and food insecurity, as well as its positive multiplier effects on other sectors such as Child Protection, Nutrition, and (to a certain extent) Education and Health, particularly when combined with soft complementary activities.

See the [full case study description](#).⁵¹

⁵⁰ Save the Children Somaliland. (2020). [Scoping and Sector Review of Social Protection in Somaliland](#).

⁵¹ Save the Children Colombia (2019). [MULTI-PURPOSE CASH TRANSFER 'PLUS': Maximizing impact on children through integrated cash-based programming](#)

CASE STUDY 3: World Vision’s Citizen Voice and Action community-based social accountability programme

Enhancing the participation of children and other beneficiaries

World Vision’s Citizen Voice and Action community- based social accountability programme is key to effectively implementing child-sensitive social protection, as it facilitates constructive dialogue between local governments and communities so as to improve both the quantity and quality of basic social services for improving children’s well-being.⁵² In Bangladesh, through Citizen Voice and Action, vulnerable children and families learned about their right to access the government’s social safety net programmes and successfully benefitted from the provision of primary and secondary education stipends.

See full [case study description](#).

CASE STUDY 4: Social protection in support of multi-sectoral outcomes for refugee populations

In Turkey, UNICEF supports the Conditional Cash Transfer in Education Programme for Refugees, which reached 562,016 in 2019, with higher cash payments for girls. This programme is delivered in partnership with the Govt of Turkey and mirrors the CCTE programme for Turkish children from economically poor households. The programme aims to reduce financial barriers, reinforce the importance of girls’ education, and help combat patriarchal norms that undervalue and disempower girls. Linkages to a child protection component are an important addition of this programme and include utilizing social workers to address violence at home, child marriage, and child labour. Learnings from this child protection component are being used to, in turn, strengthen the government CCTE programme provided to Turkish citizens.

See [full case study description](#).⁵³

⁵² World Vision. (2020). [COVID-19 & Urgent Need for Child-Sensitive Social Protection](#).

⁵³ UNICEF (2020). [The Conditional Cash Transfer for Education \(CCTE\) Programme](#).

CASE STUDY 5: Social protection programmes supporting protective outcomes for children in Nepal

Save the Children

Parenting programmes linked to social protection programmes have proven to be effective in promoting child protection outcomes in several countries. A parenting programme introduced by Save the Children for beneficiaries of the government Child Grant in Nepal resulted in a substantial reduction in both violence and neglect of children.⁵⁴

- The Child Grant is a Government of Nepal cash transfer programme introduced in 2010 to improve nutritional outcomes of children. The grant was initially confined to one of the poorest regions of Nepal but has since been expanded and is now universal in 14 districts. Children under five years are eligible for the grant. The payment is given to the mother (or main guardian) and she can receive the grant for up to two children.
- Data suggests that the Child Grant has resulted in a steep rise in birth registration. Save the Children, however, assessed that the grant could deliver more for children and be used as a steppingstone to ensure overall nurture and care in the crucial early years of life and thus lay a foundation for children to develop to their full potential. A comprehensive parenting programme has, therefore, been introduced as a key activity of the 'Child Grant Plus' initiative.⁵⁵
- Besides improvement in nutritional outcomes, an impact assessment of the parenting programme demonstrated increased parental activity with the children, positive feelings towards children, and a substantial reduction in violence and neglect (36).

See the Research Brief: [Child sensitive social protection in Nepal - Assessment of a Parenting Pilot Intervention Linked to the Child Grant in Nepal](#).

See the Facilitator Guide: [A Parenting Programme for the Child Grant: Beyond the Cash: Making Social Protection Deliver More for Children Through Parenting in Nepal – Facilitator Guide](#)

⁵⁴ Save the Children International. (2019). [A Research Brief: Child sensitive social protection in Nepal - Assessment of a Parenting Pilot Intervention Linked to the Child Grant in Nepal](#).

⁵⁵ See parenting facilitator guide for contents of the parenting programme: Source: Save the Children Nepal. (2020). [A Parenting Programme for the Child Grant: Beyond the Cash: Making Social Protection Deliver More for Children Through Parenting in Nepal – Facilitator Guide](#).

UNICEF

UNICEF Nepal supports one of Nepal's most populous provinces to strengthen the design and launch of a new girl-focused social protection programme in 2019 focused on girls' empowerment, called "Beti Padhao-Beti Bachao" ('Educate the Daughter, Save the Daughter' – by providing human resource and monitoring support, field monitors, and establishing a dashboard for tracking implementation).⁵⁶ This new programme aims to reduce early and child marriage and promote girls' education.

⁵⁶ Shahiman Rai (2019). [State 2 kicks off 'Beti Bachau-Beti Padhau' campaign](#). The Kathmandu Post. January 16th, 2019

ENDORSEMENTS

