LINKING CASH AND VOUCHER ASSISTANCE (CVA)
AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

# LEBANON: COUNTRY SUMMARY

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CaLP
The Cash Learning Partnership

This country summary is part of a larger resource set, providing practitioners with examples of different approaches to linking CVA and social protection.

## OVERVIEW

### Emergency Context

- **Multiple compounding crises**, including the world's largest per capita refugee population (e.g., in 2021, 1.5 million Syrian refugees are residing in Lebanon), political instability, an economic crisis, the Beirut Port explosion, and the COVID-19 pandemic, have disrupted basic services and livelihoods. The strict lockdown imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic left many households jobless and without income.

- **A dramatic rise in poverty and vulnerability** – the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) estimates over half of the Lebanese population is living in poverty, with extreme poverty affecting nearly a quarter of the national population. Data from the UNHCR-WFP-UNICEF 2020 vulnerability assessment found that approximately 90 per cent of Syrian refugee households were living in extreme poverty.

- **Soaring inflation** alongside rapidly increasing poverty means households increasingly struggle to meet basic needs, causing a spike in humanitarian needs for both Lebanese nationals and refugees.

- **Informal employment and the informal sector dominate the economy**; according to the ILO, 55 per cent of workers are informally employed and the informal sector accounts for 65 per cent of the economy.

- **Perceived imbalances and unfairness in the provision of assistance** to refugees as compared to Lebanese nationals are exacerbating existing social tensions.

### Social Protection Context

- The **emerging social protection system** comprises social insurance for formal workers (the National Social Security Fund), social assistance for those living in extreme poverty (the National Poverty Targeted Programme (NPTP)), and government social services predominately for persons with disabilities and children in institutional care.

- Assessments of the national social protection system by UNICEF and Oxfam point to **a weak and fragmented system** characterized by low investment, insufficient and inadequate programmes across the lifecycle, and poor coordination, which undermines the system's efficacy in mitigating poverty. The ILO assessment of the social health protection system, including from perspective of non-nationals, describes inequality of access and the failure of national systems to provide access for all or to regulate for quality.

- The UN's Joint SDG Fund Programme aims to strengthen Lebanon's social protection policy framework (a policy has been drafted and is pending approval) and reform the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) and the NPTP to make them more inclusive and integrated.

- The **National Poverty Targeted Programme**, Lebanon's flagship social assistance programme, launched in 2011, faces numerous challenges in being an effective poverty reduction programme.

  - While the NPTP has a dedicated line in the government budget, it is not yet established by law. The draft law takes the NPTP as a basic pillar and focuses on the response to extreme poverty. However, of the 3 components of the NPTP, only the 3rd component (food assistance) is funded - through WFP and neither the education nor health components have been funded since 2019.

  - The NPTP has **limited coverage**, reaching only a small percentage of those currently living in extreme poverty. Previously it was supposed to be 25% of those in extreme poverty, but there has been a rapid increase from 2019 to 2021 in extreme poverty numbers. Additionally, there are **geographical imbalances, with higher coverage** in areas with lower magnitudes of extremely poor households (Lebanon does not have a clear 'rural'/'urban' distinction).

  - The NPTP was designed to primarily **provide fee waivers** for health and education services

  - **Reforms are planned**: the NPTP is, however, now undertaking verification processes to scale up coverage to reach 70,000 households with the aim of complementing the planned World Bank (WB) supported Emergency Crisis and COVID-19 Response Social Safety Net (ESSN) – see below.

- **Refugees have** the right to work in limited low skilled sectors only (agriculture, construction and cleaning) **and no access to employment related social protection**. In the absence of strong government support, poor Lebanese and refugee households alike rely on non-governmental providers and informal networks.

- Humanitarian actors have implemented a **wide range of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) to support refugee households**. However, the support provided to refugee populations is viewed as ever more unfair by Lebanese communities as their own socio-economic situation deteriorates. Increasing public pressure to support poor Lebanese households and reform the national social protection system has led to **expanded humanitarian CVA support to poor Lebanese households**. It has also prompted discussions on strengthening the national system, drawing on lessons learned from the emergency response.

## Relevant Social Protection Programming

**National Poverty Targeted Programme (NPTP)**

**Objectives**: "establish a national targeting system to be used by the Government in the delivery of social transfers and services that improve living standards of the population – in particular, the poorest and most vulnerable."

**Coverage**: 43,000 Lebanese households (1.5% of the population), although a verification process is underway to reach 70 000 households. In 2018, the programme underwent a recertification process that reduced the number of households eligible from approximately 105,000 to just over 41,000. The food component of the NPTP is implemented by WFP, who also manage the card-based system and transfers to recipients. As of July 2021, WFP is providing vouchers to 35,000 households. The WB has offered the Lebanese Government a loan to fund a social safety net, the **ESSN programme**, to target 160 000 extremely poor households (see below).

**Programme Components**: The NPTP aims to provide a basket of benefits: (i) fee waivers for co-payments for hospitalization (both public and private); (ii) coverage of chronic disease medications; (iii) registration fee waivers and free books for primary and secondary public schools; (iv) food e-vouchers for eligible households.

**Administrative set-up**: The Ministry of Social Assistance (MoSA) and the Central Management Unit (CMU) under the Presidency of the Councils of Ministers (PCM) manage the NPTP. Social Development Centers (SDCs), which fall under MoSA and provide social services to vulnerable groups, are responsible for outreach and targeting. The programme was established by an official Decree but is not yet codified in law, the related law is currently before the Committee of Sustainable Development in the Lebanese parliament but needs to be passed by parliament.

**Eligibility /Targeting Mechanism**: Extremely poor households determined through proxy means testing (PMT)

**Delivery Mechanism**: Eligible households are given a Hayat card which should, when funded, give access education and health benefits at any SDC, clinic or hospital, and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). Food assistance is delivered through an e-voucher.

**The National Social Security Fund (NSSF)**
Provides a set of limited social security services to specific categories of employees, including, private sector and non-civil servant public sector employees.

**Inclusive Social Grants for vulnerable groups**
ILO and UNICEF are supporting the establishment of inclusive social grants (starting with Disability Allowances)

## Timeline of Key Social Protection and CVA Developments

**2013**: UNHCR introduced its Winter Assistance support, including for vulnerable Lebanese. WFP launches a food assistance e-voucher programme for Syrian refugees.

**2013**: The Lebanon Cash Consortium (LCC) brought together six international NGOs, including Save the Children (Consortium Lead), the International Rescue Committee (Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research Lead), Solidarités International, CARE, ACTED, and World Vision International.

**2014**: WFP began providing e-vouchers to NPTP households aligned with support provided to refugees. UNHCR introduced an inter-agency multi-purpose cash programme and winter assistance.

**2014**: Launch of the OneCard by WFP as a common delivery mechanism for humanitarian actors to deliver CVA. In 2015, UNICEF joined the OneCard to distribute winterization support and UNHCR conducted a 3 months pilot using the OneCard.

**2016**: Introduction of the joint multi-donor payment platform initiative (LOUISE), which delivered various different types of CVA assistance through OneCard.

**2017**: Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (2017-2021) called for the provision of cash-based assistance to both refugee and socio-economically vulnerable Lebanese households and the national social protection system under the Basic Assistance Pillar to be strengthened.

**2018**: Lebanon Partnership Paper agreed at the Brussels II Conference outlining the joint commitment to strengthen the national social protection system, including the NPTP.

**2018–2019**: Joint Humanitarian Development Framework (JHDF) for Lebanon for 2018-2019 is developed by ECHO and NEAR/EUTF Syria teams and commits to greater support of vulnerable Lebanese and refugees.

**2020**: Lebanon Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework outlined the response to the Beirut Port explosion, including scaling up social assistance and system reforms.

**2020**: The EUTF's 2020-2022 action plan included emergency assistance in response to the country's economic crisis, allowing the NPTP to temporarily cover additional vulnerable Lebanese households.

**2020–2021**: Development of a national social protection framework with the support of ILO and UNICEF.

# EXAMPLES OF CVA PROGRAMME LINKAGES

**WFP** began providing e-food vouchers for refugees in Lebanon in 2013 to purchase food through partner stores. in 2014, it introduced the OneCard, a reloadable and reusable prepaid card with multiple wallets. The same year, WFP began supporting the MoSA to extend its monthly food voucher programme for refugees to NPTP recipients. WFP manages the payment platform while the Ministry and SDC staff conduct targeting, selection, outreach, and monitoring in line with the existing programme design. Currently, 35,000 NPTP recipient households receive food e-vouchers, and may receive emergency top ups in response to the ongoing crisis.

There have been calls to drastically scale up the NPTP in light of the increased humanitarian needs in Lebanon due to COVID-19, the Beirut Port Blast and the continuing deterioration of the socio-economic situation. The **World Bank** announced a proposed project, Emergency Crisis and COVID-19 Response Social Safety Net (ESSN), building on the NPTP. Ongoing humanitarian support has highlighted areas in need of strengthening, including developing a comprehensive national registry and a grievance redress mechanism. The proposed 3-year **ESSN project** aims to significantly expand the reach of the MoSA/WFP food e-voucher programme, introduce a top-up cash transfer to secondary school students, expand access to social services, and introduce a National Social Registry for better identification of households in need of support, including enabling the scale-up support in emergencies. Under the ESSN, only Lebanese households will receive cash transfers, though refugee households are expected to benefit from strengthened social services.

**UNHCR** began providing multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) to refugee households in 2014 and managed an interagency platform for organizations providing MPC in parallel to WFP's OneCard. In 2016 UNHCR partnered with WFP and UNICEF to create the Lebanon One Unified Inter-Organization System for E-cards (LOUISE), replacing UNHCR's and WFP's separate payment platforms. UNHCR currently provides MPC (170,000 households), winter cash assistance (200,000 households during winter 2020-21), protection cash assistance (2,600 refugee households) and cash for rent (700 households) to refugees through the LOUISE common card.

UNHCR co-leads the Basic Assistance Working Group (BAWG), alongside MoSA, and coordinates the Basic Assistance Chapter of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, specifically MPC and winter assistance to vulnerable Lebanese and refugee households, and technical support to the NPTP. The BAWG maintains close coordination with other sectors, notably the Food Security and Agriculture Sector, which oversees the food e-vouchers, on issues such as assessments, targeting and coverage. The BAWG sets the transfer level for MPC based on the non-food component of the minimum expenditure basket (MEB) – the S/MEB was last updated in September 2020 and prices are continuously monitored and updated. (Note that Lebanon has two expenditure baskets (1) the MEB captures what a Syrian refugee household in Lebanon requires to cover basic needs for a dignified living in a displacement setting; and (2) the Survival SMEB captures what a Syrian household in Lebanon requires to meet lifesaving needs and survive in a displacement setting. Both the S/MEB have food and non food items and exclude winter fuel, a main difference is assessment of rental costs. Note that food assistance is provided separately and covers the food needs identified in the SMEB basket.

Rapidly rising inflation and declining purchasing power have made setting an adequate transfer level a key challenge and risks being a source of further tensions and conflict. The continuous changes to the official minimum expenditure basket in the context of hyperinflation to ensure adequacy risks and consequent increase in the transfer value risk pushing the transfer value higher than the amount that the Government of Lebanon provides to its citizens under its COVID-19 response, which provides 400,000LL/per month to 200,000 households, including, via NGOs, to around 1500 NPTP households who do not receive food vouchers. Misalignment in transfer values between the national and humanitarian response could exacerbate existing tensions.

**UNICEF** provides its Winter Cash programme to poor and vulnerable Lebanese households identified through the NPTP who hold the Hayat Card and vulnerable refugee households through the LOUISE platform. UNICEF also implemented the Min Ila programme, which reached around 50,000 Syrian children with cash grants and referrals to social services with the aim of building human capital and curbing negative coping mechanisms. Building on the Min Ila experience, UNICEF is now piloting an Integrated Child Well-Being Package (ICWBP) with the same objectives as the previous programme while introducing an integrated approach to support the most vulnerable children, i.e. those who are out of school and at risk of harmful activities. Learning from UNICEF's cash programmes has influenced its support to MoSA on reforms to the NPTP and the development of the national social protection strategy.

Various INGOs have implemented MPC aligning transfer amounts with the transfer level set by the BAWG. Some INGOs partner with the NPTP to identify vulnerable households while others have their own identification and targeting mechanisms. INGOs have also introduced innovative adaptations to link recipient households with social services to address non-economic vulnerabilities (e.g. Oxfam's Temporary Cash Assistance.)

## Entry Points

The Lebanon case demonstrates a degree of feasibility of linking humanitarian CVA with national systems, even in complex emergencies where national systems are nascent. Despite the system's constraints, **humanitarian CVA actors in Lebanon have been able to leverage aspects of the national system**, and blend them with humanitarian programmes to extend coverage, introduce new benefits and test new approaches. Humanitarian CVA experiences have been instrumental in providing the Government with practical evidence for developing and strengthening the national social protection system. The Government has already adopted innovative CVA measures, notably the food e-voucher into the regular NPTP and MPC as part of their COVID-19 response plan. The current crises highlight the difficulty in targeting the moving target of the 'extreme poor' for assistance given their increasing numbers in a context of rapidly rising poverty and vulnerability accompanied by rapid increases in inflation and macroeconomic instability .

**The coordination and harmonization of CVA programmes has dramatically improved, for example through developing several common tools and approaches, greater information sharing between CVA implementers, and attempts to increase cross-sectoral collaboration** (notably with the food security cluster). By leveraging elements from both the humanitarian CVA system (e.g. MPC benefit level) and the national system (e.g. NPTP database), CVA actors have **expanded support to poor and vulnerable Lebanese**, thereby ensuring greater fairness in assistance and de-escalation of social tensions. CVA actors' role in **third-party monitoring, communications and outreach, and grievance mechanisms** are critical interventions for accountability and ensuring that recipient opinions and feedback are heard and incorporated into programme design.

Humanitarian CVA actors should remain cognizant of the weaknesses of the national system and determine where or if aligning with the national system will achieve the project's goals in the short to medium term, while working across the humanitarian/development divide to increase efforts to strengthen national systems in the medium to longer term. In the case of some MPC interventions, sectoral CVA, or CVA for certain social groups (e.g., persons with disabilities, GBV survivors) or newly vulnerable groups, identifying the 'right' beneficiaries through the national system may not be possible. Indeed, **experiences and lessons of complementary CVA for specific vulnerable groups** may be instrumental in building a robust social protection floor.

Humanitarian actors have piloted **'cash plus' approaches** (e.g. Oxfam, UNICEF) to address socio-economic needs more comprehensively through case management and referrals to services. NGO implementers have also been at the forefront of **innovative adaptions for cash programming in emergencies** when standard procedures are no longer applicable. For instance, they have shown that different programme functions (e.g., case management, monitoring) can be shifted from in-person to remote mechanisms.

NGO implementers should play a **more substantial advocacy role** regarding the future of CVA programming. They have rich and valuable experiences that can inform the design of any social protection system, including the design of national programmes, administrative procedures, business continuity plans and accountability. **Capturing and communicating these experiences and lessons learned** is essential to inform advocacy. M&E efforts should evaluate if programmes achieved outcomes but also review the benefits and challenges of linking with the national system.

## Key Resources

CALP (2019) Linking CVA and Social Protection in the MENA Region: Lebanon Case Study

CALP (2019) Linking CVA and Social Protection in the MENA Region: Cribsheet

CAMEALEON (2020) Rapid field monitoring survey: The impact of the COVID-19 total lockdown on WFP multi-purpose cash recipients in Lebanon

CAMEALEON and AUB (2020) Multipurpose Cash Assistance in Lebanon: Impact Evaluation on the Well-being of Syrian Refugees

CAMELEON and Durable Solutions Platform (2020) Pinning down Moving Targets: Adapting Humanitarian Cash Programmes to the Multipronged Crisis in Lebanon

CERAH Geneve (2014) Towards a Convergence of Humanitarian and Development Assistance through Cash Transfers to Host Communities. A Case Study on Wadi Khaled and Akroum - Akkar District, Lebanon

DFID (2018) After One Year of UK-Funded Multi-purpose cash in Lebanon, What Have We Learned

ESCWA (2020) Poverty in Lebanon: Solidarity is vital to address the impact of multiple overlapping shocks. Policy Brief 15

EU (2018) Brussels (II) conference 24-25 2018: Lebanon partnership paper conference document.

EU (2018) Guidance Package on Social Protection across the Humanitarian-Development Nexus: Lebanon Case Study, EUD

ILO and UNICEF (2021) Towards a Social Protection Floor for Lebanon (ilo.org)

IRC (2014) Cross-Sector Cash Assistance for Syrian refugees and host communities in Lebanon: An IRC Approach

Key Consulting (2020) Lebanon One Unified Inter-Organizational System for E-cards (LOUSE) Learning Review

ODI (2017) The DFID/ECHO approach to cash assistance for refugees in Lebanon: documenting the process

ODI (2019) Social protection in Lebanon: a review of social assistance

ODI (2020) Social cohesion and stability between Syrian refugees and host communities

Oxfam (2020) For a Decade of Hope not Austerity in the Middle East and North Africa

PCM (2020) Proposed Lebanon Emergency Crisis and COVID-19 Response Safety Net Project: Social Impact Assessment

UN (2020) Social Protection in Lebanon: Bridging the Immediate Response with the Long-term Priorities

UN (2021) 2021 Update of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan - (LCRP 2017-2021)

UNHCR (2020) Lebanon Outcome Monitoring 2019 Panel Survey

UNHCR, Save the Children and LCC (2015) Impact of Multipurpose Cash Assistance on Outcomes for Children in Lebanon

UNHCR and WFP (2015) Evaluation of the OneCard Pilot in Lebanon

UNICEF (2018) Min Ila Cash Transfer Program for Displaced Children in Lebanon

UNICEF (2019) Building Shock-Responsive National Social Protection Systems in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region

WFP (2017) Food - Restricted Voucher or Unrestricted Cash? How to Best Support Syrian Refugees in Jordan And Lebanon?

WFP (2015) An evaluation of WFP's Response to the Syrian Crisis (2011-2014)

WFP (2020) Review of the Survival and Minimum Expenditure Baskets in Lebanon: Updated SMEB and MEB Components and Costs

World Bank-UNHCR (2020) Compounding Misfortunes - Changes in Poverty since the Onset of COVID-19 on Syrian Refugees and Host Communities in Jordan, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Lebanon

World Vision (2018) Impact of Multi-purpose Cash Assistance on Child Labour among Syrian Refugee Children in Bekaa, Lebanon