ASPECT

Social Protection in Response to Covariate Shocks: What Works for Children's Outcomes?

Meta-analysis and scoping review

Authors: James Manley, Nabamallika Dehingia, Zlata Bruckauf and Farah Khan

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United Nations Children's Fund
Three United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017

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For further information, please contact:

Evaluation Office
United Nations Children's Fund
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
evalhelp@unicef.org

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Abstract

Globally, conflict, violence, forced displacement and climate-induced covariate shocks are on the rise, impacting millions of children and young people. In this context, the adaptive social protection model that integrates social protection with disaster risk management, climate change adaptation and humanitarian crisis, has gained considerable traction. Yet the knowledge base on the effectiveness of social protection interventions implemented in fragile and humanitarian settings, although rapidly growing, remains fragmented. Drawing on a large body of impact evaluation literature, we present results from meta-analysis as well as a narrative review of the effects on outcomes relevant to child well-being. Overall, we find consistent evidence that social protection in humanitarian and fragile settings helps children stay in school (6 per cent average increase across 14 studies) and decreases child labour (6 per cent average across seven studies), while helping adults get and keep jobs (6 per cent average increase across six studies). Evidence on nutritional impact is mixed, with small but positive effects for child height-for-age, and significant increases in household and child dietary diversity (by approximately 0.3–0.5 food groups). No impact on child weight-for-height z score was found. The qualitative review of evidence indicates a positive impact of humanitarian social assistance on the mental health of caregivers and household resilience. Notably, little attention has been paid in the literature (and relevant programming), to gender-related outcomes affected by adaptive social protection interventions.

Introduction and objectives

Children around the world are increasingly affected by interrelated and often catastrophic covariate shocks, such as natural disasters, economic crises, pandemics and conflicts.

Climate change is expected to worsen, leading to an additional 100 million people falling into extreme poverty by 2030 (Hallegatte et al., 2016). Moreover, forced displacement due to conflicts and disasters has reached unprecedented levels, with an increase from 89 million people affected in 2021 to more than 117 million in 2023 (UNHCR, 2023). Children are among the most affected groups facing risks of long-term human capital losses, particularly in low and middle-income countries. Approximately 50 million children were affected by natural disasters in 2014, and 51 per cent of refugees in that year were children (Mishra and Battistin, 2017). Overall, 94 million children needed urgent humanitarian assistance in 2023 (UNICEF, 2024). Nearly half of school-aged refugee children are out of school, with girls being 2.5 times more likely to be out of school in conflict-affected countries compared to girls in other places (UNICEF, 2023).

Strong social protection (SP) systems can mitigate some of the adverse effects of shocks and crises. As a response to COVID-19, in 2020–21, around 200 countries and territories rolled out or expanded more than 3,000 social protection measures. During this period, cash transfers were distributed to 1.36 billion people, which constituted around 17 per cent of the world's population (Gentilini, 2022). Despite this progress, with growing conflicts and disasters, the number of children without access to necessary social protection is increasing globally; around 1.77 billion children aged 0–18 lack access to a child or family cash benefit (ILO and UNICEF, 2023). As countries grapple with these emergencies, the adaptive social protection (ASP) model has gained considerable traction. ASP integrates the approaches of SP, disaster risk management and climate change adaptation. The World Bank has developed a framework to conceptualize ASP, which identifies this cross-sectoral approach as aiming to strengthen household resilience by helping families to "prepare for, cope with, and adapt to shocks in a manner that protects their well-being" (Bowen et al., 2020). A more resilient household will possess these three interlinked capacities that help to minimize and resist a shock's negative impacts (Bowen et al., 2020). Preparation can include timely access to relevant information about anticipated shocks, as well as access to savings. Relatedly, the capacity to cope with a shock is highly dependent on household and individual ability to draw upon its savings during the shock. Adaptive capacity refers to the ability of households to make investments that can reduce its exposure and vulnerability to shocks in the long term, such as diversification of assets and livelihood portfolios.

Guided by the World Bank's ASP framework and definition, this literature review aims to understand the current knowledge base, and identify gaps, with regard to effectiveness of different social protection programmes in humanitarian and fragile settings in improving child, gender and household level outcomes. We adopt the World Bank's framework, recognising that associated terminology is relatively new and the social protection programmes implemented over the last 10 years in response to covariate shocks might not use the same ASP labels. Our review thus covers wider literature on social protection programmes implemented in humanitarian and fragile settings; it is not limited to those labelled as 'adaptive'

social protection alone. We synthesize global knowledge to date through meta-analysis of relevant indicators. We complement the meta-analysis with a qualitative review of the eligible studies, to understand common patterns and programme characteristics that might influence effectiveness.

More specifically, this evidence review explores the following key questions:

- Do social protection programmes implemented in humanitarian and fragile settings make a difference to improving children's well-being as it relates to child nutrition, education, child labour, gender, mental health and household resilience?
- What do we know about the effectiveness of programmes in comparison to the impact of social protection packages implemented in non-emergency contexts?
- Who are the winners of the social protection interventions in fragile and complex settings and to what extent are the needs of the most vulnerable populations addressed?

Even though the review casts a broader net and examines all eligible social protection programmes in humanitarian and fragile settings, the findings are expected to contribute, as a starting point, to a learning agenda to improve and strengthen ASP systems in the short and long term. This in turn will support evidence-based decision-making at the global as well as national levels, effectively addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, especially children and youth, in humanitarian and fragile contexts. The paper is structured as follows: the next section provides a brief background on the general state of evidence. The following section presents the methodology, including the search strategy and relevant measures included in this review. The results of meta-analysis of selected rigorous evaluations are then presented, as well as results from the qualitative review of emerging findings on outcomes that could not be included in the meta-analysis. Key messages for the current global evidence agenda on ASP programmes in humanitarian and fragile contexts are then provided.

Background

The Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board defines social protection as "*The set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their lifecycle, with a particular emphasis towards vulnerable groups.*" To this end, social protection can be protective, preventive, promotive or transformative (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004).

Social protection programmes are widely shown to increase consumption (Bastagli et al., 2019). In addition, numerous reviews demonstrate their benefits on more broad-ranging outcomes (Davis et al., 2016), including health (Pega et al., 2015), nutrition and stunting (Manley et al., 2022), mental health (McGuire et al., 2022), education (Baird et al., 2014), food security and assets (Hidrobo et al., 2018) and violence (Baranov et al., 2021; Buller et al., 2018). However, the extent to which they are able to achieve those benefits depends on myriad factors, such as targeting, social assistance frequency and amount, availability and quality of markets, infrastructure, and access to services. More importantly, contextual factors regarding level and type of fragility (if any) are likely to influence whether the social protection provided is able to achieve its intended impacts. As such, it is likely that our knowledge and understanding of SP programmes from non-fragile settings does not automatically extend to programmes which are developed specifically to respond to covariate shock situations by building community and household resilience.

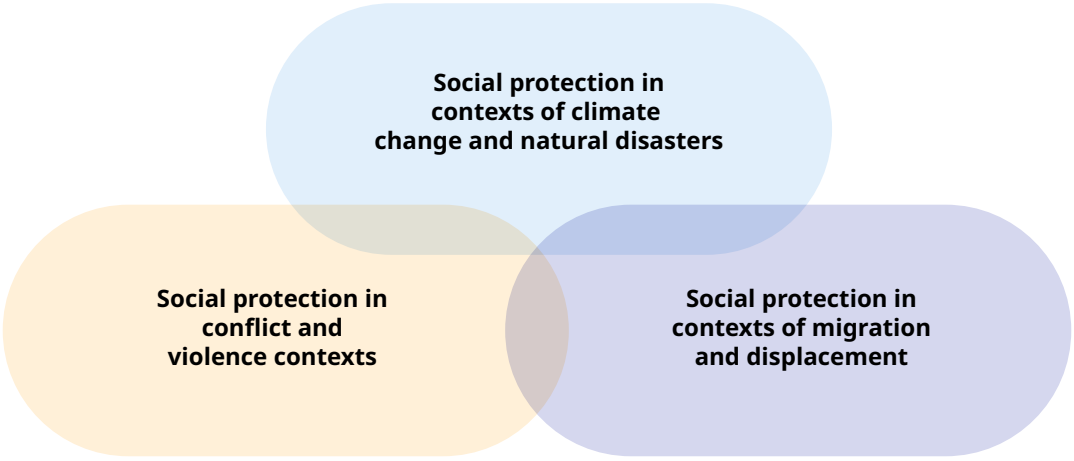
Adaptive social protection (ASP) programmes are increasingly being viewed as an effective mechanism to protect vulnerable communities from risks of shocks, particularly from the growing global threat of climate shocks and natural disasters (Costello et al., 2009). Certain populations bear a disproportionate burden of climate change risks. This includes children, women and girls, the elderly, pregnant persons, and individuals with pre-existing conditions (Sheffield and Landrigan, 2011). They also include populations in the global south who "will bear the brunt of climate change ... despite being least responsible for it" (Abi Deivanayagam et al., 2023). The increasing frequency and intensity of events related to climate change will require adaptation, and ASP can help households and individuals strengthen their capacities, build resilience, and ultimately reduce their risk in the face of climate change (Ivaschenko et al., 2018).

The number of studies examining the effectiveness of social protection interventions implemented in humanitarian and fragile contexts has grown in recent years, albeit remains limited with regard to child well-being outcomes. There is sporadic evidence that social protection in the form of cash transfers can reduce vulnerability to extreme weather events (Aurino and Giunti, 2022). However, this body of evidence has not been systematically reviewed, especially in the context of child well-being impacts. In addition, studies examining the ability of SP programmes to mitigate risks related to slow-onset events or adapt to climate change remain limited. With this review, we provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ability of SP programmes in humanitarian and fragile contexts, to improve child outcomes in the face of shocks and to improve households' resilience to future or recurring shocks.

Scope of this review: social protection programmes in humanitarian and fragile contexts

A recent review of the impact of emergency cash, food and other in-kind transfers on child development found fewer than 30 relevant studies published between 2009 and 2019 (Aurino and Giunti, 2022). In this review, we adopt a broader lens to capture programmes that are either by design or by context 'adaptive'; we include literature that examines SP programming that includes 'adaptive' design elements, as well as studies that present evidence on effects of social protection programmes implemented in humanitarian or emergency settings (without a specific or apparent adaptive element). Specifically, our review classifies studies into three distinctive yet overlapping (shock-prone) settings: climate change and natural disasters, conflict and violence contexts, and migration and displacement (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Social protection programmes operating in three distinctive and overlapping contexts



Social protection programmes: design modalities relevant for child outcomes

Cash transfers are the most popular form of social protection. However, poverty is often multidimentional, and such cash alone cannot address all barriers faced by vulnerable individuals. 'Cash plus' is a term used to refer to cash transfer programmes that are linked to additional programmes or services to address some of the barriers to reducing multidimensional poverty and enhancing long-term outcomes related to human capital. According to Roelen et al., (2017), such programmes can encompass additional benefits or in-kind transfers, behavioural change communication, psychosocial support, and improved access to services, among other interventions. It is possible to further amplify the effects of cash transfers by building programmes that link cash assistance with these additional interventions (Dao et al., 2021). In this review of social protection programmes in humanitarian and fragile contexts, we include programmes and interventions with a wide range of design modalities and conditionalities, including cash transfers, in-kind/food transfers, cash plus programmes, and a few 'cash for work' programmes. This is done with understanding that heterogeneity of designs and contexts warrant careful considerations for evidence-based decision-making. However, the majority of the eligible studies in our review cover cash and cash plus programmes.

Methodology

Search strategy and study selection

This paper primarily draws on two separate analytical strategies: (1) meta-analysis of effects of eligible programmes on selected outcomes; and (2) narrative or qualitative review of effects for outcomes where meta-analysis was not possible due to the lack of adequate estimates.

We conducted a search of the literature between 2005 and 2023, on the impact of SP programmes in humanitarian and fragile context on child well-being outcomes (nutrition, education and child labour), household resilience, child and caregiver mental health, and gender outcomes. We searched nine research databases: Scopus, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, EconLit, PubMed, 3iE, Web of Science, World Bank, UNICEF internal Evidence Information Systems Integration (EISI) database, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) evaluation Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics (AIDA) databases. Specifically, the search was done using two terms at a time: one was always 'cash transfers' but the other terms included child labour, education, nutrition, child health, resilience, coping, psychological, depression, anxiety, gender, empowerment and violence were all simultaneously searched with 'cash transfers', to identify relevant studies. We avoided using terms such as 'humanitarian' and 'fragile' so as to start with a broader list of relevant articles and ensure that we did not miss any study in the context of emergencies or shocks. We complemented a database search with a 'snowball' of 21 reviews of social protection in humanitarian and fragile contexts (See Appendix A for a list), and included a few studies recommended by experts. Any duplicates were first removed from this list of articles identified through database search, snowball search, and expert recommendations. This was followed by a screening of article titles. Studies that were clearly irrelevant to social protection based on review of the titles were dropped. Our search strategy is shown in the PRISMA diagram in Figure 2.

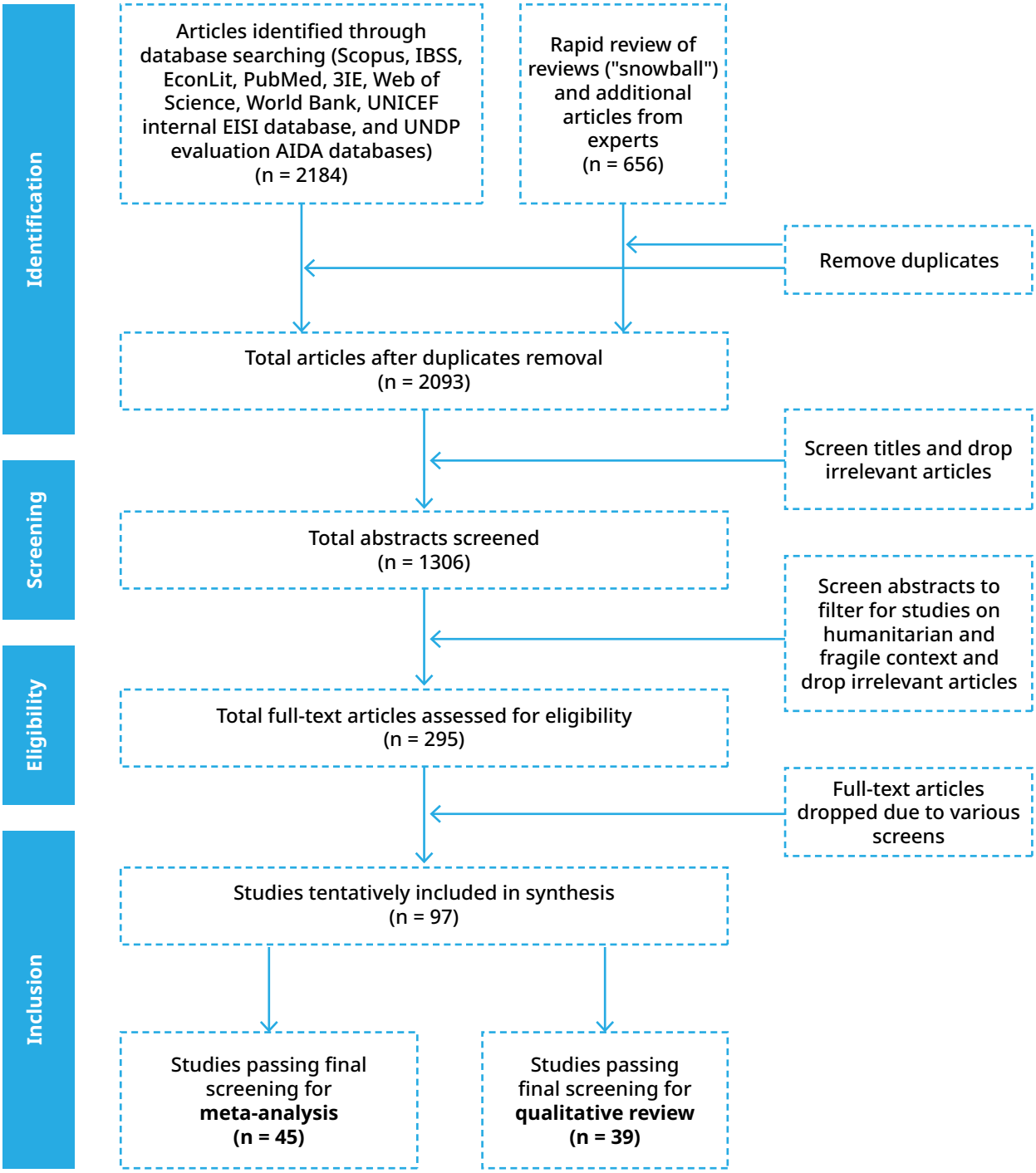
Next, abstracts were reviewed, followed by a full-text review. Articles presenting SP programmes in non-humanitarian and non-fragile contexts were dropped. We relied on our conceptual model of SP in shock situations (Figure 1) to determine whether the reviewed article presented relevant results. The eligibility criteria included: (1) studies that presented quantitative estimates on the effect of an SP programme (including national and subnational, government and non-government, in both social protection and humanitarian contexts) in the context of shocks including humanitarian crises, natural disasters, conflict, forced displacements, health and other crises; (2) studies meeting high standards for rigour, including only studies based on clear counterfactuals (i.e. control groups), most of which used a randomized control trial, difference-in-difference, quasi-experimental, or propensity score matching methods; (3) studies with sample sizes of at least 300; (4) studies presenting findings from low- and middle-income countries; and (5) studies that examined any of our relevant outcomes related to child well-being and household resilience.

For the first eligibility criterion, we include social protection programmes that were (a) created ad hoc to respond to a shock or crisis; or (b) existent but evaluated in the context of a crisis (for example, programmes for refugee camp residents, or displaced populations). We excluded some programmes such as the Red de Protección Social in Nicaragua, the Plan de Atención Nacional a la Emergencia Social in Uruguay, and Bantuan Langsung Tunai in Indonesia, which were created to address a macroeconomic instability. We did not include programmes in situations of chronic socioeconomic crisis, such as the ongoing social protection programmes in Kenya, Lesotho and South Africa.

The final set of specific outcome indicators was determined by their availability in the literature surveyed. For example, school enrolment appeared much more than school attendance in the data, so we only kept the former. We were unable to follow all of the requirements of making the review systematic, such as ensuring that at least two independent reviewers examined each of the thousands of references compiled for the snowball search and the review of findings from the research databases. We characterize this search as a 'scoping' review, recognizing that a more systematic review might uncover more work.

We limited the set of eligible studies to those providing quantitative impact estimates that included measures of variability as well as of mean impact. Where possible, we used meta-analysis to combine estimates. Meta-analysis is a statistical technique that originated in 1904 when Karl Pearson evaluated data from many studies to conclude that vaccination against intestinal fever was ineffective (Mann, 1994). Since then, it has evolved into a widely accepted systematic process for analysing data from a variety of studies on outcomes from human health to economic valuation of environmental assets (van Kooten et al., 2004). Waddington et al., (2012) note the deficiencies of the 'vote counting' approach arguing in favour of quantitatively combining estimates where feasible, to avoid assuming equal weight should be given to very different studies with different numbers of subjects. To be eligible for meta-analysis, we required an outcome to be examined at least four times, or by four separate studies. For three of our outcome areas, (gender, mental health and resilience), we could not run meta-analysis because there were not enough studies on comparable indicators. We thus use narrative review of the identified articles on these three outcome areas, qualitatively reviewing and summarizing the identified evidence.

Figure 2. PRISMA search diagram for meta-analysis and narrative review



Abbreviations: AIDA = Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics, EISI = Evidence Information Systems Integration, IBSS = International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, n = number, UNDP = United Nations Development Programme

Measures analysed in meta-analysis

Our meta-analysis examined eleven measures (Table 1, left column). Child nutrition-related indicators included two child anthropometry measures: height-for-age z scores (HAZ), weight-for-height z scores (WHZ), and four measures on food and diet: child dietary diversity score (CDDS), household dietary diversity score (HDDS), food consumption score (FCS), and number of meals consumed. HAZ is an indicator of long-term chronic nutritional deficit used to measure stunting, while WHZ is an indicator of short-term acute malnutrition used to measure wasting among children. CDDS and HDDS capture children's and household's dietary patterns with regard to different food groups consumed, in a period of time such as 30-day, 7-day, and 24-hour recall period. FCS, another standard indicator developed by the World Food Programme, also captures consumption frequencies and food group diversity. These indicators vary from each other with regard to the food groups and consumption frequencies covered, and recall windows. Education and child labour were covered by one indicator each: school enrolment and child participation in paid work. Our meta-analysis also examined the outcome of adult employment, which can impact a child's well-being in the household.

While our guiding framework of ASP (by the World Bank) emphasizes that household resilience is central to the understanding of the impacts of social protection in humanitarian and fragile settings, empirical literature on resilience is relatively recent (Otchera and Handa, 2022). Additionally, "both the definition of resilience and the methodologies used to measure it are heavily contested" (Jones and Tanner, 2017). As such, we did not find an adequate number of studies over the period examined covering consistent measures of this construct. As a proxy, we ran meta-analysis for two measures indicative of a household's resilience in the context of shocks: household cash balance, and household asset balance. In our qualitative narrative review, we cast a broader net and interpret existing literature describing impact estimates for a wide variety of resilience measures; for example, whether households adopt different coping strategies in light of crisis and disasters. The narrative review also includes a synthesis of evidence on gender and mental health outcomes.

Results

Meta-analysis overview

In the final section table T1 summarizes the 45 studies included in the meta-analysis; the full citations are found in Appendix B. Table T1 provides information on the country, implementing organizations (government-led versus non-governmental organizations (NGOs)), timeline of the programme and the evaluation, and the value of cash/in-kind transfer represented as percentage of household income during the baseline survey. Transfer amounts ranged from 3 per cent to 250 per cent of baseline income. The 45 eligible studies cover SP programmes implemented in settings of ongoing or prior conflict and violence (10 articles), climate shocks such as floods and droughts and natural disasters (18 articles), and contexts of migration and displacement (17 articles). Classification is made based on the contextual focus specified in the paper reflecting the situation at the time of writing / publication, rather than the current situation in the relevant country. A majority of the programmes were implemented by NGOs and humanitarian aid organizations, with only 12 led by national governments (Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Malawi, Mexico, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Yemen).

While we hoped to use meta-analysis to examine a greater variety of outcomes relevant to child well-being, in the end we were only able to examine the 11 outcomes shown in Table T1. Further, we compare programmes in contexts of shocks or humanitarian and fragile settings with SP programmes in non-fragile settings for a selected set of indicators, in terms of the observed impact on our relevant indicators. For the selected nutrition indicators, Table T1 presents estimates from Manley et al., (2022) on the impact of SP implemented in non-fragile contexts. Comparison of the final meta-analytical models showed that for most outcomes, programmes in covariate shock contexts have more of an effect than does social protection in non-fragile contexts (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of meta-analytic results, and comparing effects of social protection programmes in humanitarian and fragile contexts with non-fragile social protection programmes

	SP programmes in humanitarian and fragile contexts		SP programmes in non-fragile non-humanitarian contexts (as in Manley 2022, excluding humanitarian and fragile settings)	
	Impact estimate	Number of studies	Impact estimate	Number of studies
Nutrition indicators				
Height for age (HAZ)	0.09**	6	0.011	72
Weight for height (WHZ)	0.02	6	0.035	34
CDDS (food groups)	0.55***	6	0.36***	7
FCS (score)	5.72***	5		
HDDS (food groups)	0.29**	9	0.40***	15
Meals per day	0.20	4		

Child labour indicator		
Child labour	-6%***	7
Education indicator		
School enrolment	6%***	14
Additional indicators		
Adult employment (employment hours, paid work)	6%***	6
Household cash balances	0.7%	8
Household asset balance (prevent loss of assets)	3%**	7

Note: Source for a comparison is Manley (2022), but with models excluding papers covering humanitarian and fragile settings *** finding is significant at the 1% level; ** 5% level.
Abbreviations: CDDS = Child dietary diversity score, FCS = Food consumption score, HDDS = Household dietary diversity score, SP = social protection

Nutrition

Nutrition outcomes are critical to understanding the effectiveness of adaptive social protection programmes, given that the development outcomes of food consumption, diet and nutrition (in the long term) are closely tied to household resilience – the building block of the World Bank ASP framework (Bowen et al., 2020). Adaptive social protection programmes are expected to build resilience capacities, which ensures food security during adverse events, in turn mitigating the ill effects on household members' diet and nutrition (Murendo et al., 2020). To examine this relationship, we conduct meta-analysis for indicators related to child nutrition and food consumption. We hypothesize that being a beneficiary of a social protection programme increases the likelihood of having better nutrition outcomes for children residing in humanitarian and fragile settings.

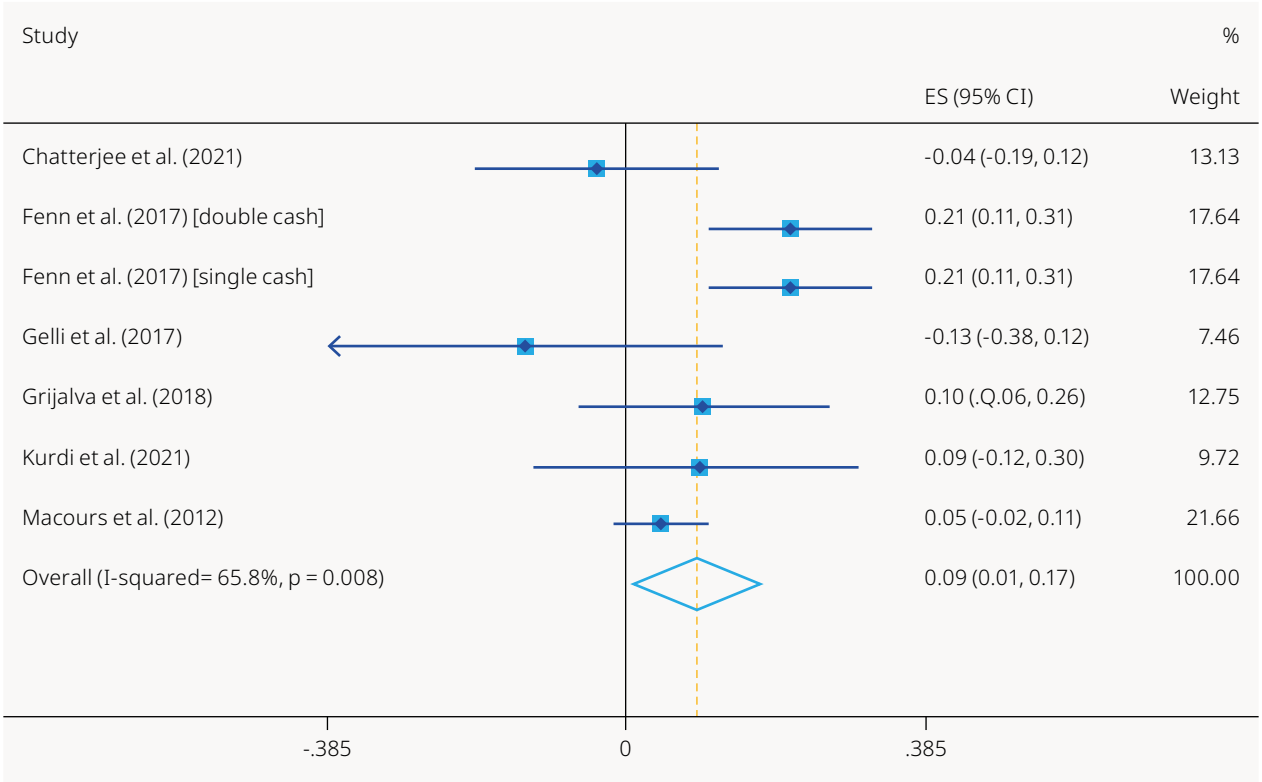
Child anthropometry: Two separate indicators of child anthropometry were examined by our meta-analysis: child stunting – height-for-age z scores or HAZ, and child wasting – weight-for-height z scores or WHZ. Studies covered children aged 0–11 years, and were published between 2012 and 2021.

Height-for-age z scores or HAZ (child stunting): Six studies provided robust estimates for effects of social protection in humanitarian and fragile contexts on child HAZ, a measure of child stunting (Figure 3). All except two studies presented estimates for children under five years of age. Overall, programmes improved HAZ, or reduced the likelihood of stunting among children. The average impact across these studies is 0.091, a large and significant effect. The strongest individual effect is from a randomized controlled trial of the 'Cash-Based Intervention' in Pakistan, a programme implemented by a global humanitarian organization in the context of climate and natural calamities (Fenn et al., 2017). The programme was built as a response to severe rates of malnutrition among children in an area experiencing climate fragility (frequent flooding and droughts). Building on a prior

intervention that provided behaviour-change communication and other nutrition-related services, the programme provided a monthly cash transfer of US$14 to a select group of participants, a monthly cash transfer of approximately US$28 to a second group, and a fresh food voucher worth of US$14 to the third treatment group (three treatment arms), for six months. For all three groups, the likelihood of children aged 6–12 months being stunted was significantly less than that of a control group, indicating the promising effects of both cash as well as food transfers. It is important to note that all participating groups, including the control groups, had access to the original programme that provided nutrition-specific awareness and services, previously and during the implementation of the cash-based intervention. Another programme that showed significant positive effects, although only for children (6–59 months) from poorest households and not overall, is the 'Cash for Nutrition' programme in Yemen, which provided cash transfers as well as nutritional training in the context of violence and conflict (Kurdi, 2021). For the children from the poorest households, authors find a statistically significant and large impact s of the programme on HAZ.

In contrast, impact evaluations of programmes implemented in displaced persons' camps in Somalia (Grijalva-Eternod et al., 2018), rainfall affected rural areas in India (Chatterjee et al., 2021), flood affected regions in Nicaragua (Macours et al., 2012), and a lean-season food transfer programme in flood-prone areas in Malawi (Gelli et al., 2017) all note non-significant findings for HAZ. None of these programmes included any nutrition-specific programme elements. These findings illustrate the importance of complementing cash support with a well-defined nutrition-focused intervention component, to cause any change in terms of reducing child stunting prevalence.

Figure 3. Meta-analysis results for height-for-age z-scores



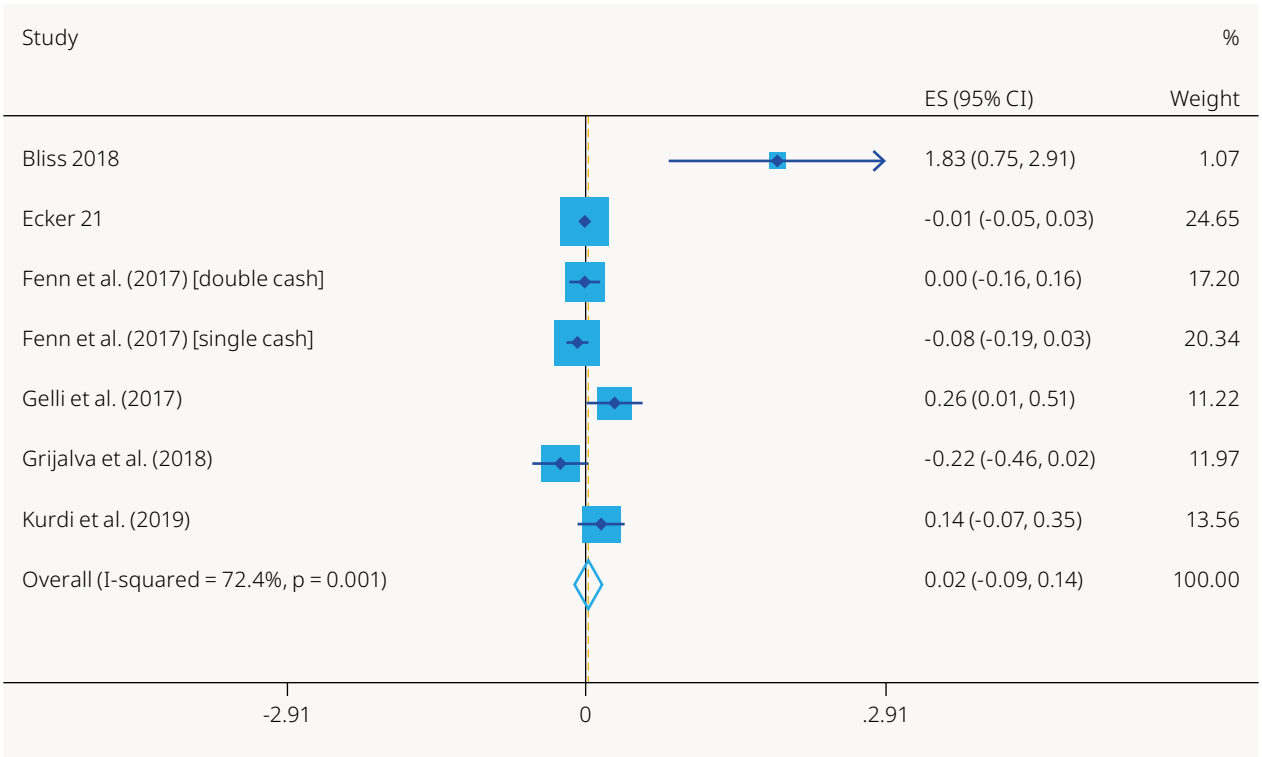
Note: Weights are from random effects analysis. Estimates from Chaterjee et al., (2021) are for children of the age group 0–11 years; Fenn et al., (2017) are for 6–12 months; and the remaining four studies cover HAZ for children less than 5 years (59 months) of age.
Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, ES = effect size

Weight-for-height z scores or WHZ (child wasting): Seven estimates have been gathered on the effects of cash transfers on WHZ for children, with studies covering different age groups between 0 and 59 months. Unlike HAZ, the meta-analytic results observe no significant impact of social protection programmes in covariate shock settings on child WHZ (Figure 4). Our analysis of social protection programmes in non-humanitarian and non-fragile settings from Manley et al., (2022) also indicate non-significant effects of social protection on WHZ for children (Table 1 above).

However, two of the six eligible studies present individual significant effects. Bliss et al., (2018) found that an emergency cash transfer programme conditional on beneficiary mothers attending sessions on infant feeding in Niger, led to significant improvements in WHZ for children aged 6–23 months. The programme was implemented in response to severe drought and famine by a humanitarian organization. The evaluation of the 'cash plus' nutrition counselling programme in Pakistan mentioned earlier, found significant impact of cash transfers on improving WHZ after six months of the first disbursement, but the effects ceased at the one-year mark (Fenn et al., 2017).

Strong nutrition focus through an explicit design element (in this case conditionality of the programme in Niger, or 'plus' counselling in Pakistan) does seem to have a higher chance of yielding positive results. Both interventions were implemented in response to natural disasters. The context seems to accentuate nutrition as a key concern, driving the nutrition-focused design.

Figure 4. Meta-analysis results for weight-for-height z-scores



Note: Weights are from random effects analysis. Estimates from Bliss et al., (2018) are for children of the age group 6–23 months; Fenn et al., (2017) are for 6–12 months; and the remaining four studies cover WHZ for children less than five years (59 months) of age.
Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, ES = effect size

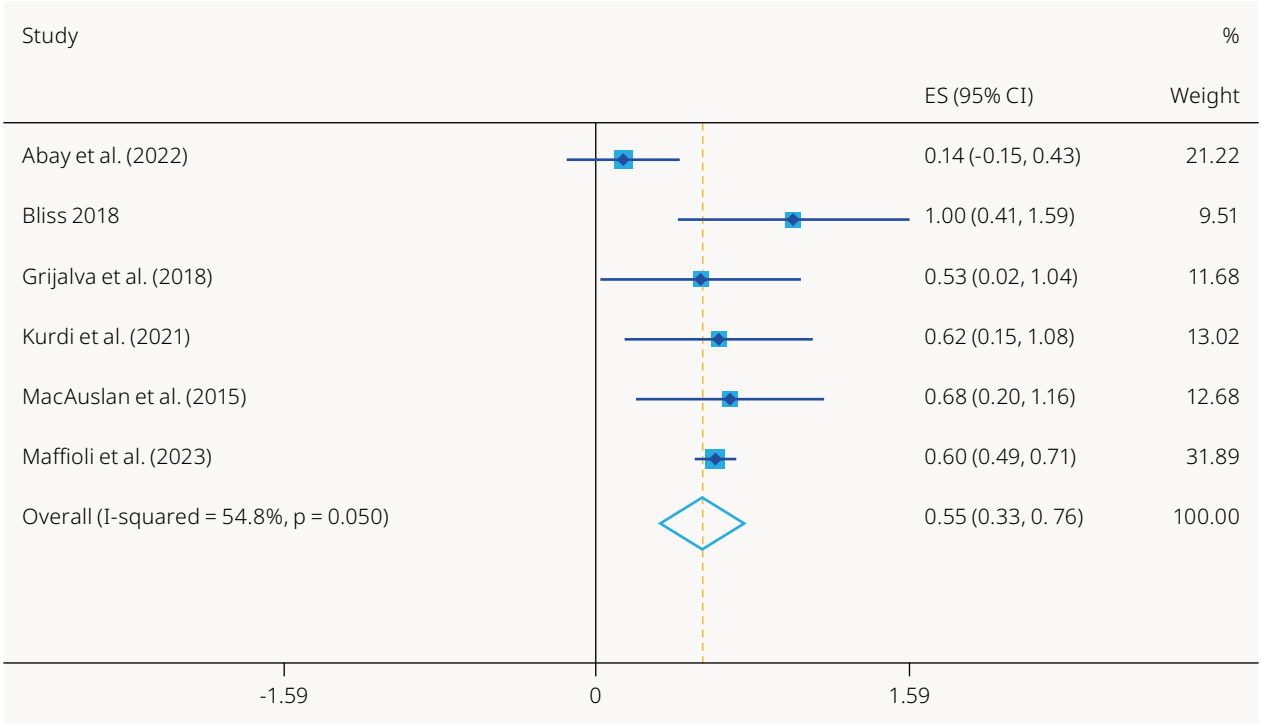
Food and diet: We analysed four separate indicators on child diet and consumption with studies published between 2014 and 2023: child dietary diversity, household food consumption, household dietary diversity, and number of meals consumed by a household. The meta-analysis results indicate that SP programmes in humanitarian and fragile contexts have positive and significant impacts on these outcomes, except on the number of meals consumed.

Child dietary diversity scores and household dietary diversity scores capture children's and households' dietary patterns with regard to different food groups consumed, over recall periods of, for example, 30 days, 7 days and 24 hours.

Child dietary diversity score or CDDS: Figure 5 reports meta-analysis results from six studies on the World Health Organization consumption indicator. The eligible studies present estimates for a wide range of age groups, with three studies covering children less than two years of age, two studies on children aged between 6 and 59 months, and one study covering children under 18 years of age. The combined meta-estimate shows that on average, SP in humanitarian and fragile settings increases dietary diversity among children by approximately 0.55 food groups, an increase significant at the 1 per cent level.

Positive and significant effects on CDDS were observed for cash transfer programmes coupled with nutritional training sessions. These programmes were from conflict-affected Yemen (Kurdi, 2021), drought-affected Niger (Bliss et al., 2018), and post-COVID Myanmar (Maffioli et al., 2023). Positive effects were also noted from an unconditional cash and in-kind transfer programme to internally displaced people (IDPs) in Somalia (Grijalva-Eternod et al., 2018), and a food stamps programme implemented in response to an extreme winter in Mongolia (MacAuslan and Attah, 2015). The only outlier study presenting non-significant results was from an unconditional cash transfer (UCT) and food transfers programme implemented during COVID-19 in rural Ethiopia, the 'Productive Safety Net Programme' (Abay et al., 2023). Authors note limited market access during COVID-19 impeding households' ability to buy diverse foods as a key reason for lack of observable impacts on CDDS. This result highlights the importance of taking market conditions into consideration when designing a cash or other type of emergency assistance in fragile contexts if we want to ensure programme objectives on diet diversity are achieved. Consistency of positive results across different types of emergency setting or the type of assistance (unconditional as well as conditional cash and in-kind transfers) suggests that the improved dietary consumption of children in the affected households is an important immediate or short-term outcome of social assistance in fragile contexts and a pathway to further changes in nutritional status.

Figure 5. Meta-analysis results for child dietary diversity scores

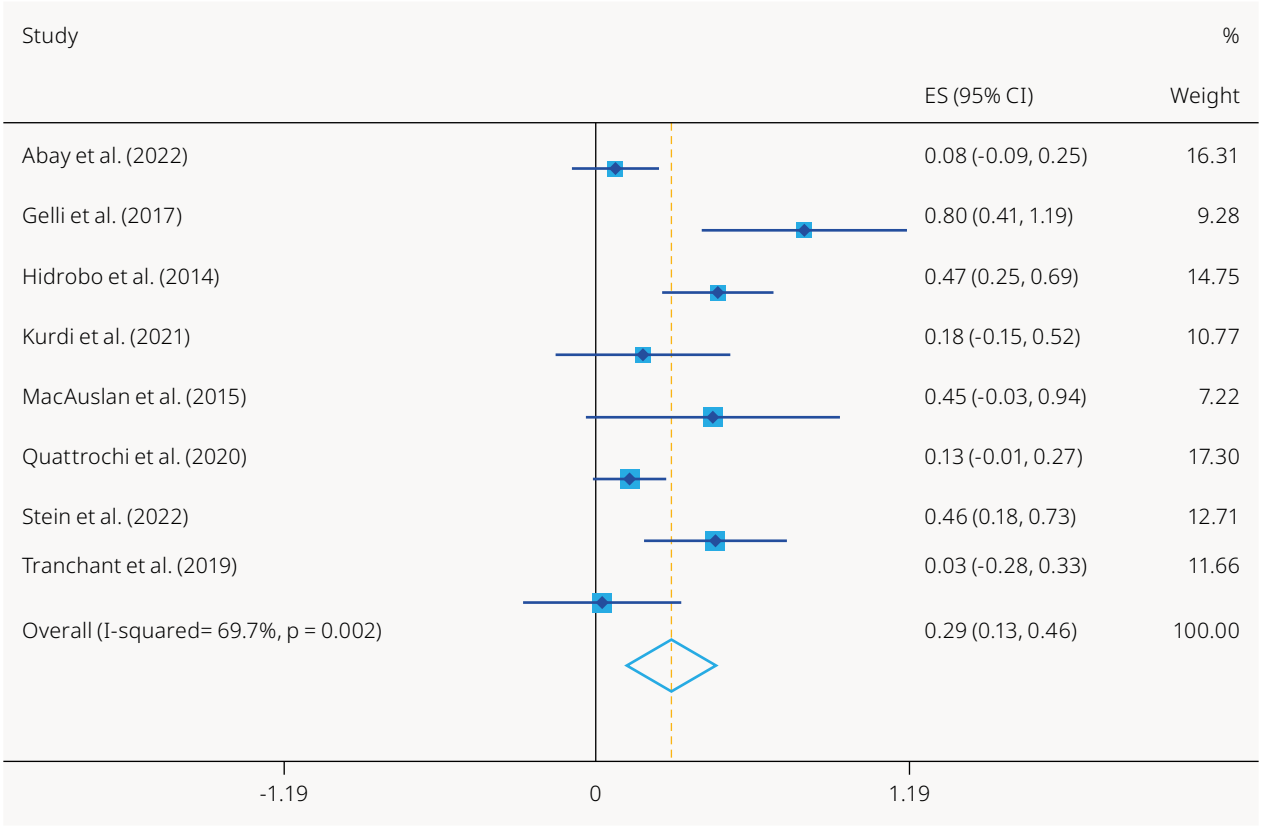


Note: Weights are from random effects analysis. Estimates from Abay et al., (2022), Bliss et al., (2018), and Kurdi et al., (2021) are for children in the age group of less than two years; Grijalva et al., (2018) and Maffioli et al., (2023) are for 6–59 months; and MacAuslen et al., (2015) is for children less than 18 years of age.
Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, ES = effect size

Household dietary diversity score or HDDS: Our next indicator related to diet, HDDS, was estimated by eight studies, with all but three studies being from conflict or refugee contexts (Figure 7). Even though four of the eight studies did not find significant effects of the individual programmes on HDDS, overall, the meta-analytic estimated effect is positive and statistically significant at a level of 0.29 additional food groups consumed by a household. The strongest significant effect was observed by the unconditional food transfer programme in Malawi that was provided post an episode of extreme flooding (Gelli et al., 2017). In Ecuador, a programme with six-monthly unconditional transfers of cash, food vouchers or food, to Colombian refugees and poor Ecuadorian households found all three modalities to have a significant and positive impact on HDDS, when compared to control populations (Hidrobo et al., 2014). Other unconditional cash or food transfers for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda during COVID-19 (Stein et al., 2022), and for people experiencing an extreme winter in Mongolia (MacAuslan and Attah, 2015), noted similar positive results.

Abay et al., (2023) who found non-significant effects on CDDS of the 'Productive Safety Net Programme', the unconditional cash transfer in Ethiopia during COVID-19, also found no effects on household-level dietary diversity. Unconditional transfers of vouchers for essential household items for internally displaced persons and host populations in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo significantly improved HDDS six weeks after the disbursements, but effects ceased to exist after one year (Quattrochi et al., 2020). The waning of effects, also observed for other outcomes of child anthropometry previously (Fenn et al., 2017), highlights the need for social protection programmes in humanitarian settings to focus on aspects of sustainability and long-term resilience which, in some instances, can be achieved through better linkages and integration within national social assistance systems.

Figure 6. Meta-analysis results for household dietary diversity scores



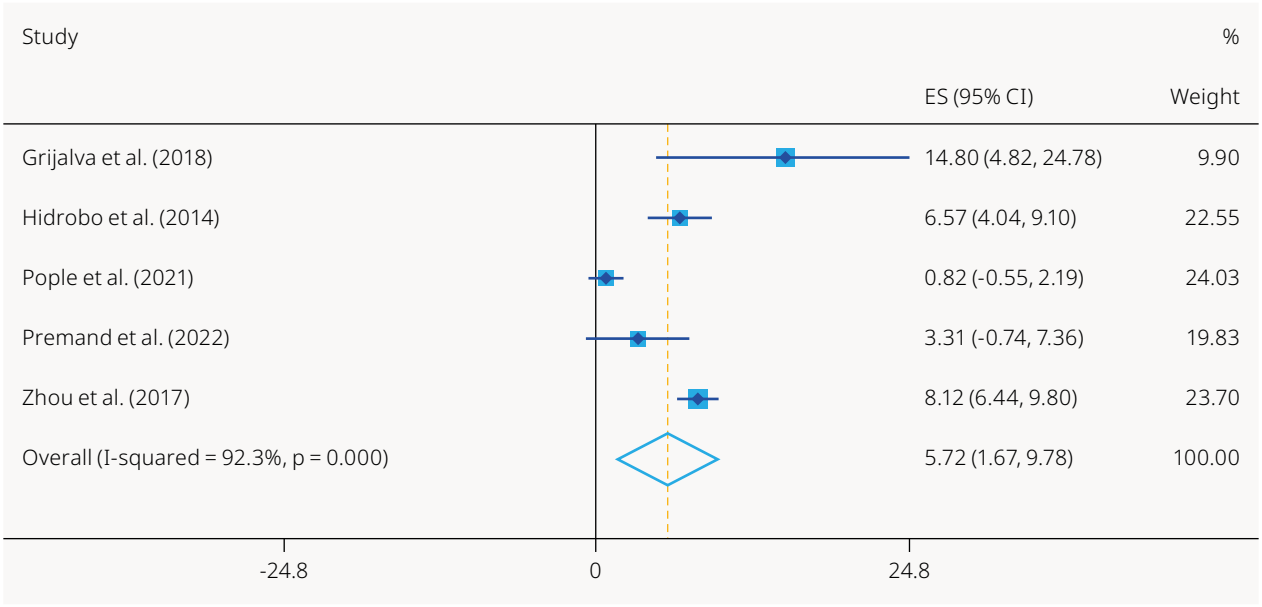
Note: Weights are from random effects analysis
Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, ES = effect size

The food consumption score combines information on household dietary diversity with the frequency of which each food is consumed, weighted by their nutritional importance.

Food consumption score or FCS: This is another common indicator of household diet. Overall, eligible SP programmes were associated with an increase of 5.7 points in FCS of households, a significant result estimated from five studies (Figure 6). The unconditional cash and in-kind transfer programme to IDPs in Somalia (Grijalva-Eternod et al., 2018), which found significant effects for CDDS, notes similar results in terms of improving household food consumption scores. Zhou and Hendriks, (2017) note that a cash and food transfers programme delivered to beneficiaries during the expected 'lean-months' in Mozambique led to improved FCS (two treatment arms with selected beneficiaries expected to engage in public works programme in exchange for US$20 cash or food equivalent of cereals, cowpeas and oil). Notably, the treatment arm of food distributions showed a greater impact than cash transfers. This was attributed to the small sum of cash beneficiaries received, which was probably not sufficient to purchase diverse food basket content or may have been diverted to non-food expenditure.

Not only size but the timing of the transfers can have an impact of an UCT on food consumption scores in humanitarian and fragile settings. In Bangladesh, an anticipatory UCT provided to beneficiaries residing in places that were expected to receive extreme flooding did not have significant effects for FCS overall (Pople et al., 2021). Impact of the social protection programme was significant only when cash was received before the flood peak. Effects dissipate entirely if the cash transfers are not received within 12 days of the local flood peak. Early cash transfers allow people to prepare better for shocks such as floods, which lead to immediate relocation for many. Authors note that in such contexts of rapid onset weather events, gains can be won only within a limited time frame.

Figure 7. Meta-analysis results for food consumption scores

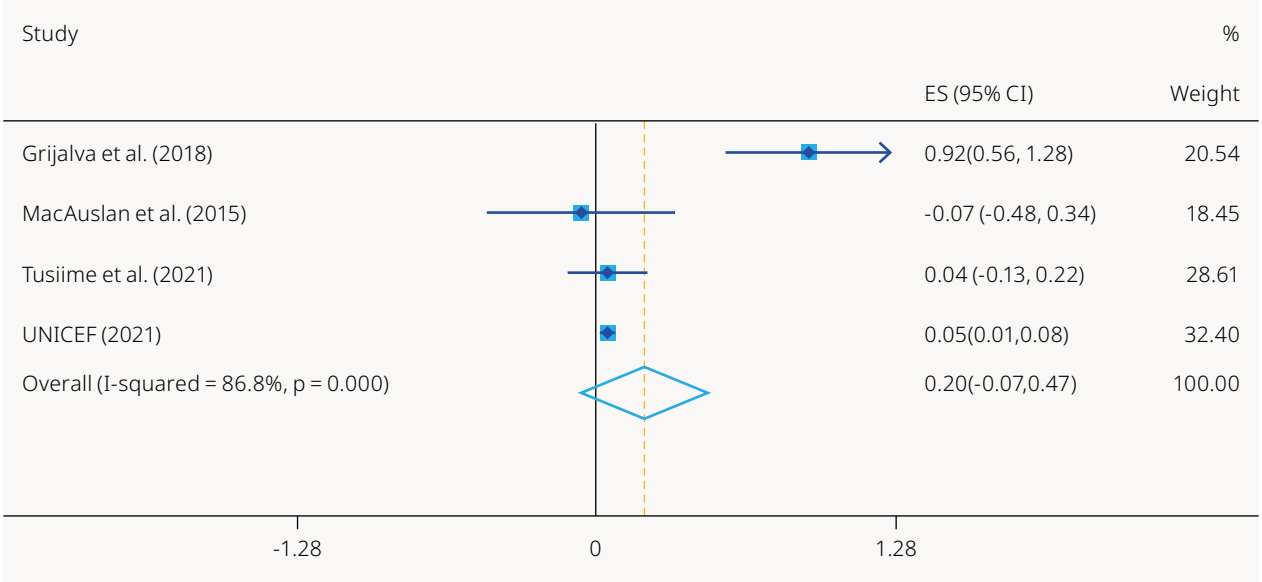


Note: Weights are from random effects analysis
Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, ES = effect size

The average number of meals a household consumed in a given day before and after receiving social assistance provides a further indicator.

Number of meals: Four studies examined an additional indicator of food and diet. Three out of the four papers report non-significant results, with the overall meta-analytic estimate being not significantly different from zero (Figure 8). Only Grijalva-Eternod et al. (2018), who present impact of the unconditional cash and in-kind transfer programme to IDPs in Somalia, note significant and positive effects of the transfers on number of meals consumed before and after the implementation of the programme. However, the increase is by around one meal (0.92), from a low baseline of less than two meals per day. Three unconditional cash or food transfer programmes from three different regions for people experiencing an extreme winter in Mongolia (MacAuslan and Attah 2015), internally displaced populations in Uganda (Tusiime et al., 2013), and Syrian refugees in Jordan (UNICEF, 2021), found no significant impacts on number of meals consumed. It is possible that the relatively higher amount of cash transferred by the programme in Somalia (cash transfer was equivalent to 46 per cent of baseline household income in Somalia compared to an average of 25 per cent across the other three programmes) led to significant impacts. Number of meals per day might also reflect certain cultural traditions and therefore be less susceptible to change.

Figure 8. Meta-analysis results for number of meals consumed



Note: Weights are from random effects analysis
Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, ES = effect size

Child labour

Child labour, an outcome critical to the state of child well-being, is expected to be reduced with an improvement in a household's ability to manage economic shocks; social protection programmes that increase household resilience to adverse events will in turn likely protect children from being forced to engage in economic activities (ICI, 2022). We hypothesize in our meta-analysis that being a beneficiary of a social protection programme reduces the likelihood of participating in work for children residing in humanitarian and fragile settings.

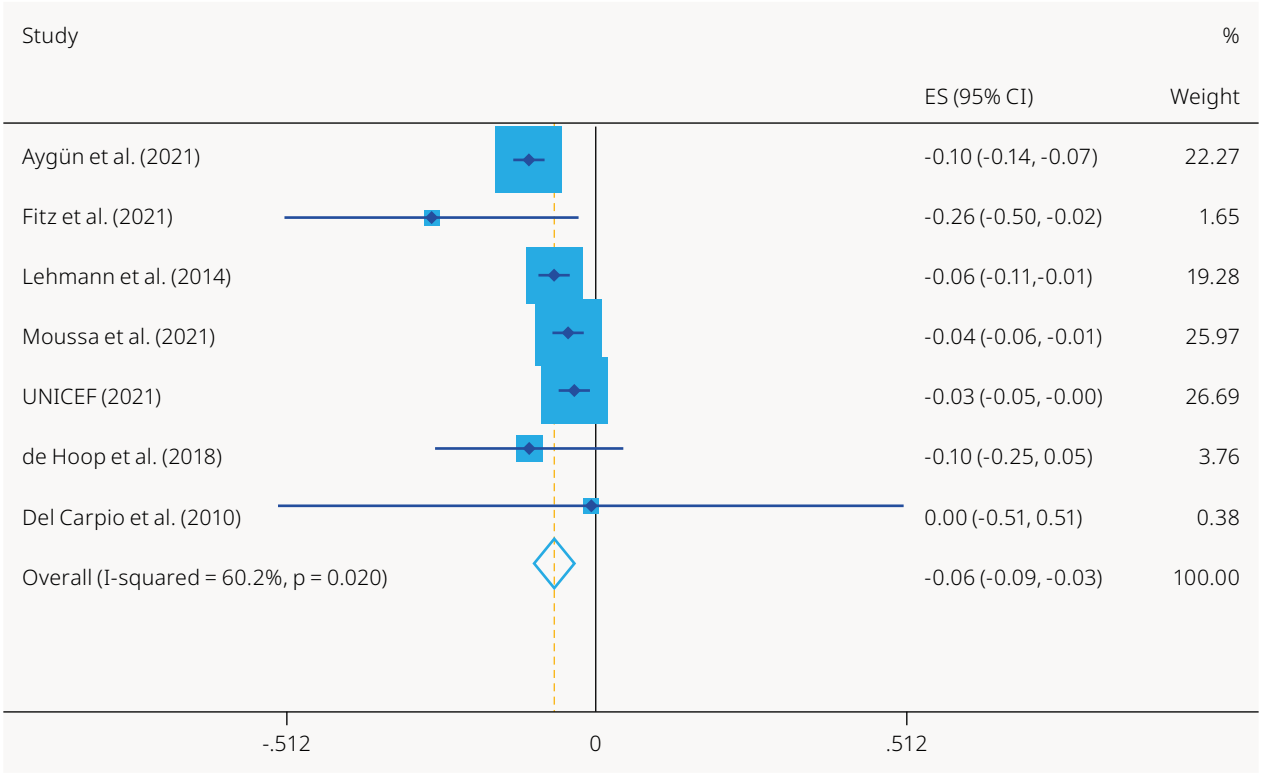
Child labour is measured through child participation in paid work.

Seven studies published between 2010 and 2022 were included in the meta-analysis of child labour (Figure 9). The overall impact of social protection programmes in humanitarian and fragile settings on child paid work is significant and negative (-0.06, with a significant p-value of 0.02). Six out of seven point estimates show reductions in child labour, with only one outlier that is given very little weight by the algorithm. Four of the seven eligible studies examined impacts of unconditional cash transfers in the context of a large influx of Syrian refugees into the neighbouring states of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey (Augün, 2021; de Hoop, 2018; Moussa et al., 2022; and UNICEF, 2021). Three impact evaluations assessed the effects of conditional and unconditional cash transfers in the context of climate-related shocks in Brazil (Fitz, 2021), Lebanon (Lehmann and Masterson, 2014) and post-drought context of Nicaragua (Del Carpio, 2010). All successful programmes can be described as 'cash only' interventions with a well-defined focus on improving school outcomes through conditionality or simple monitoring of school attendance (e.g. Augün, 2021). The largest reduction in child labour was observed in the quasi-experimental study of Bolsa de Familia conditional cash transfer (CCT) in Brazil – one of the largest government-led programmes.

The study found that while the short-lived shocks (positive rainfall deviations) increase the likelihood of paid work among children, the CCT significantly mitigates this effect. Two other studies from the context of migration and displacement found a substantial reduction in the percentage of children carrying out household chores or engaging in child labour (de Hoop, 2018 and Augün, 2021). But several studies emphasized that the heterogeneity of observed effects varied by gender, age of the child and location. Thus, effectiveness of the Bolsa de Familia to mitigate the impact of climatic shocks on child labour is particularly strong in rural areas but is less successful among boys and older children. Del Caprio (2010) found that the programme reinforced existing specializations in domestic tasks within households, particularly for older girls who were not bound to conditionalities. At the same time, de Hoop et al. (2018) found that the UCT delivered to Syrian refugees in Lebanon was particularly beneficial for girls, consistently reducing the number of girls engaging in domestic tasks by 23 percentage points.

Our findings from these selected studies seem to support earlier reviews of social protection programmes by de Hoop and Rosati (2014) and Rosati (2022), who find that overall cash transfers are associated with a decrease in child labour, though context makes a difference. Overall, they provide a strong rationale for the programme design to be gender sensitive, recognizing adolescence as the age of transition with greater responsibilities that are dependent on prevailing social perceptions and gender norms.

Figure 9. Meta-analysis results for child labour



Note: Weights are from random effects analysis
Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, ES = effect size

Child education

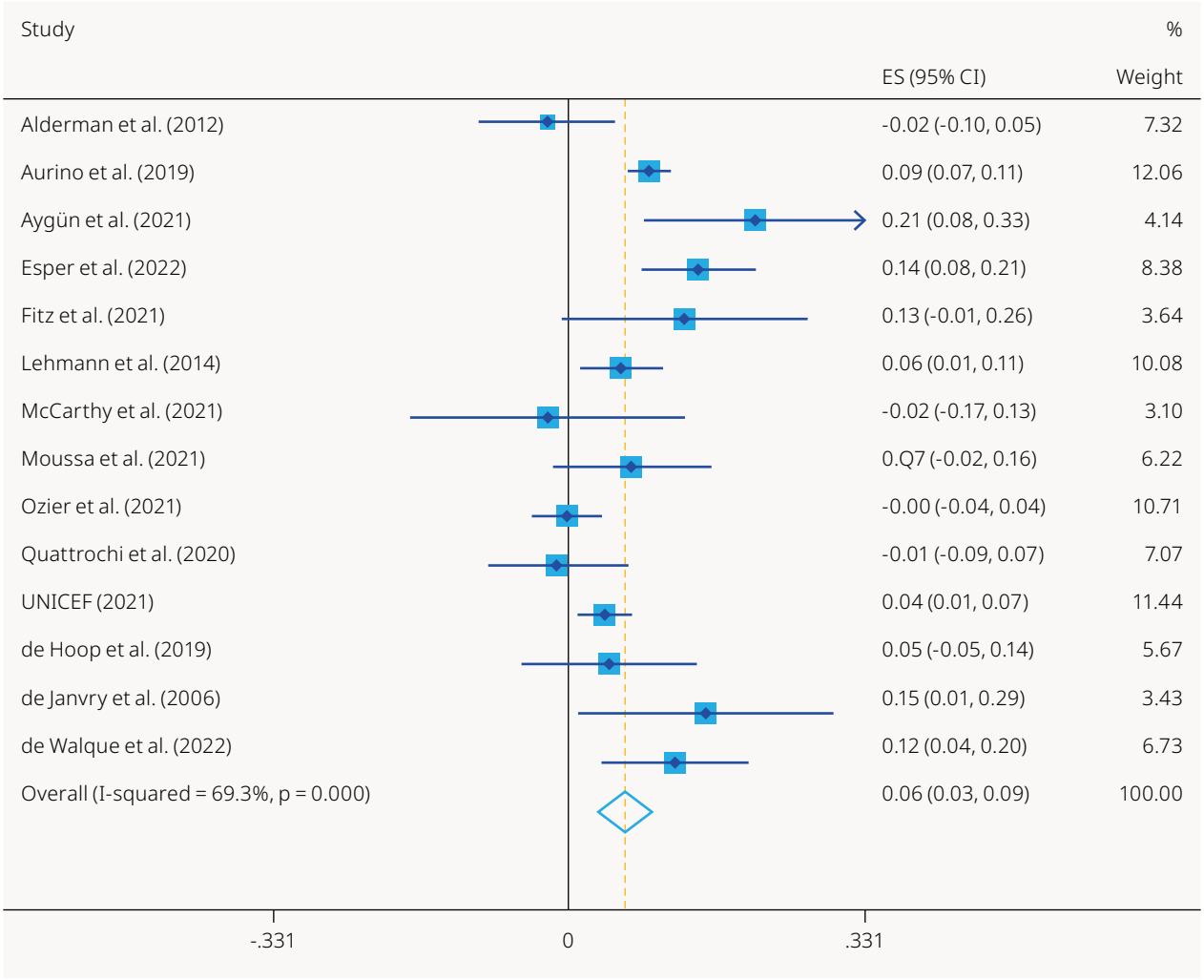
Similar to child labour, children's education is intertwined with household exposure to and ability to cope with adverse shocks. We study children's education in our meta-analysis, and hypothesize that being a beneficiary of a social protection programme increases the likelihood of enrolling or attending school for children residing in humanitarian and fragile settings.

School enrolment was used as an indicator of child education in the meta-analysis.

Eleven of 14 studies included in the meta-analysis show that SP in humanitarian and fragile settings is associated with improved school enrolment (Figure 10). The average statistically significant effect across the pool of estimates is increase in school participation rate of 6 per cent, p=0.000. Most of the studies with positive effects looked at the effectiveness of UCT. One study focused on the effectiveness of general food distribution and voucher assistance in Mali in the context of ongoing conflict (Aurino et al., 2019) and three examined the CCTs in Brazil (Fitz et al., 2021), Guinea (de Walque 2022), Honduras (de Janvry 2006), Mexico and Nicaragua. The largest effect sizes are observed for the Turkish Emergency Social Safety Net programme, a large scale UCT programme for the Syrian refugee population in Turkey. It provides a substantial US$105 monthly amount (55 per cent of the average monthly earnings at the time of the study) and quarterly top-ups. The programme produced significant positive results for both boys' and girls' enrolment, with stronger effects found for refugee children aged 12 to 17. Notably, our review shows that a national CCT programme designed to alleviate poverty at scale can have a similarly large positive effect on school attendance in response to income and covariate shocks. For instance, de Janvry et al. (2006) show that the Mexican PROGRESA programme fully compensates the negative impact of shocks on school attendance. Drawing on additional examples from Nicaragua and Honduras (coffee crises), the study underlines the potential of CCT designs to protect schooling outcomes at the time of shocks if the size of the transfer is sufficiently large. Moreover, similar to cash transfers to Syrian refugees, these examples demonstrate the importance of strong school infrastructure (existing system). This infrastructure is necessary to respond adequately during and post-crises, to changes in demand, providing a nurturing and safe environment for affected children.

Some studies that did not make it into the meta-analysis can provide additional contextual lessons for programme design. For instance, examining a Colombian programme, Wald and Bozzoli. (2011) identified impacts of the cash transfer programme on enrolment while also highlighting some important caveats in the context of ongoing conflict, noting: "The programme may work in attracting children to school, but in high conflict regions children tend to do less homework and miss more days in school." The interplay of cash incentives, constrained labour market and precarious humanitarian and fragile contexts is complex and mutable. This can result in more nuanced long-term outcomes. The findings of de Walque et al. (2022) in the Republic of Guinea, based on a randomised control trial design, seem to support this argument, showing that a substantial (11 percentage point) increase in school participation did not lead to impacts on learning outcomes as measured by mathematics, French and literacy. Overall, the findings provide support for the conclusion of Aurino and Giunti (2022) that "Humanitarian social protection can be effective in supporting children's schooling … [though] there is a large evidence gap on intervention effects on learning, cognition, and psychosocial skills."

Figure 10. Meta-analysis results for school enrolment



Note: Weights are from random effects analysis
Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, ES = effect size

Adult employment

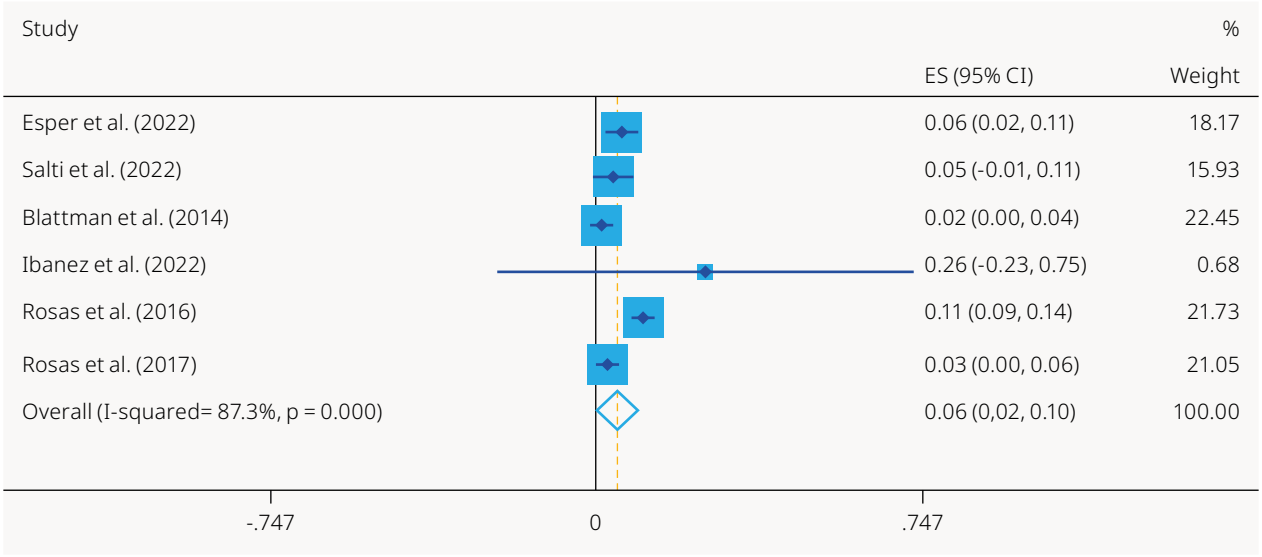
Six studies present estimates on adult employment (Figure 11), with four of them reporting positive and significant effects of the eligible social protection programmes on improving adult employment rates.

Adult employment was measured as average employment hours of paid work among the adult population.

Of these four, three report estimates from conflict settings, and one from the post-Ebola context in Sierra Leone. The two studies which present non-significant effects are from displacement and refugee contexts in Lebanon and Columbia. Overall, meta-analysis found that social protection programmes lead to a significant result of a 6 per cent increase in the hours of paid work. While not a large increase in absolute terms, this positive change is observed in conflict-challenged places. The fact that no significant impacts are observed in displacement contexts is likely to be due to structural and social barriers to employment for refugees.

Two separate social protection programmes in post-conflict Sierra Leone, a public works programme (Rosas and Sabarwal 2016), and a cash transfer and business training programme (Rosas et al., 2017) increased household members' participation in paid work, three or four months following programme delivery. Cash transfers coupled with business training in the conflict-affected north of Uganda also led to higher average employment hours for adults, two years post the receipt of the trainings and additional business grants (Blattman et al., 2014). In Afghanistan, a large unconditional cash transfer (amount equal to 250 per cent of baseline income) to returning migrants increased the likelihood of an adult being employed (Esper et al., 2022). An unconditional cash transfer to Syrian refugees in Lebanon however did not find any significant effects on adult employment (Salti et al., 2022). This programme had a relatively lower amount of transfer (22 per cent of baseline income of households compared to 100-250 per cent in programmes with positive impacts on employment). Another study that did not observe any effects on adult employment was an unconditional cash transfer for forced Venezuelan migrants in Colombia (Ibanez et al., 2022), which also had a relatively low amount of transfer (48 per cent of baseline income). While the low amount of transfer could be a potential reason for the absence of observable impacts, it is important to acknowledge that major systemic challenges exist in establishing a decent work environment for refugees across regions, such as inadequate legal framework, discrimination on the basis of nationality, and barriers to refugee workers accessing legal redress (Leaders Consortium, 2019).

Figure 11. Meta-analysis results for adult employment



Note: Weights are from random effects analysis
Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, ES = effect size

Household cash balance

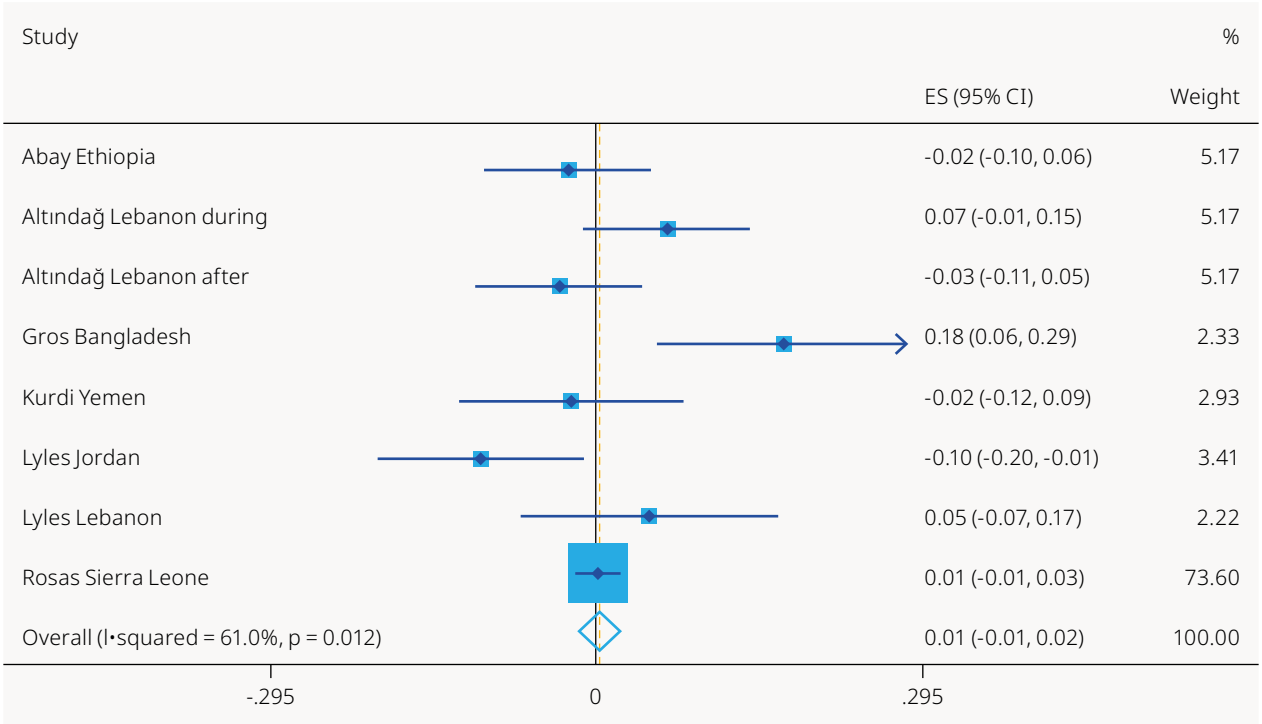
Our guiding framework dictates that ASP is anchored to the concept of household resilience, which is the ability of a household to "prepare for, cope with, and adapt to shocks in a manner that protects their well-being" (Bowen et al., 2020).

Due to the limited number of eligible studies examining the impact of programmes on household resilience, we conduct meta-analysis for outcomes of household cash balance and asset balance, as a proxy for resilience in the context of shocks.

We found seven studies that reported effects of SP in humanitarian and fragile settings on household cash balance, one of our proxies of resilience in low-income and shock-prone contexts (Figure 12). Our meta-analysis indicates no overall significant impact, with six out of the seven studies presenting null effects. Studies covered both 'cash only' and 'cash plus' programmes, from drought-affected rural Ethiopia, refugee populations in Lebanon and Jordan, flood-prone Bangladesh, conflict areas in Yemen, and post-conflict Sierra Leone (Abay et al., 2023; Altındağ and O'Connell, 2023; Gros et al., 2019; Kurdi, 2021; Lyles et al., 2021a; Lyles et al., 2021b; Rosas et al., 2017). The only programme that noted a significant and positive impact on household cash balance, is the unconditional and anticipatory cash grant provided to households residing in flood-prone areas in Bangladesh (Gros, 2019). The amount of cash transfer in this programme represented 12 per cent of the average baseline household income, an amount relatively lower than that provided in the other programmes assessed for cash balance (15 to 250 per cent of household income). Despite the lower amount of transfer, anticipatory cash transfers likely allowed households to foresee and plan their future expenditures, preventing them from being forced to make destitution spending of liquid assets and debt acquisition.

While timing of cash transfer vis-à-vis covariate shock can be expected to influence the observed status of household resilience, our analysis failed to identify any definite patterns in this area simply because there are still few studies examining the 'temporal' dimension of the cash assistance in fragile contexts. Studies assessed in this review also varied in the timeline of measuring this outcome from short and long term, ranging between one month to two years after programme delivery. Altındağ et al., (2023) assessed the impact of a cash and food voucher assistance programme for refugees in Lebanon, both during and six months after the implementation of the programme. No significant effects were noted for either scenario. Authors note that while cash assistance allows beneficiaries to save temporarily, these savings vanish quickly in order to cover consumption. Future research should try to identify the influence of cash amount, time of disbursement of cash, as well as timing of measurement of resilience, in observing effects on cash balance recovery, after the experience of a shock or crisis. Overall, the results for cash balance, although ambiguous, are not unexpected as one reason that households have liquid assets or cash, is to cushion themselves from shocks like this. Cash prevents depletion of resources and allows consumption smoothing at the time of crises.

Figure 12. Meta-analysis results for improvements in household cash balance



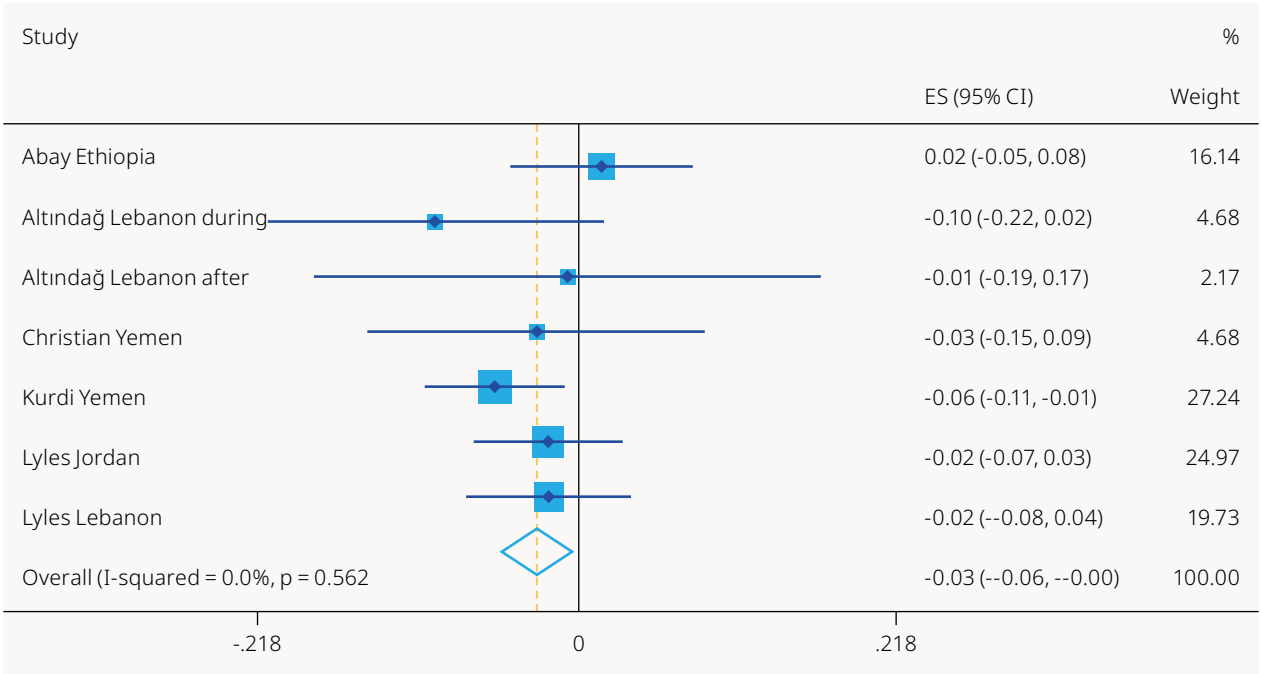
Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, ES = effect size

Household asset balance

Six studies yielded seven impact estimates for household asset balance, with overall meta-analytic results indicating a statistically significant effect of 3 per cent (Figure 13); social protection programmes in general limit the amount of assets that households are forced to liquidate as they cope with shocks.

Of the seven estimates, only one (Kurdi, 2021) notes significant effects. However, an evaluation of the studies' collective effects through meta-analysis finds that on average, cash transfers are associated with a small but statistically significant ability to help households avoid losing assets. The 'Cash for Nutrition' programme in Yemen, which provided cash transfers as well as nutritional training to pregnant women and mothers of infants (Kurdi, 2021), significantly reduced loss in household assets by 6 per cent, when measured two years after programme delivery. Five additional estimates, which cover unconditional cash transfer programmes for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon (Altındağ et al., 2023; Lyles et al., 2021a; Lyles et al., 2021b), and a public works programme in Yemen (Christian et al., 2015) find indications of a protective effect. However, the effect sizes are minimal and not statistically significant. Only one programme evaluation in Ethiopia (Abay et al., 2023) found no indication that cash worked to preserve household assets. Similar to household cash balance, the eligible programmes for household asset balance represent a wide range of cash transfer amount (12 to 250 per cent of baseline income) and exposure duration in different crisis contexts. Overall, we fail to identify relevant patterns in terms of fragility context and programme elements (timing of exposure and cash amount), that could influence the SP intervention's observed impact on household asset balance.

Figure 13. Meta-analysis results for preventing losses of household assets



Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval, ES = effect size

Healthcare access

An important use of support for people in crisis is access to healthcare, but unfortunately we were unable to find much evidence on the topic. We found only three papers tracking impacts of cash transfers on access to care, with two of them by Lyles et al., (2021a, 2021b) for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, and another by Rosas and Sabarwal (2016) in conflict-context Sierra Leone. The first, following a study done in Jordan, finds that cash transfers improve access by 11.1 per cent; the second, in Lebanon, finds effects of less than 1 per cent (0.9 per cent). The last study, in Sierra Leone, finds that transfers associated with an employment programme improve access by 4 per cent. While all three show some positive effects, the biggest takeaway is unfortunately that we need more robust evidence and more consistency in validated health indicators in humanitarian and fragile contexts.

Narrative review of additional outcomes

In this section, we summarize findings from papers that present quantitative impact estimates of eligible SP programmes on outcomes related to gender, mental health and resilience. These studies could not be included in our meta-analysis due to unavailability of an adequate number of estimates from consistent indicators. Thirty-nine studies, covering 28 individual SP programmes are a part of this narrative review for the three outcomes. Twelve of these programmes are in the context of climate shocks, while seven and nine programmes are in conflict, and displacement or refugee contexts, respectively. We observe representation of all three contexts across the three outcomes. Table T2 presents details on the SP programmes covered by studies in this narrative review.

Gender

Current evidence suggests that young girls and women often bear a disproportionate burden of the negative impacts of climate shocks and humanitarian crise (Simon, 2019). Ensuring that SP programmes act as an effective tool in improving women and girls' well-being in shock settings has thus been at the forefront of global discussions in the social protection community in the past decade (Nesbitt Ahmed, 2023). Despite the growing interest, our review identified only 10 studies published between 2010 and 2021, that present impact estimates of SP on gender-related outcomes in humanitarian and fragile contexts. These studies cover seven individual programmes, from Afghanistan, Ecuador, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Nicaragua, and Uganda. Only two of these programmes operate in a climate-fragile context (Nicaragua and India), with the programme from Kenya responding to COVID-19, and the remaining covering conflict and displacement contexts. The programmes represent both cash only (two programmes) and cash plus interventions. Most of these programmes, with the exception of Lebanon and Uganda, targeted women as the only – or one of – the primary beneficiaries. However, only one programme, WINGS in post-conflict Uganda (described below), was found to have a direct gender objective in terms of improving women's economic as well as social status (empowerment and agency).

The 10 eligible studies cover 3 broad gender outcomes: gender-based violence, empowerment and gender norms, and economic benefits.

Gender-based violence. Three studies, covering two separate programmes, examined intimate partner violence (IPV) among recipients. A food assistance programme for refugees in Ecuador reduced controlling behaviours of spouses, and physical or sexual IPV by 19 to 30 per cent (Hidrobo et al., 2016). The programme targeted women with infants and cash transfers were conditional on women's participation in nutrition workshops. A further investigation of the potential pathways linking social protection with the unintended outcomes of IPV, found that improved financial stability and women's participation in social groups through the nutrition sessions could have led to improved inter-personal relationships between the beneficiary women and their spouses (Buller et al., 2016). However, results from the WINGS programme in post-conflict Uganda are in contradiction to what was observed in Ecuador. WINGS aimed to improve women's autonomy by providing them with cash worth 100 per cent of baseline income, and business skills training noted no significant changes in women's experiences of IPV (Blattman et al., 2015). This programme led to an increase in the degree of control asserted by the spouses of beneficiary women over their finances and their freedoms of movement (Green et. al., 2015). At the same time, the study observed a 0.18 standard deviation increase in the quality of relationship with their spouses (feeling freer to express their thoughts). It is likely that the cash transfer and skills trainings led to husbands being encouraging of their wives' economic activities, but also becoming more controlling of the earned income. One hypothesis to be tested by future research could be whether higher amounts of cash transfers to women triggers greater controlling behaviour by spouses.

The limited number of studies on this outcome impedes our ability to identify trends, but it shows that gender focus should be applied in the programme design to expect any gender-relevant outcomes. Future research should look at the pathways between social protection and women's experiences of violence, as well as changes in these pathways based on the nature of the emergency and shock.

Empowerment and gender norms. We find evidence suggestive of positive impacts of cash plus programmes on women's household decision-making capabilities, despite the limited number of studies. Afghanistan's 'Targeting the Ultra Poor' (TUP) programme, which provided cash and livestock along with skills training to migrants, led to significant increases in women's decision-making regarding fertility and mobility (time use, finding a job outside the house, opening a business), and effective access to inputs and resources, including ownership of a mobile phone and having savings or loans (Bedoya et al., 2019). The WINGS programme in Uganda also led to a small increase of approximately 7 percentage points in household decision-making for participating women (Malaeb et al., 2023). In contrast, UCT programmes in Lebanon to Syrian refugee households led to no significant impacts on women's decision-making within the household (Chaaban et al., 2020). It is plausible that the additional components of skills-building and participation in social groups in TUP and WINGS, which was missing in Lebanon's cash assistance programme, could be the factors behind the positive outcomes in women's participation in household decision-making.

Gender roles. We identified only two studies that report changes in gender roles as a result of the SP intervention. In Nicaragua, Del Carpio et al., (2010) examined gendered distribution of unpaid labour as an unintended consequence of 'Atencion a Crisis', a drought-responsive cash plus programme that aimed to diversify households' non-agricultural productivity. The programme reduced the total hours worked on agricultural activities by older boys, while increasing the number of hours spent on domestic work by older girls, strengthening existing gender roles. These changes were noted to be driven by an increase in household investments in non-agricultural activities and improved income of households. In contrast, in India, a public works programme, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), which provides non-agricultural employment opportunities to poor households, inadvertently led to the weakening of existing gender norms around son preference, including sex selection of infants (Chatterjee and Merfeld, 2021). The study notes that income and agricultural productivity shocks in India usually were found to lead to infant sex selection in favour of boys. The NREGS programme reduced this effect of economic shocks on sex selection of infants, potentially through income smoothing. Results from these two programmes emphasize the need for a strong programme theory that accounts for cultural and social norms and our assumptions, to avoid unintended adverse impacts for women and girls.

Economic benefits. Four studies examined economic benefits for women, such as improvements in female employment and incomes. Three covered contexts of conflict, while one was from a programme implemented as a response to COVID-19. The outcomes related to gendered economic benefits were concomitants of the assistance provided to the women targeted in all four studies. For example, in Kenya, UCT was provided to female microenterprise owners to address the shock of COVID-19. Findings indicate a substantial increase in profit, revenues and inventory spending within treated businesses (Brooks et al., 2022). In Afghanistan, the TUP programme, which provided women with training on skills as well as how to access savings accounts and savings encouragement, along with monetary assistance, led to an expected increase in women's labour participation rate by 22 percentage points. Similarly, the WINGS programme that provided cash and business skills training to extremely poor, war-affected women in post-conflict Uganda increased women's employment rates as well as income; participants doubled their microenterprise ownership, increased non-agricultural employment hours by 94 per cent and doubled their monthly earnings.

Mental health

The relationships between economic deprivation, depression and stress are well recognised in the literature (Kuruvilla and Jacobs, 2007). By increasing household income and consumption, social protection programmes can reduce internal family conflict, prevent child labour, and improve food security, all of which are identified as risk factors of poor mental health outcomes (Pourmotabbed et al., 2020; Sturrock and Hodes, 2016). This relationship between social protection programmes and mental health outcomes might manifest differently in crises situations, particularly for children, given the existing context of emotional and mental turmoil.

We identified 15 impact evaluation studies in fragile and humanitarian contexts that reported mental health outcomes for children and young adults or caregivers. These studies covered 13 SP programmes, with two in contexts of climate shocks (floods in Bangladesh and droughts in Nicaragua), five in conflict regions, and six in the contexts of displacement and migration. In terms of programme design, both cash only and cash plus programmes were represented. The studies covered indicators on depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, overall psychological well-being, anti-social behaviour, and happiness.

Mental health of children and young adults (10–30 years old). The evidence base on impact of shock-context SP programmes on children's mental health outcomes is limited. We found impact estimates for only three programmes. The cash only programme for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, 'Min Ila', which provided a basic monthly education transfer of US$20, led to improvements in children's emotional state; children aged 10 to 14 years in treated areas reported feeling more optimistic about the future and more confident and assertive (de Hoop et al., 2018). The cash only 'Hajati' programme for refugees in Jordan reported similar findings, with children residing in households that received cash transfers exhibiting 4 to 5 percentage points fewer symptoms of depression and reporting increased happiness (Natali et al., 2020).

Evidence from conflict areas in Liberia suggests that unconditional cash transfers combined with cognitive behavioural therapy trainings can reduce anti-social behaviours among high-risk boys and men aged 18 to 35 engaged in part-time theft and drug dealing (Carpena et al., 2023; Blattman et al., 2017). However, neither cash nor therapy alone had an impact on anti-social behaviour after a year of the therapy sessions. Relying on qualitative evidence to explain these findings, authors note that after the end of therapy sessions, men who did not receive cash had no support to contend with their economic circumstances, which is a risk factor for unhealthy behaviour. For those who did receive cash, it facilitated the continued practice of the newly learned behaviours and habits. This indicates the importance of an exit strategy for programmes.

Mental health of caregivers. Examining psychological well-being of caregivers is important given that any changes in their mental health status will likely be felt by children as well. Of the 11 studies that presented relevant findings, all except one reported evidence in support of social protection programmes being an effective tool in improving adult caregivers' psychological health. The TUP in post-conflict Afghanistan (Bedoya et al., 2019), 'Atencion a Crisis' in drought-prone Nicaragua (Macours et al., 2012), and South Sudan's cash plus business trainings for women in conflict areas (Muller et al., 2019), improved beneficiaries' psychological well-being, including levels of happiness and a reduced prevalence of depressive symptoms. Programmes that provided only cash or in-kind assistance to eligible participants also noted similar findings. Cash assistance for refugees in Lebanon (Battistin, 2016; Chaaban et al., 2020; Foster, 2015), Uganda (Stein et al., 2022), and Democratic Republic of Congo (Quattrochi et al., 2020) led to improved happiness and reduced levels of beneficiary anxiety and depression by approximately 2 to 5 percentage points. However, Green et al. (2016) observed null effect of the WINGS programme on women's depressive symptoms. They hypothesize that this could be because the economic gains were not enough to offset the stressors related to planning and launching a new business.

Overall, results suggest that SP programmes with different design modalities, across different shock environments, lead to improvements in psychological health, primarily for adults and caregivers. It is likely that the improvements in households' economic status, and the reduction in food insecurity as a result of the programmes cause overall improvements in psychological well-being. This is consistent with the evidence on positive mental health effects of cash transfers in general (Wollburg et al., 2023). Evidence for child mental health outcomes is however extremely limited.

Household resilience

While our meta-analysis provides evidence regarding cash and asset balance as measures of household resilience, we identified 22 additional eligible studies presenting impacts of SP programmes on other outcomes of resilience, such as food and non-food coping strategies, and financial resilience. These 22 studies cover 18 individual programmes, in contexts of climate shocks (10 programmes), conflict (3 programmes), and displacement and migration (5 programmes). Both cash only and cash plus programmes were represented by the reviewed studies.

Food-related coping strategies. Food-related coping strategies refer to behavioural changes in response to shocks and crises, such as consuming fewer meals, eating less expensive food, and borrowing food from neighbours and relatives. We find strong evidence in support of social protection programmes reducing the reliance on food-related coping strategies in the short term (6 months), across different humanitarian and fragile settings. Evidence regarding long-term impacts (2 years or longer) on these behaviours is limited and inconclusive.

Unconditional transfer of cash and/or food packages reduced the adoption of food-related coping strategies across a wide variety of contexts: refugee households in Lebanon (Altındağ et al., 2023), internally-displaced populations in Somalia (Grijalva-Eternod et al., 2018), households with new mothers in Myanmar during COVID-19 (Maffioli et al., 2023), drought-affected individuals in Niger (Hoddinott et al., 2018), and refugee households in Turkey (Özler et al., 2021). For all except one of these programmes, cash or food transfers were made on a monthly basis, for a duration of at least five months to two years. On average, transfers were approximately 25 per cent of the beneficiary household's baseline income. The regular flow of cash or food, even if for a few months, most likely has an impact on the immediate or short-term behaviour with regard to food-related coping strategies. However, the 'TabangKO' programme that provided emergency cash transfers and financial literacy training to households affected by a typhoon in the Philippines, noted no significant differences in food-related coping strategies between single sum transfer households and staggered payment households (Mercy Corps and Causal Design, 2015). Depending on the nature of the shock or emergency, the cash transfer modalities might impact the observed outcomes.

In Lebanon, two humanitarian aid programmes provided poor refugee households with a fixed amount of US$175 per month, and a food voucher for items worth US$27 per person per month. While significant positive effects were noted for the food voucher component right after the receipt of the assistance, neither the food voucher nor the cash transfer had any significant impact on the food-related coping strategies of households six months after the end of the programme (Altındağ et al., 2023). Similarly, the 'Emergency Social Safety Net' cash-only programme for refugees in Turkey, which also noted positive effects a few months after receipt of monthly cash transfers, found a significant negative impact on coping strategies 18 months after the programme ended (Özler et al., 2021). It is plausible that non-recipient households had significantly more earnings from work in the long run while recipient households were reliant on the assistance alone during the programme implementation period. Cash-only programmes are usually designed to address immediate needs, which probably is reflected by these findings. To gather further insights, future research should examine to what extent these results related to long-term impacts hold true for programmes that include elements of capacity-building and employment opportunities.

Non-food related coping strategies. Similar to food-related coping strategies, most evidence points to positive impacts of social protection programmes on reduced adoption of non-food related coping strategies. Non-food related strategies include behaviour related to engagement in dangerous or risky work to address the income shocks, pulling children out of school, degrading housing, etc. In Yemen, between 2016 and 2017, the 'Cash for Nutrition' programme, which provided monthly cash transfers to households with young children conditional on attendance at nutritional trainings, led to significant reduction in non-food coping strategies (Kurdi, 2021). Similar findings were noted for UCT programmes from the refugee context in Lebanon (Altındağ et al., 2023; Battistin, 2016; Chaaban et al., 2020), post-COVID-19 Ethiopia (Abay et al., 2023), and flood-prone Bangladesh (Gros et al., 2019).

One study examined differences in impacts by design modalities. Hoddinott et al. (2018) compared cash and food assistance recipients of a public works programme in drought-affected areas in Niger. Households in food localities were observed to have lower reliance on coping strategies than cash localities (less likely to borrow from friends, to purchase food on credit, or to cancel a debt repayment), as a result of the programme. Cash recipients spent significantly more on agricultural inputs, which might explain the continued reliance on coping strategies.

In terms of long-term impacts of social protection in humanitarian and fragile settings on non-food coping strategies, Altındağ et al. (2023) and Özler et al. (2021) report findings similar to food-related coping strategies. Cash and food transfers led to positive changes in the short-term, but effects cease to exist when examined 18 months after the end of the programme. These results are further supported by Skoufias (2007) who examined the impacts of PROGRESA, a multicomponent (health, nutrition and education) cash transfer programme in Mexico. This programme did not replace or reinforce any pre-existing risk-sharing patterns among households. On being asked how they would respond to shocks, there were no significant differences between recipient and non-recipient households for non-food related coping strategies. Authors of the report note that most beneficiaries did not view the cash transfer programme as a permanent solution, and hence did not change their coping strategies.

Financial resilience. In addition to reducing coping strategies, our review finds that social protection programmes can lead to improved resilience measured as income diversification, reduced burden of debt, and improved capabilities to bear consumption expenses in case of a future shock. Premand and Stoeffler (2022) used a theory-based empirical approach to capture resilience in drought-affected Niger (Cisse-Barrett approach to measuring resilience). Findings suggest that the cash plus programme (cash and behaviour-change sessions on child health) strengthened household resilience by smoothing consumption levels. Similar findings are noted for a cash only programme, 'Renta Dignidad' in Bolivia, a non-contributory pension programme which doubled the transfer amount for beneficiaries as a response to income shocks triggered by COVID-19 (Bottan et al., 2021). The study measured financial resilience of households as the probability of being able to cover expenses related to an unexpected financial shock and found that recipients of the programme had a higher likelihood of having enough resources to cover more than a week of expenses and enough food for a week.

We find that business trainings or access to business-related resources can impact household resilience, by improving capacities to save and diversify income sources. In Nicaragua, 'Atencion a Crisis', which was implemented as a response to severe droughts and provided beneficiaries with cash transfers and a grant aimed at increasing productivity in non-agricultural activities, led to significant shifting of households' income portfolios towards diversification, thus increasing their resilience to climate shocks. The effects were stronger for those who received cash as well as vocational training and other capacity-building sessions, when compared to recipients of cash alone. In South Sudan, a cash transfer coupled with business and life skills training targeting youth (particularly women) improved savings and reduced debt and borrowing (Muller et al., 2019). Similar findings with regard to reduced debt and increased savings were noted by Christian et al. (2015) for impacts of a cash-for-work programme in Yemen.

Overall, we find that SP programmes in humanitarian and fragile contexts, in most cases, increase household resilience in the form of coping strategies and financial resilience during situations of shocks or crises, helping households to avoid changes in their food as well as non-food related consumption. However, knowledge on the necessary design elements for successful long-term impacts is currently lacking.

Key takeaways and implications

Our review highlights and summarizes existing global evidence on the effectiveness of shock-context SP programmes in achieving child well-being outcomes. While the overall goal of this review is to contribute to our understanding of the impacts of adaptive social protection specifically, we cast a wider net to include programmes in shock contexts, or contexts of humanitarian and fragile settings, given that the conceptualization of ASP is relatively new, and programmes implemented in the past decade in response to shocks might not use the same ASP terminology. The studies reviewed (primarily covering cash and cash plus SP design modalities) present evidence from contexts of conflict and violence; climate change and natural disasters; and migration and displacement. Overall, we find robust positive effects on selected key child outcomes. Social protection in such challenging contexts helps children stay in school (6 per cent average increase), decreases child labour (6 per cent average reduction), improves children's dietary diversity (increase of 0.3–0.5 food groups consumed) and food consumption score (5.72). It also helps reduce stunting measured as height-for-age scores (-0.09). Yet, we found no significant effects on child wasting and number of meals per day. We also found that social protection programmes in shock contexts help adults get and keep jobs (6 per cent increase), and consistently improve adults' mental health outcomes as well as household resilience. Our findings align with recent literature syntheses by Aurino and Giunti, Jeong and Trako (2022) and van Daalen et al., (2022), which used narrative reviews to conclude that SP programmes are effective in response to shocks, although it is always important to take into account the programmatic and implementation conditions and context of the local situation. Very few studies explore the temporal elements of response, but results show promise indicating that timing of the transfer matters for wider outcomes. With a wide heterogeneity of the contexts within our typology, and variations in programmes and how they were set up (e.g. humanitarian versus government-led, conditional versus unconditional, cash only versus cash plus), we would be cautious in drawing conclusions on the successful design elements. Yet, we offer below some key takeaways that can be considered by programmes, and for evidence generation.

Key takeaways for programme design

→ Local market conditions, transfer size and timing matter.

A few studies showed that disruption of the local markets during covariate shocks can be an obstacle for realising child nutritional needs (e.g. dietary diversity). Programme planning has to account for the scale and elasticity of local supply chain and plan its possible response to anticipate increase in demand for food variety. Meaningful size of the cash transfer seems to matter not only for food consumption scores, but also for the increase in the number of meals per day (transfers equivalent to at least 46 per cent of the baseline household income in the latter case). Relatedly, timing of cash transfers can also influence their impact on children's food consumption. In the contexts of shocks like floods and other natural disasters where households might not have time to respond and cope, early cash transfers can allow people to be better prepared, as is shown by our reviewed studies on anticipated cash transfers. Overall, limited evidence from identified eligible studies indicates that programme design should take into account economic, social and ecological factors of existing market conditions, the nature of shocks and their expected impacts, and aim to ensure that the amount and timing of cash transfers are responsive to the specific contexts of implementation.

→ Programme theory on adaptive social protection has to tease out underlying assumptions on the heterogeneous and gendered effects of cash.

Our review has shown that social protection interventions in fragile contexts are likely to produce varied effects on time allocations and schooling of all children in the household (e.g. older siblings, older girls specifically). Specific risks and vulnerabilities might vary by the type of shock and its implications for household consumption and overall disruption to livelihoods. The secondary and/or unintended effects should be reflected in the programme theory of change, along with considerations of labour market contexts (supply side) as well as the reality of social and gender norms in the country.

→ Strong systems and absorption capacity of existing school infrastructure warrant positive outcomes.

Several rigorous studies showed that the supply side of education has to be ready to absorb additional demand for schooling among vulnerable children, including refugees and forcibly displaced populations. The system also has to be equipped to motivate those groups for learning. Similar to nutrition, large enough transfer size and well-developed educational systems can both enable positive impacts on school enrolment in fragile contexts and mitigate the negative effects of shocks in the non-fragile environments. Cash and education have to be delivered through integrated, multi-sectoral emergency efforts.

→ Adaptive social protection has to include gender considerations (addressing structural inequities in labour markets, care burdens, access to technology and capacity-building, etc.).

The limited literature that explored gender outcomes shows that covariate shocks can change intra-household dynamics and potentially lead to undesirable gender effects. While it is too early to say how common these effects are across programmes and contexts, the observed cases suggest that the programme design and its theory of change have to be more explicit regarding efforts to prevent violence and empower women and girls within the broader set of structural conditions. This is aligned with recent literature that reiterates the need for a gender-responsive and context-specific approach to resilience-building efforts (Hidrobo et al., 2024). Our review also suggests that social protection programme designs can further explore linkages to social networks as a way to empower women subject to designs that are culturally sensitive and context appropriate.

Key considerations for a future evidence generation agenda

While the data available for meta-analysis showed that positive outcomes are possible, the evidence base on social protection programmes in humanitarian and fragile settings is still in its infancy, leaving a critical knowledge gap for a growing programming area.

→ Future evaluations should understand better the pathways from 'being in school' to learning.

Despite the positive findings of meta-analysis, we found limited or negligible evidence available on other child-related indicators, including those that measure the effects on learning, cognition, psychosocial skills, school transitions or child health outcomes. Admittedly, these are not easy to measure in humanitarian settings, as they often require a longer panel. Qualitative evidence conducted in close alignment with rigorous quantitative designs can help to unpack the motivational, psychosocial and broader community factors that are at play.

→ Gender dynamics and gender-related primary and secondary outcomes are among the largest voids in the evidence base related to social protection programming in fragile contexts.

Consistent with prior synthesis work on this topic, our review underscores the lack of rigorous quantitative evidence on the impact of social protection programmes in humanitarian and fragile contexts on gender outcomes (Simon, 2019). As women are often vulnerable due to pervasive gender norms which limit their access to productive assets and employment, and for biological reasons which leave them susceptible to health risks in emergencies, their disadvantage is often compounded in times of crisis. We found limited studies presenting evidence on gender outcomes which are likely to reflect the lack of gender-responsive and transformative programming. Emerging findings from existing literature indicate potential positive as well as unintended results. Future rigorous evaluations should explore the panel designs to understand short, medium, and particularly long-term changes in household decision-making, violence and caregiver behaviour patterns and gender equality, as well as girls' and women's agency as a pathway to better child outcomes.

→ Children's and adolescents' mental health outcomes remain understudied.

Only two studies out of 15 included in the review examined the relationship between cash transfers in fragile contexts and children's/adolescents' mental health. Most of the papers reviewed focused on caregiver and adult mental health during the crises and in response to social protection interventions. Post-traumatic stress, depression and other psychological health measures can be a blueprint for future well-being and resilience of young people and adults. Therefore, wherever appropriate to the programme design and conditions, they are important indicators to include in future impact evaluations. Linkages between mental health and risk behaviour, social cohesion and other outcomes related to adolescents' transitions remain largely unexplored.

→ More studies are needed to better understand the dynamic nature of resilience and its multidimensionality.

This includes questions on how long coping behaviours are sustained, and how they change over time. Very few evaluations report on components of resilience other than coping strategies. Better utilization of theory-based approaches can help to understand whether social protection programmes in different emergencies can improve psychological, social, and other resilience dimensions at the household and community levels.

→ **Evaluations need to disentangle the effectiveness of different intervention packages or 'bundles' to achieve outcomes (e.g. cash plus and linkages to existing services).**

We find that in fragile and humanitarian settings, child-related outcomes such as education, health, food insecurity and nutrition are embedded in how well a family can prepare, mitigate and recover from covariate shocks. Cash plus interventions that address both short-term family resilience and intermediate child outcomes have become more common in recent years, but evidence remains limited. More has to be done to demonstrate the added value of additional components, their combination and intensity, as compared to standard cash transfers, to achieve the same outcomes.

Limitations

We recognise the multiple limitations of this scoping review. Our review covers quantitative indicators and published literature sources only. Requirements for comparability of measures limited the range of outcomes we were able to analyse in a consistent way through meta-analysis. We also recognize and acknowledge the heterogeneity of social protection programmes included in this review, with regard to programme design elements and fragility contexts. Each type of shock transmits its impacts to households in a different way, which means there is a need for different policy and programmatic responses to mitigate the effects. While our study is not equipped to identify, in detail, the design elements that could have contributed to the observed impacts, we do supplement the meta-analysis results with qualitative discussion of the specific programmes. We try to emphasize the differences as well as similarities in programme design, timing of programmes and evaluations, and the specific context in which the programmes were implemented. With these caveats, the analysis provides some important insights for programme design as well as future evidence agenda setting.

Conclusions

In today's world, fragility and shocks are only expected to increase, with climate change, pandemics and continued food crises affecting more children than ever before. Social protection programmes in humanitarian and fragile settings strive to improve households' economic security and resilience and strengthen their ability to cope with future shocks. These provide a path towards better child outcomes. Rigorous evidence generation should continue to be undertaken to provide timely, contextualised and credible knowledge on what works, what does not, and how to improve targeted efforts for children at scale.

Tables

Table T1. Interventions included in meta-analysis by country*

Country	Programme (Whether programme is/was run by government or NGOs, and programme name + design)	Participants	Duration of programme/ exposure	Timing and period of evaluation short ≤6 months, long >2 years	Type of humanitarian or fragile context	Outcomes	Transfer % of income	Citations in text
Social protection in the contexts of climate and natural calamities								
Bangladesh	NGO.WFP social protection programme: unconditional cash transfers	Women recipients; average age 38 years; 8,900 surveyed in evaluation.	1 month (one-off transfers dispersed prior to flood)	Short/Immediate term (impact assessed 3 months after transfers)	Anticipates flood	Nutrition	4%	Pople et al., 2021
Bangladesh	NGO. Anticipatory cash transfers: unconditional cash transfers	HHs vulnerable to flooding; 439 surveyed in evaluation	1 month (one-off transfers dispersed prior to flood)	Short/Immediate term (impact assessed 1 month after transfers)	Anticipates flood	Resilience	12%	Gros et al., 2019
Brazil	Govt. 'Bolsa Familia': cash transfers conditional on schooling and health visits	Women with children aged 6–17 years; 11,433 HH surveyed in evaluation.	4 years for the evaluation (programme still ongoing since 2003)	Medium term (estimation of impact with rainfall data for one year 2008–2009.)	Rainfall shocks	Education; Child labour	18%	Fitz & League 2021
Ethiopia	Govt. Productive Safety Net Programme: unconditional food transfers	HHs; 3,000 HHs in evaluation	1 year for the evaluation (programme ongoing)	Medium term (first survey in 2019, re-surveyed by phone in 2020)	COVID	Nutrition; Resilience	ND	Abay et al., 2023

Guinea	NGO. Cash transfers conditional on school enrolment + behaviour-change communication regarding child education	HHs with children; Child ages 5–15 (average =9); 4,697 HHs in evaluation	3 years (originally scheduled to be quarterly for two years; irregular transfers sent over three years)	Long term	Ebola	Education	10%	de Walque et al., 2022
India	Govt. National Rural Employment Guarantee: public works programme	HHs in rural areas; child birth and outcomes data assessed in evaluation from 89,264 infants	~5 years for the evaluation (programme ongoing; started in 2007)	Long term	Rainfall shocks	Nutrition	10%	Chatterjee & Merfeld 2021
Malawi	NGO (WFP and other programmes aggregated): unconditional food/cash transfers	HHs; 4700 HH average 5 members; 0.25 female head; N=3,700	3 years for the evaluation (programmes implemented post follow-up)	Long term	Drought response	Education	26%	McCarthy et al., 2021 (% from McCarthy by email)
Malawi	Govt + NGO. Malawi Vulnerability Assessment: unconditional food transfers	HHs; 1,199 HHs surveyed; average 5.3 members; average age of head HH, 36.5.	6 months for the evaluation (Oct 2015 to Mar 2016.)	Short term	Flood	Nutrition	19%	Gelli et al., 2017
Mexico	Govt. PROGRESA: cash transfers conditional on schooling, health visits, and more	HHs; 59,000 HHs in evaluation, 10% female heads, head average age 47	1 year for the evaluation (programme continued for about 20 years)	Medium term	Drought	Education	25%	de Janvry et al., 2006
Mongolia	Govt. Unconditional food stamps only, to poorest 5% of HHs	HHs; 1,500 surveyed in evaluation	1 year for the evaluation (programme ongoing after initially being created in response to shock)	Medium term (baseline Aug-Oct 2011 and follow up Nov-Dec 2012.)	Bad winter	Nutrition	10%	MacAuslan & Attah 2015

Mozambique	NGO (WFP): Cash or food-for-work only	Food insecure HHs: size average 6; 860 HHs in evaluation. 6 month study; late 2012.	6 months (variable start and end but between Oct 2011 and Dec 2012)	Short term	'Lean season'	Nutrition	ND	Zhou et al., 2017
Myanmar	Govt + NGO. MCCT/LEGACY Programme: Cash transfers conditional on behaviour-change communication	Women with children <5 years; Average mother's age 31; Evaluation sample >10k	~2 years (30 months)	Long term (original programme ran from 2017 to 2019, but this follow up 1-2 years later during COVID)	COVID	Nutrition	3%	Maffioli et al., 2023
Nicaragua	Govt. 'Atencíon a Crisis': cash transfers conditional on child school enrolment and behaviour-change communication	Women preferred; 4,180 caregivers, average adult age 30.5. Bimonthly transfers over a year 2006–2007.	~1 year	Medium term (Nov 2005 – Dec 2006)	Drought	Nutrition; Child labour	15%	Del Carpio & Macours 2010; Macours et al., 2012
Niger	Govt. Niger Safety Net programme: cash transfers+ behaviour-change communication for few recipients	HHs; 4,300 HH average size 8.5.	2 years (monthly transfers from Feb 2013 to Apr 2015.)	Long term	Drought	Nutrition	15%	Premand & Stoeffler 2022
Niger	NGO (Concern Worldwide): unconditional emergency cash transfers	Women with children < 24 months; 211 HHs in evaluation	3 months	Short term (surveys July– Sept 2012)	Famine	Nutrition	65%	Bliss et al., 2018
Pakistan	NGO (DFID). Cash-based Intervention: cash or food transfers (behaviour-change communication for both programme and control)	HHs; 2,496 HHs in evaluation average size 7; mothers age 33.	6 months (monthly transfers)	Short term	Flood and drought prone/'lean season'	Nutrition	19%	Fenn et al., 2017
Sierra Leone	NGO (World Bank). Youth Employment Support: Cash transfers conditional on business trainings for youth	Youth aged 15–35. 2,782 surveyed in the evaluation	9 months	Medium term	Ebola	Adult employment	ND	Rosas et al., 2017

Social protection in conflict and violence contexts								
Afghanistan	NGO. UNHCR cash only programme: one time unconditional cash transfer	HHs; 2,500 HHs in evaluation; HH head age 37.	16 months	Medium term (impacts measured July 2016–Mar 2017)	Conflict	Education; Adult employment	250%	Esper et al., 2022
Mali	NGO (WFP). Emergency Food Assistance: food transfers and school feeding	HHs with food insecure children aged 6–59 months; 1,100 HHs in evaluation	~4 years (with value of assistance decreasing over time)	Long term	Conflict	Nutrition; Education	ND	Aurino et al., 2019; Tranchant et al., 2019
Sierra Leone	Govt + NGO. 'Cash for Work' Programme: public works programme for 15–35 year age-group	Youth aged 15–35 years; 5,506 surveyed in evaluation	5 months	Short term (April–August 2012)	Conflict	Adult employment; Resilience	ND	Rosas & Sabarwal 2016
Uganda	Govt. Youth Opportunities Programme: business grants + vocational trainings	Youth aged 16–35 years; 2,670 youth in evaluation	4 years (2008–2012)	Long term	Conflict	Adult employment	100%	Blattman et al., 2014
Uganda	NGO (WFP). General food distribution programme: unconditional food transfers	HHs; 1,260 HH (500 female headed) in evaluation	3 months	Short term (Oct–Dec 2008)	Conflict affected	Nutrition	ND	Tusiime et al., 2013
Yemen	Govt. Social Welfare Fund Programme: unconditional cash transfers	HHs; 6400 HHs and 3280 children < 5 years in evaluation	~1 year for the evaluation (programme ongoing)	Medium term (surveys track Yemenis over one year 2012-13)	Conflict	Nutrition	4%	Ecker et al., 2021
Yemen	NGO. Cash for nutrition: cash transfers conditional on education, health	HHs with children <5 years; 3,840 HHs in evaluation	~2 years (sporadic transfers between Jan 2015 and late 2017)	Long term	Conflict	Nutrition	15%	Kurdi et al., 2019, Kurdi 2021
Yemen	NGO. Social Fund for Development's Labor Intensive Public Works Program	HHs; 1,400 self-selected households in randomly selected communities (including controls)	~1 year for the evaluation (programme ongoing)	Medium term (Baseline in May 2010; endline in November 2011)	Arab Spring conflict and economic shock	Resilience	16%	Christian et al., 2015

Social protection in the contexts of migration and displacement								
Colombia	Govt. PEP-RAMV social services: cash transfers and multiple social services related to health and livelihoods provided	Migrants: average age 32; 2,232 Venezuelan forced migrants surveyed in evaluation	~2 years	Long term	Forced migrants	Adult employment	48%	Ibañez et al., 2022
Democratic Republic of Congo	NGO. Unconditional cash and voucher transfers	Women; 88% women, average age 35. N=850	~1 year	Medium term: some recipients surveyed one year after receipt	Conflict returnees	Nutrition; Education	51%	Quattrochi et al., 2020
Ecuador	NGO (WFP) food/cash/ vouchers: cash/in-kind transfers conditional on nutrition trainings	HH head average age 41; N = 2,000. May–Oct 2011.	~7 months	Medium term (Mar/Apr 2011 to Oct/Nov 2011)	Refugees	Nutrition	36%	Hidrobo et al., 2014
Jordan	NGO (UNICEF). 'Hajati' programme: cash transfers conditional on education support	HHs with children; 9,100 children 10–16 in 4,300 HH	10 months (monthly transfers delivered through 2017/18 school year)	Medium term	Conflict returnees	Nutrition; Education; Child labour	31%	Natali & de Hoop 2021
Jordan	NGO. Multipurpose cash transfers: unconditional cash transfer	28,000 refugee households receive MPC; this study tracked 1,000.	~1 year for evaluation (programme ongoing)	Medium term	Conflict: Syrians	Resilience	250%	Lyles et al., 2021
Lebanon	NGO. Cash based assistance + food vouchers	HHs: 3,000–4,000 households meeting targeting standards 2016-19.	~1 year (monthly payments)	Medium term	Conflict: Syrian refugees	Resilience	35%	Altındağ et al., 2023
Lebanon	NGO. Multipurpose cash transfers: unconditional cash transfer	53,000 MPC recipients; this study tracked 1,000	~1 year for evaluation (programme ongoing)	Medium term	Conflict: Syrians	Resilience	233%	Lyles et al., 2021
Lebanon	NGO. UNICEF's 'Min Ila' programme: cash transfers and educational promotion	HHs with children; HH average 6 members; adults average age 35	~1 year (monthly transfers during the course of the 2016–2017 school year)	Medium term	Conflict: Syrian refugees	Education; Child labour	29%	de Hoop et al., 2018

Lebanon	NGO (WFP and UNHCR). Multipurpose cash: unconditional cash transfers	HHs: HH head age 40; various samples. Feb 2019 to July 2019	~6 months for evaluation (programme ongoing)	Short term	Conflict: Syrian refugees	Education; Child labour; Adult employment	22% (avg)	Battistin 2016, Moussa et al., 2022, Salti et al., 2022
Lebanon	NGO. 'Winter Cash Assistance': unconditional cash transfers	HHs: 1,360 HHs interviewed, average 6 members; Adults average age 38	3 months (Jan–March 2014)	Short term	Syrian refugees	Education; Child labour	82%	Lehmann & Masterson 2014
Somalia	NGO. Water supply + cash transfers	240 mothers; 300 children < age 5	5 months	Short term: 5.5 months on average	IDP camp	Nutrition	46%	Grijalva-Eternod et al., 2018
Turkey	Govt. Emergency Social Safety Net: Unconditional transfer of cash and/or food packages	HHs: 2,680 HH (Aygün), 5,500 HH (Özler), w/ children. Mar 2017 to Dec 2018.	~7 months for evaluation (programme ongoing: started Nov 2016)	Medium term (surveys from May–Nov 2018)	Conflict: Syrian refugees	Education; Child labour	36%	Aygün et al., 2021; Özler et al., 2021
Uganda	NGO (WFP). Food for education programme: in-school feeding and take-home rations conditional on school attendance	HHs with children age 6–17 years; 3,130 HHs	~1 year	Medium term (late 2005 – early 2007)	IDP camps	Education	ND	Alderman et al., 2012
Uganda	NGO (WFP). Food or cash transfers only	HHs: 900 HH average size 9. Feb 2020 to Sept 2020	~1 month (One-off transfers began in Feb 2020 others disbursed as late as Aug 2020)	Short term (recipients tracked for 4–8 months post receipt)	Refugees/ COVID	Nutrition	23%	Stein et al., 2022

Note: Some programmes were implemented in the context of multiple shocks, therefore they appear in more than one category.
***** The categorization of shock/crisis for each study (climate and natural calamities vs conflict vs displacement and migration) is based on the crisis context described for the specific social protection programme in the study.
+Nutrition outcomes covered include HAZ, WAZ, child dietary diversity score, food consumption score, household dietary diversity score, and number of meals consumed. Education and child labour includes one outcome each: school enrolment and child labour rate. Adult employment covers estimates of when any adult in the household has paid work/employment. Resilience includes cash and asset balance of households.
Abbreviations: DFID = Department for International Development, Govt = governmental, HH = household, IDP = internally displaced person, MCP = multi-purpose cash assistance, MCCT = maternal and child cash transfer, N = number, ND = no data, NGO = non-governmental organization, UNHCR = United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, WFP = World Food Programme.

Table T2. Programmes discussed in Qualitative Narrative Review section

Country	Programme (Whether programme is/was run by government or NGOs, and programme name + design)	Participants	Duration of programme/exposure	Timing an period of evaluation short ≤6 months long >2 years	Type of humanitarian or fragile context	Outcomes	Transfer % of income	Citations
Social protection in the contexts of climate and natural calamities								
Bangladesh	NGO. Anticipatory cash transfers: unconditional cash transfers	HH vulnerable to flooding; 439 surveyed in evaluation	1 month (one-off transfers dispersed prior to flood)	Short/Immediate term (impact assessed 1 month after transfers)	Anticipates flood	Mental health; Resilience	12%	Gros et al., 2019
Bolivia	Govt. 'Renta Dignidad': unconditional cash transfers to elderly (>60 years) [programme doubled cash transfer amount in response to COVID shocks]	Elderly individuals; 5,627 covered in evaluation	One month (April 2020) [the evaluation measures impact of doubled cash amount in April 2020]	Short term (evaluated immediately after receipt of cash transfer)	COVID	Resilience	30%	Bottan et al., 2021
Ethiopia	Govt. 'Gratuitous Relief Programme': unconditional emergency food transfer	HHs in drought-affected region: 1,330 HHs; 29% female heads; average head age 46	12 months (2003–2004)	Medium term (exact months since end of programme not specified)	Drought	Resilience	33.50%	Gilligan & Hoddinott 2007
Ethiopia	Govt. 'Productive Safety Net Programme': unconditional food transfers	HHs; 3,000 HHs in evaluation	1 year for the evaluation (programme ongoing)	Medium term (first survey in 2019, re-surveyed by phone in 2020)	COVID	Resilience	ND	Abay et al., 2023
India	Govt. 'National Rural Employment Guarantee': public works programme	HHs in rural areas; child birth and outcomes data assessed in evaluation from 89,264 infants	~5 years for the evaluation (programme ongoing; started in 2007)	Long term	Rainfall shocks	Gender	10%	Chatterjee & Merfeld 2021
Kenya	NGO. Unconditional one-time cash transfer	Female microenterprise owners; 753 women in the evaluation	One month (May 2020) [one-time cash transfer]	Short term (evaluated immediately after receipt of cash transfer)	COVID	Gender	100%	Brooks et al., 2020

Mexico	Govt. PROGRESA: conditional cash transfers, with school enrolment, and/or health visits as conditionality	HHs: 59,000 HHs in evaluation, 10% female heads, head average age 47	24 months for the evaluation (1997–99); programme ran for 20 years till 2019	Long term (evaluated while programme was ongoing)	Climatic shocks	Resilience	20%	Skoufias 2007
Myanmar	Govt + NGO. MCCT/FiLEGACY Programme: Cash transfers conditional on behaviour-change communication	Women with children <5 years; average mother's age 31; evaluation sample >10k	~2 years (30 months)	Long term (original programme ran from 2017–19, but this follow up 1-2 years later during COVID-19)	COVID	Resilience	3%	Maffioli et al., 2023
Nicaragua	Govt. 'Atencíon a Crisis': cash transfers conditional on child school enrolment and behaviour-change communication	Women preferred:; 4,180 caregivers, average adult age 30.5. Bimonthly transfers over a year 2006–7.	~1 year	Medium term (Nov 2005–Dec 2006)	Drought	Gender; Mental health; Resilience	15%	Del Carpio & Macours 2010; Macours et al., 2012
Niger	Govt. + NGO. Cash and food transfer programme: unconditional transfers	HHs in drought-prone region: 2,268 HHs covered by evaluation	6 months (April-–Sep 2011)	Short term (evaluated immediately a month after end of programme delivery)	Drought	Resilience	65%	Hoddinott et al., 2018
Niger	Govt. 'National Safety Net': unconditional cash for all (behaviour-change communication for few HHs)	Women recipients; 3,800 HHs with average HH size 8.5	26 months (Feb 2013– Apr 2015)	Long term (evaluated in two years, immediately after end of programme delivery)	Drought	Resilience	15%	Premand & Stoeffler 2022
Philippines	NGO. 'Tabangko Cash Transfer Programme': unconditional cash transfer, followed by financial literacy messaging	HHs affected by typhoon; 1,659 HHs covered by evaluation	6 months (April–Sep 2014)	Short term (evaluated 5 months after end of programme delivery)	Typhoon	Resilience	12%	MercyCorps & CausalDesign 2015
Social protection in conflict and violence contexts								
Afghanistan	Govt. + NGO. 'Targeting the Ultra Poor' programme: cash transfers + training on livestock and entrepreneurship	Women recipients; 1,500 women in evaluation	12 months (2016)	Medium term (baseline in 2016 and endline in October 2018)	Conflict	Gender; Mental health	30%	Bedoya et al., 2019

Liberia	NGO. 'Sustainable Transformation of Youth in Liberia': Cash transfers and cognitive behavioural trainings	Young and adult men; 999 in evaluation; average age 25	2 months	Short term	Conflict	Mental health	100%	Blattman et al., 2017, Carpena et al., 2023
Republic of South Sudan	Govt. + NGO. 'South Sudan Youth Business Start-Up Grant Programme': cash transfer with business and skill training	Young individuals; 2,292 in evaluation, 60% female, average age 28	6 months (programme terminated mid-way due to conflict)	Short term (baseline around April 2015 and follow-up in May 2017; follow-up delayed due to conflict)	Post conflict	Mental health; Resilience	ND	Muller et al., 2019
Uganda	Govt. Cash transfers and trauma counselling programmes	Women recipients; 465 women covered; average age 42	unspecified	unspecified	Post conflict/ trauma	Mental health	ND	Van Reisen et al., 2022
Uganda	NGO. WINGS programme: cash transfer + business trainings and support	Women recipients; 1,800 women with average age 27 years	16 months (2009–10)	Medium term (endline after 16 months)	Post conflict	Gender; Mental health	100%	Blattman et al., 2015; Green et al., 2015 & 2016 Malaeb et al., 2023
Yemen	NGO. Cash for nutrition: cash transfers conditional on education, health	HHs with children <5 years; 3,840 HHs in evaluation	~2 years (sporadic transfers between Jan 2015 and late 2017)	Long term	Conflict	Resilience	15%	Kurdi et al., 2021
Yemen	NGO. 'Social Fund for Development's Labor Intensive Public Works Programme'	HHs: 1,400 self-selected households in randomly selected communities (including controls)	~1 year for the evaluation (programme ongoing)	Medium term (baseline in May 2010; endline in November 2011)	Arab Spring conflict and economic shock	Resilience	16%	Christian et al., 2015
Social protection in the contexts of migration and displacement								
Democratic Republic of Congo	NGO. Unconditional cash and voucher transfers	Women; 88% women, average age 35. N=850	~1 year	Medium term: some recipients surveyed one year after receipt	Conflict returnees	Mental health; Resilience	51%	Quattrochi et al., 2020
Ecuador	NGO. Cash/ food transfers conditional on nutritional trainings	Women recipients; 2,357 in evaluation; average age 41 years	6 months (2011)	Short term (baseline in March and follow-up in Oct/Nov 2011)	Refugees	Gender	11%	Buller et al., 2016; Hidrobo et al., 2016

Jordan	NGO (UNICEF). 'Hajati' programme: cash transfers conditional on education support	HHs with children; 9,100 children 10–16 in 4,300 HH	10 months (monthly transfers delivered through 2017/18 school year)	Medium term	Conflict returnees	Mental health	31%	Natali & de Hoop 2021
Lebanon	NGO. Cash-based assistance + food vouchers	HHs; 3,000-4,000 households meeting targeting standards 2016–19.	~1 year (monthly payments)	Medium term	Conflict: Syrian refugees	Gender; Mental health; Resilience	35%	Altındağ & O'Connell 2023 Battistin et al., 2016, Chaaban et al., 2020, Foster 2015
Lebanon	NGO. UNICEF 'Min Ila' programme: cash transfers and educational promotion	HHs with children; HH average 6 members; Adults average age 35	~1 year (monthly transfers during the course of the 2016/17 school year)	Medium term	Conflict: Syrian refugees	Mental health	29%	de Hoop et al., 2018
Lebanon	NGO. 'Winter Cash Assistance': unconditional cash transfers	HHs; 1,360 HHs interviewed, average 6 members; adults average age 38	3 months (Jan–March 2014)	Short term	Syrian refugees	Mental health; Resilience	82%	Lehmann & Masterson 2014
Somalia	NGO. Water supply + cash transfers	240 mothers; 300 children < age 5	5 months	Short term	IDP camp	Resilience	46%	Grijalva-Eternod et al., 2018
Turkey	Govt. + NGO. 'Emergency Social Safety Net': unconditional cash transfers	HHs; 5,500 HH w/ children	~20 months	Short and medium term (follow-ups every six months till around 20 months of programme delivery)	Syrian refugees	Resilience	36%	Özler et al., 2021
Uganda	NGO. Food or cash transfers (one-off transfer)	HHs; 900 HH average size 9	~6 months	Short term	Refugees/ COVID	Mental health	23%	Stein et al., 2022

Abbreviations: HH = household, IDP = internally displaced person, MCCT = maternal and child cash transfer, NGO = non-governmental organization.

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For further information, please contact:

UNICEF
Evaluation Office
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
USA

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@UNICEFEval

Evaluation YouTube channel

evalhelp@unicef.org

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