

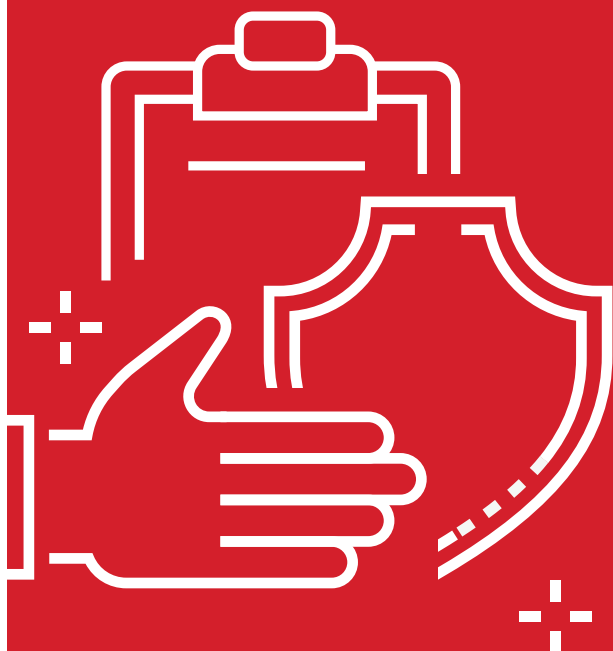
Guidance for National Societies

**Social protection in
the age of COVID-19**



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Executive summary

Document purpose and intended audience: This tip sheet aims to provide National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies with an overview of key issues to consider when planning and implementing social protection and humanitarian cash-related programmes in the context of COVID-19.

The primary intended audience is cash, social protection and COVID-19 emergency response managers and technical focal points, although National Society key decision makers from all sectors are encouraged to explore the contents of this document to understand key concepts on how cash and social protection can help advance their sector's objectives in response to COVID-19.

Social protection and COVID-19: an overview of the current situation

- The impact of COVID-19 is no longer limited to the public health consequences of the disease on people's health and wellbeing; the pandemic is increasingly causing socio-economic hardships for many, especially already vulnerable groups. This will continue into the near future and beyond, with the **World Bank** estimating that COVID-19 will push between 71 - 100 million people into extreme poverty.
- In response, national authorities continue to use social protection (SP) instruments as a key response tool, due to their effectiveness in reaching large numbers of people, and in particular, those most vulnerable to the consequences of this pandemic. As of 12 June 2020, **data** shows that 195 countries/territories have planned or introduced social protection measures in response to COVID-19, with an estimated 1.7 billion people benefiting from social assistance programmes.

The role of humanitarian and development actors

- Humanitarian and development actors, including National Societies, can contribute to the implementation of SP schemes across numerous contexts in the following ways: i) Advocating for missing or excluded groups to be included; ii) Monitoring and highlighting concerns and gaps in the design and implementation; iii) Offering complementary and integrated services to increase the efficiency, coverage and equity of schemes; iv) supporting the delivery of social protection schemes by filling gaps in coverage.

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This tip sheet remains as a 'live' document and provides simplified guidance for National Societies on:

- How National Societies can analyse the social protection context in their country in the age of COVID-19
- How National Societies can contribute to ensuring that social protection schemes in their country reach more people in need
- Provide links to further information, guidance and other resources.

Of the four components of social protection schemes – social assistance; social insurance, social care and; labour and job market initiatives - this document focuses primarily on social assistance, although many of the tips related to how National Societies can support public awareness campaigns, information sharing, registration and the integration of other COVID-19 response activities are certainly applicable to many of the remaining three components. Indeed, readers will notice that the document also highlights practical solutions and examples of activities that National Societies are or have been doing at the country level with regards to social protection.

Responding to COVID-19 through social protection schemes



Many SP schemes in various countries are currently being either created or modified in response to the health and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. There are numerous examples of current schemes being extended to more people, or cash transfer values being temporarily increased to meet the needs of populations affected by the direct and indirect consequences of COVID-19. The figure below shows examples of how social protection schemes can be adapted during shocks, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

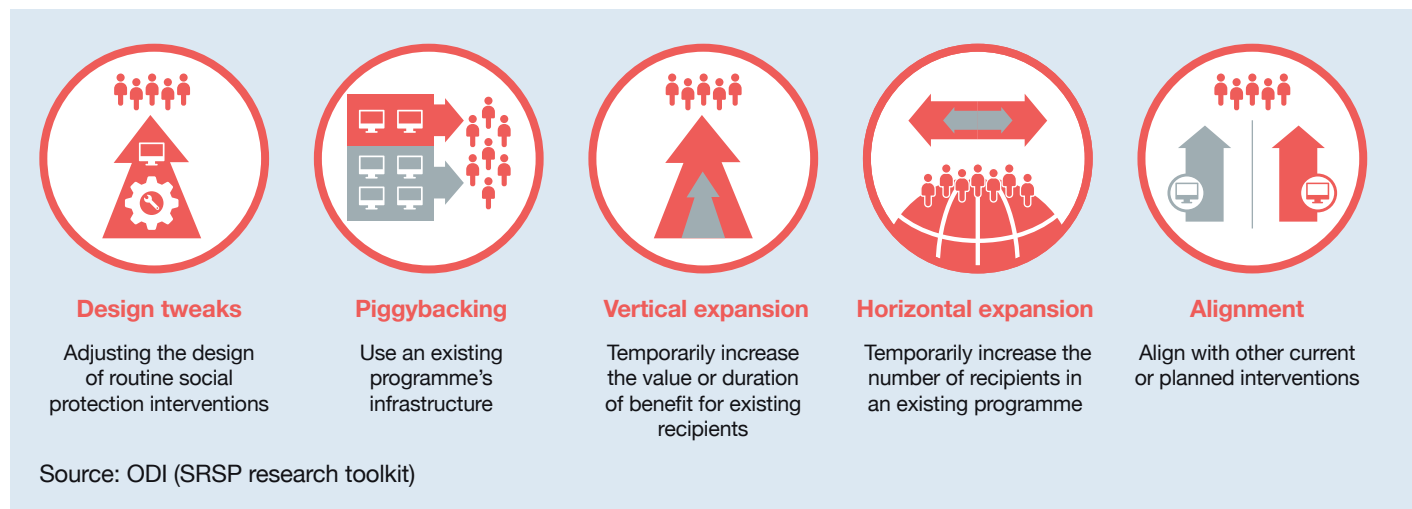
Social protection mechanisms aim to reduce social and economic risks, vulnerabilities and deprivations for all people throughout their lifecycle

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Figure 2 — Typology of options for shock-responsive adaptation



What role can National Societies play in contributing to SP schemes in response to COVID-19?

National Societies are well placed to contribute to social protection schemes, due to their auxiliary status to public authorities, their access to vulnerable populations and current and growing capacity within the Membership in cash-based assistance as well as service provision across numerous sectors. However, if National Societies want to effectively contribute to schemes in the age of COVID-19, it is important to understand the programmatic changes of such schemes due to the pandemic. An in-depth analysis will allow a National Society to conduct robust and reliable gap analyses and identify opportunities for the Red Cross/Red Crescent to support public authorities to reach the right people, with the right assistance at the right time, and to advocate for inclusion of the most vulnerable.

For more information on the role of National Societies in SP, readers are encouraged to consult a complimentary document entitled, 'The role of the Red Cross Red Crescent in Social Protection', available on the **Cash Hub**.

Analysing social protection schemes and the role of the National Society in responding to COVID-19

As a critical first step, a National Society will need to conduct an analysis of the SP system they intend to engage with to define how best they can contribute given the context, their available capacity and relationship with key SP stakeholders. Some useful resources on SP coordination mechanisms, initiatives and action reports in the age of COVID-19 at the country level can be found at the following sources:

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- National Ministry/Department websites, i.e. National Disaster Management Authority, Department of Employment and Labour, Social Welfare/Development or Public Health Ministries
- **World Bank publication on Country Social Protection Responses to COVID-19**
- **ILO dashboard of Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 around the world**
- The country's Cash Working Group (CWG), if present and active

It is also important to analyse the potential risks, including reputational risks, before deciding if, and at what point, it is appropriate for the National Society to offer its services to support a SP scheme's design and delivery, or contribute to filling gaps to address unmet needs. This is normal procedure when starting any activity, but some points to keep in mind specifically related to SP in the age of COVID-19 include:

- ✓ Can the National Society continue to deliver on its mandate and respect the Fundamental Principles?
- ✓ Does the National Society have the necessary capacity, resources and expertise to deliver, especially with the particular challenges of COVID-19?
- ✓ Does the SP scheme respect existing data privacy standards and is there a common understanding amongst all stakeholders on the collection and sharing of data?
- ✓ Can the National Society maintain its neutrality while engaging with the SP scheme, which is usually a government responsibility?
- ✓ Can the National Society ensure the safety and security of its staff and volunteers when carrying out the activities during COVID-19?

Positioning the National Society on relevant social protection coordination and delivery platforms

Once a National Society has a clear understanding of the current SP context in a given country, it will be crucial to position the Red Cross/Red Crescent on relevant SP coordination and delivery platforms. It will be particularly important to build close working relationships with government ministries and other stakeholders responsible for coordinating, designing and implementing SP schemes.

To do this, National Societies should aim to be present at regular SP coordination and technical meetings with government counterparts and other key stakeholders at national and local levels, in order to maintain clear lines of coordination and communication with all relevant actors.

However, before attending these meetings, it is important that there is institutional buy-in and support for the National Society's engagement in SP, and there must be a clear understanding of what the Red Cross/Red Crescent can offer to SP schemes in the country. Some questions that a National Society should be able to answer include:

- What can the National Society offer to SP schemes responding to COVID-19, and what parts of the design and implementation of these schemes does the Red Cross/Red Crescent hold a competitive advantage in?
- How can the National Society's resources and capacities improve the coverage, reach and equity of a SP scheme in response to COVID-19?

Once again, it is also important to assess how the National Society can carry out these activities, whilst ensuring duty of care to staff and volunteers.

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Example: The ‘Bayanihan to Heal as One Act’ has been made into a law in the Philippines in March 2020, and it recognises the **Philippine Red Cross** as a key partner to the government in addressing COVID-19 by providing social safety nets and medical assistance.

National Society response options and social protection during COVID-19

The following section provides an overview of possible National Society response options and key points to consider when supporting SP schemes during COVID-19. National Societies could focus on one or a combination of these response options as appropriate and in line with their mandate and capacities.

Readers will note that this document provides useful tips relevant to National Societies responding to COVID-19 when discussing these response options; it does not go into detail or provide step by step guidance on how to design and deliver such options. Therefore, for detailed guidance and tools on the design and delivery of SP schemes, please consult the annex which provides useful resources on how to design, deliver and/or contribute to SP schemes.

Coordination and dissemination

- ✓ National Societies can distribute information on available support and eligibility criteria for a new or expanded SP scheme as result of COVID-19. This could include information campaigns on cash distributions, service subsidies, benefits or health insurance schemes available to the general population or certain vulnerable, marginalised or socially distance communities.
- ✓ National Societies can support efforts to ensure that clusters and local NGOs/religious organisations working in the community are aware of and can contribute to the

design and implementation of SP programmes, to ensure alignment and integration.

- ✓ National Societies can attend COVID-19-related national SP coordination and technical meetings providing opportunities to strengthen their auxiliary role with public authorities and working relationships with other actors, as well as staying up to date on relevant developments in the response to COVID-19 and the role of SP schemes.
- ✓ Generally, National Societies can also provide coordination and dissemination support to the delivery of SP schemes through information campaigns and community engagement activities on issues related to targeting systems, selection criteria, payment providers, degree of conditionality and monitoring frameworks.

Example: The Honduras Red Cross network of Councils has been coordinating with the national Municipal Emergency Committees to support people with food and supplies for basic needs. The cash working group has also extended technical support to humanitarian delivery activities, highlighting the importance of effective cooperation in the country’s response.

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Outreach and targeting

- ✓ National Societies can advocate for the inclusion of certain excluded groups that are left out of SP schemes, such as undocumented people (refugees, informal workers) as well as those particularly at risk of the direct and also indirect consequences of COVID-19. This could involve advocating for the removal or relaxation of certain barriers like the requirement for identification documents to receive support, or the expansion or realignment of schemes to target the most vulnerable, regardless of their status or other personal or collective community characteristics.
- ✓ National Society volunteer and staff networks can support outreach and targeting activities of a SP scheme to reach remote locations and communities or support the identification and inclusion of special cases that may have been missed by traditional assessments and registry lists. As this pandemic progresses, it is likely that vulnerabilities and needs will consistently change as countries experience different stages in the spread of COVID-19. It is crucial that National Society activities are equally flexible to the changing situation, and risks and community needs are regularly assessed.
- ✓ If a National Society supports remote populations through gap filling where national SP schemes are unable to reach (for example using cash and voucher assistance), it is important to make every effort to try to align targeting criteria and design features so that both initiatives can be merged in the future, if possible.
- ✓ In agreement with relevant authorities and when government resources fall short, National Societies should consider blanket targeting to groups at risk (ill,

disabled, elderly, slum dwellers) to avoid physical contact during COVID-19 and save time.

- ✓ National Societies should also consider the timing of their gap-filling support, noting the potential impact of lockdowns and other social measures in response to future waves of COVID-19 cases. For example, lockdowns may be implemented at the national or sub-national levels in response to localised outbreaks or hotspots of cases in a given geographical area.
- ✓ National Societies can facilitate access to health services, where out of pocket payments or other barriers restrict access to essential services. These services may be specific to COVID-19, but equally important will be support to ensure the continuation of non-COVID-19 essential services like maternal and newborn care, amongst others.

Example: The Viet Nam Red Cross Society

is planning 10 trainings on beneficiary targeting for cash assistance that took place over the month of June 2020 in several districts of Viet Nam, in collaboration with the National Centre for Information Communication and Education and the Ministry of Health. Post training, the National Society is working to initiate an improved beneficiary selection process that will ensure inclusion and coverage of support to vulnerable groups.

National Societies should prioritise facilitating access to available national health insurance schemes where available, before considering subsidising access to all or part of a pre-defined and quality assured essential health service package for a given population or certain sub-groups in collaboration with public authorities and

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other stakeholders. Finally, once the above options have been explored, the National Society could also consider the use of cash and voucher assistance to support certain groups overcome identified direct and indirect barriers to access health services at various stages throughout this pandemic.

Registration and social registers

- ✓ National Societies can first establish whether a registry of affected persons exists that can be used to identify which individuals require assistance and whether COVID-19-adapted SP schemes can cover the needs of those identified.
- ✓ National Society volunteers and staff can work with relevant authorities to build, expand, update and validate social registry lists, where they can apply their skills and capacities in needs assessment, registration and community engagement. The National Society can also share critical information to communities on how, when and where to register, even providing dedicated support to especially vulnerable cases to ensure they are included in the relevant database as the pandemic progresses.
- ✓ When supporting the government to update the social register, National Societies should define and agree the registration process and targeting criteria, including the data to be collected. In certain cases, it may be possible to integrate existing National Society lists into the national social registry, but only if necessary data protection standards have been met and the National Society has permission from affected populations to integrate their information into the government system. National Societies may also request access to a government social registry. In both these cases, an MoU needs to be signed between the government and the National Society with rules for adherence to data protection principles and standards. This MoU should also include protocols on the use of the registry, access of information, permissions, frequency of updates, etc.

- ✓ When collecting registration data, try to agree with the government on simplified conditions/processes wherever possible, so that data can be collected quickly and safely. For example, remote data collection and validation methods may be useful to ensure physical distancing can be maintained.

Transfer values, conditionality and adaptation

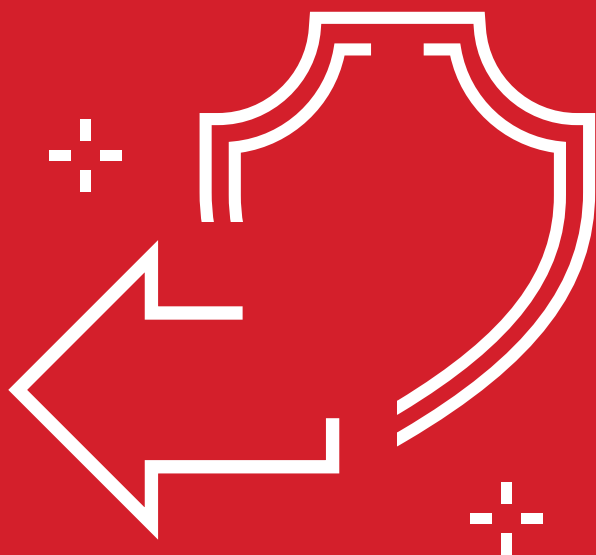
- ✓ Where government systems are not in place or cannot be used, the National Society can support with direct provision of cash and voucher assistance and should try to agree/align the transfer value, frequency and programme duration with government and other relevant actors.

Example: The Philippines Red Cross

is currently conducting a pilot cash assistance intervention in Metro Manila during COVID-19, including an assessment and feasibility study, risk management process, establishment of a minimum expenditure basket, pilot disbursements and an integrated evaluation process.

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- ✓ National Societies can advocate for the government to drop conditionality to cash transfers, and/or encourage flexibility in the timing and frequency of payments and top-ups to adapt to the current situation and to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19. For example, larger and less frequent payments may be more appropriate to avoid physical contact, or earlier payments for families to prepare for isolation and economic losses may help households better prepare for localised outbreaks and the subsequent public health measures, such as lockdowns.
- ✓ Other advocacy activities could focus on facilitating inter-household remittances support in response to COVID-19 by asking for charges and other fees to be removed from the cost of money transfers into and around the country.

Example: The National Society in Eswatini has influenced the transfer value of the assistance the Government provides to vulnerable households affected by COVID-19 based on their experience responding to food security crisis

Delivery mechanisms and distributions

- ✓ National Societies can first take stock of government agreements with financial service providers (FSP) like banks, Post Offices, mobile money companies, to see if the National Society can align with or directly use these transfer mechanisms to allow for economies of scale, lower fees, etc. Remote delivery mechanisms such as e-payments through electronic or mobile payment platforms could be appropriate and especially useful to minimise physical contact during COVID-19, but care must be taken to ensure certain individuals are not excluded through this method of payment
- ✓ Where social protection systems are weak or non-existent, the National Society can support the government in the design, delivery and maintenance of innovative remote and 'last-mile' payment mechanisms.
- ✓ In line with activities described in the coordination and dissemination section, National Societies can also contribute to harmonising delivery mechanisms among humanitarian actors and the public authorities.
- ✓ In conjunction with activities to support communities to navigate the application process and provide important information on available SP schemes, National Societies can also support the delivery mechanisms of such schemes, including customer service type activities such as feedback mechanisms as mentioned, as well as translation and information services, and helping individuals open accounts or access bank and mobile money services.

Example: Volunteers from the Dominica Red Cross Society are collecting data on COVID-19 affected individuals by conducting cash and voucher assistance assessments by using Google forms, which has simplified the application and data collection process.

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- ✓ During in-person distributions, National Societies can support by ensuring physical distancing and conducting various complimentary health and hygiene promotion activities such as malnutrition screening, vaccination as well as COVID-19 risk communication activities, for example. Furthermore, volunteers and staff can investigate whether delivery and distribution initiatives can be coordinated and even integrated with other response activities, where social care activities for the elderly or disabled may overlap with SP schemes, for example.

Example: 178 vouchers have been distributed in the city of Lima, Peru, by the National Society of the Peruvian Red Cross, along with food kits and supporting the delivery of primary health care services.

Monitoring and evaluation, information management and communication

- ✓ National Societies can support the design and delivery of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of SP schemes in response to COVID-19, including data collection and impact assessment process and mechanisms in conjunction with public authorities, other relevant partners and affected communities. They can also coordinate on reporting efforts to ensure alignment and avoid duplication.
- ✓ National Societies can also offer innovative solutions to support the delivery of SP schemes, including remote, mass and localised communication methods such as SMS, social media, mobile phone apps, radio, TV, as well as engagement with community networks, civil society actors, local committees and other community forums and platforms.
- ✓ When appropriate National Societies can support community engagement and feedback mechanisms related to SP schemes during COVID-19. Reliable and timely feedback data from communities could provide crucial insights to help improve the schemes and identify which groups are missing or excluded.

Example: The South Africa Red Cross Society, along with UNDP and the IFRC in southern Africa, has conducted a survey to assess citizens experiences and perceptions of social protection during the COVID-19 response. The survey results will provide relevant feedback for use in national, post-crisis safety nets adjustment plans. Peruvian Red Cross, along with food kits and supporting the delivery of primary health care services.

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This document has been developed by the Technical Working Group on Cash and Social Protection (member of the Cash Peer Working Group) for the Movement's Cash Hub.

Feedback

Do you have any feedback on this document, or do you wish to share your National Society's experience in engaging with social protection schemes? We would like to hear from you. To provide feedback on this tip sheet or if you require advice or technical support on the contents of this document or social protection schemes more broadly, please contact us at the following email addresses:

Andra Gulei, Cash and Social Protection TWG Co Chair: andragulei@redcross.org.uk

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If you would like to share your National Society's experience engaging with social protection schemes, please complete the questionnaire at this [link](#), consisting of seven questions which should take no more than five minutes to complete.

Further resources

Red Cross/Red Crescent resources and support

- [Cash Hub Help Desk](#)
- [Livelihoods COVID-19 Help Desk](#)
- [Health COVID-19 Help Desk](#)
- [Climate Centre social protection resources](#)

External guidance, tools and resources

- [Socialprotection.org - Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 Expert Helpline.](#)
- [CaLP Guide to humanitarians working with social safety nets](#)
- [Shock-Responsive Social Protection Toolkit](#)
- [CaLP West Africa guidance and checklist – Connecting humanitarian CVA with government social safety nets](#)
- [WFP social protection resources](#)
- [CCD – Collaborative Cash Delivery Network's COVID-19 advocacy brief](#)