

The background of the slide features a light gray world map with a halftone dot pattern. Overlaid on the map are several icons: a red circle in the upper left containing a white line-art icon of a hand holding a medical device; a red virus icon in the center; a network of gray nodes and lines in the middle right; a blue circle in the lower middle; and a large red circle in the lower right containing a white line-art icon of a banknote with an arrow pointing right.

Linking humanitarian cash and social protection

Learning from the experience of eight National Societies

During times of crisis, it's essential that people have adequate social protection. Cash and voucher assistance, delivered in partnership with governments, can be a particularly effective way of providing this support.

In the last few years, around 100 Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC) National Societies have delivered cash and voucher assistance (CVA), across a wide range of contexts. This support helps vulnerable households to reduce risks and manage shocks, so that they can meet their basic needs, maintain their dignity and protect their livelihoods.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this trend, with many National Societies using CVA as their preferred means of protecting people from the economic and social impacts of the crisis. At the same time, governments are relying on cash transfers more than ever before, with coverage set to reach 1.3 billion vulnerable people globally as social protection programmes are expanded in response to the pandemic¹. Across the world, National Societies have supported governments in expanding access to social protection benefits for the most vulnerable.

This paper looks at how National Societies in Eswatini, Kenya, Malawi, Montserrat, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey have worked with governments in the first few months of the pandemic, to implement, enhance and scale up cash-based social protection schemes, and shares learning from that experience². Whilst COVID-19 restrictions challenged the gathering of data to inform this paper, meaning key data may have been overlooked, every effort has been made to ensure that the learning presented here is accurate and relevant. It should also be noted that National Societies' wider responses to the pandemic, such as healthcare, infection prevention and control, community awareness activities and other support are not examined in this report.

¹Source: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/737761605775837011/pdf/Where-is-the-Money-Coming-From-Ten-Stylized-Fact-on-Financing-Social-Protection-Responses-to-COVID-19.pdf>

²The research that informs this report was carried out between August and September 2020 and looked at governments' and National Societies' early responses to the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings are based on secondary data review, semi-structured interviews with key staff in the National Societies, and in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Cash and Social Protection Technical Working Group.



Defining social protection

While social protection policies and programmes vary across countries, the International Labour Organization (ILO) describes it as:

“The set of policies and programs aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their lifecycle, with a particular emphasis towards vulnerable groups.”³

National social protection systems generally involve both support based on prior contributions (for example, social insurance for health, unemployment, and pensions), and support that is non-contributory (for example, social transfers, fee waivers and subsidies) to ensure vulnerable people’s essential needs are met. National Societies mainly work with or alongside non-contributory social safety net initiatives contributing to effective shock-responsive social protection.

‘Shock-responsive social protection’ refers specifically to support given in response to shocks affecting a large proportion of the population at once, such as conflict, climate related disasters, and disease outbreaks.

³ Source: <https://socialprotection.org/learn/glossary/what-is-social-protection>

⁴ Source: <https://www.calpnetwork.org/library-and-resources/glossary-of-terms/>

Defining cash and voucher assistance

Based on the Cash Learning Partnership’s definition, the term ‘cash and voucher assistance’ (CVA) refers to programmes where cash, or vouchers for goods or services, are directly provided to individuals, households or community recipients. The term ‘cash assistance’ refers specifically to unrestricted financial support, distributed as either physical currency or e-cash⁴.

Unlike in-kind support, such as food distribution, CVA is a flexible form of aid that offers recipients the freedom to choose what they purchase. CVA brings benefits and multiplier effects to local economies and markets, and supports peoples resilience and ability to protect their lives and livelihoods and enable faster recovery.

How Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies work with governments

National Societies each have a legal mandate as auxiliaries to their governments, with a formal role in national disaster management architecture. As such, they are integral to their country’s ability to prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises and are often the first frontline responders.

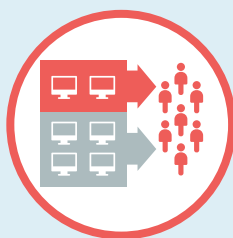


When disasters happen, connecting or aligning humanitarian CVA with existing government-run social protection programmes can improve their efficiency and effectiveness. National Societies are also often able to use their auxiliary role, experience and expertise to advocate for wider use of CVA and help strengthen and expand existing social protection systems.

Below are the most common ways in which humanitarian cash initiatives work with, expand and adapt government social protection programmes⁵:



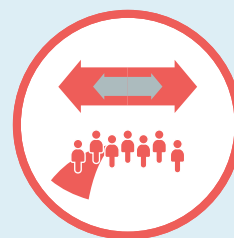
Design tweaks: implies making small adjustments to the design of a routine social protection intervention such as removing or reducing conditionalities or changing the cash delivery mechanism. In the response to COVID-19, conditionalities in some interventions have been reduced or adapted to enable greater access by people in need of social assistance.



Piggybacking: means that a humanitarian operation is built upon and uses elements of an existing social protection intervention, these could be the cash delivery mechanism that is already accessed and known by people in a country or area as well as drawing on existing databases highlighting who might already be vulnerable before the emergency.



Vertical expansion: is a temporary increase in the value or duration of benefits for people already benefiting from social support that require additional assistance due to new circumstances or shocks.



Horizontal expansion: is an extension to the programme coverage to include new recipients not regularly part of the programme but in need to the new circumstances or shocks.



Alignment: is when humanitarian interventions and social protection interventions are developed in parallel but are aligned in their design and features.

Source: ODI (SRSP research toolkit)

⁵Source: https://cash-hub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/08/Guidance-for-NS_Strengthening-linkages-with-SP.pdf

What National Societies have to offer

When delivering cash and social protection interventions, National Societies can have a significant role as a key partner of choice for governments, humanitarian and development organisations and donors. National Societies have a role in supporting national governments, and often have vast networks of volunteers, sometimes located in areas difficult to access for their government and are therefore represented at village-level, district, and national. Their auxiliary role, experience, networks, community reach, and expertise mean they can support social protection systems to:

Be quicker

by being flexible, agile and adaptive, present and ready to respond.



Reach those in need

by using community engagement, reaching remote areas and advocating on behalf of vulnerable people.



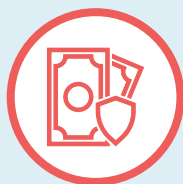
Reduce duplication

by improving and extending the systems that target who is eligible to receive assistance and register people for the various programmes.



Be more cost effective

by using their existing networks of volunteers, existing national capacity and experience of creating agile mechanisms.



Be more predictable

by helping improve early warning systems, connecting with community preparedness initiatives and increasing the use of early action protocols.



Be more sustainable

by linking with longer-term programmes, drawing on other National Society experiences and drawing on existing relationships with community groups and other key stakeholders including local and national government structures



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Eswatini

What the Government of Eswatini doing on social protection

The Eswatini government currently implement four social assistance programmes which are administrated and managed by the Department of Social Welfare, they include: the Old Age Grant which is a universal grant provided to people over 60 years; the Disability Grant, which is a means tested grant for poor disabled people providing them with monthly support payments; and the Orphans and Vulnerable Children Education Grant, a means tested annual bursary for poor orphans and vulnerable children in secondary schools and high schools throughout the country. Eswatini also offers a Military Pension and a Workmen's Compensation Scheme. The majority of these social grants are distributed as cash, mainly in envelope, and due to the limited financial inclusion of the traditional financial system and the transaction costs applied by banks, few can afford to receive their grants monthly through their bank accounts.

When crises happen, the Social Protection Cluster convenes to devise a coordinated response, but as yet there's no defined policy on social protection in emergencies.

What the Baphalai Eswatini Red Cross Society is doing

The Baphalai Eswatini Red Cross Society (BERCS) has been operating a cash assistance programme since the 2016/17 drought. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, BERCS worked with the World Food Programme and other agencies to promote cash assistance as a key tool in the humanitarian response.

BERCs played a significant role in advocating for cash assistance in Eswatini by advocating for the scale up of cash assistance to Members of Parliament, key government officials and the National Disaster Management Agency. This led to the realization that the existing model of cash-in-hand distribution was expensive and increased the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The Government, requested BERCS' help to confirm that recipients preferred cash to in-kind support, and to make the switch to providing cash electronically.

Using a mobile money system, the government delivered cash to more than 300,000 people in 50 constituencies. BERCS expanded this support to reach a further 5,501 households, using funding from ECHO and from within the Movement. The transfer value for both schemes was agreed as \$39 USD per household per month for two to three months. After the initial BERCS intervention, the government then took on responsibility for supporting these households.

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In June 2020, the Government managed to implement the distribution of the first cash cycle using mobile money in 29 out of 59 constituencies, organising the cash response in less than 3 months. Then in early August 2020, the Government completed the first round of cash for all targeted people and supported more than 25% of the total population across Eswatini with mobile cash for the first time.

BERCS played a reference role and acted as CVA consultant to the Government of Eswatini in linking CVA to their national humanitarian response, they aimed to support the pre-existing SP system in adopting the mobile cash payments for the distribution of social grants.



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Kenya

What the Government of Kenya is doing on social protection

Kenya's Ministry of Labour manages most social protection programmes through its Department of Social Protection and Social Assistance Unit. However, other departments have programmes in place to support orphans and vulnerable children, elderly people and people with disabilities.

The Social Protection policy was developed in 2011 however it lacked a key pillar, a shock-responsive social protection system. A social protection system was introduced in 2019 during the review of the policy, a process that Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) played active role in, and it has become a core pillar of the Kenya National Social Protection Policy for humanitarian organizations to link onto. The Government's commitment to social protection, and the National Societies support of the Government goals in this area make Kenya an important example of how these approaches can work successfully.

What the Kenya Red Cross Society is doing

Existing cash assistance programmes

The KRCS has an established role providing humanitarian support to crisis-affected people alongside the government. It is mandated to respond in emergencies and can implement cash assistance swiftly and at scale due to its expertise and presence in all 47 counties.

KRCS partners with the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) on the Hunger and Safety Net Program (HSNP), Kenya's flagship social protection programme. KRC supports in providing cash top-ups (vertical expansion) to HSNP recipients affected by shocks and reaching people affected who are not targeted by the HSNP (Horizontal expansion). KRC supports horizontal and vertical expansion of the Inua Jamil Programme, under the National Safety Net, again by reaching additional people and increasing the transfer amount).

The National Social Protection Secretariat manages information systems and data for all government safety net programmes, and KRCS is well integrated into this system. During the COVID-19 crisis, KCRS supported a government initiative to streamline data by combining recipient lists from different organisations into a central 'Single Registry'. People registered for support by KRCS, with their consent, were entered into this register enabling ongoing, longer-term support if relevant from the government. KRCS is also involved in a review of national social protection policy.

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Responding to COVID-19

For the COVID-19 cash response, KRCS and other humanitarian groups worked with the government to agree a standard cash transfer amount for all beneficiaries, based on minimum expenditure basket (MEB) calculations. The government then covered a proportion of this cost, with KRCS and other agencies topping it up to the total agreed transfer value, effectively expanding the programmes value upwards (vertical expansion).

During the pandemic, KRCS has focused on supporting vulnerable households in informal urban settlements and rural areas, including strategies to address gender-based violence. One project in Nairobi supported 19,620 households, some of whom were already registered in the National Social Protection Database and others newly registered in the system. KRCS topped up government payments of KSH 2,000 with KSH 5,500 transferring KSH 7,500 for three to four months. This amount was calculated by the Kenya Cash Working Group as 50% of the household minimum expenditure basket. KRCS is the co-chair to the Government for the Kenya Cash Working Group.

KRCS uses the widespread and efficient M-PESA mobile money transfer service to swiftly distribute cash to recipients. Where there is no phone network coverage, transfers via banks and local traders and vendors are used.



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KRCS is committed to developing shock-responsive interventions that can increase the impact of government action. It aims to gradually expand and improve these initiatives, linking those that enhance capacity and resilience at a community level into government emergency response mechanisms.

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Malawi

What the Government of Malawi is doing on social protection

As climate variability and economic instability increase, an increasing number of people in Malawi are in need of humanitarian assistance to meet their food and households needs during periods of food insecurity.

To address rising risks, the Government of Malawi has discussed with key stakeholders how to increase national resilience by strengthening and linking social protection and humanitarian systems to make them more 'shock-sensitive'. The ministries mandated to deliver social assistance and aid agencies will work together on all aspects of resilience, from prevention and preparedness to response, recovery and long-term development.

What the Malawi Red Cross Society is doing

The Malawi Red Cross Society (MRCS) plays a major part in relief efforts in emergencies. It has historically mainly distributed in-kind support, using cash assistance for the first time in 2010. Since then, MRCS has delivered cash assistance as part of numerous responses.

During COVID-19, MCRS has been working with the government and communities to make sure people understand and can access the social protection support that is available, alongside this the MCRS continues to disseminate information in key areas relating to gender and inclusion and protection concerns including sexual exploitation.

MRCS has also focused on livelihoods and food security during the pandemic, presenting a cash distribution plan for the government. It used forecast-based financing to predict needs and plan budgets accordingly, and to clarify the main areas of support and who should be targeted. In addition, MRCS carried out feasibility studies to ensure support was delivered in the right way. Cash was used as a first choice, with in-kind aid being distributed where this wasn't possible.

At the national level, MRCS is part of the Cash Technical Working Group. The group has agreed that cash assistance should only be used in responses if the markets have been assessed and are functioning, so that people are able to buy the goods they need. It also considers the security situation, and whether it is safe to go to markets.



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Montserrat

What the Government of Montserrat is doing on social protection

In normal times, the Montserrat Social Services Department (SSD) offers financial support to people with disabilities and elderly people with low incomes. Any Montserrat citizen with a non-communicable disease is entitled to free medication and care, while non-nationals receive subsidised care. Dental care is free for children and the elderly.

COVID-19 has had a serious impact on the island's economy, and the government has targeted support towards people who have lost their jobs. It has supplied food packages worth around \$400 XCD (approximately \$148 USD) to households that met certain criteria, given monthly cash support to adults who have lost income, and paid employees' salaries to protect their jobs.

What the Montserrat Red Cross is doing

The Montserrat Red Cross (MRC) is a branch of the British Red Cross Society (BRC), with a significant level of autonomy. Working with the Government of Montserrat, it has supported people who have been economically impacted by COVID-19.

For households that had lost income, the government gave support of \$900 XCD per adult per month for three months, up to a maximum of \$1,800 XCD per month based on 2 adults, with payments made through cheques or direct transfers into bank accounts. This could be used to cover food costs, rent, utilities or other essentials. However, the calculation didn't take into account the number of children in a family.

MRC topped up the government's support with an extra payment of \$100 XCD per child per month over the same time period, reaching 200 households. To be eligible for this support, households must:

- have qualified for, or received, food or cash support through the SSD's employment support project
- have children who were aged under 18 at the time of applying for SSD support, and
- have given the SSD permission to share its data with MRC.

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The support was delivered in the form of vouchers for one of six supermarkets, as it was decided that this would be safer than distributing large amounts of cash. Each voucher had a value of \$100 XCD, (\$37 USD), and for each child the family received three of these vouchers. The MRC's arrangement with the supermarkets did not require a voucher to be fully redeemed in one shopping trip.

The use of this kind of support was largely a new experience for MRC, and it learned from the success of the government's earlier voucher programmes prior to the pandemic. MRC also supported the government's distribution of food packages by managing a food bank and delivering parcels door-to-door when needed.

MRC has been working with the Montserrat government for years as part of its welfare and safeguarding boards. Because of this strong relationship, collaboration in response to COVID-19 was seamless. The main challenge was that the SSD needed permission from households to share their data before MRC could offer them support. In order to address this the MRC signed a data sharing agreement with the SSD and the SSD obtained verbal permission over the phone from each beneficiary before passing personal information on to the MRC.



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Nepal

What the Government of Nepal is doing on social protection

Cash assistance has been rapidly growing as a first line response for the Government of Nepal and humanitarian agencies in the country. However, this has not been the case during the COVID-19 crisis. In response to the pandemic, the Government of Nepal announced a cash for work programme for informal sector workers, or food assistance equivalent to 25% of pay for those who didn't take part.

The Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) and the humanitarian Cash Working Group advocated for the use of multi-purpose cash grants based on a MEB calculation. However, the government was concerned that using cash assistance in response to the impacts of COVID-19 could raise expectations about the level of support available and would not be sustainable in the longer term. The government also stressed the importance of avoiding dependency on government funds, and problems with targeting and misuse of money.

The government did provide short-term cash assistance in August, when flooding and landslides displaced 13,000 people. The money, given to people who had lost homes or family members, was provided mainly by bank transfer, or as physical cash where this wasn't possible.

What the Nepal Red Cross Society is doing

NRCS developed its first cash-focused Standard Operating Procedure in 2019 and tested it as part of a flood response in 2020. It has since formally adopted this procedure and developed a cash in emergencies toolkit, both of which have been used in subsequent responses. The tools and guidelines are designed to enable staff and volunteers across NRCS to systematically plan, implement and monitor cash-based assistance and promoting cash awareness in its entire network.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, NRCS worked with the government and other partners on the preparedness and response operation. As lead agency in the Cash Coordination Group (CCG), NRCS developed a practical guidance and MEB document for humanitarian agencies implementing CVA during the COVID-19 crisis and early recovery. The CCG:

- strongly recommended the use of multi-purpose cash assistance, rather than vouchers or other forms of help;
- developed selection criteria for beneficiaries, and agreed a proposed cash transfer amount based on a MEB calculation;
- designed its guidance to work in alignment and in consultation with government ministries, policies and priorities.



Similarly, Cash Working Group has been closely working with the federal government for development of cash assistance guideline for local municipals. However, different discussions with the government about the use of cash assistance are ongoing.

NRCS used multi-purpose cash assistance to support 2,000 households affected by flooding in September and October 2020, with Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) funds. In addition, with bilateral support from UNICEF, NRCS has been maintaining social registry of 45,000 households in 6 municipalities of 3 districts in province 2 of Nepal. The project aims to strengthen the capacity of municipalities to identify the most flood risks settlements in each ward and register these households and link them with the cash delivery system so that they can be transferred cash or other supports addressed in case of disaster.



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Nigeria

What the Government of Nigeria is doing on social protection

In 2017, Nigeria unified its social protection system under a single National Social Protection Policy (NSPP). Developed using a bottom-up approach, the NSPP has helped to drive action at state level, ensure the long-term continuity of projects and provide support for social protection initiatives that operate in parallel with government activities. Coverage so far is low, with a very small percentage of vulnerable households receiving support.

Going forward, the World Bank and others have recommended that Nigeria's social protection system needs to: develop a policy framework to provide clear institutional roles and responsibilities, generate political commitment at federal and state levels, increase investment in social service delivery, allocate funding to enable scale-up, and encourage accountability.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has used its social protection system to roll out new measures to reduce the impact of the virus on the most vulnerable. Where possible, humanitarian agencies have linked their pandemic responses to social protection programmes in a deliberate 'piggy-backing' policy.

What the Nigeria Red Cross Society is doing

The Nigeria Red Cross Society (NRCS) works closely with stakeholders at all levels within state and local government, and communities. It has a presence in all states in Nigeria, and 800,000 volunteers across the country. Cash assistance is relatively new to the organisation, and the BRC, IFRC and ICRC are supporting its development.

In response to COVID-19, NRCS partnered with the government, the IFRC and the ICRC to develop and implement a Country Plan, which included cash assistance. As part of this plan NRCS is targeting 3,600 households in 12 states where virus prevalence is high, with a further plan to increase this to 5,400 households in another 6 states using BRC funding. The amount each household receives has been decided in collaboration with the Cash Technical Working Group, based on MEB calculations.

NRCS targets its support at remote and hard-to-reach communities and urban slums where the government and other agencies are not responding. Unlike government systems in remote areas, which use pen and paper, NRCS uses the electronic Kobo collect mechanism to rapidly gather beneficiary data and transmit and store it. As a consequence, the government works with NRCS and the data collected in these areas.

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Pakistan

What the Government of Pakistan is doing on social protection

Since 2005, high inflation and rising costs have affected many families in Pakistan. This has led to the creation of the Government's Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), which aims to support economic development and empower women by delivering cash directly to them. The Ehsaas Emergency Cash programme, launched in 2019, is an offshoot of BISP. It aims to reduce inequality and lift lagging districts by:

- using data and technology to create precision safety nets
- promoting financial inclusion and access to digital services
- focusing on learning and skills development
- overcoming financial barriers to healthcare and tertiary education.

Before COVID-19 the Ehsaas programme supported 4.5 million Kafaalat recipient families, providing them with monthly instalments of PKR 2,000 for 4 months. Due to the pandemic, the programme has provided a top up of PKR 1,000 and have received the support as one lump sum of 12,000 PKR covering 4 months for these households. The programme has also identified and provided support to a further 7.5 million households providing vulnerable households with this one-off lump sum of PKR 12,000.

What the Pakistan Red Crescent Society is doing

The Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) has built up its expertise in CVA in recent years. It is part of the national Cash Working Group and has technical staff who can be deployed to carry out market assessments and cash disbursements.

PRCS' response to the COVID-19 crisis has targeted rural and semi-urban populations on low incomes, and women-headed households, in remote and marginalised areas. PRCS has supported more than 11,000 families with multi-purpose cash assistance, providing a one-off lump sum of 15,750 PKR. Whilst this is a slightly higher amount compared to the Government support, this has not caused any challenges, as this is recognised as urgent and temporary support for the most vulnerable households. During this period in 2020 and early 2021, PRCS also provided ongoing support for over 8,000 households affected by monsoon floods and severe winter weather conditions with multi-purpose cash grants to meet their immediate needs.

In rural areas there are no over-the-counter or ATM banking facilities, so cash is transferred through Pakistan postal services and mobile cash transfers. PRCS used an Android system to collect data about vulnerable families, which was then shared with the Provincial Disaster Management Authority. In addition, BISP has agreed that PRCS, along with other aid agencies, can access beneficiary data from the National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) to respond to disasters.

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What the Government of Turkey is doing on social protection

Turkey has an established social protection system that is mainly operating as part of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (MoFLSS). In 2019, its budget for social assistance was \$9.6 billion.

The ministry has its own social assistance information system that integrates data from various public institutions. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it allocated around \$3 billion for cash assistance to mitigate the impact of the crisis on six million vulnerable Turkish citizens.

The Government of Turkey has maintained an open-door policy for refugees, and currently hosts approximately four million people under temporary and international protection.

What the Turkish Red Crescent Society is doing

The Kızılaykart digital platform

The Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS) implements humanitarian cash assistance through its Kızılaykart digital platform, which is connected to the MoFLSS Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAIS) and plays an info-hub role for linking national social protection programmes with humanitarian CVA.

The TRCS, through the Kızılaykart platform provide horizontal and vertical expansion to several national social protection programmes targeting the refugee community in Turkey. This includes the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) programme designed to provide protection and cash assistance to enable refugees to meet their basic needs and the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) programme aiming to support refugee children attend school. TRCS is on the steering committees for these programmes, alongside the government, EU, UN, IFRC, ministries, relevant government directorates and local authorities.

In total, 2.7 million people have been assisted by TRCS, through Kızılaykart as of December 2020.

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Responding to COVID-19

Prior to COVID-19, TRCS' large-scale cash assistance programme demonstrated its ability for rapid response and scale-up, and high impact. As a result, TRCS has maintained a central position as a key government partner in the pandemic response at all levels and has been able to implement cash assistance largely in line with its existing programmes without any disruptions to the interventions.

As part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the TRCS Kizilaykart platform has used its integrated information channels such as SMS, social media accounts and a dedicated TRCS call centre to share information and provide opportunities to improve people's protection and safety. Additional measures have been put in place to ensure ongoing field level activities such as registration of recipients and distribution of the Kizilaykart cards providing cash assistance. Where people have been unable to visit bank branches or TRCS service centres due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions, TRCS teams have delivered the cards to people's houses. Additionally, TRCS teams have continue to provide referrals to Government and non-governmental services where needs are identified that are beyond the ESSN and CCTE.

TRCS has also provided its Göçmen database for managing, tracking and verifying different types of assistance. This technology is compatible with national systems and allows different stakeholders to contribute to a single database. TRCS is now working with IFRC on further digitisation and innovation.

Advocating for refugees

TRCS and IFRC have also assessed the economic and social impact of the pandemic on refugees, 69% of those surveyed said they had lost employment and faced COVID-19 related debts. The majority had no problems using the Kizilaykart cards for cash assistance or accessing markets, so TRCS and IFRC swiftly and successfully advocated with the government for an economic top-up payments for vulnerable refugees. In this way, TRCS continued its core programme uninterrupted, while modifying the ESSN programme to accommodate new needs and implications of COVID-19.



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Lessons learned

The following are key lessons from National Societies' experiences of COVID-19 cash and voucher assistance (CVA) programming in partnership with governments' social protection schemes. They're designed to be relevant to other members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement that are looking to scale up their use of cash assistance and link it with national social protection mechanisms.

01 The COVID-19 crisis has helped National Societies' focus on supporting government social protection systems

Social protection policies and interventions have been one of the most important instruments to respond to the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis around the world. National Societies such as the Turkish Red Crescent and Kenya Red Cross were already playing key roles in relation to national social protection systems before the pandemic. This has allowed quick scale-up, partnering with the government to reach those affected by COVID-19 based on existing relationships and ways of working.

For many other National Societies, COVID-19 has resulted in increased collaborations with governments around social protection. Several National Societies have made new contacts, contracts and agreements with government departments on issues such as data sharing, cash assistance modalities and mechanisms, recipient registration and complementary working. These have all helped them to form links with government social protection efforts that they can build on in the future.

All of the National Societies spoken to for this report are beginning to play an advocacy and contributory role in their governments' social protection systems. Learnings from the Kenya Red Cross suggest that National Societies should seek to understand how a government's social protection system works, look for areas where their objectives overlap, build up relationships and practical experience, and then seek to influence and improve the system from within.

02 National Societies need more clarity on the definition, scope and practice of social protection

National Societies' knowledge and expertise in social protection varies a lot, and this study has highlighted the need for more clarity and guidance about what social protection entails. There are still many misconceptions, with some seeing this as a new way to refer to cash assistance or as something specific to the COVID-19 response. This might be reflective of the understanding of social protection across the humanitarian sector.

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More peer-to-peer learning within the Movement, and within National Societies, would be useful. It would also help National Societies to learn from how other agencies outside of the Movement are implementing and linking into social protection mechanisms – their knowledge, policies and practice – and the role that cash assistance plays in this.

Social protection can be defined in different ways by different organisations, and in different contexts. It may be helpful for the Movement to consider existing glossaries⁶ and develop or agree on a common set of simplified definitions of (shock-responsive) social protection, social assistance and the role of cash assistance within these and what they can mean for National Societies.

03 The role a National Society can take depends on the social protection context

Where a well-established national social protection system exists, governments are usually in control of responding to people's needs. National Societies can support this by providing evidence, influencing policy, and supporting delivery with people or locations that they have particular access to. For instance, in Turkey the National Society has close government links and offers significant benefits as a partner through the use of its Kızılaykart digital platform and Göçmen database.

⁶ <https://socialprotection.org/learn/glossary/what-is-social-protection>

Where the social protection system exists but is weak or relatively new, National Societies can play a policymaking and maintenance role, rolling out social assistance to more people, strengthening the system if possible and, eventually, handing it over to the relevant authorities. For example, in Eswatini, BERCS has influenced the government to move from delivering physical currency to using mobile money, which is faster, more efficient and safer.

Where there are recurring shocks that are often climate-related, National Societies can envision, model and support agile social protection systems that can scale-up and deliver assistance to people affected by cyclical and predictable risks. The Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) in Kenya is an example of where an existing social protection system has been made shock-responsive through KRCS' support.

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04 There are risks as well as rewards to engaging with national social protection programmes

National Societies need to be aware of the political and operational risks of engaging in social protection, some of which are outlined below.

Risks to impartiality and independence - A National Society's neutrality may be compromised if:

- a government controls the means by which cash is distributed in a way that doesn't align with the National Society's approach;
- a government excludes populations, prioritises some people over others, or pursues politically driven social protection policies.

Risks to reputation and funding - A National Society's credibility or funding may be at risk if:

- it provides short-term, shock-responsive support but, where long-term support is needed, it is unable to link these interventions into sustainable government social protection programmes;
- it becomes involved in providing long-term support in place of the government, and is unable to maintain this due to the short-term nature of humanitarian funding cycles;
- bureaucratic delays at a national level prevent the timely delivery of a cash response to the population.

05 National Societies need to work on being 'cash ready'

One of the key success factors highlighted by the majority of National Societies was being prepared to quickly and efficiently launch cash assistance. By being 'cash ready', National Societies can more easily gain their government's trust as a proven and credible partner of choice.

The National Societies in Turkey and Kenya already had well-defined infrastructure in terms of logistical, administrative and human resources before the pandemic, whereas others were still developing their financial, HR and logistical systems. It can help to have the following in place:

- staff who are well-trained and skilled in cash assistance and overarching programme management including targeting;
- staff who are involved in the planning, coordination and development of NS strategy that can consider where their capacities and interventions could be linked into existing social protection policies and programmes;
- tried and tested processes and procedures to enable cash assistance, including clear and ready contracts with financial service providers (FSP);
- committed leadership and management of the National Society, which facilitates the change required to be cash ready and become a partner of choice in this area;

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- secured funding available at the local level and for early actions;
- established information and data collection and sharing systems (digital if possible).

National Societies should then support their cash readiness through cash preparedness. Forecast based financing (FbF) and investing in cash-based early action are also seen as increasingly vital.

06 Governments need to be ‘cash ready’ too

For National Societies to partner effectively with governments on shock-responsive social protection, state ministries need to understand cash assistance and cash preparedness, and have the policy, frameworks and capacity in place to respond rapidly at scale to disasters.

In places like Nepal, Eswatini and Malawi, the National Societies had to invest a great deal of time and advocacy effort to get their governments on board with humanitarian cash assistance. Where the National Society is investing in its cash preparedness, there can be huge opportunities for government departments and staff to engage with various activities.

Governments’ ability to have a single registration system or a database was seen as equally essential. This should allow for all data from humanitarian actors to be fed into a single centralised database, and for this system to be drawn on reciprocally by all those involved.

07 Both National Societies and governments need to be ‘data ready’

Problems and delays with data collection, verification and sharing have hampered some National Societies’ cash responses, whereas others have benefited greatly from systems that run smoothly and enable collaboration between agencies. In Turkey, the Red Crescent’s Göçmen database enabled the government and humanitarian agencies to work collaboratively, while Nigeria’s Kobo collect system enabled a fast, reliable response, with easier data sharing.

Having agreements and policies on data sharing in place in advance is also important. This can speed up implementation of programmes and ensure both governments and National Societies know what to expect from each other. The Montserrat Red Cross hit a stumbling block over the question of sharing vulnerable migrants’ data with the government, because a policy hadn’t been agreed in advance. In Pakistan, although PRCS has a data sharing agreement with the government, delays in data sharing and issues of data validation created extra work and affected who could receive support when needed.

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08 Recipient targeting should ideally be agreed before a crisis hits

Targeting is the hardest part of any assistance programme. Working on this ahead of a crisis allows for informed decisions to be made around targeting criteria and enables the National Society to bring in humanitarian perspectives aligned with the Movement's Fundamental Principles. At the same time, National Societies' strong local networks mean they can often help expand government reach and support rapid access to communities.

An important aspect of targeting for shock-responsive interventions relates to the need to understand risk and vulnerability of different segments of the population to different hazards. National Societies can support the identification of vulnerabilities in advance to support targeting. They can also support pre-registration of potential recipients.

Through its network of 800,000 volunteers, the Nigeria Red Cross has been able to assist the government with beneficiary targeting by gathering lists of people in need and providing first-hand data on affected populations.

09 Cash transfer values should be negotiated as early as possible

In every country, negotiations to define the cash transfer value were flagged as challenging and a point of friction that slowed things down. If these amounts can be agreed in advance, based on likely scenarios and early actions, it will enable responses to be swifter and more efficient.

Where National Societies were experienced in cash assistance and well versed in the use of the MEB tool, they were able to guide governments towards a realistic and justifiable transfer value. However, in general National Societies tended to settle on higher transfer values, and as a result they were often used to top up government payments for particular groups or enable them to extend coverage at a lower level.

Where governments had large caseloads and limited financial capacity, these solutions could work well. In Kenya, for example, KRCS worked with the government and other agencies to agree a transfer value for all beneficiaries. The government then paid a proportion of this amount, and humanitarian agencies topped it up to the agreed value.

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10 National Societies can benefit from proactively positioning themselves in relation to governments before a crisis hits

It's important for National Societies to understand the scope and parameters of a national social protection system, gauge their fit within it, and potentially build their capacity to match a government's scope and ambition. To enable this, National Societies should invest in the right systems, policies and people to enable strong connections with the government.

National Societies' early action planning and emergency preparedness should involve positioning themselves with the government as an agile and reliable partner for when a crisis hits. For instance, through its mandate as a humanitarian auxiliary, the Kenya Red Cross already had strong collaboration with the government when COVID-19 hit and trusted to lead in key areas. On a smaller scale, in Eswatini, BERCS' positive pre-existing relationship, credibility and capacity made it a strong choice as a partner for the government during the pandemic.

As the case studies illustrate, engaging with governments through key policy and operational platforms can provide an entry point for National Societies to build successful links. Building these relationships also enables them to communicate their mandate, impartiality, scale and scope in advance of a crisis, speeding cooperation when an emergency happens. Examples of this kind of engagement include:

- being part of national disaster and crisis platforms, and decision-making committees;
- engaging in policymaking discussions with key ministries, for example by helping to define the minimum expenditure basket;
- contributing to existing national safety net programmes;
- having a clear policy on shock-responsive social protection and engaging with the design of a government's social protection policy as an auxiliary stakeholder.

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