

Making the Case for Social Protection



The overall goal of social protection is to reduce vulnerabilities, poverty and inequality, offering economic and social stability and building resilience. Social protection reduces reliance on emergency assistance by addressing the root causes of poverty and vulnerability. It bridges the gap between short-term humanitarian response and long-term development, helping communities become more resilient.

The Movement's auxiliary role positions it to influence policy and champion the rights of people in vulnerable situations. National Society presence at community and national level gives them unique access to people at risk prior to, during and after disasters and crises strike.

Article 3(2) of the Statutes of the Movement tasks all National Societies with the following activities: cooperating with the public authorities in the prevention of disease, the promotion of health and the mitigation of human suffering by their own programmes in such fields as education, health and social welfare...

Social Protection matters because of existing RCRC Movement commitments and transformations included in the IFRC Strategy¹ especially:

SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING NATIONAL SOCIETIES AS STRONG
AND EFFECTIVE LOCAL ACTORS

INFLUENCING HUMANITARIAN ACTION

UNDERGOING A DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2030 Strategic Goals



**PEOPLE ANTICIPATE,
RESPOND TO, AND QUICKLY
RECOVER FROM CRISIS.**

We will improve local response and preparedness. And we will tackle underlying causes of crises to reduce their impact or prevent them from occurring.



**PEOPLE LEAD SAFE, HEALTHY
AND DIGNIFIED LIVES AND HAVE
OPPORTUNITIES TO THRIVE.**

We will encourage well-being at all levels. This includes promoting positive social, mental and physical health, as well as supporting people's livelihoods.



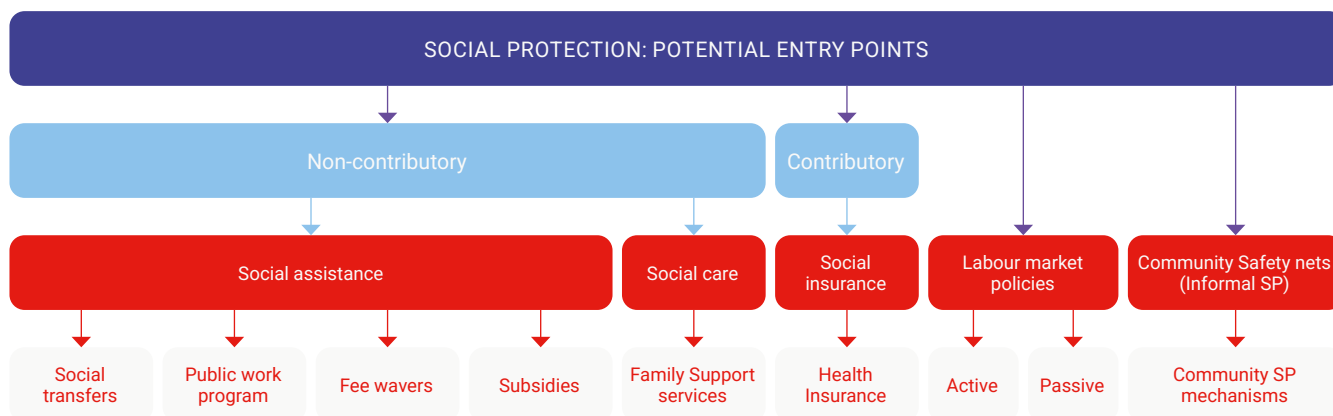
**PEOPLE MOBILIZE FOR
INCLUSIVE AND PEACEFUL
COMMUNITIES**

We will promote and support more inclusive, equitable and cohesive societies. We will embody our humanitarian values in all that we do.

¹IFRC 2030 strategy Strategic Goals <https://www.ifrc.org/who-we-are/about-ifrc/strategy-2030>

1. What is Social Protection²?

Social protection is a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing and protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life cycle, placing a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups. This protection can be provided through social insurance, tax-funded social benefits, social assistance services, public works programme and other schemes guaranteeing basic income security and access to essential services. *Source: Dignity in Action 2023 glossary.*



Social protection encompasses policies and programs aimed at reducing poverty, vulnerability, and inequality throughout the life cycle.

2. Why Social Protection Matters for the Movement

National Societies are in a central position to decide what role they are best placed to play in their country's social protection space. This includes policy formulation with other actors, programme design such as registrations and vulnerability criteria development, and implementation such as case management, cash delivery.

NS are already players in the growing areas of anticipatory action and shock-responsive social protection. They are increasingly using cash alongside traditional emergency responses to foster greater efficiencies to respond to needs before a disaster or shock strikes.

Social Protection places emphasis on people-centred and inclusive assistance. National Societies can play strategic roles in shaping social protection policies and interventions, for example to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised groups are included in targeting approaches.

NS are already heavily investing in cash preparedness to increase capacity and expertise to deliver cash assistance. Investments in cash preparedness improve a National Society's readiness to scale responses up or down within state-led social protection systems.

National Societies are often implementing partners for national or international social protection actors. Their national reach and community presence makes them a suitable partner, especially in areas lacking formal social protection systems.

National Societies can play strategic roles in shock-responsive social protection policy and response design by maximising their in-country presence, auxiliary role, technical expertise, and support from the wider Movement.

²For a brief overview of Social Protection see CaLP video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MFApvl1leU>

3. Social Protection approaches can address several humanitarian challenges

- + Reduces humanitarian need: Tackles root causes of poverty.
- + Strengthens resilience: Builds community capacity to withstand shocks.
- + Supports local economies: Injects cash into communities, fostering recovery.
- + Promotes inclusion: Targets vulnerable groups, reducing inequalities.
- + Cost efficiency: Aligns humanitarian programs with government systems.

Inclusion: Leaving no one behind. Despite growing trends towards higher inclusion in national social protection systems, high numbers of vulnerable and newly vulnerable people remain excluded, as a result of a lack of access, political or other bias and limited capacity. This includes policies that prevent people on the move, the forcibly displaced and refugees from accessing national social protection systems.

Timely and effective scale-up in response to shocks and crises. Complex targeting, use of out-of-date registers, and inefficient cash delivery mechanisms can seriously restrict the timeliness and effectiveness of the support provided to people in need. System, resources, and funding limitations constrain the ability to scale-up and respond to needs in contexts of protracted crisis, sudden onset disasters and massive displacement without investments in social protection and anticipatory action.

Unifying fragmented assistance systems. The lack of a holistic approach and synergy between different line ministries and institutional departments responsible for humanitarian, development and social assistance contribute to delivery challenges. Duplication, exclusion, fragmented coordination can be addressed by actors with long term presence in country that can forge alliances.



What are the challenges in linking social protection with humanitarian efforts?

Coordination:

Aligning humanitarian actions with national systems requires collaboration.

Funding gaps:

Expanding coverage during crises can strain resources.

Social cohesion:

Ensuring equitable support for host communities and displaced populations.

Adequacy of support:

Social protection benefits are often too low to meet needs during crises.

4. What experience shows about RCRC impact when engaging with Social Protection

1. Risk Mitigation and Strengthening Community Resilience

Social protection equips households and communities to better manage risks associated with illness, disability, old age, and withstand shocks such as natural disasters, economic downturns or health crises. Programs like social safety nets, anticipatory action and disaster insurance allow communities to better withstand crises and protect their assets. This fosters resilience and reduces the impact of crises.



Example: The Kenya Red Cross Society's involvement in the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) provided cash top-ups to drought-affected communities and expanded support to additional beneficiaries during drought.

2. Reducing Reliance on Humanitarian Assistance

Social protection addresses the root causes of vulnerability, reducing reliance on emergency aid. By providing predictable and sustained support (e.g., cash transfers, health subsidies), these programs align with the Movement's mission to build resilience and prevent crises.



Example: The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) programme, run by the IFRC and Turkish Red Crescent Society and funded by the European Union, provided regular cash assistance to more than 1.5 million refugees living in Türkiye. Watch: How a cash card helped refugees in Türkiye

<https://www.ifrc.org/article/cash-and-livelihoods-winning-combination-long-term-sustainability-and-support-refugees>

3. Supporting Economic Recovery and Local Development

By injecting cash into households and communities, these programs stimulate local economies, promote recovery, and foster dignity through agency. Economic growth in vulnerable areas reduces the risk of cyclical poverty and associated vulnerabilities.



Example: In Malawi, cash assistance programs promoted livelihoods and food security, ensuring timely responses through forecast-based financing

4. Enhancing Health, Education, and Well-being

Social protection in the form of cash and access to services enables access to healthcare, education, and nutrition, ensuring healthier, more self-reliant communities. Supporting these outcomes reduces long-term humanitarian needs, aligning with the Movement's goals of sustainable impact.

Example: COVID-19 Response: A number of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies conducted emergency response operations during the pandemic, including the provision of social assistance to affected populations.

5. Reducing Inequalities and Building Social Cohesion

Social protection helps close gaps for marginalized groups, including women, displaced persons, and people living in poverty. This promotes social cohesion and reduces tensions. Reducing inequality fosters stronger community ties and mitigates risks of social unrest, aligning with the Movement's focus on peace and equality.



Example: The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) program in Turkey aligned humanitarian cash transfers with national social assistance systems, reducing tensions between refugee and host communities.

6. Mobilizing Resources Efficiently

Partnering with governments or leveraging existing social protection frameworks reduces duplication and maximizes the Movement's resources. By integrating into national systems, the Movement can achieve greater scale and sustainability in its interventions.



Example: In Kenya, the Enhanced Single Registry reduced duplication and improved targeting, enabling faster provision of aid. The use of digital payments has enhanced financial inclusion and reduced administrative overheads.

7. Enhancing the Movement's Strategic Leadership

Supporting social protection programs positions the RCRC as thought leaders in reducing vulnerability. Proactively engaging in these efforts aligns with the Movement's Fundamental Principles, including humanity, impartiality, and neutrality.



Example: British Virgin Island- Joint Cash Platform with Ministry of Social Development, using a single streamlined approach for beneficiary management, reporting and cash delivery platform.



Example: The Ukrainian Red Cross successfully influenced government policies, advocating for increased cash transfer values during winter months.

5. Call to action

Social protection represents a transformative opportunity for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. By building resilience, reducing inequality, and promoting sustainable development, it strengthens the Movement’s commitment to humanity and dignity.

There are number of ways NS can engage with Social Protection.

LEVEL OF COLLABORATION	EXAMPLES OF ROLES IN SP		
Policy	Policy formulation	Coordination	Providing capacity building activities
Intervention design	Vulnerability criteria & building unified single registries	Targeting criteria and transfer value setting	Participatory feedback loops
Implementation	Targeting and communication, engagement and accountability	Targeting and payment mechanisms	Referrals – case management

Figure 1. NS spheres of influence for Social Protection

Source: [Articulating RCRC Movement experience and models of collaboration – Cash and Voucher Assistance and Social Protection in Türkiye, Ukraine, Kenya](#)



REMEMBER Social protection actions in practice:

Partner with governments to create shock-responsive³ and inclusive social protection systems.

Build capacity by training staff and volunteers to support social protection systems.

Lobby for improved engagement with communities in social protection registration and feedback processes.

Get involved in determining adequate transfer values that will address needs based on contextual factors.

Actively take part in coordination forums that address policies and programme design to leverage the capacity to scale up and scale down existing systems in response to crises.

Expand cash assistance to align with national safety nets and advocate for integrating cash transfers into national social protection systems.

³Shock-responsive mechanisms: Systems that scale up during crises to provide timely support

6. Useful links and resources

+ RCRC Cash Hub Social Protection section
<https://cash-hub.org/resources/cash-and-social-protection/>

[Articulating RCRC Movement experience and models of collaboration – Cash and Voucher Assistance and Social Protection in Türkiye, Ukraine, Kenya](#)

[Tip sheet: Strengthening Linkages with Social Protection Systems: Orientation guidance for Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies](#)

+ Climate Centre Social Protection
https://www.climatecentre.org/priority_areas/social_protection/

[Policy for social protection and climate action](#)

[Social protection and WASH](#)

