

Report

Integrating assistance to the displaced into a social protection system in Cameroon

An ideal, but in whose interests?

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About this publication

The overall aim of this project is to improve understanding of mechanisms for greater coherence between social protection programmes and humanitarian assistance. By providing clearer guidance about when, how and why different connections between them might be considered, the project aims to develop the theory, evidence base and operational guidance on how social protection and humanitarian systems can work together to meet the needs of those affected by displacement crises, including not only the displaced but also vulnerable households in their host communities. The research is grounded in three countries with a total of six study sites, presenting different situations of displacement and humanitarian response: Greece (Athens and Ioannina), Colombia (Bogotá and Cúcuta) and Cameroon (Far North and East regions). The project is led

by ODI, in close collaboration with the Centre for Applied Social Sciences Research and Training (CASS-RT) in Cameroon, the Alberto Lleras Camargo School of Government at the University of Los Andes in Colombia, and the National Centre for Social Research (EKKE) in Greece.

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Abbreviations/Glossary

CAR	Central African Republic
CASS-RT	Centre for Applied Social Sciences Research and Training
CNPS	National Social Security Fund (<i>Caisse Nationale de Prévoyance Sociale</i>)
DGSN	Directorate of National Security (<i>Délégation Générale à la Sûreté Nationale</i>)
EU	European Union
FCFA	Franc of the Financial Community of Africa (<i>Franc du Communauté Financière Africaine</i>)
FGD	focus group discussion
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace (nexus)
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDA	International Development Association
IDP	Internally displaced person
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KII	Key informant interview
MINAS	Ministry of Social Affairs (<i>Ministère des Affaires Sociales</i>)
MINAT	Ministry of Territorial Administration (<i>Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale</i>)
MINEPAT	Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development (<i>Ministère de l'Economie, de la Planification et de l'Aménagement du Territoire</i>)
MINREX	Ministry of Foreign Relations (<i>Ministère des Relations Extérieures</i>)
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
ODA	official development assistance
PMT	Proxy means test
PFS	Social Safety Nets Project (<i>Projet Filets Sociaux</i>)
THIMO	Labour Intensive Public Works (<i>Travaux d'Haute Intensité de Main d'Oeuvre</i>) – component of PFS
TMO	Ordinary Monetary Transfers (<i>Transferts Monétaires Ordinaires</i>) – component of PFS
TMU	Emergency Monetary Transfers (<i>Transferts Monétaires d'Urgence</i>) – component of PFS
TMU-C	COVID-19 Emergency Monetary Transfers (<i>Transferts Monétaires d'Urgence – COVID-19</i>) – component of PFS
TSN	Transitional Safety Net (UNHCR programme)

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

USR Unified Social Registry

WFP United Nations World Food Programme

Key messages

- Social protection programmes that only offer assistance for a short time (e.g., 2 years), such as in Cameroon, do not provide a true safety net. Although ideally displaced people would be assisted through state social protection structures, people in protracted displacement need a safety net on which they can rely, which such programmes cannot provide.
- Conditionality in the provision of international financing for social protection can lead to displaced people being included among its recipients, as in Cameroon. However, for state structures to be a main vehicle for assisting the displaced, government would have to take on the responsibility for the welfare of the displaced. This is quite different and there is currently no incentive for this in Cameroon, especially when social protection for citizens is not (yet) a priority. Nor are there incentives for humanitarian agencies to hand over to the Government that responsibility – and those resources.
- Equalising transfer values of emergency assistance with social protection transfers has become a common option for humanitarian agencies wanting to advance integration. For displaced people, though, it risks giving inappropriate levels of support, since their needs are rarely the same as those of the host population. Though it is tempting for humanitarian actors to focus on the only alignment that they can control, humanitarian and social protection actors should be focusing on more difficult challenges, if the objective is a social protection system that can also address the needs of people affected by displacement or other crises.
- The preconditions for coherence between social protection and humanitarian aid are currently absent in Cameroon. Progress first needs to be made towards a common approach to understanding and assessing poverty, need and vulnerability, and transparency, both within and between the humanitarian and social protection sectors. Greater coherence in approaches to implementing a national social protection policy is also a priority.

Executive summary

There is growing investment in national social protection systems for addressing the needs of people affected by crisis, rather than channelling support through entirely parallel humanitarian systems. This has combined with a decade-long movement to adopt longer-term development approaches to protracted displacement, resulting in significant interest in the greater use of social protection for supporting the needs of forcibly displaced people. ODI has undertaken a three-country study, in Greece, Colombia and Cameroon, to analyse the potential for greater connections between humanitarian assistance to displaced populations and national social protection systems.

This paper looks at two case study sites in Cameroon. East region is home to some 300,000 refugees fleeing conflict in the Central African Republic. While around a quarter are in managed camps, the majority live in host communities. In Far North region, Boko Haram violence has displaced over 100,000 Nigerian refugees, alongside over 300,000 registered IDPs.¹

Social protection is still very nascent in Cameroon. A national policy was agreed in 2017 but has not been formally approved by the government. This policy explicitly includes displaced people as a priority group for social assistance. There is very little provision of social insurance (e.g., pensions), especially for the rural poor. The Ministry for Social Welfare (MINAS) runs ad hoc assistance projects for vulnerable groups (e.g., disabled, orphans) when it has funds, but it is poorly

resourced. The World Bank began supporting a programme called a ‘safety net’ (PFS) in 2013, and coverage has gradually expanded, including to areas with large displaced populations. The current phase is eventually expected to reach 200,000 households (less than 10% of those living below the poverty line nationally). PFS includes both unconditional cash transfers in a ‘graduation-style’ programme (TMO) and cash-for-work (THIMO). TMO provides around \$26 per household per month for two years, with additional annual grants of around \$140; THIMO pays around \$2.25 a day for a maximum of 60 days per year. TMO is targeted on poverty using a proxy means test, with predetermined quotas of recipients in an administrative area. There is no entitlement to social assistance, which makes it neither predictable nor dependable (the characteristics of a safety net).

The majority of humanitarian assistance for the material needs of displaced people is channelled through the World Food Programme (WFP). Because of resource constraints, the number of recipients and the value of transfers have been progressively reduced in recent years. The vast majority of aid is given as in-kind food aid, with some receiving e-vouchers redeemable for food at a restricted number of outlets. A small minority receive cash transfers. Transfers were halved in 2020, and voucher and cash transfers are currently set at \$8 per person per month, around 20% higher for a household of six than TMO, when also considering the annual grant. In 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began

¹ A third displacement crisis, caused by political conflict in North-West and South-West regions, was not part of the study, because where a state is a party to a conflict, there are additional complications in supporting the state to address the needs of people affected by that conflict.

piloting a Transitional Safety Net (TSN), designed to mirror the levels and duration of support offered by TMO, for displaced households not identified as being among the most vulnerable. Money is paid through mobile phone transfers.

The analytical framework for this project identified 16 potential ‘connection points’ where social protection and humanitarian systems may be aligned, support each other or be integrated – or remain unconnected. Connection points include the areas of finance, legal frameworks, targeting, registration, transfer design, payment systems and feedback mechanisms. No connections are made at any of these points between humanitarian aid to the displaced and social protection programmes apart from TSN, where there is alignment at one connection point (transfer design).

There are two reasons for this lack of connection: very different objectives of the two forms of assistance, and complex systems of incentives which do not make it in the main actors’ interests. PFS is intended to be a short ‘push’ to help people out of poverty; humanitarian assistance looks to ensure that all crisis-affected people can continue to meet their minimum needs. The conception behind PFS – one-off short-term support to a limited number of households – makes it hard to find compatibility with a system for ensuring continuous support for all those unable to meet their minimum needs. This incompatibility runs through how programmes conceive of eligibility, targeting, transfer values and the duration of support.

The institutional incentive structure also makes connection difficult to achieve. The challenge is greater than just finding connection between social protection and humanitarian assistance, as if they were two coherent systems. The current incentive structure does not drive greater

coherence within either ‘system’. In the domain of social protection, this is seen in a lack of coordination between ministries, with the Ministry for Social Welfare establishing a social registry based on vulnerability, but with no connection to the main social assistance programme, PFS, which is run by the Ministry of Planning (MINEPAT). Because MINEPAT is the gatekeeping ministry to such resources, there is no internal incentive driving it to hand over or share responsibility with MINAS. Similarly, the incentive structure in the humanitarian sector does not drive greater coherence among humanitarian actors, who may share overall missions but who are also competitors for donor resources. The incentive system exacerbates lack of transparency, for instance around assessment, targeting and eligibility, and information sharing.

There are also no incentives either for the state to take over responsibility for the welfare of the displaced from largely international humanitarian agencies, or for humanitarian agencies to pass on that responsibility and hand over authority and responsibility for the allocation of those resources.

The paper also analyses the potential impact of changing the relationship between humanitarian assistance to the displaced and social protection, looking at the question from six perspectives:

1. Effectiveness in meeting the needs of the displaced
2. Effectiveness in meeting the needs of the host population
3. Equity
4. Cost and efficiency
5. Accountability and acceptability to all stakeholders
6. Sustainability

The very limited coverage, quota-based targeting, short-term nature and lower transfer values of current social assistance all mean that alignment at the connection points around programme design (including targeting and transfer design) would adversely affect the displaced, who have greater poverty and (often) greater constraints on independent livelihoods. There are unlikely to be any advantages to the displaced in their assistance being channelled through social protection structures, even if it were possible to do this. Relations between the communities, which are good, are unlikely to be affected, since there is in any case little knowledge about the nature and levels of need that other people receive. There is potentially a longer-term benefit in their being included on the new social registry, though its relationship to actual social protection benefits is still unknown.

There are clear advantages for the displaced in the government taking greater responsibility for their welfare, and playing a much greater role in humanitarian assistance would be evidence of this. However, the government's limited involvement currently is not the cause of the problem: it is a symptom of a deeper reluctance to take responsibility, for which it has no incentive.

Host populations recognise their interest in displaced people receiving adequate assistance because of the risks that desperation drives crime, and because of the benefits of economic interactions. The latter would be improved if humanitarian assistance adopted the social protection transfer modality of cash. There are no other obvious implications for host populations in other changes in alignment.

It is difficult to make judgements about equity because of the lack of information, exacerbated by a lack of transparency, about levels of poverty

and livelihood insecurity of either the displaced or host populations. Rates of poverty and its depth are generally greater among the displaced, though presumably with much variation. Equity will not be served by equalising the levels and duration of assistance.

Significant cost savings for donors are likely if humanitarian assistance were channelled through social protection (PFS), but there is insufficient evidence to be able to compare the quality of implementation, particularly regarding the extent of exclusion error. It is likely that a move to cash transfers would be an alternative way of making some cost reductions, though such analysis was beyond the scope of this research project.

There is generally a trust deficit across both the humanitarian and social protection systems. A joint effort to improve the accountability of both systems to recipient populations might be beneficial, but it is difficult to see how this could be achieved in the short or medium term. Although humanitarian donors are not all happy with the degree of transparency in the humanitarian system, their hesitation to trust government with discretion in using funds for the welfare of the displaced is of higher order. Although the government of Cameroon is also dissatisfied with transparency in the humanitarian system it appears to tolerate it, in exchange for international agencies taking responsibility for the welfare of the displaced. A change in linkages between humanitarian assistance and social protection alignment would be largely irrelevant to achieving a much-needed improvement in accountability and acceptance.

For as long as both social protection and humanitarian assistance are largely funded by international donors, arguments for sustainability are of limited relevance. The main current

social protection programme, PFS, functions as a project, not a structural safety net, and is therefore making only a limited contribution to a sustainable social protection system, especially since social protection will not be a priority for the government in the next decade. Considering sustainability for the recipients rather than for the system, it is difficult to see how aligning support for the displaced with PFS can reduce their dependence on external aid.

Displaced people need a safety net. Although the PFS is called a safety net (*'filets sociaux'*), it does not function as one. The clear conclusion is thus that the possibility for benefits from greater connection between humanitarian and social protection assistance remains distant, as is the possibility of greater connections being achieved. The preconditions for achieving this are also distant: these start with collaboration among humanitarian actors and collaboration across ministries working on social protection. Progress will be needed in three domains: a coherent vision and strategy dealing with the kinds and levels of assistance to which people will have an entitlement in which circumstances; structures and processes that can identify and assess the needs and vulnerabilities of displaced and host populations in the same terms; and a radical change in the relationships between the organisations currently working on both social protection and humanitarian assistance in Cameroon. System incentives do not currently drive greater coherence or collaboration.

Although an ideal social protection system, able to respond to the different and changing needs of people with different difficulties and vulnerabilities, would also protect displaced people, this remains a distant possibility in Cameroon. Counter-intuitively, concentrating on finding areas for practical alignment between

social protection and (humanitarian) support for the displaced is not the best way to work towards that ideal. Aligning the value or duration of transfers is not relevant to achieving any meaningful objectives and will have little or no impact on social cohesion, but it risks unfairness and lack of equity in treating people who have particular needs, and greater constraints in achieving independent livelihoods, as a result of forced displacement.

Progress should rather be looked for by first establishing preconditions for greater connection which are also of value in themselves, even if they do not serve as building blocks of greater future connection. Coherence, coordination and transparency are needed in the way in which vulnerability and poverty are analysed and assessed within the humanitarian and social protection sectors. More developmental approaches should be adopted for supporting displaced populations, including a major move to cash rather than vouchers or in-kind assistance. An analysis of poverty in Cameroon that also considers the situation of the displaced and host communities together is a necessary basis for developing strategies for improving the livelihoods of both groups.

The study also draws out wider policy implications of relevance beyond Cameroon. A social protection system has to be able to function as a genuine safety net before it can replace humanitarian assistance for displaced populations. This means that it would have to be rights- or entitlement-based, so that those in need of it can rely on it, for as long as they need it.

Such a social protection system must also have the capacity to identify and assess the needs of potentially large numbers of new clients very quickly, and to give different benefit levels to

people in different circumstances. These are political decisions which countries must make for themselves and cannot simply be pushed as technical recommendations by those offering external finance.

Discussion about the integration of social protection and humanitarian assistance has focused on cash transfers (social assistance). Integration is also important in service delivery, and the forcibly displaced need to be fully integrated in mechanisms for protecting rights, including freedom of movement, the right to

work, access to land on reasonable terms, the right to open a bank account and documentation guaranteeing these rights.

As in Cameroon, refugees are often concentrated in areas of greater poverty and marginalisation. Fears about humanitarian aid harming social cohesion are increased by the high levels of need among the host population. Government and development partners should be concerned with ensuring that development investments are adequately targeted in such areas.

1 Introduction

1.1 Integration of humanitarian assistance for the forcibly displaced with social protection

The number of people who are forcibly displaced has more than doubled in the last decade, surpassing 84 million globally in 2021 (UNHCR, 2021b). Those affected increasingly find themselves displaced on a protracted basis, and in many parts of the world are now more likely to be living alongside host community members in urban, semi-urban or rural areas rather than in designated camps for refugees or internally displaced people (IDPs) (UNHCR, 2017; UNHCR, 2020; OCHA, 2017).

There have been various initiatives to promote more development-oriented solutions to displacement, instead of the traditional ‘care and maintenance’ models of humanitarian assistance that are based on providing immediate relief to meet emergency needs (UNDP, UNHCR and World Bank, 2010). This agenda has aligned with a broader movement seeking to find structural responses to the needs of those affected by crises, including looking to the increasing potential of national social protection systems, which are becoming more widespread and stronger.

There is therefore growing interest in the potential for humanitarian assistance to link with national social protection systems to respond to forced displacement by meeting the needs of both displaced and host populations.²

Linking state social protection and humanitarian aid can take many forms.³ The working analytical framework for this project, drawing on previous conceptual work by Barca (2019) and Seyfert et al., (2019), identifies 16 possible ‘connection points’ covering policy, administration and programme design, where humanitarian and social protection assistance may ‘connect’ (see Figure 1).⁴ At each of these connection points, four broad options exist for linkages. This may take the form of alignment, where humanitarian aid and social protection are coordinated in some way but remain as separate programmes and systems; they may remain as separate programmes and systems but make use of elements of each other’s programmes and/or systems (‘piggy-backing’); or humanitarian assistance may be fully integrated into the social protection system in that dimension. Alternatively, there may be no connection at all between humanitarian assistance and social protection at that point (‘parallel’).

² For example, see the commitments to increase engagement with social protection systems and promote displaced populations’ access to such systems in the 2016 New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, the Grand Bargain emerging from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees.

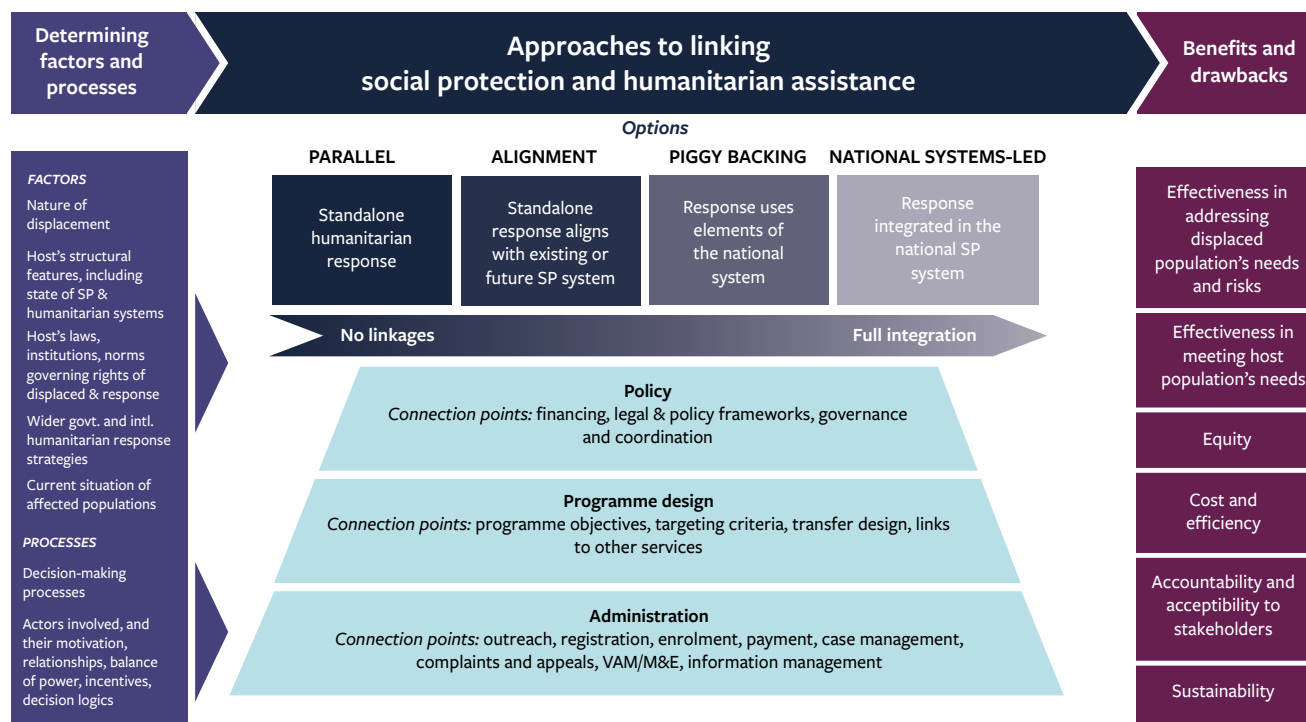
³ There is no clear definition of the term ‘humanitarian assistance’, beyond circular definitions that it is aid given by humanitarian agencies in humanitarian crises, which are similarly undefinable (Levine and Sharp, 2015). Here it is used specifically to refer to assistance that is given outside the structural assistance modalities used by the state for social protection. Internationally, much humanitarian assistance is coordinated to some degree within a system led by to varying degrees by governments and the UN, consisting of a variety of national and international agencies. Where some form of state social protection is provided to people in a crisis, this is not considered as humanitarian aid for the purposes of this analysis. Although there may be instances where the dividing line is blurred, that does not present an analytical problem in Cameroon.

⁴ Some earlier literature refers to the connection points as ‘entry points’ because they were identified in order to advance integration, and they were seen as potential entry points to begin or intensify that process.

Figure 1 presents the overall analytical framework for this research project. The 16 potential

connection points are in the central column, categorised under policy, programme design and administration.

Figure 1 Analytical framework for assessing linkages between social protection and humanitarian assistance to the forcibly displaced



Source: Lowe et al. (forthcoming), drawing on Barca (2019) and Seyfert et al. (2019)

Looking at how any particular humanitarian and social protection programme are working together, a profile could be drawn, identifying the nature of the linkages (if any) at each of the 16 possible connection points.

There is currently only nascent research on the different profiles of linkages which could work in practice in different displacement situations, or on the impacts on different population groups from different integration profiles (Peterman et al., 2018). There are hopes that very different benefits could be achieved through greater connection

between humanitarian assistance for the forcibly displaced and national social protection systems. These hoped-for benefits include:

- better material outcomes for the displaced as a result of more predictable assistance
- greater social cohesion between displaced and host populations as a result of perceived greater equity in how the two populations are treated
- more secure rights (particularly for refugees),⁵ including greater financial inclusion, if they are better integrated into state processes

⁵ In principle, IDPs should already have full rights as citizens, although in practice they may still have difficulties accessing state services as IDPs.

- greater sustainability, where assistance to the displaced is embedded in state budgets and does not depend on annual funding cycles
- greater cost efficiency in delivering assistance.

However, there is little evidence as to how far any of these different benefits can indeed be affected by the way in which assistance to the forcibly displaced is linked to national social protection.

The right-hand column of the analytical framework (Figure 1) shows the six dimensions in which outcomes can be assessed as a result of a different profile of connections. These are the six lenses used in Section 5 to assess the potential for the greater linkages between assistance to the displaced and social protection.

1.2 Research questions

ODI was commissioned by the World Bank to lead a two-year project (2020–2022) to address some of the evidence gaps, in particular looking at what kind of linkages may be possible in different situations, and at where linkages of different kinds could prove beneficial. The project has several components, including primary research in Cameroon, Greece and Colombia.

This report presents the findings from the primary research in Cameroon, which was undertaken by a partnership of researchers from ODI and the Centre for Applied Social Sciences Research and Training, Cameroon (CASS-RT).

The overall research project aims to answer four key questions across the three case studies and study sites:

1. To what extent and in what ways have social protection and humanitarian assistance been linked in different contexts?
2. What factors and processes led to the adoption of these approaches?
3. What have been the benefits and drawbacks of these approaches for different stakeholders, and what is perceived to have driven these impacts?
4. What are the insights for considering approaches to linking social protection and humanitarian assistance in different displacement situations?

In Cameroon, there is a very limited degree of connection or integration. This case study therefore contributes more on the analysis of where *in principle* it might be possible to expect any benefits. The current lack of connection between the two systems also meant that the country was an important place for studying possible barriers to integration (question 2) and potential challenges to alignment or integration.

1.3 Methodology

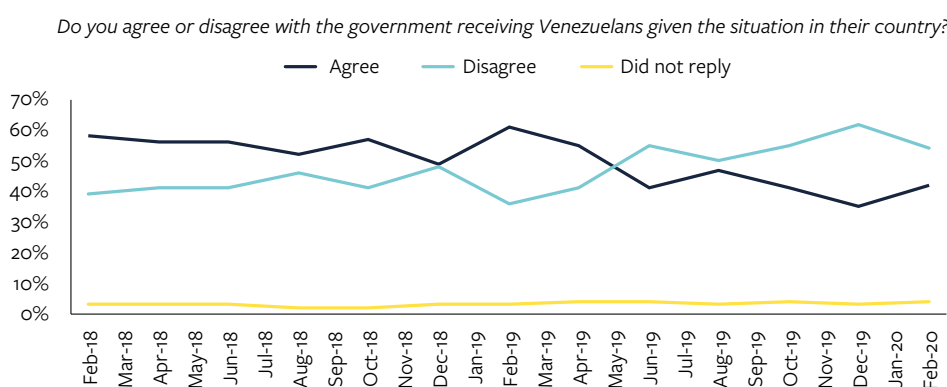
The study covered two largely distinct areas of research: the institutional and political dimensions of integration; and the likely outcomes for recipient populations of the way in which assistance could be organised. The first area was addressed through qualitative research, combining a study of existing literature (including project documents) and interviews with people working in a range of institutions connected to either humanitarian assistance or social protection at different levels, from the capital to communes. Outcomes for displaced and host communities, together with their perceptions about the displacement situation, forms of assistance and their own situation, were studied through a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative approaches (survey data) with qualitative research from interviews and focus group discussions with

IDPs, refugees and residents in host communities and key informants, combined with a study of what has already been written.

There are three different displaced populations in Cameroon: refugees from the Central African Republic in eastern Cameroon (studied in the East region in our research); refugees from

Nigeria and IDPs from conflict with Boko Haram in Far North (*Extrême Nord*) Region; and IDPs from an internal political conflict in the North-West and South-West (Figure 2). This research project covers the first two displaced populations, but not IDPs from the internal conflict in the North-West and South-West.⁶

Figure 2 Map of regions of Cameroon, concentrations of displacement and study areas



Source: UNHCR (2021)

The survey data were collected, and qualitative interviewing carried out, by a research team from CASS-RT. The original sampling strategy for

the survey was to select in equal parts men and women, recipients and non-recipients of household transfers (whether classed as social protection

⁶ The IDP crisis was not deemed appropriate as one of the two case study sites because the government is a main active party to the conflict, and humanitarian principles would make it exceedingly difficult to consider channelling assistance through the government to those displaced by that conflict.

or food assistance) in each region. The East and Far North regions were selected for their specific displacement and social protection profiles. The team then selected several departments and enumeration areas (based on the 2005 census) with higher rates of displacement, and where we were aware of social protection/humanitarian assistance programmes being implemented. The eventual intended sample population for the survey was 1,500: 500 from the host population (split evenly between Far North and East), 750 refugees (250 in Far North and 500 in East) and 250 IDPs, all in Far North. The data were collected 4–26 February 2021. In total, 1,492 interviews were conducted: 490 from the host population, 740 refugees and 248 IDPs. Due to missing data, the final number of respondents analysed is 1,480.

Refugees in East region were interviewed both in and outside camps. In the Far North region, a greater proportion of the displaced population lives in camps and nearly all the displaced households in our sample were camp-based

(refugees and IDPs). Within the enumeration areas, households were chosen through a quasi-random approach using a variation of the ‘random walk methodology’ (for more details, see Annex 1) for all groups except one. Due to the difficulty of finding IDPs living outside of camps, that group was selected based on a snow-ball sample. Within households, the adult with the most recent birthday among those present was chosen to be interviewed to achieve a balance in the gender and household role of interviewees. Among randomly selected households, a screening question on receipt of social protection/humanitarian assistance was then asked, with the intention that approximately half of the sample is a transfer recipient. However, this approach was deemed unfeasible by the enumeration team because of the difficulties in finding recipients of national social protection programmes and was dropped, which is why the final sample does not include as many host recipients as intended. The sampling strategy was otherwise implemented as planned.

Table 1 Survey sample size, by displacement status, region, sex, camp status and whether they receive transfers

	Male				Female			
	Non-camp		Camp		Non-camp		Camp	
Receives transfer?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Host (East)	119	6		1	121	3	1	
Refugee (East)	101	14	47	67	125	19	56	67
Host (Far North)	108	10			118	6		
Refugee (Far North)		9	5	87		8	4	105
IDP (Far North)	5	1	54	75	4	1	49	79

Note: Some respondents who had indicated that they received transfers in an initial question for sampling purposes may have been reclassified later based on their answers to more detailed questions. Numbers in this table refer to the sampling process, and may not match data presented later in the report.

The survey instrument (Annex 2) was designed to include relevant topics, covering

the demographics of the host and displaced populations, the prevalence of different kinds of

assistance, the prevailing levels of food security and well-being and various dimensions of social cohesion, including the extent of personal relationships between members of the host and displaced communities, attitudes towards the communities and levels of trust in government. The survey instrument was also designed for use across the three countries to test the main research hypotheses, particularly the relationship between receipt of different forms of assistance and various outcomes related to basic needs (e.g. food security); social cohesion; and economic agency (e.g. financial inclusion). Because of the difficulty in getting detailed information on the locations where different assistance programmes were being run ahead of the quantitative survey, the sample included fewer households than anticipated enrolled in social protection programmes. This means that the hypothesis can only be answered more indirectly.

Sites for the qualitative interviews in both regions were sampled purposively. Villages were first selected where the population can be found

that met the characteristics needed, i.e. where IDPs were also living, where refugees were living together with hosts in the village and where social assistance programmes had targeted the host population. These sites were in Garoua-Boulaï commune in Lom-et-Djérem department in East Region and in Mokolo department in Far North Region. Both locations included refugee camps, villages and informal settlements.

In each site or village, interviewees were sought according to specific characteristics, including displacement status, and ensuring a balance of male and female respondents and those who had and had not benefited from social protection or food assistance. To find these households or individuals, a snowball methodology was used, relying first on contacts made available by the commune. The set of interviewees and FGD participants was intended to capture diversity, but not to be representative. FGDs were held separately for men and for women. The total number of focus groups and interviews conducted is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 Distribution of informants by categories in Far North and East Regions

	Target groups	Female	Male	Total completed Far North	Total completed East	Total
FGDs	IDPs	4	4	8	0	8
	Refugees	7	6	5	8	13
	Hosts	4	5	5	4	9
	<i>Total</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>30</i>
IDIs	IDPs	6	5	11	0	11
	Refugees	23	19	13	29	42
	Hosts	11	12	12	11	23
	<i>Total</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>76</i>

Additionally, 18 key informants were interviewed, including local government officials, civil servants at the relevant Ministries and senior staff at international organisations working on both humanitarian assistance and social protection.

1.4 Limitations

The study methodology was designed to address the policy questions (see above) around linkages between social protection and humanitarian support to the displaced, rather than to provide rigorous evidence about the situation of the displaced or recipients of social protection. The sampled population groups are, as far as possible, representative of the refugee, IDP and host populations *who are receiving different forms of assistance* in the sites researched, but not of those populations as a whole, much less representative of hosts or displaced people across the Far North and East Regions. That was made challenging because of the difficulties in obtaining information about exactly where different assistance programmes were being implemented; and the lack of sampling frames, which included the identities of recipients and non-recipients. The lack of sampling frames also meant that sampling in the research sites had to use random walks. This is a widely used methodology in such situations, but it does not result in perfect randomisation. However, since the intention was not to draw any conclusions about the populations as a whole, but rather to learn about specific issues in (a few) different situations, this is not a major limitation in our ability to draw overall conclusions and recommendations.

Several changes were occurring to both humanitarian and social protection assistance around the time of the fieldwork, in coverage and transfer values. (Humanitarian assistance was being reduced, while social protection was being

increased in phase 2 of the safety net programme; see further discussion below.) Informants of both the qualitative and quantitative research were not always precise about the period they were referring to, and some of the specific information may be out of date. However, as will be clear below, this has not affected the analysis of the policy questions, which does not depend on comparison at particular points in time of household-level outcomes.

In the survey in particular, there were sometimes doubts about the accuracy of the precise information given about the different transfers received. It appears that not everyone knew the name or source of the assistance they received. For example, some IDPs in Far North region reported receiving assistance from a programme, the Transitional Safety Net (TSN, see below) which, to the best of our knowledge, was only paid out in East and North (but not Far North) regions at the time of the survey. In qualitative interviews, some people named the source of their assistance, but details about the transfers (e.g., the value) either matched a different aid programme or sometimes matched no programme at all that we knew of. Again, although this may have a small effect on some of the statistical analysis, it has not affected the overall policy analysis.

The usual cautions have to be raised in relation to the reliability of information from interviewees. For example, recipients of assistance were asked directly about its importance for enabling the household to meet its essential needs, but displaced populations are well-used to the assessments of aid agencies. Their responses can be influenced by considerations that their answers might influence the aid they receive, however questions are framed and however often the interviewer insists that interviewees' answers will have no bearing on aid received.

It may be easier to use replies to draw comparisons between the well-being of displaced and host populations, or between those receiving and not receiving assistance. Comparisons do not rely on total honesty, but there is still an assumption that any tendencies (e.g., to exaggerate suffering) are similar across different groups. This cannot be confirmed: displaced people may be more conditioned to playing an assessment 'game', but it is at least plausible that this analysis is less influenced by a past aid presence. Qualitative interviewing was therefore heavily relied on: answers about how the transfers

were spent and about broader experiences of life and seeking a livelihood are likely to be less conditioned by experience of aid assessments, making their interpretation more transparent.

More broadly, it was very difficult to obtain information about the operational details either of humanitarian assistance or social protection. As discussed in more detail below, we consider this to be a finding rather than a limitation – evidence for difficulties which will have to be overcome in the pursuit of greater integration.

2 Country context

2.1 Country overview

Cameroon is a lower-middle income country with a population in 2020 of around 26.5 million.⁷ Rich in natural resources, the country has had fairly steady annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaging over 4% (or 1.7% per capita) over the last decade, until 2020 (when the economy was badly hit by the Covid-19 pandemic combined with a fall in world oil prices) (World Bank, 2022; ADB, 2021). However, years of economic growth have failed to translate into progress in reducing high national poverty rates, which declined only marginally from 40% in 2001 to 37.5% in 2014 (the most recent year for which there is data) (World Bank, 2021a).

The limited impact of macroeconomic growth on poverty reduction is largely due to increased inequality between rural and urban locations, wealthier and poorer regions, and – more recently – stable and conflict-affected areas (World Bank, 2019; 2021a). Economic development has principally benefited the central and southern regions (particularly their most populated cities), while the northern and eastern regions have seen limited investments and service provision, resulting in high levels of socio-economic deprivation and poverty rates as high as 77% in Far North region (Development Initiatives, 2020; World Bank, 2019). Government spending on health, education and social assistance is already low compared to other sub-Saharan African countries, and these limited funds are biased towards more prosperous regions rather than distributed according to local need (Development Initiatives, 2020).

Partly as a result of this socio-economic marginalisation, the country has experienced rising levels of political instability, with Boko Haram making inroads into Cameroon's Far North region in 2014, and conflict breaking out in the North-West and South-West regions in 2017 when calls for greater autonomy for these regions escalated into civil war and a secessionist movement (ibid.). Although this crisis has sparked some decentralisation measures, political power has historically been highly concentrated both institutionally and personally. Some 87% of public expenditure was managed at the central level as of 2015 (ibid.). President Paul Biya has been in office since 1982, reaching his seventh term in 2018 through elections marked by concerns about irregularities (Freedom House, 2021). Governance has been a recurrent challenge, with the country currently ranking 149th out of 180 in the 2020 Transparency International corruption perceptions index (World Bank, 2021b). The most recent scandal, nicknamed 'Covidgate', has aroused an unusually strong reaction in a country used to corruption. Covidgate involved embezzlement, with 160 politicians, high officials and their close contacts suspected of siphoning off millions of dollars allocated to the Covid-19 response. Investigations recommended the opening of proceedings for offences including overbilling, falsification of procurement documents, single source procurement of medical equipment and insider dealing (SPARC Africa, 2021).

⁷ According to World Bank data (www.data.worldbank.org).

2.2 Displacement in Cameroon

2.2.1 Displacement situation

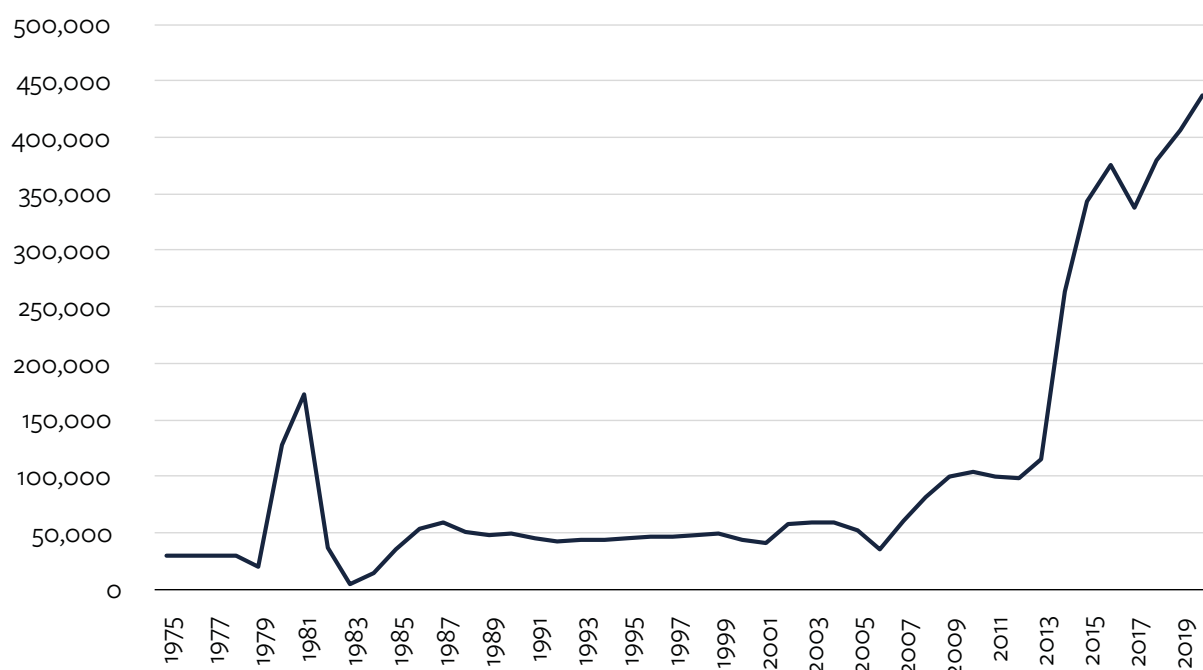
Cameroon has been a significant country of refuge for almost two decades and has also suffered its own problems of internal displacement in the past eight years. The total displaced population of IDPs and refugees is currently around 4% of the country's total population, spread across three quite distinct displacement situations.

Refugees from the Central African Republic

Refugees started fleeing to Cameroon to avoid insecurity and conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2004. Over the next 10 years 92,000 arrived, often finding refuge among communities where they shared a common language and culture, and even family ties,

predominantly in the East and Adamaoua regions (plus a small number in the North region).⁸ The upsurge of fighting in CAR at the end of 2013 brought a new refugee influx, with the population more than doubling over the next two years, reaching almost 250,000 by the end of 2017. A steady flow has arrived since then, and despite the government signing a Tripartite Agreement for the Voluntary Repatriation of Central African Refugees Living in Cameroon in June 2019, very few refugees seem intent on returning home soon, if at all. Violence around CAR's December 2020 general elections led to 13,000 new arrivals in 2021, taking the total of CAR refugees to 333,400 as at September 2021 (UNHCR, 2021a). Of these, around 70% live in rural host communities, 25% live in managed refugee camps, and 5% live in urban areas (ibid.).

Figure 3 Number of refugees in Cameroon, by year



Source: Authors, using World Development Indicators (<https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators>)

⁸ See Barbelet et al. (2017) for an analysis of relations between refugees and the local population in East Region.

The refugee population in the East Region represents nearly two-thirds of all CAR refugees in Cameroon, but also equates to around 20% of the host population size in the region. If the region were a country, it would have the highest number of refugees per capita in the world (World Bank, 2018a).

Nigerian refugees and Cameroonians displaced by the Boko Haram conflict

At the end of 2013, Nigerians started to seek refuge in Cameroon from insecurity created by Boko Haram. Around 64,000 arrived in 2014–2015, and a steady inflow since then has led to a total of 119,000 in 2021, almost entirely in Far North region. A little over half (57%) of registered Nigerian refugees are camp-based (predominantly in Minawao, a large UNHCR-managed camp), with the remainder mostly living among host communities in isolated rural areas on the Nigerian border, and many unregistered refugees living in settlements near Minawao. Very few live in urban areas (UNHCR, 2021a).

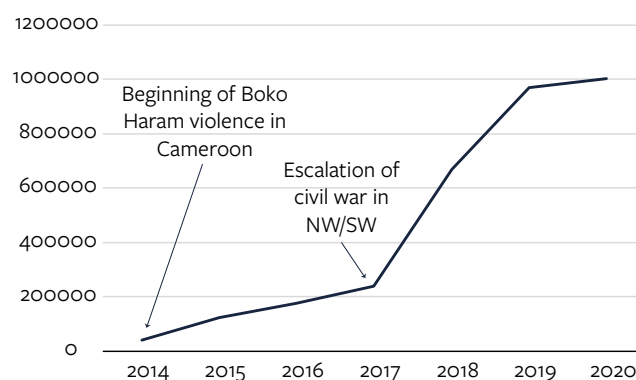
The spread of Boko Haram-related violence to the Far North region in 2014 triggered a crisis of internal displacement. Numbers of IDPs have grown since then: there were 93,000 IDPs in October 2015, almost 250,000 by the end of 2017 and by the end of October 2021 there were an estimated 342,000. Because IDPs do not register their presence as refugees do, their number is less certain. Many live in camps; others stay close to their location of origin, often with extended family members (Karimbhoy, 2017; OCHA, 2021).

The region presents a challenging host environment. The Far North is by far the most deprived region in Cameroon, with over 70% of the population living in poverty. Governance and service provision were already weak before the violence and insecurity (World Bank, 2021a).

IDPs displaced by the crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions

Longstanding political tensions between anglophones in the North-West and South-West Regions and the largely francophone state⁹ escalated into civil war at the end of 2017,¹⁰ causing a huge upsurge in displacement in Cameroon (see Figure 4). By the end of 2018, UNHCR had registered almost 450,000 IDPs from the North-West and South-West Regions. This number has since grown to over 700,000 (UNHCR, 2021b).

Figure 4 Growth in number of IDPs in Cameroon since 2014



Source: Authors, using data from IOM (www.migrationdataportal.org)

⁹ The formerly German colony of Kamerun was divided by the League of Nations in 1919 into areas mandated to the French (the majority of what is now the Republic of Cameroon) and to the British (Northern and Southern Cameroons, governed from Nigeria). In 1961, the former became part of newly independent Nigeria, while the latter became the North-West and South-West Regions of what was initially named the Federal Republic of Cameroon, to be governed on a federal basis. This federal autonomy did not emerge, leading to decades of political discontent that gave grounds to the current secessionist movement (ICG, 2017a).

¹⁰ State radio described it as ‘a declaration of war’ by the President on those seeking secession (Sixtus, 2017).

Box 1 Research sites

Gado Badzeré, East Region

Within the East region, data was collected from villages in Garoua-Boulai commune (in the Lom-et-Djérem department, where many refugees live on the border with the CAR) and Gado Badzeré refugee camp (located on the outskirts of Garoua-Boulai town, which has a population of some 25,000). According to UNCHR, as of 30 September 2021 there were 28,181 Central African refugees in Gado Badzeré. Over half the population (57%) is under 18, and women and girls represent 53%. Aside from poverty, refugees there face many other problems. UNHCR has found it difficult to continue site registration due to Covid-19, and so a large number of documents recognising people's status as a 'person of concern' to UNHCR have expired. Without valid documents, refugees risk police harassment. Within the camps, forced marriages persist with the complicity of community leaders. There are worries that GBV cases, including those involving children, have not been managed by the communities in accord with the law which has been to the detriment of survivors. Care for people with special needs is lacking.

Minawao, Far North

Over half of all Nigerian refugees live in one large camp, Minawao, established in 2013 on the outskirts of the town of Mokolo, in the department of Mayo-Tsanaga. New arrivals (including over 2,500 since the beginning of 2021) together with natural population growth have brought the total population of the camp to over 67,700 (as of 30 June 2021). The majority (61%) are under 18, and a small majority (54%) is female.

A large population has sprung up around this main camp, including nearly 200,000 IDPs and 20,000 unregistered refugees. Refugees outside Minawao camp face particular difficulties in having their refugee certificates renewed (UNHCR, 2021).

In the nearby village of Zamai there are three camps for IDPs. There is an informal IDP settlement in Tchouvouk, and in Wandai refugees live among the host community.

This study is based on research on the first two displacement crises described above, focusing on the response to the Boko Haram-related Nigerian refugee/IDP influx in the Far North, and the CAR refugee influx in the East Region. It does not explore the more recent IDP crisis in the North-West and South-West regions. The feasibility and desirability of integrating humanitarian assistance with government social protection provision

would obviously be limited given the government's role as a principal party to the conflict that has caused the displacement crisis.

The significant socio-economic differences between the refugee and host populations are relevant to the question of linkages between social protection and humanitarian assistance. Population pyramids (Figure 5) breaking down the population by age and sex clearly show that many males were

missing in the productive ages between 15 and 60 within the refugee population, which also has a greater proportion of children under 15. Nearly half of all CAR refugee households are female-headed, with an average of four children (JAM, 2019). The World Bank (2018) confirms that the dependency ratio for refugees was much higher than for the population as a whole, with far fewer at the most economically productive age. The situation may be changing in the Far North. UNHCR (2015) suggests that the IDP population was broadly comparable to the host population (Figure 6), whereas IOM (2019), which included out-of-camp refugees in the sample, indicates that only 35% in the Far North were between 18 and 60, with women making up 56% of that age range.

Figure 5 Comparisons of host and CAR refugee population profiles by age and sex
Source: WFP (2018: 70)

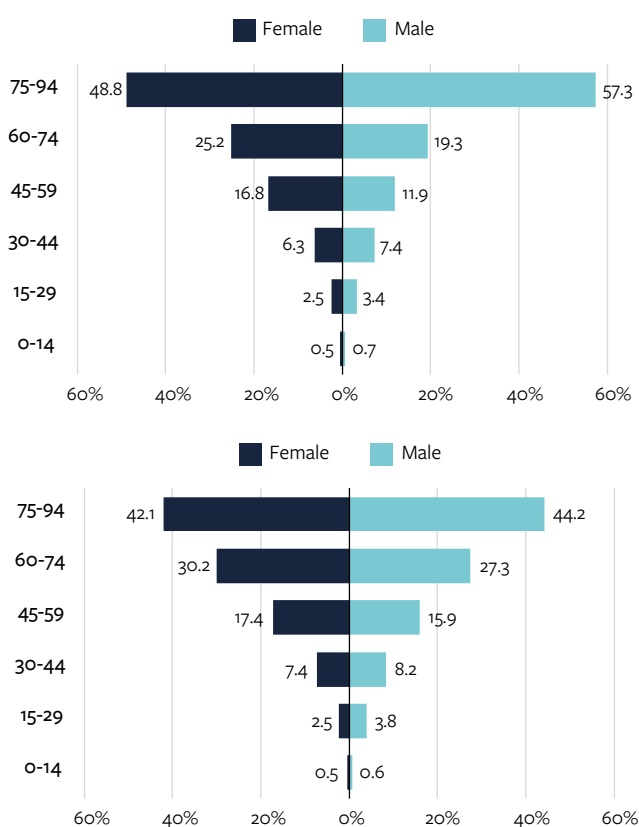
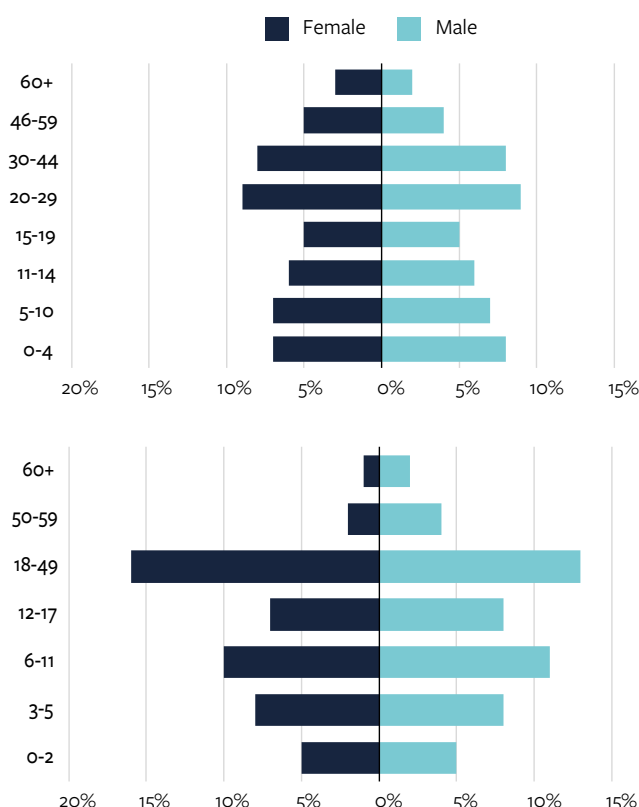


Figure 6 Profile by age and sex of displaced population in Far North: 2015 (IDP only, top) and 2019 (IDP and out-of-camp refugees)



Source: UNHCR 2015 (top) and IOM 2019 (bottom)

2.2.2 State response to displacement

Cameroon is party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, as well as the OAU Convention on the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Under these instruments, recognised refugees are entitled to wide-ranging rights; in relation to social protection, refugees are to receive equal treatment to nationals with respect to public relief and assistance (although the channels of distributing such benefits may differ), as well as generally equal treatment in relation to social security (UNHCR, n.d.).

At the national level, Cameroon has adopted relatively progressive refugee legislation, with the 2005 Refugee Law (officially in effect from 2011) guaranteeing refugees freedom of movement, the right to work and access to healthcare, education, social assistance and social security (GoC, 2005; IRC, 2019). At the 2016 Leaders' Summit on Refugees and Migrants, the government made a number of additional commitments, including to improve refugees' access to education, to strengthen the process of providing ID cards, and to facilitate voluntary returns (IRC, 2019). As part of the process to access financing from the IDA18 Refugee Sub-Window, the government also committed to prepare a medium-term strategy to manage refugees, facilitating greater access to basic social services for displacement-affected populations and improving legal security and the issuance of documentation for refugees (*ibid.*).

In practice, there is a significant divide between laws and stated commitments and policy implementation (IRC, 2019). This in part relates to fragmented institutional arrangements at the central government level: the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT) is the focal ministry for humanitarian affairs and plays a primary role in refugee management in rural areas, but refugee issues such as status determination are managed separately by the Ministry of Foreign Relations (MINREX); identity documents are managed by the President's Directorate of National Security (DGSN), while development-related projects are the domain of MINEPAT, and line ministries typically oversee and coordinate

programmes within their sectors (*ibid.*). The elaboration of a unified social registry for future social protection assistance, which is to include the displaced, is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Welfare (MINAS).

Refugees' lack of access to their rights in practice is also linked to the wider socio-economic environment in refugee-hosting areas, where entrenched deprivation, insecurity and infrastructure gaps limit the opportunities and services available to both displaced and host communities.

To help improve coordination and develop a response that more comprehensively addresses needs in refugee-hosting areas, Cameroon is one of the countries for piloting 'Humanitarian-Development-Peace' (HDP) Nexus activities¹¹ (Development Initiatives, 2020). The HDP Nexus Taskforce found a strategy document written but later 'shelved' by the government (Republic of Cameroon, n.d.), which the taskforce has used to move the HDP Nexus approach forward in the country.¹² The strategy aims to reduce the long-standing socioeconomic marginalisation of the North, Far North, Adamaoua and East regions, and identifies priorities for government reform, including the adoption of a strategy for displaced populations and the revision of communal development plans and the Public Investment Budget to better address the needs of crisis-affected populations. However, the strategy has yet to be endorsed by the President (it has been on hold since 2018), and implementation remains

¹¹ For example, Cameroon was a case country for the IASC's study on financing the nexus, and a pilot country for the UN Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration and the Humanitarian Development Peace Initiative (HDPI), a joint initiative of the UN and World Bank that emerged from a commitment made at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 (Development Initiatives, 2020).

¹² The Recovery and Peace Consolidation Strategy for Northern and East Cameroon 2018-2022 was produced by the Government with technical support from EU, UN and World Bank. Its description as 'shelved' is from a key informant, pers. comm.

uncertain. ‘Nexus’ financing remains challenging; Cameroon’s Humanitarian Response Plans have been among the worst-funded in Africa in recent years, and a very low proportion of developmental ODA to Cameroon goes to crisis-affected regions (ibid.), although this may change given the World Bank’s classification of Cameroon as a fragile and conflict-affected country in 2020 and its increasing focus on providing IDA funding to displacement-affected regions.

While the general refugee-hosting policies and commitments outlined above paint a picture of Cameroon’s refugee response, there are also important distinctions between the treatment and experience of refugees from the CAR and those from Nigeria. The response to each of these distinct refugee populations is briefly outlined below.

CAR refugee response

In relation to the longer-standing CAR refugee influx, the overall policy response has been broadly favourable, particularly in comparison to the Nigerian refugee response in the Far North (IRC, 2019). While the government initially adopted an exceptionally open policy, from 2014 onwards the rapid growth in numbers and increasing strain on resources and host-refugee relations led to some hardening of official attitudes towards refugees’ movements (Barbelet, 2017). Lack of identification documents, limited service provision in host communities, and refugee households’ financial constraints have restricted some of their rights, such as access to education and health services, as well as triggering protection risks (early marriage, exploitation, abuse and physical violence) (JAM, 2019). Although in principle refugees enjoy full freedom of movement, this can be made more difficult by the need to acquire letters of permission or permits for movement, without which they can face harassment from the

police. Registration and renewal of refugee cards has been constrained by Covid-19; people whose cards have expired have suffered much greater restrictions on freedom of movement.

In general, the government has not taken the principal responsibility for providing assistance to CAR refugees at the local level, and has not actively promoted their long-term integration, since official policy has primarily been to promote their voluntary repatriation. Instead, the provision of assistance has been led by international humanitarian agencies (Barbelet, 2017). In some cases, this led to tensions and resentment from local authorities and host communities, given the poor socioeconomic conditions and weak government service provision in refugee-hosting areas (ibid.). As a result, the provision of services such as water, healthcare and education to refugees was increasingly integrated with provision for host communities. However, financing for such activities has been stretched given the demand to respond to urgent new needs arising from the two more recent displacement crises.

Nigerian refugee response

Against the backdrop of the conflict with Boko Haram, the government’s response to the Nigerian refugee influx has been far stricter and more security-oriented than the CAR refugee-hosting policy (IRC, 2019). Public officials (and some of the wider public) have suspicions about ties between refugees (and IDPs) and Boko Haram. Government ‘*refoulement*’ (forced return) operations saw the expulsion of thousands of Nigerian refugees across the border between 2015 and 2017. This has continued, albeit at a somewhat lower rate (ibid.).

Nigerian refugees also face pervasive barriers to formal registration (ibid.), which is a prerequisite for access to services and free movement. Even

where such documentation is issued, their enjoyment of rights and freedoms has been restricted by insecurity, weak service provision and the lack of socio-economic opportunities. The government's ability to provide concrete support has been limited, meaning that international agencies have played an even larger role, including leading on assistance provision (ICG, 2017a).

Internal displacement

In relation to internal displacement, there is no legally binding global instrument conferring on IDPs special status in international law with rights specific to their situation, since IDPs are entitled to enjoy the same rights and freedoms as any other citizens of the country. At the regional level, the rights and freedoms of IDPs are enshrined in the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention), which outlines governments' obligations to provide protection and assistance to IDPs, and to cooperate with international organisations, humanitarian agencies, civil society organisations and other relevant actors where nationally available resources are inadequate to provide this protection and assistance (African Union, 2009). Cameroon acceded to the Kampala Convention in 2015 but has not yet domesticated this into national legislation.¹³

IDP response in the Far North Region

The government's priority in the Far North Region has been to put an end to the Boko Haram insurgency. In this military campaign, international humanitarian law has frequently been violated, with many reports of government security forces committing human rights abuses against civilians, triggering international condemnation (Human Rights Watch, 2021). More broadly, the government's main activities in relation to IDP needs have focused on securing the territory and enabling their return. There is also a political incentive to encourage return, in order to advertise the area as safe and to show that the government is in control of its territory. There has been limited government support to assist IDPs during or on return from displacement, meaning that such assistance – where it has been provided – has primarily come from the international community (ICG, 2017b).

As mentioned, the government response to internal displacement in North-West and South-West regions is beyond the scope of this study.

2.2.3 Humanitarian response to displacement

Humanitarian agencies have been supporting most of the material needs of refugees in the East through direct service delivery (for basic services, water, protection) and food aid/monetary transfers. Very little assistance was given from a

13 Incorporating the Convention into domestic legislation would not necessarily imply a need for IDP-specific legislation, since as citizens IDPs are entitled to the same rights as other persons in the country. However, action may be required to ensure that they can exercise their rights on a full and equal basis with others. Sometimes, domestic law may need amending to cover the situation of IDPs, but the Kampala Convention also requires states to designate an authority to be responsible for coordinating IDP protection and assistance; adopt national and local strategies and policies on internal displacement; provide necessary funds to IDP protection and assistance; and incorporate the Convention principles into negotiations for sustainable solutions to internal displacement (AU, 2009).

development perspective for building economic self-reliance or promoting integration (Barbelet, 2017; OCHA, 2019; 2020; 2021; Development Initiatives, 2020).¹⁴

Pressure to change the ‘direct maintenance’ model has come from two directions. Provision of basic services to the displaced is now increasingly integrated with support for services to local populations, partly in response to a perception by the local population of a lack of fairness, though this also reflects a trend seen in other countries.

The humanitarian response in Cameroon, which is almost entirely a response to displacement, has been one of the least-funded responses internationally.¹⁵ There has been significant donor pressure to reduce the number of refugees being maintained by humanitarian assistance, especially among refugees populations who have been in Cameroon for several years and who have more opportunities for an independent livelihood. Until 2016, all refugees who arrived after 2013 were receiving a full food ration,¹⁶ and 20% of those who arrived pre-2013 were also being assisted (Salti et al., 2018). Since 2016 there have been progressive cuts in the ration size (or, in the case of assistance through vouchers, a cut in the transfer value), but driven by funding shortfalls rather than an assessment of reduced needs (JAM, 2019: 11). There has also been pressure to reduce the number of displaced, or at least the proportion of the displaced, receiving food assistance.¹⁷

It has been difficult to create an open discussion on this. The challenges faced by agencies (including government, donors, UN and other donor agencies) in engaging with questions of need and targeting are instructive and relevant to this study of the potential integration of humanitarian assistance and social protection.¹⁸

A push in 2019 to reassess how far humanitarian assistance was necessary for the vast majority of refugees from CAR concluded that 83% of refugees in the East region were vulnerable to food insecurity and 71% were ‘highly vulnerable’ (JAM, 2019: 35). These figures have raised difficulties for conversations between humanitarian agencies, and in particular for conversations with government, for three reasons.

First, the same assessment found that over half of the host population fell below its threshold for immediate humanitarian transfers. From a government or development perspective, long-standing poverty is not necessarily the same as a need for immediate humanitarian transfers. From that perspective, there is an almost inevitable perception that needs have been exaggerated.

Second, the majority of refugees in East region have some degree of independent livelihood. Over a quarter have access to land for farming, and more than half are engaged in some form of paid work. Livestock holdings of refugees in the East were not what might be expected of people in need

14 Data from OCHA (<https://data.humdata.org/dataset/hrp-projects-cmr>) gives the budget and short description of all projects included in the Humanitarian Response Plan. Although the line between ‘care and maintenance’ and development support is not always clear-cut, analysis of the data by the authors shows that a very small percentage (<5%) of the total assistance requested can be classed as supporting self-reliance.

15 The Humanitarian Response Plan has been less than 50% funded for six out of the past seven years (OCHA, 2021); Cameroon also topped the list for the most neglected humanitarian crises worldwide in both 2019 and 2020 (NRC, 2020).

16 That is, a ration containing 100% of food energy needs, estimated at 2,100 kcal per person per day.

17 Pers comm, two donor KIs.

18 Key informant interviews.

of immediate transfers: ‘old’ refugee households owned on average 20 head of cattle, new refugees living out of camps owned 15 head of cattle, and those living in camps owned four (JAM, 2019: 31). A high degree of confidence in the food security data would be needed to create consensus that the vast majority were highly vulnerable.

The third problem is that this high degree of confidence is lacking, because the information itself is so opaque. Concepts such as ‘high vulnerability to food insecurity’ are not clearly defined (even where they are clearly operationalised). They mean little from an economic/poverty perspective, and not much more from a food security perspective: they give no indication how much income (in money or food) a household needs to meet all its needs or (from a vulnerability perspective) what kind and size of shock would render them unable to meet their needs. Because the determinations of need are based on opaque calculations, other staff in both humanitarian and social protection domains have struggled to find a clear entry point for questions.

In the absence of clear implications if refugee and IDP households do not receive assistance, the overall donor envelope has determined the numbers receiving assistance and the amount of such assistance. The overall envelope has continued to fall, leading to large cuts in humanitarian assistance. Pressure to move away from the ‘direct maintenance’ model, though, has been limited because ‘development’ support for livelihood promotion for the displaced remains so limited.

The current perception is that there is greater interest from humanitarian donors in the Far North compared to the East. There are currently more organisations working in the Far North: there are 77 different NGOs working as partners of UNHCR to deliver services in the East (mainly in the fields of livelihoods and education, though

often working with quite small client populations); alongside WFP and UNHCR itself, there are 99 different NGOs in Far North region working as partner agencies of UNHCR, working mainly on livelihoods and food security, WASH, health, education, protection and shelter. The findings of this study, although not designed to assess relative need, would nevertheless tend to support the view that displaced populations in the Far North – a poorer and more marginalised region even than the East – faced greater difficulties in meeting their basic needs than those in the East.

2.3 State of social protection system

2.3.1 Social protection policy

Social protection in Cameroon in its widest sense is predominantly informal (community- and family-based), with minimal formal (state) provision (Vudinga, 2017). There is no legally enforceable right to social protection (Devereux, 2017). Most people who need assistance (i.e., are living below the poverty line) do not receive anything.

Cameroon produced a first strategy on social protection in 2013 and then developed a more comprehensive social protection policy in 2017 (Republic of Cameroon, 2017). The latter, however, still has not been approved by the government as official policy. Although some progress is being made in implementing this ‘finalised’ policy, there is still a degree of limbo: because the policy is considered finalised, it is not under further discussion; and yet, because it has not been officially approved by the government, it is not being fully implemented much less prioritised. Indeed, in interviews for this study, it was made clear that social protection is not currently a priority for government policy and is unlikely to be so for another decade (discussed further in Section 3.2.2).

Social protection programming in Cameroon is consequently at a very nascent stage, and has historically been highly regressive (World Bank, 2018b). The bulk of social protection expenditure (around 1% of GDP) goes towards civil service pensions, which received over ten times more funding than all social assistance schemes combined in the last Social Protection Expenditure Review (using 2016 data)¹⁹ yet benefits only a small fraction of the population (around 141,000 pensioners in 2016) (ibid.). A contributory system for private sector workers, the National Social Insurance Fund (CNPS by its French acronym), covers only 10% of the working population, excluding the 90% of the workforce who work in the informal sector (ibid.).²⁰ The second prominent category of social protection expenditure has been universal energy and food subsidies, which have also disproportionately benefited richer and urban households (ibid.).

Targeted social assistance has represented only a minor component within Cameroon's small social protection portfolio. Of this budget, 90% was absorbed by health-related benefits and reduced medical fees for vulnerable groups, leaving little other social assistance programming in place for poor and vulnerable households (World Bank, 2018b). Both IDPs and refugees are explicitly listed among the 'priority targets' ('cibles prioritaires') for non-contributory transfers, together with orphans, the elderly, households in chronic poverty and victims of accidents and crises (Republic of Cameroon, 2017: 29).

International partners, particularly UNHCR, UNICEF and the World Bank, are working to increase commitment and provision of social assistance. Recent years have seen the gradual growth of small, targeted assistance schemes, with two initiatives warranting a mention for different reasons.

2.3.2 MINEPAT and the PFS

The main social assistance scheme which is the obvious homologue of humanitarian assistance is the 'Social Safety Nets Project' (*Project Filets Sociaux*, PFS), funded by a \$50 million World Bank loan²¹ and implemented since 2013 by the Ministry of Planning, Programming and Regional Development (MINEPAT) (World Bank, 2013). The project started with two pilots, which have gradually been expanded. Two main schemes have developed. The main vehicle for social assistance is the Ordinary Monetary Transfer (Transfert Monétaire Ordinaire, TMO), which has given unconditional cash transfers of 10,000 FCFA (\$17.50) per month in bi-monthly payments over a two-year period. Payments were recently increased to 15,000 FCFA, or \$26. The second main scheme is Labour Intensive Works (Travaux à Haute Intensité de Main d'Oeuvre, THIMO), a short-term 'cash for work' project, offering up to 60 days per person of paid work at 1,300 FCFA (\$2.25) per day.

TMO follows a 'graduation model', offering accompanying assistance to targeted households to improve their productivity (e.g., training to improve

19 That is, before the World Bank-supported social assistance programme, see below.

20 There have, however, been efforts to extend the contributory pension regime to some informal workers in recent years, reaching around 250,000 own-account workers by 2020 (ILO, 2021).

21 Alongside the various transfers, the overall PFS project grant also includes a component to build system capacity by developing a targeting mechanism for the cash transfer programme, a management information system for the cash transfer and cash for work scheme, and creating a Safety Nets Project Management Unit.

their health, nutrition, education and skills). It also offers an annual lump-sum grant of 80,000 FCFA (\$140), intended for livelihoods investment.

Two additional schemes have been added to PFS. The Emergency (or Urgent) Monetary Transfer (Transfert Monétaire d'Urgence, TMU) offers a more rapid crisis response in areas particularly hit by an influx of the displaced, providing social assistance for 12 months (six payments). A separate Covid-19 Emergency Monetary Transfer (Transfert Monétaire d'Urgence – COVID-19, TMU-C) provides three payments to poor and vulnerable households in urban areas.²² TMU and TMU-C do not include annual grants or additional support.²³

The aim for the initial phase of PFS (2013–2018) was to reach 65,000 'poor and vulnerable' households in the five poorest regions of Cameroon, which include the three main regions hosting refugees (Adamaoua, East, and Far North). Additional funding of \$60 million was provided²⁴ to expand this in 2019, and the plan for the current phase is to reach 200,000 households, which would cover approximately 10% of those living below the poverty line.²⁵ The project is supposed to include refugees in all programme components from 2019. It is difficult to obtain definitive data on coverage for any of the schemes within PFS. Informants at MINEPAT in August 2021 told us that 42,000 households were receiving TMO, 12,000 households were receiving TMU and 21,000 people were working

under THIMO. No breakdown was available of recipients by displacement status. The earlier WB project report (May 2021) reported that 52,000 households were receiving TMO, 22,000 had received TMU, and 40,000 were working under THIMO (Mamadaliyev, 2021).

Targeting for TMO is in three steps. Geographical targeting was used to focus the programme on the five poorest regions, which include the regions hosting refugees (Adamaoua, East, North and Far North), as well as 5,000 urban households in Yaoundé and Douala (World Bank, 2014). Departments and communes where poverty is highest were selected within these. A community-based targeting exercise was then conducted through a Local Citizen Control Group, which drew up a long list of eligible individuals/households, according to pre-set poverty criteria. Final selection was based on what is known as a 'proxy means test' (PMT). Data were collected through a survey of asset holdings and living conditions for those on the long list. A centralised analysis of this data calculates a 'poverty score' for each household, used to select project recipients according to a predetermined quota for each commune.

Although called the 'Social Safety Net Project', it is clear from the description above that the World Bank-supported initiative is not currently a safety net in the true sense of the term. A safety net is protection which can be relied on: an individual

22 Cameroon offered additional social protection in response to Covid-19, including a temporary increase in pension payments of 20%, some temporary waivers for payments for electricity and water and a temporary suspension of fees for mobile money transfers (Devereux, 2021). None of these provisions is relevant to the host and displaced communities in this study.

23 See World Bank 2018a and 2018d for further details of the projects.

24 Half in the form of a grant under the IDA18 Refugee Sub-window, and half in the form of a loan from the country's IDA18 national allocation.

25 This figure is estimated based on the World Bank's data on the size of the population (26.5 million people in 2020) and the latest available calculation of the national poverty rate (37.5%, as of 2014).

knows that they can act *in the knowledge that, if they fall, they will be caught and protected*. A short-term cash transfer or public works programme to a limited number of households does not provide this guarantee. Although it may be effective in helping to reduce extreme poverty, and it may be an important element of social protection more broadly, it is not an entitlement and cannot be relied on in time of need. Provision of support through PFS can be described as a social protection *programme*, but not a social protection *system*. This is not simply a comment on its current limited coverage. Even as it expands, it remains a project, and does not fill the social protection system void. This is not a criticism of the programme as a poverty reduction instrument, but the distinction between a programme and a system is a critical limitation in the context of this study. If one is looking for greater coherence between social protection provision and humanitarian assistance to displaced populations in need, there is a major difference between talking about the coordination of projects and about the integration of systems, for which a key starting point is the existence of a true safety net, a system of social protection. The other key starting point is a proper system for humanitarian assistance.

2.3.3 MINAS, social centres and the Unified Social Registry

The Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) runs a network of ‘social centres’ (*centres sociaux*) in each commune, through which it offers various kinds of support to individuals identified as particularly vulnerable, in particular the elderly and those with disabilities. Resources are far too limited for this coverage to be anything close to systematic, and the support actually offered

can depend on whether MINAS secured donor support for a particular project – to provide wheelchairs to people with disabilities, for instance. Implementation capacity was described as weak by informants.

MINAS, supported by UNICEF, is currently piloting what it calls a *registre social unifié* or unified social registry (USR), which would identify vulnerable individuals in each administrative area. Although no official policy exists to define vulnerability or the criteria for inclusion on the social registry, a recent operational decision has been made to include displaced people on the registry (in accordance with their prioritisation in the National Social Protection Policy). No policy yet exists on exactly how the USR will be used, or what entitlements may flow from inclusion in the USR.²⁶ It is not clear how or whether the USR will link to entitlement to PFS (which has been developing a Management Information System of its own, to manage transfers to recipients of the regular cash transfer, emergency cash transfer and cash for work scheme). Any discussion on this is hampered by an institutional disconnect, because PFS is entirely managed by MINEPAT with no institutional connection to MINAS. The potential for USR and PFS to be closely connected is further constrained by a lack of thematic links between them. USR follows the perspective of MINAS (and possibly also of the UN agency supporting MINAS, UNICEF) in being based on a notion of *vulnerability*. PFS, supported by the World Bank, is based on notions of *poverty*.

According to several of our interviewees, MINAS is regarded as somewhat marginalised from power and budgetary allocations, even in the domain of social assistance.

26 This is based on interviews for this study.

2.4 De facto access of the displaced to social protection and humanitarian assistance

This section presents an overview of the access of displaced people to humanitarian transfers (of food and money) and to social protection, looking in particular at targeting policies.

Displaced people in the Far North and the East could be getting one of the following three forms of assistance, or none at all:²⁷

1. Humanitarian transfers, given as in-kind food aid, vouchers or cash, from WFP or other humanitarian organisations.
2. Monetary assistance as social protection, through one of the PFS schemes (TMO, TMU, THIMO).
3. Assistance from UNHCR's Transitional Safety Net (TSN), a pilot project aligned with TMO social protection in transfer values and duration. This has been available only to refugees (and their hosts), but not to IDPs.

Of these, humanitarian transfers are the dominant aid vehicle for both refugees and IDPs.

An overview of the main assistance available is summarised in Table 3.

2.4.1 Access to humanitarian transfers

Since the vast majority of such transfers are from WFP, this can serve as a description of the assistance generally received by the displaced. Of

the approximately 450,000 refugees currently in Cameroon, the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) targeted 185,000 to receive emergency transfers, i.e. around 40% of the total refugee population. WFP informants told us that it was offering transfers, which it calls 'food assistance', to 120,000 refugees from CAR and to 128,000 displaced in the Far North.²⁸ The displaced figures in the Far North were not disaggregated into refugees and IDPs, but from the overall figures, it would appear that recipients include 65,000 refugees and 63,000 IDPs. This would represent around 57% and 20% of these populations respectively.²⁹

Targeting and eligibility criteria by which refugees and IDPs access humanitarian assistance remain opaque. Despite months of investigation and repeated requests for information, this study was unable to achieve any clarity on the assistance being given to different displaced populations, including eligibility criteria. Information was regarded as 'too sensitive' to be shared.

As discussed in Section 2.2.3, these emergency transfers from WFP have been progressively reduced for refugees since 2016. Until 2016, refugees were receiving a full ration of food aid, meaning a monthly ration of food containing 2,100 kcal per person per day. Rations were cut first to 80%, then 70% and since 2020 to around 50% (from the information available). Where assistance is given as vouchers or cash, the transfers were initially 8,800 FCFA (\$16) per person per month, but this was cut in 2020 to 4,400 FCFA (\$8). Coverage has also narrowed over the years. Since

²⁷ Other forms of assistance in sectors such as water, education and health are beyond the scope of this report.

²⁸ WFP has replaced the term 'food aid' with 'food assistance', to include transfers given in money or vouchers as well as those given in-kind (as food). Although cash transfers can be spent however recipients like, they still come under the overarching term 'food assistance'.

²⁹ Figures given by WFP are presumably rounded, hence the rounding of other figures.

Table 3 Summary of assistance types and their availability in areas hosting displaced people

Financed by	State	State	Donors	World Bank/ state				UNHCR	Variety of donors
Type	Contributory social protection		Social centres (MINAS)	Social Safety Nets Project (PFS)				Transitional Safety Net (TSN)	Humanitarian transfers
Project, component	Civil service pensions, CNPS pensions	Energy subsidies	Various ad hoc projects	TMO main (‘ordinary’) social assistance transfer	TMU ‘urgent’ transfer, for areas with displacement emergency	TMU-C Covid-19- related emergency payments	THIMO Cash for work	TSN Monthly money transfer	WFP ‘food assistance’; various other (smaller scale)
Targeting	Contribution- based	Urban	Targeted at ‘vulnerable’ – elderly, orphans, people with disabilities	Poverty targeting	Poverty targeting	Poverty targeting	Poverty targeting	Targeted at less vulnerable and poverty targeting	‘Vulnerability’ targeting
Transfer	N/A		Small and ad hoc assistance (e.g. wheelchairs)	\$440 p.a. for 2 years + additional support	\$300 p.a. for 1 year	\$150 over 6 months	\$130 total - \$2.20 per day x 60 days	\$410 p.a. for 2 years	\$90 p.a. per person, as voucher or food aid (WFP)
Coverage (displacement- related)	Almost entirely absent for both hosts and IDPs Entirely absent for refugees	Almost entirely absent for both hosts and displaced	Very patchy coverage Not targeted at displaced	42,000 recipients. [2,100 displaced] No targeting in camps.	12,000 recipients [1,300 displaced]	Not implemented in displaced- hosting rural areas	21,000 recipients [2,900 displaced] Some exclusion of IDPs in camps	Refugees and host population 70%/30% 10,000 households (only in East and North regions)	>120,000 refugees from CAR; >128,000 displaced in FN (c. 206,000 as food aid). Mainly refugees, some IDPs. (Additionally, 412,000 IDPs in NW/SW)

Note: Numbers receiving PFS as given by MINEPAT in August 2021. Figures for displaced (in italics and square brackets) are from WB. All figures are rounded. Figures will be higher by time of publication. Transfer values are approximate equivalent in USD in 2021. See text for further details, including values in local currency.

2018, only 20% of refugees who arrived from CAR before 2013 have been receiving food assistance (Salti et al., 2018: 3).

2.4.2 Access to social protection

Since 2019, official policy has been to include refugees and IDPs in PFS, but in practice they have rarely been recipients, particularly those in camps. MINEPAT told us that they had not collected data disaggregating PFS recipients by their displacement status, so they had no way of knowing how many refugees or IDPs have received PFS.

Additional Financing from the World Bank for the PFS expansion from 2019–2022 was designed to ensure refugees' inclusion in all programme components (Mamadaliyev, 2021). According to the latest project report, with figures from May 2021 (*ibid.*), 2,099 refugee households were among the 52,000 households receiving regular cash transfers (TMO), though no refugee households were yet benefiting from the accompanying measures to boost household productivity. There were 1,331 refugee households among the 22,000 households receiving emergency cash transfers (TMU), and 2,931 of the 40,000 participating in the cash for work (THIMO) programme were refugees. Disaggregated figures for IDP households are not available, although in principle they are meant to be included in these three programmes. (TMU-C is focused on urban areas in response to Covid-19 and is not targeted at areas with displaced populations; it is not relevant to this study.)

In our survey sample (taken a few months before the data presented above from Mamadaliyev, 2021), hardly any refugees (<1%) and IDPs (2%) were receiving TMO or TMU (the component targeted at areas with high numbers of displaced), though more said that they had applied or tried to get

access to the scheme. Among IDPs and refugees, 1% and 3% respectively reported working on THIMO. To put this in context, these numbers are similar to those for the host population. This situation may have changed since the fieldwork was conducted in early 2021, as the second phase of PFS has been gradually extended, specifically aiming to include refugees and to target communes with a high refugee influx.

The cash for work scheme (THIMO) does not exclude IDPs, but, according to key informants, their low participation figures among the survey sample is because THIMO had not been extended to IDPs living in camps. This policy may be unofficial and is 'because they are receiving international assistance instead', and, as is common in many such situations, there is a strong concern to avoid what is known as 'double-dipping', where a recipient household benefits from more than one source of assistance. An additional and related problem raised by some IDPs was that, after working for one month on THIMO, they were never paid, and were informed that they should not have been eligible, apparently due to the presumption that they were the responsibility of humanitarian agencies and to avoid double-dipping. It was not possible to investigate or verify this claim. It is unclear at what level this policy of excluding IDPs originates. The presumption that humanitarian actors take care of IDPs may be a national one; if this does not reflect national policy, it is possible that local officials were unaware of national social protection policies. Either could be a significant obstacle to the integration of humanitarian assistance and social protection.

As mentioned above, MINAS is to include both refugees and IDPs in the new USR in Cameroon. It is unclear whether all displaced will be included, or just the vulnerable among the displaced. At

a policy level the inclusion of both IDPs and refugees constitutes two distinct and extremely important developments, but it is not relevant as a mechanism for receiving assistance.

2.4.3 Access to TSN

UNHCR's Transitional Safety Net (TSN) is a pilot project, intended to be a parallel source of social protection-type assistance specifically for refugees (and their hosts), and as a transition for refugees to move from receiving humanitarian assistance to social protection. It is thus something of a half-way house between social protection and humanitarian assistance.

So far, the pilot has been implemented with a small geographic scope, in 2020 covering 10,000 households of CAR refugees (in East and North regions). Transfer values are in line with the TMO social protection programme – 15,000 FCFA (\$26) per month (paid bi-monthly). Recipients also receive an additional annual lump sum payment, but because of resource constraints the annual lump sum is 60,000 FCFA (\$105), slightly less than TMO. TSN is paid through mobile money.

UNHCR and WFP are coordinating to ensure that refugee households do not receive assistance from both organisations ('double-dipping'). WFP is targeting those more in need, in line with its usual targeting in Cameroon, and TSN is intended for refugees who are less in need and who would not be eligible for assistance from WFP. However, since 98.5% of refugees were estimated to be below the national poverty line and over 90% were estimated to be unable to afford a minimum expenditure basket (set at 40% of the national poverty line), all recipients of TSN would be considered poor by any standard (UNHCR, 2019).³⁰

2.4.4 Access to livelihood support

Apart from assistance through transfers, some displaced people receive livelihood support (e.g., tools, agricultural training and establishing communal gardens) from a variety of humanitarian organisations, with 27,000 households targeted in the in HRP 2019. This is almost certainly dwarfed in importance by informal livelihood support – i.e., not from humanitarian agencies or through state social protection, though this remains unquantified. It most often takes the form of access to land, which may be granted by individuals or through local structures, or support with housing and help to find work. Such support is beyond the scope of this report, but it should be recognised as hugely important in the lives of many people in need, particularly for the displaced.

Some informants complained that it was only possible to receive one form of assistance, so receiving humanitarian transfers or food assistance made them ineligible for any livelihood support that would help them in the longer term. This reflects a common humanitarian mindset that livelihood support is somehow more appropriate for people who are not in a crisis situation or who are currently less in need.

No published information was available on the outcomes of the assistance or on the expected outcomes, such as the degree to which households were expected to be self-reliant on a sustainable basis after receiving support. This makes it more difficult to plan for the provision of support for self-reliance and of ongoing transfers to meet basic needs ('food assistance') within a single coherent strategy.

30 The national poverty line was 27,832 FCFA; the MEB was 11,733 FCFA.

3 The current integration profile of social protection and humanitarian assistance

In this section, we use the analytical framework presented in Section 1 (see Figure 1) to analyse the integration profile of social protection and humanitarian assistance, looking in turn at each of the potential connection points between the two systems (Section 3.1). We then explore the drivers of the status quo and the potential interests in changing that status quo, first from the perspective of the humanitarian sector and then from the perspective of actors involved in state social protection (Section 3.2).

3.1 What is the current state of integration?

A comprehensive social protection system includes a wide range of protections, including social insurance (contributory pensions, sick pay, etc.), employment protections (minimum wage, right to maternity leave), labour market programmes (vocational training, job counselling) and a variety of social assistance (non-contributory) payments (child benefit payments, benefits for those with disabilities, food price subsidies and payments to those in particular economic need). Regarding linkages between social protection and assistance to the displaced in Cameroon, issues arise mainly in relation to social assistance and specifically PFS (TMO, TMU and THIMO), because these are the only forms of social protection transfers being received in any significant way by the populations in the areas studied. (Because all the other forms of social protection are substantially lacking for these populations, the term social protection is used in the rest of this section to refer to social assistance from the state, which is principally the PFS.)

The vast majority of humanitarian assistance to displaced people in Cameroon is given without any integration, alignment or even coordination with state social protection. Indeed, with the exception of TSN, humanitarian assistance remains entirely separated from social protection at all of the connection points identified in Figure 1, as detailed below. No instances could be found where different aid schemes took advantage of each other's mechanisms through 'piggy-backing'.

It should be stressed that the lack of integration does not imply a criticism, or that it is necessarily a failure to align or integrate. Section 6 will look at the question of how far the lack of connection is a situation that should be changed.

Financing: Humanitarian assistance to the displaced is financed by international donors through international agencies, predominantly the UN. This financing does not pass through the government budget. Social protection is also largely funded by international donors but is funded through the government budget. There is generally no coordination between the two financing streams.

World Bank funding to PFS goes through the government, but even though it includes provision for refugees and IDPs, there is no coordination with humanitarian resource flows. UNHCR's TSN may aim to 'pave the way for donors to shift from funding external actors to deliver humanitarian aid to providing direct support to the Cameroonian government to assist refugees' (UNHCR, 2019)

– i.e. eventually through the PFS – but TSN is currently financed by international donors through UNHCR, not the government.

Legal and policy framework: There is no legal or (state) policy framework that governs emergency assistance to the displaced. The legal and policy framework governing social protection is unclear since, as discussed above, the national policy finalised in 2017 has yet to be ratified as government policy. As mentioned, the National Social Protection Policy lists both IDPs and refugees as priority targets for social assistance, offering a potential opening for a future linkages. However, at an operational level, coordination is lacking between humanitarian relief and any such prioritisation, beyond the apparent *de facto* policy to exclude IDPs from PFS because they are being supported by humanitarian agencies. This, possibly unofficial, policy has been taken unilaterally by state institutions and without coordination with humanitarian agencies.

The inclusion of refugees and IDPs in the USR may offer an opportunity for the integration of assistance to the displaced into social protection. However, USR has not yet been established, and its future connection to social assistance and PFS is very unclear, since it is managed by a different ministry, based on different criteria of eligibility, and responds to a different set of policy objectives.

Governance and coordination: Both humanitarian and government informants agreed that coordination is extremely weak. The government exerts little governance or coordination of humanitarian assistance for the displaced. It is largely absent from humanitarian coordination structures, and government officials said they meet ‘rarely and irregularly’ with humanitarian actors. Ministry staff do not

appear to know the details of how decisions about humanitarian assistance (coverage, transfer values, eligibility) are taken, and they express a degree of mistrust about the data provided by humanitarian agencies, in particular believing the reported prevalence of, and degree of, vulnerability among the displaced to be exaggerated (see Section 2.2.3).

Part of the problem lies in a lack of coordination within the government itself. In principle, refugee policy is decided by MINREX (the Ministry for Foreign Relations); emergency assistance, including to the displaced, is managed by the Direction de la Protection Civile in MINAT (Ministry of Territorial Administration; and PFS sits in MINEPAT (Ministry of Planning, Programming and Regional Development). There is also a problem of coordination in the social protection sector. Key informants from the two main actors in PFS, the World Bank and MINEPAT, gave different information about the programme, such as about its implementation status and the disaggregated number of recipients. However, the lack of coordination within social protection in Cameroon is most starkly illustrated by the fact that PFS is not managed by the Ministry of Social Welfare (MINAS) but by MINEPAT. One justification offered (by key informants) was that MINEPAT has a far greater operational capacity at national level. Another explanation offered was competition between ministries for resources. Since the Ministry of Planning is a gatekeeper to the resource allocation process, there were strong incentives to maintain control of the large sums of money which the management of PFS brings.

Governance and coordination are also relatively weak in the humanitarian sector, in the sense of the governance of the humanitarian response as a whole. Although OCHA is responsible for coordinating an overall Humanitarian Response

Plan, what is actually implemented is largely determined by the individual power of each operational agency to command resources. In recent years there have been improvements in the coordination of humanitarian cash transfers through national-level Cash Working Groups, but the Cash Working Group in Cameroon, as elsewhere, is a forum for coordination and technical sharing. It is not meant to be an instrument of governance or to have control over any of its members, and government social protection agencies often are not active members.

Programme design

Objectives: TMO is a graduation-type project giving assistance for a limited period to help households exit poverty. TMU is a shorter-term programme for helping meet emergency needs. Humanitarian transfers have the objective of helping households meet their basic needs, for as long as such needs exist.

Eligibility criteria/targeting: There is no connection between the basis for determining eligibility to PFS and the basis for determining eligibility to humanitarian transfers. It is not simply that the eligibility criteria are not the same: simple differences in thresholds, for example, could in principle be adjusted to achieve alignment. However, there is no connection either in the conceptualisation of need or in the principles of eligibility.

The targeting of humanitarian food assistance in Cameroon is currently based on ‘vulnerability to food insecurity’ determined by indicators such as reported difficulties in accessing enough food at

the time of the assessment (see Section 2.3.3).³¹ The underlying principle is that all households in urgent need should receive assistance. PFS, on the other hand, is targeted on the basis of asset poverty (PMT, see Section 2.2). The operational principle is that a quota is set for each administrative unit, and those with the lowest PMT score up to that quota will receive benefits.

The determination of need and eligibility in the two systems is likely to present a fundamental constraint to greater harmonisation, unless one or both of the systems has a fundamental rethink about its objectives, overall strategy and its role in supporting populations in need. It is likely that, in most cases, the criteria for eligibility for humanitarian assistance results in a selection of households which is different from the selection that would be made by PFS, and vice versa. Currently, it is impossible to know how different the results of the selection on the two systems would be. However, even if by chance the degree of food insecurity and asset holdings of recipients of PFS and humanitarian transfers happened to be the same in some places, that doesn’t make alignment or coordination any more likely, or even possible.

Targeting of the TSN project is also unrelated to the targeting of PFS, except in relation to the geographic areas covered by the pilot scheme (UNHCR, 2019). TSN is coordinated with WFP food assistance with the intention that more ‘vulnerable’ households receive normal WFP assistance, while the TSN transfer goes to less vulnerable displaced households. How vulnerability has been defined and operationalised

31 JAM (2019) for example operationalises ‘high vulnerability’ by reference to Food Consumption Score (a WFP indicator based on how many food groups and how often a household reports having eaten in the previous period); a Coping Strategies Index, based on how often the household says it has had to skip meals, reduce portions, etc.; and reported household expenditure.

in practice is unclear. TSN is also targeted at the host population. However, the number of recipient households from the displaced and host populations is set by quota (70% displaced, 30% hosts) and not by common eligibility criteria.³² It is almost impossible that the quota share between displaced and hosts would happen to coincide with the same level of poverty across the two population groups, and thus with any similarity in entry-level thresholds.

Refugees were excluded from the Fifth National Household Survey undertaken in 2021.³³ In the absence of any studies assessing the monetary poverty of refugees, IDPs and the local population, it is impossible to know how different the entry-level thresholds are.

The decision to include the displaced in the nascent USR offers a significant opportunity for integrating displaced people into the overall social protection thinking of the state. Although this has reportedly been taken as an operational decision, it is still unclear at what level any policy decision has been taken, and how secure this decision is. UNICEF wants to use the USR as an entry point for improving cooperation between the humanitarian sector and social protection, or, as one informant described it, ‘trying to sell USR as a tangible case of what nexus is about’. However, only when it becomes clear how USR will be used in targeting social assistance will the next set of policy questions be addressed, relating to how social protection benefits might be extended to displaced people.

Transfer design – value: Generally, transfer values have been very different in the two systems, with much higher levels of aid being given by humanitarian agencies. This partly reflects the different objectives of the two systems (see above). However, the disparity has reduced in the past two years, as PFS transfers have increased by 50% and humanitarian transfers have been cut by 50%.

TMO transfers are currently set at 15,000 FCFA (\$27) per household per month, regardless of household size, with two annual payments of 80,000 FCFA (\$142). Until 2016, WFP transfer recipients were receiving a full food ration, then reduced to a 70% ration, or 8,800 FCFA (\$16) per person per month. Levels of humanitarian assistance are proportionate to the number of individuals in the household. In 2020, the transfer was cut to 4,400 FCFA (\$8) per person per month.

TSN was designed to align with TMO in the level and duration of assistance received. Households receive the same 15,000 FCFA per month (regardless of household size). However, because of financial constraints the annual lump-sum is slightly lower than TMO, at 60,000 FCFA (\$106).

The rationale for the alignment is that humanitarian assistance should not be considered a long-term mechanism. The ‘exit strategy’ should be for refugees to be assisted instead through PFS – where needed, and until they ‘graduate’ from such assistance. The argument for aligning transfer values is that refugees should not therefore become accustomed to support that will not be sustained. As discussed above, the objectives of TSN are similar to those of TMO: to

32 UNHCR (2019), the project document, does not mention that hosts are to be included in TSN, though a KI described how their inclusion takes place.

33 The ‘*Cinquième Enquête Camerounaise Auprès des Ménages*’ (<http://slmp-550-104.slc.westdc.net/~stat54/nada/index.php/catalog/167>).

help refugee households to move out of poverty, including by using the annual lump-sum transfers to invest in longer-term livelihoods. This contrasts with WFP's objectives, linked to its targeting of those most in need of food assistance, which are rather to sustain households by providing for their basic needs.

Implementation (outreach, registration, enrolment)

Payment (modality): Until last year, social protection and humanitarian agencies used very different transfer modalities and mechanisms. PFS paid people in cash (i.e., banknotes) every two months through micro-finance organisations. This has involved some degree of trouble and expense for recipients who had to travel to pick up their money. Humanitarian transfers have been given in a variety of ways. The vast majority is given in-kind, with WFP using direct food distributions for 83% of its recipient caseload. Of the remaining 17%, roughly half receive cash through Western Union, and the rest receive an e-voucher by mobile phone. Vouchers can only be redeemed for a restricted list of commodities and at a restricted number of approved suppliers. According to the displaced people interviewed, only vouchers and not Western Union transfers were being used in the study sites, but we were unable to obtain information about where different modalities were being used. TSN and some other humanitarian agencies use mobile phones to transfer money, redeemable as cash.

PFS assistance may move to mobile phone transfers or mobile bank accounts, which have been used in a limited way for emergency Covid-19 transfers (TMU-C). This is widely recognised as being preferred by recipients and

cost-effective, but we were informed that the widespread adoption of mobile transfers had been constrained by regulations of the Central Bank of the regional currency, FCFA (the *Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest*, BCEAO). These are beyond the control of the national Cameroon government.³⁴

Other: There are no institutional connections for any operational matters such as outreach, registration, enrolment, case management, complaints and appeals, M&E or information management.

3.2 What factors and processes led to the current integration profile?

Parallel systems for assisting the poor/vulnerable through social protection and the displaced through humanitarian aid were not the outcome of a conscious design process. It was rather a default setting, and the inevitable outcome when a variety of actors each pursued their own agendas. Rather than looking for the factors which led to such lack of coordination, the status quo may be better thought of as the outcome of a *lack of factors* which would be needed to impose order. Forces for ensuring coherence or coordination are weak on both sides – in government and the state apparatus on the one hand, and in the international humanitarian system on the other. This becomes clear the moment one moves away from an idealised analysis, and instead incorporates an actor-oriented analysis, which aims to understand how a status quo is maintained by looking at the priorities and interests of the various stakeholders involved.

34 The regulations were modified during the pandemic to reduce virus transmission by enabling greater use of digital payments – see BCEAO, 2020.

3.2.1 The humanitarian system and the lack of harmonisation

Lack of coordination – with state systems, with development interventions and even internally among humanitarian actors – is the default outcome for humanitarian aid because of the characteristics of its architecture, its perceived mandate and its working culture (Safarpour et al., 2020; Balcik et al., 2010; Moshtari and Gonçalves, 2011; Parmar et al., 2007; Subbaro et al., 2010; Levine and Sharp, 2015; Schiffling et al., 2020; Idris, 2017; and many more). In principle, international humanitarian aid or emergency relief exists where international donors see urgent needs which a state is proving unable to meet, and usually (but not always) in response to that state requesting assistance. Although in most cases, such assistance should be designed as support for the state's own efforts, this is not always the case.³⁵ The presence of humanitarian assistance is often an indicator of the state's inability or unwillingness to deal with the problem, which has perhaps led humanitarian agencies to feel that they are always filling a vacuum, and one where the urgency and importance of their humanitarian mission overrides any benefits from trying to deal with an ineffective state or even with a government that is hostile to humanitarian principles.

Globally, the humanitarian architecture is based on a difficult combination of inter-agency collaboration together with competition for resources from donors (Idris, 2017; Schiffling et al., 2020; Levine and Sharp, 2015). No individual organisation has responsibility for a crisis as a whole, since that responsibility lies with the government of the affected state. Each donor

can decide for itself what it wishes to fund (even if some donors do frequently share analysis and some degree of coordination). Implementing agencies are in competition for resources and may choose to develop those initiatives which are best capable of attracting resources, rather than those which would be most beneficial to affected people. This makes it almost impossible to develop a comprehensive and coherent humanitarian action plan.

Since those same agencies are in large part gatekeepers to the knowledge of what is actually happening on the ground (i.e., situation reports, needs assessments, etc., which are largely undertaken by organisations with vested interests), the results are often fragmentation of action, lack of coordination and even unwillingness to share data which could be useful to a competitor. In such a context, it is perhaps surprising how much cooperation and collaboration does exist (e.g., through agencies who come together in the Cash Working Group, though this is only for a degree of coordination *within* the humanitarian sector), rather than that such cooperation and collaboration is limited. The research team for this study tried for over a year to obtain basic information about the numbers of displaced people being assisted and the criteria used to determine their eligibility for assistance. The fact that such information was felt to be 'too sensitive to be shared' (see earlier) is an example of just how far cooperation and collaboration are currently limited.

Funding of humanitarian aid depends on individual donor decision-making, much of which is specifically linked to individual projects. The

35 The principled case for a distinct and neutral or impartial humanitarian response comes where the state is a party to a conflict. This situation does not arise in our case studies, though it may be relevant to humanitarian response in North West and South West Regions in Cameroon.

architecture globally makes it difficult in any country to achieve coherence in setting eligibility criteria or transfer values, let alone achieving coordination with state social protection. Such coherence would involve the amount of assistance given, and thus the overall budgetary envelope, being determined by the scale of needs. In practice, the total resources available depend upon decisions of individual donors, which determines the amount of assistance given year by year. For example, the huge cut in assistance to refugees over the past years may have been justified on grounds of need, but the cause was simply the lack of resources available to WFP.

No one actor within the humanitarian system has the power to impose coordination or a common strategy. Only the government of the state concerned could do so, but emergency relief has tended to operate in countries where the government is either unable or unwilling to take responsibility for a crisis and to impose a strategy or coordination. This situation is changing in many countries, but there are no signs that it has changed in Cameroon (see below).

In the absence of enforced coordination, humanitarian actors have no great incentives to see a move from humanitarian assistance to state social protection.³⁶ Even if they accept that such integration is theoretically desirable, there is little trust in the state, and the recent ‘Covidgate’ scandal has only reinforced this mistrust. This has been seen by the reaction to the government arranging a rapid inquiry to finalise a new IMF loan: the IMF then rejected this as closure, and

demanding a full external audit, with Human Rights Watch calling on the IMF not to advance a new loan to the government without proper safeguards (Africa Report, 2021; HRW, 2021). Such mistrust towards how the state manages and disburses resources was in part echoed by the Cameroonian population in the East and Far North (see below). Although humanitarian agencies are more positive about wider government policy towards the displaced in the East and Far North than they are about its implementation capacity and transparency, they also believe that they are better guarantors of humanitarian principles and of the interests of the displaced than is the government of Cameroon.

The business interests of humanitarian agencies are also not served by greater integration with state social protection.³⁷ Although humanitarian agencies could still play useful roles in technical assistance to the displaced through social protection, funding models for operational agencies are often linked to the volume of funds which pass through them. For as long as international donors make funds available for humanitarian assistance, they have little incentive to change the status quo.

3.2.2 The government of Cameroon and the lack of linkages

The limited ability and willingness of the government of Cameroon to take responsibility for the situation of the displaced, in particular for refugees, has several roots.

³⁶ See EU (2019) for a rare explicit recognition of the vested interests of humanitarian agencies in shaping how aid is organised.

³⁷ It is rare to find an explicit recognition that humanitarian agencies have ‘business interests’, except where the discussion is of the business interests of donor countries (e.g., El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., 2016, relating to China’s use of aid to advance its business interests). See Steets et al. (2016) for an analysis of self-interest in the humanitarian system.

Cameroon has been a generous host of refugees for many years. Most feel relatively safe and welcome (as the study's primary research attests) and have enjoyed the right to work and a degree of free movement. However, central government increasingly shows a desire for refugees to return home as soon as possible. As with most refugee-hosting countries, it neither wants to see their long-term future in Cameroon nor attract more refugees into the country. The increasing tendency to see displacement through a security lens is adding to this (in Cameroon as elsewhere).

Although global actors may have an interest in pushing for the states hosting refugees to take responsibility for their well-being and to invest in their development, it is far from obvious what incentives the Cameroon government has to do so. For a variety of reasons, the government is already struggling to invest adequately in the development of its own citizens in the very same refugee-hosting regions. There is little to be won politically in encouraging the permanent settlement of foreign citizens, particularly where this is believed to encourage further population movements to the country. The government's main action in this regard has been to incorporate some refugees into PFS-TMO, in particular by targeting PFS-TMO on areas with displaced populations. However, here there was a clearly identifiable interest. IDA18 funding for that programme, targeted mainly at Cameroonian citizens, included as a condition the inclusion of the displaced among the recipients.

When looking at incentives, it is sometimes helpful to think in terms of ministries (plural) rather than government (singular). MINEPAT has a clear incentive to include the displaced among the recipients of PFS, because the same ministry is receiving that funding for which this is a conditionality. However, this funding would

only have a minor role, if any, in incentivising any other ministry to change its policy or practice towards refugees. Similarly, the IDP policy of some ministries is either seen through a security lens or is pushing them to return to demonstrate that the situation is normal (and that the government is in control). The incentive from PFS funding for MINEPAT to adopt a different approach will have limited impact in changing that.

Social protection is currently not a political priority for the government. As noted in Section 2.2, the (draft) National Social Protection Policy was completed in 2017 but has not been fully ratified by the government and thus remains in partial limbo in the Prime Minister's Office. Cameroon's overall development vision, Horizon 2035, sets out three phases. The first (2010–2019) focused on economic growth; the second, and current, phase (2020 to 2030) is geared towards ensuring that economic growth is more broad-based; senior informants in the civil service told us that social protection does not become a political priority until phase 3, from 2031 to 2035.

Given its low priority for government, it is perhaps not surprising that internal coordination is weak within the social protection domain in Cameroon. Cameroon does not have what could be called a social protection system, but rather a series of ad hoc social protection projects or initiatives, with little that unites them either conceptually or institutionally. In the absence of a strong political lead on social protection from the top of government, civil servants at the different ministries have little incentive to promote a coherent social protection system that would go beyond their own ministry's mandate or interest. Competition between individual ministries, and its role in hampering coordination and cooperation, has already been discussed.

It is tempting to think that everyone working in governments and state bureaucracies always has an interest in making their systems more coherent and efficient, but this would be unrealistic. Apart from the institutional disincentives to coherence discussed above, the system incentives for individuals also play a role. Civil service salaries in Cameroon are very low: as in many other countries, civil servants rely heavily on non-salary remuneration to survive. An important element of this is the additional allowances which are paid for non-routine activities in various initiatives, such as through per diems or frais de mission. Key informants have argued that employees at all levels benefit individually from fragmentation and complication, rather than having an incentive to simplify processes and increase efficiency.

Summary: there are two broad reasons for the lack of linkages between assistance to the displaced and social protection. On one hand, an actor-oriented analysis shows that most of the stakeholders involved, both on the government side and among humanitarian actors, have interests which would not be advanced by the creation of a more coherent, unified assistance system. Second, there is a large void in social protection in Cameroon, with very little provision or coverage. What does exist cannot be considered a *system*, and there is currently no great political will to create one. It's difficult to think of integration between two systems when one of the assistance systems does not exist and the other is itself fragmented.

As a result, it is not (currently) possible to achieve a coherent system for providing assistance through linkages between, or integration of, *systems*. Instead, attention turns from objectives to outputs or *projects*. Where creating linkages should be a means to achieve coherence, it instead becomes an objective in itself – but only the

alignment of projects, not coherence between systems. Efforts are invested in pseudo-linkages, in creating something that looks like connection – e.g., by mirroring the design of social protection in the design of assistance to the displaced – as if making transfer values or payment schedules the same was removing a serious blockage to creating a more coherent, integrated assistance system.

4 Outcomes of integration profile for affected communities

As discussed in Section 3, there has been almost no connection between assistance to displaced people from humanitarian agencies and social protection assistance from the state. It is not possible for us to directly analyse the effect of the integration profile on outcomes for affected communities, because there are no direct comparisons regarding the displaced that can be made – the TSN pilot from UNHCR and the inclusion of the displaced into PFS were still too recent at the time of the research for any outcomes to be explored. It is difficult even to compare the separate outcomes of PFS and of humanitarian food assistance on host and displaced communities, respectively, because limited (publicly available) documentation exists of the impact of either.³⁸

This section focuses on three dimensions where it has been suggested that outcomes could be improved by greater connection between humanitarian assistance to the displaced and social protection: ability to meet basic needs; financial inclusion; and social cohesion. For each dimension, we look first at the current situation and how it has been affected by (unlinked) assistance: we then attempt to analyse how those outcomes might be different with greater connection.

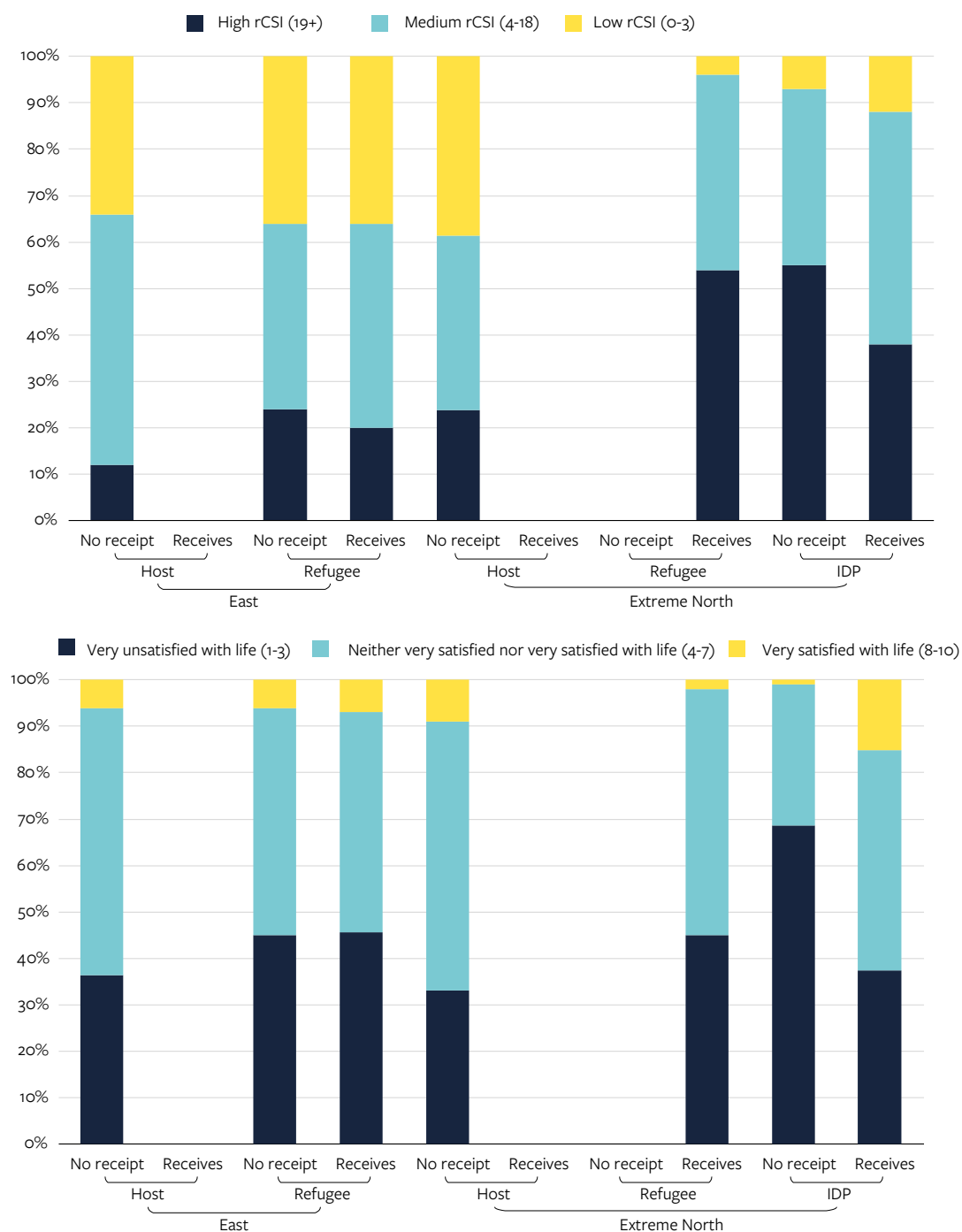
4.1 Basic needs

4.1.1 The current situation

The challenge for analysing outcomes in meeting the needs of displaced people starts from the beginning: knowing the degree of need among the different displaced populations, and how far any need is acute (i.e., a need for urgent humanitarian assistance) or one of chronic poverty. According to our key informant interviews, there is broadly a difference of opinion between the main humanitarian actors on the one hand, who claim that the vast majority of the displaced need urgent humanitarian transfers to meet their minimum needs (see above, 2.3.3), and the government on the other hand, which believes this to be an exaggeration. As also discussed in Section 2.3.3, the nature of the food security assessments of displaced populations which have been undertaken makes it very difficult for any reader to judge.

³⁸ World Bank (2018) refers to a rigorous impact assessment of phase 1 of PFS, but the report does not seem to be publicly available. We could find no document assessing the impact of humanitarian food assistance on livelihoods, social cohesion or financial inclusion in Far North or East regions, though some study has been made of the nutrition impacts of humanitarian feeding programmes (Ngwenyi et al., 2019).

Figure 7 Difficulties in accessing food (rCSI) and life satisfaction, disaggregated by displacement status, region and transfer receipt



Source: data from survey in primary research

Note: Sample sizes for host population recipients in both regions and for refugee non-recipients in the Far North were too small to allow for robust analysis.

A high dependency on urgent humanitarian transfers might be expected to result in a significant rise in acute malnutrition with recent cuts in assistance. The only recent evidence of malnutrition rates is from a survey conducted in February and March 2021 by the Ministry of Public Health, UNICEF and UNHCR (RoC et al., 2021). This found global acute malnutrition (GAM) rates for children under 5 of 4.5% and 5.9% in the East and Far North respectively, but without disaggregating figures for displaced and host populations. In Minawao camp GAM was 3.9% in the refugee population. These rates are all well below emergency thresholds. Rates of stunting among under-5s in 2021 were more worrying, at 33%, 36% and 48% in East Region, Far North Region and Minawao camp respectively. However, the 2017 SMART survey found rates of stunting at 38% and 41% for East and Far North Regions respectively, suggesting a possible improvement in the situation over the past three years (WFP, 2018). The lack of disaggregated figures for the displaced makes it hard to draw definitive conclusions. There were no anecdotal reports of worsening malnutrition in the primary qualitative research for this study.

In our survey, around a third of recipients of food assistance reported that the assistance was indispensable, and another third described it as very important ('the household would struggle without it'). On most indicators of material well-being, host households in the Far North struggled more than those in the East, which matches what is known about the prevalence of poverty. Refugees struggled more than host populations in their area on all indicators, though refugees in the East scored the same as the host population in the Far North on a standard proxy indicator used

by humanitarian agencies to assess food security, the 'reduced coping strategies index', rCSI.³⁹

Unsurprisingly, those receiving food assistance report having fewer difficulties in accessing food than those who are not. The difference was very marked among IDPs in Far North, but quite modest among refugees in the East, who had more independent livelihoods. Different factors will lead to different levels of need in the various population groups, including being in the Far North or East, living in or out of camp and being an IDP or refugee.

Displaced households receiving assistance were also more likely to have had all children enrolled in school in the previous school year. However, when asked how frequently they were stressed, failing to cope or able to keep on top of things, less than a quarter of all population groups reported having problems 'very often' or never being on top of things, and the modal answer to all three of these questions and for all groups was the middle answer (of five possible), viz. 'sometimes'.

The picture from qualitative research was broadly similar. Levels of poverty are greater than the resources available.

What I get really isn't enough ... it doesn't last us till the end of the month (CAR refugee, East)

I can't buy everything I need, I only get the essentials (CAR refugee, East)

This is hardly surprising, since assistance was cut by 50% shortly before these reports, and the aid was neither intended nor expected to cover all of people's needs. Many share aid (as would be

39 rCSI gives a composite score based on answers regarding the frequency with which respondents have resorted to one of five behaviours: relying on less preferred foods, borrowing or relying on help from friends, limiting portion sizes, restricting adult consumption to allow children to eat, and skipping meals.

expected), most often with other members of their community who are not benefiting from the assistance, but sometimes the displaced share aid with members of the host population whom they know and who are in need.

When I get my sack of rice, my neighbour's child will come running after me, because his family didn't get any help. I can't just leave him like that! I have to take some of what I got and share it with my neighbour, because they didn't get (CAR refugee, East)

Social obligations thus mean that a de facto retargeting exercise takes place, with smaller transfers being shared among a larger number of recipients. (It is impossible to know whether reports of sharing are exaggerated without a large enough sample to compare reports of sharing-giving and sharing-receiving.)

All reported spending much of the support on food items, some indication that the transfers are helping to cover the most basic of needs. Many were also enabled to avoid getting into debt, to save (through an informal savings/credit group), and to pay for school, health care and rent. Some used part of the transfer to invest in small business activities; for those receiving food vouchers, breaking the rules in this way was frustratingly expensive (see Section 4.3). Those receiving food aid might use some of the food to prepare items for sale. Overall, this is a fairly typical pattern of aid expenditure, though not entirely identical to the reports of use of PFS (see below).

The impact of a delay in receiving assistance is another useful indicator of how far the problem is chronic poverty or an urgent need for emergency assistance. Such delays have occurred with humanitarian assistance, though were not reported for PFS.

It's even happened that we have been three months without getting money. And just recently, we got money in November but then December's [2020] money didn't come until 4 January [2021].

This caused hardship, but there were no complaints from interviewees that this had caused crisis.

Taken together, these various indicators suggest that deep and chronic poverty abounds, but that an acute hunger crisis was not a widespread problem in our study sites. A minority of households would struggle greatly to meet even the most basic needs without some form of assistance, again as is typical in a society with high levels of poverty. No conclusions, though, can be drawn about needs across displaced populations as a whole.

Until recently, PFS was giving 10,000 FCFA (\$17.50) per month, which only represented about 8% of the national poverty line. Unsurprisingly, host population recipients regarded this as a welcome contribution, rather than critical for coping. There were some differences in the patterns of money use from humanitarian transfers. Recipients talked about consistently being able to feed their family and talked more about using PFS money for non-food items, and for healthcare, schooling, saving, improving their housing and repaying debts. The annual lump-sum payment was much appreciated for investment (and is discussed further in Section 4.2). These differences from humanitarian transfers are more likely to reflect differences in the relative standard of living of recipients, rather than in the transfer itself. Chronic poverty is widespread and deep among the host population, particularly in the Far North: a number of households in the host population also rely on assistance from within

their communities to meet even their basic needs. In general, though, hosts are less likely to struggle as much as the displaced in their region.

4.1.2 The potential consequences of closer alignment for people's ability to meet basic needs

We look at five characteristics of assistance as they affect direct transfer recipients to judge the possible impacts of linking social protection and humanitarian assistance at contact points which affect these: transfer values; targeting; reliability; accessibility; and accountability.

Transfer value

As discussed above (Section 3.2), WFP's food assistance transfers are currently 4,440 FCFA (\$8) per person per month, compared to 15,000 FCFA (\$26) per household through TMO. According to JAM (2019), the average household of refugees from CAR comprises six people, which would give them a monthly transfer of 26,400 FCFA (\$47). This is much higher than the monthly TMO allowance but, when the annual lump sum is included, would be 20% higher than TMO for a household of six. (Until last year it would have been two and half times higher.) However, IOM 2020 found that the average household size of displaced people in the Far North (mainly IDPs) is 7.8, which would result in transfers worth 72% more than TMO annually. Another critical difference is that TMO only offers assistance for two years whereas humanitarian aid, in principle, continues for as long as a household is deemed to be in need and meets the criteria.

This suggests that displaced households, especially in the Far North, would be financially much worse off with full integration of assistance. However,

it is impossible to predict how much people would benefit from transfers with full integration, because there would be a strong incentive for people to split their households in registration in order to double the assistance they receive. The average size of a displaced household is thus likely to fall. (This does not imply any illegitimate behaviour by those choosing to divide their households, which are not, in any case, always restricted to nuclear family members.)

In most humanitarian food assistance programmes, higher levels of assistance are given to individuals or households regarded as being unable to meet any of their own food needs, often categorised as 'extremely vulnerable'.⁴⁰ The population profiles (Figure 6, above) of IDPs in Far North region showed that there is a relative lack of adult male labour, which can be a factor behind both greater and vulnerabilities of different kinds. No such provision is offered to the destitute through PFS or through any other social protection in Cameroon. Presumably, these people survive through intra-communal assistance in the hosting communities. Because these support networks are often disrupted by displacement, this provision would be extremely important in any attempt at integration. This is why TSN, which does align values, is deliberately not targeted at those most in need, relying on the parallel provision of humanitarian aid for the poorest section of the community instead. In its current design it does not, therefore, represent a model that could simply replace humanitarian aid. The current de facto principle that no one should benefit from more than one aid stream would have implications for the displaced if access to a standard PFS transfer made them ineligible to receive any top-up benefits in recognition of their specific needs due to displacement.

⁴⁰ We have not been able to confirm that this is the case in Cameroon.

Targeting

Alignment would have to consider both the targeting principles and the actual process or mechanisms.

Aligning the targeting principles would be difficult since the objectives of the two systems are different. PFS is not intended or designed to sustain the destitute, but rather to support the advancement of the poor out of poverty. It is unclear how reliable the use of asset poverty on its own would be as an eligibility criterion for supporting the destitute among the displaced.

Currently, the operational targeting of both systems is perceived as untransparent and therefore regarded with some suspicion.

Several host community respondents believed that by including community chiefs, the targeting process for TMO leads to favouritism and nepotism.⁴¹ Few displaced respondents could comment on the targeting of the PFS, but one (out-of-camp) IDP made an accusation of corruption in accessing THIMO:

Sometimes, it's down to foul play, sometimes it's corruption. There are people who say 'I'll put you down for work, and at the end you'll give me something', that's how they choose people. (IDP, Far North)

If these suspicions are well-founded, there would be a reasonable concern that replacing humanitarian aid simply by integrating displaced

people into the overall population for TMO might lead to their exclusion, because they would tend to have fewer links with influential figures including on the LCCG.

Many suggested that targeting of humanitarian aid was also unduly influenced by powerful intermediaries, in this case the '*relais*' who help NGOs to identify and register participants.

Reliability

PFS transfers were slightly more reliable than humanitarian transfers because multi-year funding was guaranteed (by the World Bank) from the start, whereas humanitarian aid relied on repeated shorter-term commitments, which sometimes led to temporary hiatuses. This led to a perception by some of advantages to PFS over international aid (identified with NGOs) because of its permanency.

They said that aid from the government doesn't end, but for the NGOs – perhaps it will stop. (Host, Far North)

This though risks confusing the continuation of a programme with assistance to any individual household: PFS transfers only last 2 years, whereas many have received humanitarian assistance for several years, since in principle it lasts for as long as needed.

A more often expressed worry from both host and displaced respondents was the risk of

⁴¹ Those working on PFS told us that they felt that the use of PMT in targeting, although designed to ensure objectivity and fairness, served to reduce trust because people could not see the lists of those eligible produced locally were then reduced to a final list of actual recipients. In a context of generalised poverty, there may be few obvious differences between those who scored just above the PMT threshold and those who scored just below – and the threshold might not in any case correlate with local perceptions of need or poverty. This could easily lead to a belief that the process had been corrupted, even if it has in fact been carried out in an exemplary way.

‘détournement’ (diversion or embezzlement), if humanitarian assistance was channelled through government systems:

No, everything would disappear, it’s best that the NGOs don’t give the money to the government. (Host, Far North)

It’s better that [humanitarian assistance and government programmes] don’t merge. If they did, we wouldn’t receive anything any more... there’s too much misappropriation, we’d rather the government doesn’t get involved in the work of the NGOs. (IDP, Far North).

While this was a more widespread view, many simply did not mind who support came from, as long as it was provided.

The two aid sources thus have different kinds of reliability problem. The main risks for displaced people from humanitarian aid are short ruptures in delivery and reductions in its value. The risks they would face from being integrated into TMO instead are to receive nothing because of exclusion and diversion. The shortcomings in the reliability of humanitarian aid are thus less serious for the displaced. If alignment is to involve finances being channelled through state systems, major improvements in transparency will be required.

Accessibility of support

Recipients of PFS did not raise many accessibility concerns. Some complained of the distances they had to travel to receive their money; transport often cost 300 FCFA (US\$0.50) but in a few cases as much as 2,000 FCFA (US\$3.40, more than 5% of the TMO bi-monthly transfer value). This also took time, up to a whole day. (A few reported occasionally having to stay overnight.) The opportunity cost of one day’s lost work every two months represents an additional ‘tax’ of over

2% on their potential total earnings. Two people in the Far North region also spoke of a fear of being attacked when they went to collect money.

The displaced also did not have major accessibility issues in receiving their transfers. Cash and vouchers were usually easy to redeem, though there was time lost in queueing for food aid distributions. This was a particular complaint among IDPs in the Far North. A day wasted in the queue every month represented a hidden ‘tax’ of 5% on the total potential earnings of recipients. (The value of the time of the poor is rarely referred to in aid evaluations or in aid discourse generally.)

If the delivery mechanisms of humanitarian aid were to be integrated with PFS, some of the displaced might face greater problems where the locations to receive money was particularly far, due to limitations in their freedom of movement. In the Far North, some are regularly stopped by the police on suspicion of being Boko Haram and sometimes detained if they do not have all the right papers to hand.

If humanitarian aid were replaced by PFS which then adopted the mobile phone transfers used by TSN (and some NGOs), some displaced may have difficulties if they could not acquire a SIM card because they lacked documentation or could not access a mobile phone because of affordability constraints. However, some aid programmes (such as TSN) have successfully used mobile transfers (including by providing mobile phones directly to recipients). A general commitment to the use of mobile phone technology might lead to such restrictions being alleviated. As with the case of household sizes (above), it is difficult to draw conclusions based only on the first, immediate impacts of any change without then considering what further impacts would follow.

Some displaced might face a more fundamental access barrier with integration into PFS, because their lack of documentation might directly restrict their access to PFS registration. If the state were directly responsible for the welfare of the displaced, it might in theory be more likely to address this documentation problem to implement PFS more efficiently. There is currently little evidence to support this argument, though.

Accountability mechanisms

Accountability mechanisms were not strong either with programmes in the humanitarian sector or in the programmes in PFS.

Few people felt comfortable using complaints and appeals mechanisms. Only 7% of the recipients of recipients of humanitarian transfers said that anyone in their household had raised an issue formally, and almost half did not know where or how to complain. From qualitative interviews, this seems to be the case for social protection too.

It is possible that displaced people feel less able to raise complains or appeals.

Since you're a foreigner, and you don't understand French, you don't know what problems you can make for yourself [if you complain]... If you complain about someone... they're going to believe him, and then he can create more problems for you. The two of them will chat with each other in French, and you don't understand a word, so you can't defend yourself... So you just let it go, you just live with it. (Nigerian refugee, Far North)

This fear of complaining as a foreigner applies to assistance from any source. Since the accountability mechanisms are also weak for humanitarian assistance, there may not be any great change with greater connections.

In principle, a concerted effort to establish a well-functioning system for both PFS and humanitarian aid might be welcome, but given that the two function so differently in every way (application, eligibility, selection, registration, transfer mechanisms, etc.), it is perhaps hard to see this being possible.

In summary: the greater prevalence and depth of poverty among displaced populations, and particularly in the Far North (including IDPs) suggests that equity would not be served by having similar quotas of recipients among host and displaced communities, nor by equalising the value of the transfers. There are no reasons to believe that the material well-being of displaced would necessarily be better if their assistance were subject to the targeting, reliability, accessibility and accountability mechanisms of PFS instead of those from the humanitarian sector.

4.2 Economic agency

Our research considered economic agency in relation to access to livelihoods, employment (of others), financial inclusion and general financial wellbeing.

4.2.1 The current situation

Most displaced people have an independent livelihood, especially refugees in the East. The survey found a similar proportion of displaced and host people were in paid employment in the East Region (around 70% of women and 80% of men). In Far North region, fewer refugees had paid work (40% compared to around 60% for host population and IDPs). Among those receiving transfers, slightly fewer were in paid work, which one would expect with poverty/vulnerability targeting.

The two systems have a markedly different impact on economic agency in one key respect. PFS is designed to support economic agency and offers annual lump sum payments of 80,000 FCFA (US\$140) that can be used for small investments. Recipients appreciated this and described the small business investments which it had enabled them to make. In this way, PFS may well have supported economic agency, though with two caveats: it is hard to quantify the impact on overall household earnings; and, crucially, no study has been made to know how long any impacts will last. (Many poverty studies have shown that most households that just manage to escape poverty fall back into poverty within a very few years.) TSN aligned with PFS in making annual lump-sum grants: although slightly smaller, this may have a similar impact. However, it is too early to assess the impact of these grants or the sustainability of any impact.

In contrast, most humanitarian food assistance, notably from WFP, is deliberately designed to be limited to supporting immediate food needs. For the majority of recipients, it therefore provides either food aid (in-kind) or vouchers that can only be redeemed at approved retailers and only for approved food items. (This is not the case for some NGO transfers which provide cash.) Investment in economic agency is thus prevented or deterred. Displaced respondents felt this acutely.

Depending on aid is to be reduced to a child... it's dependency... That kind of help isn't what I need. They need to change that kind of aid and instead give us help to become independent.

This partly reflects a frustration with the rules imposed by WFP, which prevent them from using food assistance to invest in income-generating

activities. As is always the case, many people circumvent the rules restricting the use of vouchers, but at a cost.

So, the shop-keeper will tell you, 'OK, you have 13,000, so give me that. I'll keep 3,000 and 10,000 is for you... This is called 'le cash-out'. (The English expression 'cash-out' was regularly used by those speaking French or other languages)

This reluctance by humanitarian agencies to give the displaced cash is actively discouraging investment in livelihoods by the displaced; and it is directly fuelling corruption and cost-inefficiency. For each displaced person who cashes-out, over 25% of humanitarian aid money is instead going straight into the pockets of better-off shopkeepers. (Small market traders cannot negotiate with WFP to become approved vendors.)

Very few people in the study sites had bank accounts. The formal banking system has very limited presence in rural areas, and just 5% of the host population in our sample had an account. This is partly due to access constraints, but others spoke of the impossibility of opening a bank account 'when you don't have any money'.

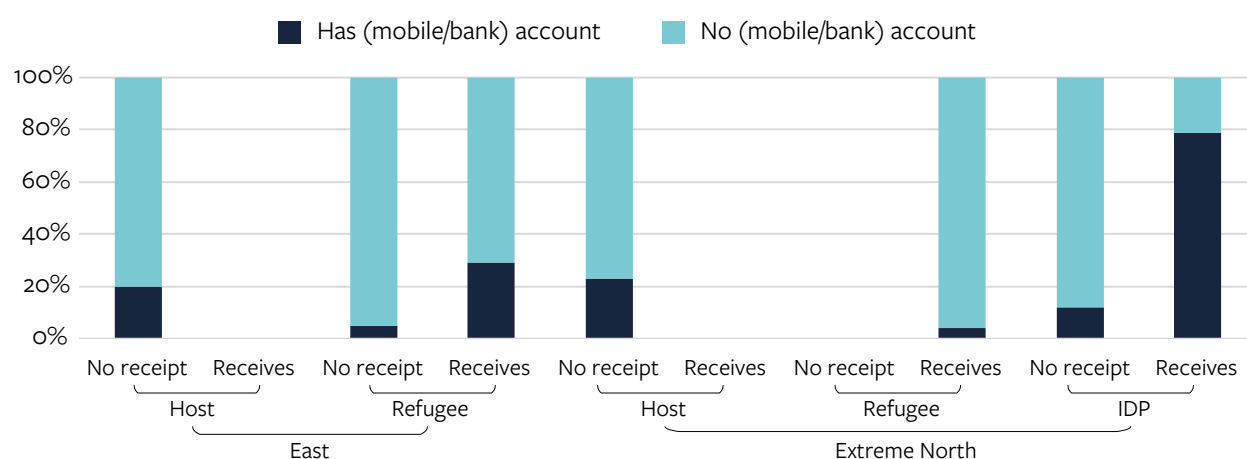
Access to mobile money wallets was more widespread and, in some cases, assistance appeared to have a pronounced impact. While very few Nigerian refugees (6%) had mobile wallets, half of IDPs (51%) and 10% of refugees in the East region reported having set these up specifically to receive an aid transfer.

Many respondents reported difficulties accessing loans, but displaced people had more difficulties. They lacked the social capital necessary, namely a network of people whom they knew, who trusted

them and who could afford to lend them money. They equally lacked guarantors or collateral. However, a major disincentive to borrowing was anxiety about what would happen if they failed to repay – always a possibility given the degree of economic uncertainty in their lives. A few respondents said that being known to receive

assistance helped you to buy on credit from the shops if the assistance was late. In general, though, assistance did not on its own make people credit-worthy or give them access to formal credit on better terms, though a few were able to join rotating loan funds (*tontines*). The form of assistance was not relevant in this respect.

Figure 8 Proportion of households with a bank account or mobile phone wallet, disaggregated by displacement status, region and transfer receipt



4.2.2 The potential consequences of greater connections for economic agency

There would probably be benefits in respect of the economic agency of displaced people if humanitarian transfers were to be more closely connected with social protection in its modality (unrestricted cash) and in the use of annual lump-sum grants. These benefits could be significant, but that has not yet been quantified; nor is it known how sustainable they might be.

Such connections would be unlikely to affect financial inclusion specifically, since the barriers to accessing financial services are too great to be overcome in this way. Current modalities of

(most) PFS transfers do not directly encourage either normal bank accounts or mobile phone wallets. Most of the IDPs who opened phone wallets to receive humanitarian transfers draw all their money at once and do not use these wallets for anything else, suggesting limited impacts on genuine financial inclusion.

Access to informal savings and credit is improved by transfers generally, but there is no obvious mechanism by which greater linkages would affect this, either positively or negatively.

4.3 Social cohesion

4.3.1 The current situation

Social cohesion is broadly good between the displaced and host communities in the Far North and especially East regions, though formal assistance, whether from the humanitarian sector or the state, has probably played little role in shaping this.

The survey found that the vast majority of displaced and the majority of hosts felt that relations were good. There were some incidences of friction, but informants clearly identified these with the behaviour of individuals, and not with friction between communities. Causes of friction included: the usual tensions between livestock owners and the farmers whose fields were damaged by livestock; conflicts over queueing at water points (including where refugees kept hosts from using a waterpoint that they regarded as being given to them); and hosts accusing refugees of cutting wood on their land or stealing food from their fields. One informant mentioned the rape of young refugee girls.

Despite this, some felt that a degree of discrimination existed. In the Far North, a third of refugees in the survey felt they were not treated equally by hosts, but only 10% of refugees in the East felt this. A few respondents mentioned stories of being insulted by someone from the host community (CAR refugees in the East) or that the host population was suspicious of them or distant with them (Nigerian refugees in the Far North).

It was more common to hear displaced people speaking positively, of receiving help and support from the local population in housing, access to land and being given employment opportunities. Interviewees from the host communities

sympathised with the plight of the displaced in both the east and Far North. They were happy to employ them on their farms: several informants preferred to employ the displaced rather than the local population, either seeing this as a good way to support them or believing them to be more hard-working. (We were not able to establish whether the displaced are paid the same for the same work, or whether they are willing to work for less, as is common among displaced populations and a frequent reason why they are hired for work.)

In the East, little sense of economic competition was found in the survey either among hosts or refugees; in the Far North, it was more widespread (about half of the host population and nearly three-quarters of the refugees). There are regular and generally positive interactions between displaced people and members of the host population. Almost all of the displaced survey respondents reported having regular social contacts with members of the host communities, and the vast majority of hosts also reported having regular contact with the displaced (two-thirds in the Far North and 90% in the East). The survey did not find any clear trends linking assistance with social contacts across the population groups, feelings of discrimination or the perception of inter-communal relations.

Assistance provision may have had some effect on social cohesion between communities, positive and negative, through several mechanisms – both positive and negative. There is a general fear in the aid community that where a much higher proportion of displaced people than in the host population are receiving aid, this can cause feelings of resentment to the displaced. Many in both the host and displaced communities were concerned that hosts should also receive

assistance, and there was a general agreement that poverty existed across all communities and that social cohesion depended on fairness.

There were a few isolated instances of aid directly giving rise to hostility or resentment. A few IDPs claimed that locals had attempted to collect assistance designed for IDPs; the case of the IDPs who were not paid for working on THIMO has been mentioned (above); and the resale of food aid by some was resented by some market sellers who were being undercut. This, though, is another consequence of the in-kind aid modality rather than the level of aid given.

There were more reports, though, of positive impacts of assistance on social cohesion: sharing and a recognition that theft (and begging) reduced because of aid. Where aid was not given in-kind, local businesses and market sellers valued the input into the local economy of money spent by the displaced. There was a general perception too that the assistance that had come to host communities from the government or NGOs had arrived only because of the arrival of the displaced population.

It is also important to consider the social relations which exist between people (citizens and refugees) and the Government or with institutions that govern their lives more widely – what could be called ‘vertical’ social cohesion. Although survey respondents from all population groups professed great trust in the government, a different picture emerged from the in-depth interviews. There were high levels of mistrust in the state both host and displaced informants and perceptions that local officials were corrupt.

Government assistance provision may have influenced perceptions of government or of the state in different ways. Concerns about the (mis)targeting or embezzlement of government

assistance abounded, but it is difficult to say whether this has increased mistrust in administrative systems or whether such trust was already lacking. A much more in-depth and narrowly targeted study would be needed to assess the impact of the targeting of PFS on trust in government. The lack of transparency of PFS targeting from the host community’s perspective may have given them one more reason to mistrust the administration: alternatively, the provision of some form of social protection, however imperfect, may have increased their appreciation for the efforts which a state shown to be looking after the poor.

Reductions in humanitarian assistance caused some frustration with humanitarian agencies, but there was a considerable understanding that the cuts had been caused by a lack of funds in part due to the international COVID-19 pandemic and the strain which this had put on donor countries. Some struggled with the transparency of the aid system, as discussed above, and several felt that recipient lists were drawn up ‘somewhere at a university in Rome’, but it is less clear how much trust in an international agency, rather than in the state or the government, is an integral part of social cohesion.

4.3.2 The potential consequences of greater connections for social cohesion

The integration profile of assistance does not seem to have had any impact on social cohesion between hosts and the displaced. Separation of the humanitarian and social protection delivery systems to date has not prevented regular social contacts. There was no great sense of unfairness about differences in the size or source of transfers given to different populations, largely because people did not know who was providing

the support, or how much other communities were getting (and in any case, many – but not all – hosts accepted that the displaced had a greater level of need).

Concerns on both sides were for greater aid for all, and opinions about alignment or integration tended to depend on whether people felt that this would bring more assistance in total. Some felt that more would benefit:

If the government came to help us [refugees], they couldn't stop at helping only us. They would also have to help the villagers. That would be good for relations between us. (Refugee, East)

However, many others believed that greater reliance on government systems would both spread the aid more thinly and also simply reduce the amount available overall due to resource misuse. This would exacerbate competition over aid resources. In other words, the state of alignment in itself was not a concern of people, and there is little evidence to support a view that a change in how assistance to the displaced and social protection were linked would alter horizontal social cohesion either positively or negatively.

Vertical social cohesion may be affected by closer linkages, but it is harder to predict in which ways. Where explicit references to a social contract were voiced in the research, these principally

were voiced by refugees (both Central African and Nigerian), who argued that it was the government's responsibility to look after them. If assistance were given to the displaced through state systems, this might be taken as evidence of the state looking after them and paying attention to their needs. On the other hand, any perceptions of corruption or inadequacy might worsen trust in the government (trust in the UN or INGOs is arguably less important for social cohesion). Particularly in the Far North, Cameroonians (including IDPs) felt abandoned by their government, leading respondents to place their trust in NGOs instead:

I prefer that the NGOs help me, because it's as if the Cameroonian government forgot me, I never receive their aid. (IDP, Far North)

It's better that [the government and humanitarian agencies] function separately ... It's because of the NGOs that [the government] helps us. Even though the government is there since [NGOs] arrived, if you join them together, then the government will just disappear again – and then how will we manage? (Host, Far North)

While the former statement suggests some potential for enhanced government provision to help improve IDP–government relations, the latter indicates such a void of trust that it would take much more than simply short-term assistance from the state to have any impact on the social contract.

5 Conclusions

The analytical framework for this project posited that the outcomes of any integration profile between social protection and assistance to the displaced could be assessed on six criteria:

1. Effectiveness in meeting the needs of the displaced
2. Effectiveness in meeting the needs of the host population
3. Equity
4. Cost and efficiency
5. Accountability and acceptability to all stakeholders
6. Sustainability

In this section, we will summarise the extent to which the current integration profile is contributing to positive or negative outcomes on each of these parameters.

Effectiveness in meeting the needs of the displaced

Humanitarian aid transfers are larger in size, have much greater coverage and are longer-lasting than PFS transfers. There is little reason, therefore, to doubt that they are better at meeting the basic material needs of the displaced. However, many displaced would prefer the cash modality used by PFS to the use of in-kind food aid or restricted vouchers, which dominates humanitarian assistance.

It has been suggested in several countries that the displaced may have an interest in receiving the same value of transfer as is used for social assistance, even where this would be lower, because this may reduce resentment and jealousy in the host community. We found no reason to believe

that this would apply in Cameroon, largely because none of our informants in any community had any information about what anybody else was receiving.

Social assistance is currently neither more predictable nor long-term. Despite marginal advantages on reliability over humanitarian assistance, social assistance is currently much less predictable, because even the very poor cannot expect to receive it. There is no rights-based approach and less a sense of an entitlement to support than with humanitarian assistance.

There is likely to be an advantage for displaced people – especially refugees – being included on a social registry. In principle, this should increase their visibility with government. This may have both positive and negative consequences. A high political profile is not always favourable to displaced people, particularly to refugees. On the other hand, if policy were generally favourable to their situation, it could have several benefits in the longer term: greater attention to their political needs (ID documents, freedom of movement, etc.); national resource allocations including them in population figures; and opening up the possibility for them to receive other benefits from the state. However, until the universal social registry (USR) is linked to a social protection system, it is hard to know what actual benefits there might be. A policy will be needed on how USR will link to the provision of SP, and on how displacement will affect that provision. Inclusion in the USR is not, in other words, an objective in itself. The USR is a tool, but everything depends on how it is used, and what it is used for.

There is a clear need for the government to be involved in aspects of social protection for the

displaced beyond transfers, for example ensuring that their rights are upheld and that they have proper documentation to access these rights.⁴² These dimensions of social protection do not depend on linkages with humanitarian assistance.

Effectiveness in meeting the needs of the host population

Host populations have a clear interest in displaced people receiving adequate assistance, so they can meet their basic needs without resorting to petty crime and engage economically with the host community and local businesses. There would be benefits to the host population if humanitarian transfers adopted the cash modality of PFS, but there are no other advantages for host populations in any change in the way in which displaced people are assisted.

Equity

The lack of information about the levels, causes and nature of poverty among the displaced is a significant barrier to planning a coherent system that can equitably support poor and vulnerable people in both host and displaced communities. This is made more difficult by the lack of clarity and a common language surrounding eligibility for the two systems. The greater prevalence and depth of poverty among the displaced, and their additional livelihood constraints (e.g., more difficult access to land), mean that equalising the coverage and value of humanitarian transfers with TMO would not be equitable.

Equity could be improved with changes in the way in which ‘vulnerability’ and poverty are assessed. A truly equitable system for responding to needs demands a holistic and integrated understanding

of livelihoods, poverty and vulnerability among the various displaced *and* host populations. However, that is a distant prospect.

Cost and efficiency

It is likely that there would be significant cost savings if all humanitarian assistance were channelled through PFS, with no costs for humanitarian agencies. We were not able to obtain information that would enable us to make an up-to-date comparison of the total cost-to-transfer ratio of humanitarian assistance with TMO. The most recent document to give this basic data for food aid suggests that the cost of food made up 38% of the total project cost for in-kind food aid.⁴³ It seems highly likely that operating costs are much lower for PFS than for humanitarian assistance.

This is not a sufficient argument for integrating the two systems. First, consideration would have to be given to the quality of implementation, particularly regarding the extent of exclusion error. This has not been documented either for humanitarian or social protection assistance. Second, if the cost efficiency of humanitarian assistance were the sole objective, other strategies for achieving cost savings may possibly be found that do not involve subsuming assistance to the displaced into PFS. For example, it is likely that cost savings could be made by moving away from in-kind delivery of food or even of restricted food vouchers and using cash assistance instead. More fundamental reform of relief distributions could also be examined from a cost perspective, for instance by introducing more competition by breaking down the overall operation into several functions (e.g., needs assessment, registration,

⁴² In our survey, 25% of the displaced did not have any proper documentation or ID.

⁴³ WFP (2015), describing PRRO 200552 for 2015–2016.

transfer, monitoring) which more agencies could take on. Such analysis was beyond the scope of this research project.

Accountability and acceptability to all stakeholders

There is generally a trust deficit across the humanitarian and social protection systems. Levels of trust in government by the international donors that fund assistance for the displaced are probably insufficient for full integration of assistance streams. Issues of transparency are also raised for humanitarian assistance, but the problems are of a different kind. Donors are more prepared to hand over money to UN organisations, because there remains a high level of confidence in their accounting systems and financial probity, even where there is less conviction in the rationality justification for the spending.

Acceptability and accountability at local level would probably not be improved by full integration, without a fundamental change in the transparency of the workings of the local administration and of social protection at the local level. A joint effort to improve the accountability of both systems to recipient populations would be beneficial, but it is difficult to see how it would emerge, in the absence of any shared systems at any other point (in targeting, delivery, etc.).

Despite some dissatisfaction with humanitarian assistance in the government of Cameroon and the relevant ministries, they appear to tolerate the situation as long as they are not themselves responsible for the welfare of the displaced.

In the current situation, greater integration would therefore be unlikely to improve the accountability and acceptability of assistance to the displaced. Greater alignment in the design of assistance

to the displaced with social protection would be irrelevant to improving accountability and acceptance.

Sustainability

PFS is not currently part of a sustainable social protection system in Cameroon. The only permanent national structure for social protection is the system of social centres. PFS is a donor-funded project (albeit through loans), and though international funding for PFS is guaranteed in multi-year agreements, it is potentially no more sustainable than support for humanitarian assistance in the medium to long term. Government funding cannot be guaranteed for an area that has not been prioritised by the government of Cameroon until the next decade. Institutional sustainability may be affected by the disconnect between PFS and the ministry responsible for social protection.

In the long term, if a functioning social protection system is to emerge in Cameroon, it may be more sustainable for the needs of displaced populations to be met this way than through humanitarian assistance. The inclusion of the displaced in the social registry may be critical for this.

An argument has been advanced (including by some key informants in Cameroon) that the alignment of transfer values for humanitarian assistance with PFS increases its sustainability for recipients, because it avoids creating dependency by creating expectations that cannot be met indefinitely. It is difficult to make sense of this argument either on empirical grounds or in principle.

There is no argument from equity for stipulating that support to the displaced should be equal in value to assistance offered by social protection programme which has different objectives

(see above). The argument for nonetheless aligning transfer values would involve sacrificing humanitarian principles (that aid is given to those most in need and only according to their need) on the altar of sustainability. Worse, it would still not improve the sustainability of any benefits, i.e. improving self reliance. There is no evidence that a higher transfer value creates dependency and reduces initiative. Dependency on aid is caused by forced displacement, rather than by the aid response to forced displacement. There is also no clear logical argument to support reducing transfer sizes to gain self-reliance. The logic of TMO design is that boosting household income, including lump sum grants, enables poor households to become more resilient; in other words, the benefits of the transfers are sustainable after the grants have ceased. On this rationale, higher levels of grants should accelerate the anti-poverty impacts of the grants and heighten the advancement to a more sustainable livelihood. It is strange to argue that this positive impact of temporary grants would suddenly erode livelihoods in the case of displaced people.

Preconditions for a safety net that can protect the displaced

Although none of the six criteria outlined above provides a case for the close linkages between social protection and humanitarian assistance to displaced people in Cameroon, this does not contradict the argument that the ideal way of providing assistance to the vulnerable (including the displaced) is to have a single comprehensive system providing longer- and shorter-term assistance of different kinds, as needed. The argument is rather a recognition that **Cameroon does not currently have a social protection system**, but, as argued earlier, only what could be called a social protection *programme*, providing short-term cash transfers (including transfers in exchange for labour). These projects are ad hoc, are not entitlement-based and therefore unpredictable; their objectives are poverty

reduction, not to provide a safety net in time of need to all who require it. **A ‘safety net’ which cannot be relied on to be there when needed is, to be blunt, not a safety net at all.**

Displaced people need a safety net. Moving that guarantee from the humanitarian system to a national social protection system may be the ultimate objective, but there is little rationale for starting that process by reducing humanitarian assistance or by harmonising transfer values. The process must start from the analysis of what must be in place in Cameroon before the state social protection system can represent a viable safety net.

The rest of this section examines what these preconditions are. The first precondition for a safety net which can also cover the displaced in Cameroon is **a social protection system with comprehensive coverage**. The system would have to command the **confidence of the recipient communities**, including both those who are eligible and those who are not. Using this safety net to protect the displaced requires **political will and the commitment of government** to the provision of comprehensive social protection, and to taking responsibility for the welfare of the displaced.

When this is in place, the conditions for integration of humanitarian and social protection assistance can be examined. These include the following:

1. **Coordination among humanitarian actors** is a prerequisite for coordination between the humanitarian system and the state/social protection actors. Collaboration between the two systems can then begin, with progress needed in three domains.
2. **A coherent vision and strategy** need to be developed, making it clear which kinds of

assistance will be offered to whom in which circumstances. Inclusion of displaced people in a unified social registry establishes an important principle, but on its own it does not provide this guide.

3. It will remain difficult to address these questions until there is **a coherent system of information about needs, and vulnerability analyses** for both displaced and host populations in the same terms. There is currently no agreed methodology for assessing need, vulnerability and poverty – or even for deciding exactly how far these concepts overlap or are different. There are additional logistical challenges in establishing and maintaining a system for assessing rapidly changing circumstances. The current (2021) Fifth National Household Survey is taking six months to survey 13,000 households, a small percentage of the over 1 million households living below the poverty line Cameroon. Coherence does not mean that perfect information is needed about situations that often change rapidly: systems are needed that can be managed with the resources available.

4. Very different **relationships between the organisations currently working on both social protection and humanitarian assistance** will need to emerge. Currently, information sharing is difficult even within the humanitarian sector, let alone with government. Integration will require intense collaboration. Agencies which are currently competitors for resources will have to agree how their roles can be complementary and collaborative. In sharing information, questions about data protection are just one small part of the challenge. A strong coordinating body is needed that commands the respect of those who need to be coordinated – many of which are agencies that are more used to coordinating others. This should, of course, be a government, but

the question remains about which government entity can take on this role, given that competition and lack of coordination are as much a problem within government as between government and the humanitarian sector.

Putting all of this in place is not possible in the near term. It is difficult even to see in which timeframe it might be realistic given the government's current lack of prioritisation of social protection, and the fact that, as discussed in Section 5, achieving all of this may not be perceived to be in their own interests by any of the most important stakeholders concerned.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Immediate recommendations

Most actors would probably share the same vision of an ideal social protection system: a coherent system that can assess the different (and changing) needs of people with different difficulties and vulnerabilities, and can respond most appropriately, given the resources and capacity constraints. It would respond to the needs of both displaced and non-displaced, but with no assumption that their needs were the same or that they should necessarily receive the same assistance (any more than the pensions of the elderly would necessarily be the same as child benefits for mothers of young children).

It is hardly controversial to argue that this ideal remains distant in Cameroon. More significantly, though, we argue that the most appropriate way of making progress towards such an ideal does not lie in finding areas for practical alignment between social protection and support for the displaced. Creating linkages or alignment is – in and of itself – not an ideal or even necessarily useful: a well-functioning social protection system will contain several elements with different criteria and modes of assistance. Rather than focus on formal integration for its own sake, the recommendations therefore point to ways of improving coherence and coordination and establishing some of the pre-conditions for integration which are of value in themselves, and which may – or may not – also serve as building blocks of greater future integration.

1. The first step to achieving greater coherence and coordination in the way in which vulnerability and poverty are analysed, assessed and addressed lies in improving coherence and coordination within the humanitarian and within the social protection sectors.
2. The humanitarian sector should work to achieve greater transparency in its assessments and greater sharing of information and analysis. It is difficult to see how, with its current financing set-up, it could move away from a competitive model and towards a collaborative national strategy, looking at needs and response across the country, but it should look to make progress towards this.
3. This should include a rethink of how support to displaced populations is targeted, designed and delivered. Even without alignment or integration, assistance could be based more around developmental approaches to supporting livelihoods and reducing poverty, moving away from the direct provision of ‘solutions’. Wider use of cash, rather than in-kind assistance or restricted vouchers, would help in this regard. Thresholds for determining eligibility for assistance could be designed which are intelligible to those working on poverty and social protection – i.e., expressed within the same overall terms – even where actual thresholds are not aligned.
4. The state needs to develop coordination and coherence in its social protection work, particularly between the work of MINEPAT on PFS and MINAS. Here too, though, it is difficult to see how competition for resources can be replaced with a collaborative strategy. Development partners will have to recognise these challenges and work together in seeking to mitigate them. This will involve balancing short-term objectives (e.g., who currently has the best implementing capacity?) and longer-term objectives (e.g., where should systems be housed, where does capacity need to be built up?).

5. Questions of social protection are fundamentally political in nature, and not just technical, and they should therefore be determined by government. The government must be the central actor in the process, and so progress can only be made towards a coherent social protection system if the government chooses to be invested in this. Although programmes can be stimulated by funding opportunities, this does not necessarily translate into genuine political will. Development partners need to make an honest appraisal of the possibilities for supporting the development of such political will, and a strategy for moving towards a more comprehensive and coherent social protection system needs to be in line with political will.
6. Aligning transfer values is not relevant to achieving any meaningful objectives. Where the situation of displaced and host populations has been found to be similar, and where the same objectives are pursued for both populations, it may be appropriate to include them in the same programmes or to offer similar levels of assistance. However, this should not be pursued as a goal in itself, nor should it be seen as a vehicle for achieving integration at a time when such integration is distant. Although the creation of shadow alignment is much simpler, because it is a concrete linkage that is under the practical control of humanitarian agencies themselves, it is more useful to consider *why* integration can be beneficial, and then to seek ways to achieve those benefits. Such areas would include supporting or encouraging the government to take greater responsibility for assistance to the displaced (even where resources had to be made available by partners); and improving the cost efficiency and cost-effectiveness of humanitarian assistance to the displaced. For example, moving the vast majority of food assistance to the displaced over to a cash modality would have several benefits, and could be achieved without having to think in terms of alignment or integration with social protection.
7. Cameroon has proved to be a hospitable hosting country for refugees, giving them rights to work, freedom of movement and access to land which are not granted in many countries. Support for refugees does not necessarily entail either the provision of humanitarian assistance or social protection. Asking Cameroon state institutions to provide ('developmental') livelihood support to those refugees facing protracted displacement should not necessarily entail expecting the people of Cameroon to have to pay for it. International finance can be used to support state institutions to provide assistance to refugees in ways that are integrated into the development support that is provided for host populations, but still designed for refugees' specific situation.
8. Even in the absence of integration or alignment of support programmes, much greater communication is needed between those supporting the displaced in the humanitarian community, those working on different forms of social protection and those working on poverty and livelihood support. A more integrated analysis of poverty, considering the situation of the displaced and host communities together, could serve the development of strategies for improving the livelihoods and resilience of both population groups, while recognising the different opportunities and constraints faced in each population group.

6.2 Wider policy implications

1. The priority for developing social protection is to have a comprehensive social protection system in place. Before it can be used to replace humanitarian assistance for displaced populations, it has to have sufficient coverage, including in the areas hosting displaced populations, and it has to function as a genuine safety net. To be a safety net, those in need of it must be able to rely on it: it cannot be time-bound, and it has to exist as a right to all

who meet the eligibility criteria. Where the displaced population does not have a specific displacement-related need or more acute needs than the host population, there may be no need for specific humanitarian assistance, and social protection programmes short of a true safety net would be appropriate.

2. Capacity would have to be built in the social protection system for identifying and assessing the needs of potentially large numbers of new clients/recipients. This capacity often does not exist in nascent social protection systems such as in Cameroon, and it may take many years to build in countries, like Cameroon, where the size of the displaced population is greater than the coverage achieved by social assistance over several years. In many situations it may be useful to think of a transitional period, where a rapid response system is able to meet the immediate needs of the newly displaced for a period long enough for the social protection system to incorporate them. Since displacement is so often protracted, especially once it has lasted above six months, it would be helpful to build these exit strategies into the short-term rapid response system. However, although alignment in programme design (transfer values, transfer modalities) commands much of the attention to attempts to integrate social protection and humanitarian assistance, there are no obvious reasons why it should be particularly relevant to the success of such an exit strategy.
3. The social protection system would have to include the capacity to give different benefit levels to people in different circumstances. This may include a much higher level of benefit for those with no independent capacity to meet their needs and no social network on which they can depend. The process of developing policies for deciding on the criteria for receiving different levels of benefit and what these levels should be is a political one, and one that will take considerable time. Once this is achieved, a separate process will be needed to design the system for assessing needs and implementing the policy. This process too cannot be entirely technical, and will take some time. However, all this needs to be in place before full integration can take place.
4. Much of the attention regarding the integration of social protection and humanitarian assistance has focused on social protection as cash transfers (a social assistance safety net). The benefits of integration also need attention to social protection more broadly, including integrated services (which are increasingly being used for displaced populations, as in Cameroon), and most crucially protection of economic rights, including freedom of movement, the right to work, access to land on reasonable terms (especially in rural areas), the right to open a bank account, and documentation guaranteeing those rights.
5. Refugees often find themselves in areas which are of greater poverty and are more marginalised in the host country. The perception that different levels of assistance to the displaced will lead to resentment did not prove founded in this case study, but there is a more fundamental objection in principle to the idea that adequate levels of assistance to the displaced should therefore be avoided. This is implicitly putting the cost of social cohesion onto the displaced, rather than recognising that the root of the problem lies in a lack of equitable development.

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