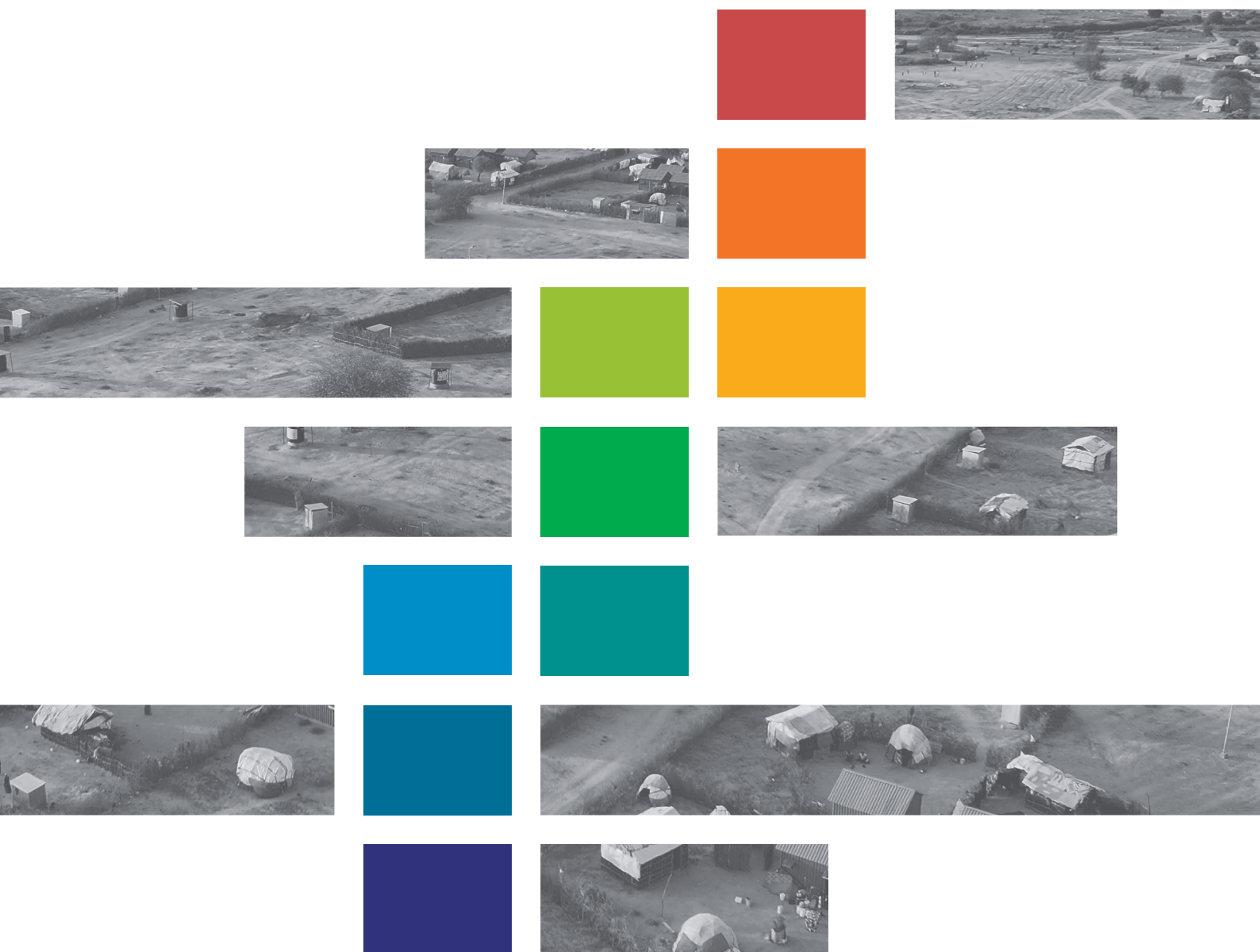




Social Protection for Stability: A Catalytic Agenda

High-Level Panel on Social
Protection in Fragile and
Conflict-Affected Settings

NOVEMBER 2025



After receiving cash assistance from WFP, a Sudanese refugee and mother of five buys food in a refugee camp in Ethiopia.

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The High-Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings

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Process

The High-Level Panel brought together members chosen not only for their individual expertise, but also to reflect the diverse stakeholders that must work together to deliver social protection in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Building on the momentum of the 2024 Forum on Social Protection in Fragility and Conflict, the Panel set out to chart a clear path for investing in inclusive, adaptive, nationally grounded social protection systems in fragile settings.

To anchor its work in real-world experience, the Panel launched a public enquiry, receiving 78 submissions from local organisations, national practitioners, international partners and academic experts. The Secretariat synthesised this evidence into a separate report that serves as a resource for policymakers and practitioners alike. This synthesis also helped shape the Panel’s deliberations, during two meetings in London, towards this Catalytic Agenda.

Secretariat

The High-Level Panel was supported by a dedicated Secretariat, hosted by the Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (STAAR) Facility: Rachel Scott (Head of Secretariat); Anna Hulbert (Operations Manager); Valentina Barca, Gabrielle Smith (Technical Leads); Megan Smith (STAAR Facility Manager); Charlotte Maugham (Communications Lead); Deanna Kotecha (Communications Assistant); Conor McKiernan (Project Support); Christina Lowe, Sophia Swithern, Louisa Lippi (Technical Experts); Aala Hassan (Research Assistant).

Disclaimer

This document was developed in close collaboration with the members of the High-Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings. Members contributed in their personal capacities and their inputs have shaped the analysis and collective recommendations presented in this outcome document. The content does not necessarily reflect the official positions of panel members’ institutions, or of the UK Government and Federal Government of Somalia as co-chairs.



A trainer is conducting a business development session under the Baxnaano programme's Economic Inclusion component, helping participants build entrepreneurial skills for future income-generating activities.

The Baxnaano Programme, led by the Federal Government of Somalia with support from the World Bank and partners, aims to reduce poverty and enhance resilience by providing cash transfers and promoting economic inclusion for vulnerable households.

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The Panel's work was shaped by a central question:

"why is social protection still marginal in the places where it is needed most, and how can we change it?"

Foreword

From the co-Chairs

We were honoured to co-chair the High-Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings. The Panel was convened in response to a growing global recognition: that in a world facing overlapping crises, deep instability, and constrained resources, the case for investing in social protection as a tool for peace, stability and resilience has never been more important.

Too often, fragile and conflict-affected settings are overlooked in global conversations about social protection. Yet in these settings, social protection is not a luxury, it is an essential part of the journey toward growth. It has the potential to help stabilise societies, strengthen state legitimacy, support peacebuilding and recovery, and reduce dependence on reactive humanitarian responses. It also enables communities to adapt to and recover from climate-related shocks.

The Panel's work builds on the momentum generated by the 2024 Forum on Social Protection in Fragility and Conflict and was shaped by a central question: **why is social protection still marginal in the places where it is most needed, and how can we change that?** Our focus was around two urgent priorities: (i) catalysing global action on advancing effective and sustainable social protection in fragile and conflict settings and (ii) strengthening the architecture through which it is financed and delivered.

To inform our deliberations, we listened. The Panel launched a public enquiry - an open call for evidence and insights from those working closest to these challenges. We received submissions from a wide range of contributors, from local organisations and national practitioners to international agencies and academic experts. These were invaluable in grounding the Panel's deliberations in real-world experience and the needs of partners, and we are deeply grateful to all who shared their perspectives.

We hope that the report synthesising the rich evidence submitted will serve not only as an input to the Panel's own work, but as a valuable resource for policymakers and practitioners alike.

We also extend our sincere thanks to each member of the Panel. Your time, thought leadership, and diverse experiences have enriched this process. Across our meetings and consultations, we were struck by the shared commitment to a future in which social protection is not sidelined in fragile settings, but embraced as a central pillar of crisis response, recovery, and development.

This Outcome Document, with the Catalytic Agenda as its core, reflects the Panel's collective view on what is needed to realise that vision - both in principle and in practice. As co-chairs, we invite all partners, local and global, to take forward these recommendations with urgency and ambition, as a strategic imperative for a more peaceful, inclusive and resilient world.

We thank you for your engagement, and we invite you to act.

H.E. Salah Ahmed Jama
Deputy Prime Minister, Federal
Government of Somalia

Rt Hon Baroness Chapman of Darlington
Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth
and Development Office, UK Government



A health worker under the Baxnaano Health and Nutrition component conducts growth monitoring to assess a child's nutritional status and detect malnutrition early. © Federal Government of Somalia

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Introduction: Why social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings matters

The case for action: instability is the new normal

Fragility and violent conflict are structural features of today's world, shaping the global landscape of poverty, inequality, hunger and displacement. Far from being exceptions, fragile and conflict-affected settings have become central to development, humanitarian and security challenges.

The scale of the problem is stark. One in four people globally live in contexts experiencing high or extreme fragility – in which violent conflict is also highly concentrated – yet they account for more than 70% of people living in extreme poverty globally. By 2040, nine out of ten of the world's poorest people could be living in these settings. Fragility is increasingly protracted, compounded by climate shocks, displacement and economic decline. These places are becoming the epicentre of global instability, where the costs of inaction are highest.

Left unaddressed, fragility fuels humanitarian need, forces displacement, erodes institutions and drives insecurity that crosses borders. A peaceful, stable world is in everyone's interest.

The OECD defines fragility as:

The combination of exposure to risk and the insufficient resilience of a state, system and/ or community to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks.

It notes that fragility and conflict are distinct but related. Conflict-affected contexts tend to be exposed to higher levels of fragility, but the majority of contexts facing high and extreme fragility are not in a state of war. Fragility however increases the risk of conflict or crisis. Helping countries and communities to address its drivers is thus key to preventing conflict and supporting peace.

Why social protection – and why now?

Social protection is one of the most strategic, cost-effective, yet underutilised investments available to governments, development, and humanitarian actors in fragile settings. It is not a luxury for stable states – it is a stabilising force.

A healthy society protects its most vulnerable people, giving them the means to rely on themselves and rebuild their future. Social protection therefore offers an extraordinary opportunity for building and sustaining peace, by enhancing the health of society. Well-designed social protection programmes can help households weather shocks, preserve livelihoods and avoid negative coping strategies. Social protection can sustain the state-citizen contract, underpin peace agreements, strengthen resilience to climate shocks, stabilise the workforce, support inclusive recovery and growth, and restore national leadership over the path to the future.

Yet investment lags far behind what is needed. In 2023, only 3.4% of total aid to fragile settings went to social protection, compared to 70.1% for other development programming, and 26.5% for humanitarian assistance. Coverage is also an issue: in fragile contexts, only 17% of the population is covered by any form of social protection, compared to 49% in other developing countries. This imbalance is often due to differences in domestic resource availability, as fragile states naturally face more severe fiscal constraints. It persists despite growing evidence that social protection can deliver results even in conflict zones: meeting basic needs, supporting peace agreements and helping societies hold together.

What is social protection?

Social protection is a basic human right, designed to address the key risks, shocks and vulnerabilities we face over the course of our lives. It includes support via formal systems, like social assistance (e.g. cash transfers such as child grants), social insurance (e.g. pensions), employment assistance (e.g. skills training) and care services (e.g. child protection), alongside informal mechanisms such as remittances and intra-family transfers. These policies and programmes help people cope with hard times, build better futures and live with dignity.



Mothers are registered on the Mother and Child Cash Transfer plus (MCCT+) programme at Laloba Primary Health Centre (PHC) in Port Sudan. The MCCT+ is an integrated social protection programme that provides vulnerable pregnant women and lactating mothers with regular cash assistance, in combination with knowledge, skills and access to basic health, nutrition and protection services.

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A shifting context: fewer resources, greater needs

The global financing environment is tightening. Aid budgets are under pressure, domestic fiscal space is limited and risk tolerance is low. Humanitarian needs are rising while humanitarian budgets are stretched precariously thin. At the same time, fragile and conflict-affected states can be highly exposed to climate shocks, compounding risks and increasing demand for systems that can adapt and respond to all types of crises. Peacekeeping operations are drawing down, leaving economic vacuums that social protection could help fill.

Despite these challenges, many fragile states already have the foundations of social protection in place – systems that can be preserved, adapted and scaled to meet growing needs. Investing now can prevent their collapse, protect vulnerable people, sustain development gains in protracted crises and reduce the costs of repeated humanitarian surges.

A shared win for all actors

For governments, social protection is a tool to reduce poverty and inequality, promote social inclusion, create the conditions for reform, build trust, boost economic growth and maintain stability. For development partners, it is a smart investment to reduce reliance on humanitarian responses while preserving the gains from prior development investments. For the private sector, it underpins workforce stability, market demand and business continuity – as well as having demonstrated economic multiplier effects. For crisis-affected communities, it signals fairness and hope, provides lifelines when needed, reduces drivers of displacement and strengthens resilience.

Social protection can even play a preventative role in countries not traditionally classified as fragile, but where rising inequality and unmet expectations – particularly among younger generations – are fuelling civic frustration. Meaningful and inclusive social protection can demonstrate goodwill and signal that governments are responsive to demands for fairness and redistribution.

Ultimately, social protection is an investment in peace and stability, not only in welfare.

It is a shared win: it can strengthen government legitimacy, provide communities with greater security and help development partners reduce costs.

Financing social protection

If social protection is to fulfil its promise, financing and development partner approaches to risk must shift.

In a zero-sum environment, governments and development partners must make deliberate choices: rebalancing from fragmented or short-term schemes to investments in lasting systems. Indeed, sustained and predictable development financing must be the foundation for investment in social protection systems. In parallel, domestic budget allocations should grow, supported by reforms that expand fiscal receipts.

At the same time, financing models must be resilient to turbulence. Rather than being suspended when conflict escalates, financing for social protection should be designed to continue operating through crises, ensuring protection reaches people precisely when it is needed most.

In addition, other sources of financing can also be tapped or better connected to social protection: debt relief, climate finance, private sector engagement, diaspora contributions and solidarity funds. The challenge is not only to mobilise resources, but to use them more strategically – aligning social protection with linked agendas such as climate mitigation and adaptation, stability and inclusive growth, and demonstrating the potential of more risk-informed social protection (such as ‘shock responsive’ or ‘adaptive’) better linked to disaster-risk finance, to protect vulnerable groups facing climate shocks.

What are the social protection principles?

The social protection principles are embedded in ILO Recommendation 202 (2012) and underpin the Universal Social Protection 2030 agenda, aiming to ensure ‘progressive realisation’ of the right to social security globally, through enhanced coverage, adequacy, comprehensiveness and sustainability of state-led support. Key principles include universality of protection, accessibility, non-discrimination, coherence and solidarity in financing.

What success looks like

In fragile and conflict-affected settings, success means improving a country’s prospects for peace and stability. Social protection contributes to this by supporting the most vulnerable people, helping ensure that deprivation does not fuel grievances that can be exploited by armed groups and extremists. Instead it offers people a sense of security, dignity and hope for their families. The way it is delivered will vary between and even within countries, shaped by the stage and scale of conflict, territorial control by non-state actors, underlying drivers of instability, and the role and political stance of the government and its partners. But a positive outcome will always share common features, and there will always be a transition path out of crisis and reliance on humanitarian aid towards nationally led systems, as soon as is feasible and appropriate.

Success also means being able to sustain existing systems in the face of crises, which may require temporary transitions away from national structures, and using social protection to anticipate risks and reduce the impact of future shocks, which is often the cheapest and most effective choice in the longer term. Crucially, success requires safeguarding both the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and operational independence, and the social protection principles, by applying ‘do no harm’ not only to people but also to the institutions that will sustain social protection and provide the foundations for stability in the future.

From words to action

The costs of inaction are steep: spiralling humanitarian needs, protracted use of humanitarian budgets, deepening inequality and entrenched instability. By contrast, the benefits of investing in social protection in fragile and conflict-affected states are profound: fewer crises, stronger resilience, fairer societies and a more stable world.

The High-Level Panel was established at this critical juncture to chart a way forward. Its work reflects a growing consensus: social protection in fragile and conflict-affected states is not only possible, but essential. Now is the time to turn this recognition into collective action – shift the agenda from peripheral to central, from fragmented to strategic, from short term to transformative.

Barriers to progress

The High-Level Panel’s deliberations and the public enquiry identified a clear paradox: social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings is both possible and necessary – yet remains marginal in practice. Evidence shows it can stabilise societies, deliver peace dividends and protect the most vulnerable people. Still, a series of structural barriers keeps social protection underfunded, under-prioritised and underused.

The Panel’s consultations and deliberations were grounded in the evidence provided by the Public Enquiry, as summarised in the accompanying **Public Enquiry: Synthesis of Evidence**. This work highlighted five main obstacles:

1

Political buy-in and narrative

Social protection in fragile settings is often narrowly perceived as welfare alone, rather than being recognised for its broader role in creating the conditions for reform, building trust, maintaining political and economic stability, and thereby promoting peace and resilience. This limited view leaves social protection sidelined in global and national agendas, when it should be advanced as both a human right and a strategic investment in societal wellbeing. In addition, action on social protection is often top-down and development partner-driven. Yet for the agenda to succeed, stakeholders from the Global South – particularly in states that are fragile and conflict-affected – must be meaningfully engaged.

2

Design and delivery challenges

Fragile settings vary widely, requiring pragmatic, context-appropriate approaches rather than idealised models. Weak foundations undermine delivery – for example, fragmented registries, unreliable payment systems and under-resourced local actors – while informal community mechanisms remain vital but under-recognised. Tools and workforce capacities are often not tailored for fragile contexts. Digital solutions can both expand reach and heighten risks without safeguards. Using national systems in highly complex conflict settings is challenging, especially when large parts of a country are controlled by non-state armed groups. Transitions to national or hybrid systems are too often late or absent, with transition paths and benchmarks missing from the outset. Evidence gaps, weak data systems and exclusion of displaced and marginalised groups further constrain progress. Bilateral development partners, as well as international agencies and beneficiary governments, tend to be risk averse – they are reluctant to do something that might fail. There must be a shift to using national systems by default: ‘do no harm’ must be applied not only to protect people but also to institutions, ensuring short-term fixes do not weaken the systems needed for long-term stability.

3

Chronic underinvestment

Social protection in fragile settings remains chronically underfunded, receiving just a fraction of official development assistance (ODA) compared to broader development assistance and humanitarian aid. Domestic investment is often constrained by record debt burdens and high military spending, leaving little room for social spending. Where government revenues remain less than 10% of GDP, significantly and rapidly expanding social protection coverage can risk undermining macroeconomic stability. However, broadening the tax base, reallocating budgets and using debt relief or swaps could help expand fiscal space. Bilateral development partners and international financial institutions (IFIs) often default to risk avoidance and short project cycles, weakening results, when what is needed is multi-year, predictable financing and responsible risk management to keep financing flowing even during turbulent times. At the same time, fragile settings remain largely excluded from climate finance despite being among the most exposed, missing opportunities to build social protection systems that can reduce climate vulnerability.

4

Siloed approaches

Humanitarian, development and peace actors have made progress in complementarity and collaboration but often continue to work in silos. Although efforts have been made to enhance linkages, humanitarian cash programmes and social protection systems may be designed without clear two-way transition paths, including due to complex contextual factors, leaving countries dependent on temporary structures. Joint planning, national leadership and incentives to drive transitions are often lacking. Privacy and security concerns may impact data handovers, creating breaks in support, while peer-to-peer exchange remains underused despite its potential to provide learning on adaptable and politically viable social protection models.

5

Insufficiently resilient systems

Fragile and conflict-affected settings are highly exposed to overlapping crises – conflict, displacement, climate shocks and disasters – that threaten both communities and the social protection systems meant to support them. Climate shocks often intensify fragility by driving new displacement and tensions, underscoring the need for adaptive and shock-responsive approaches. Yet protecting and maintaining existing social protection systems must be a first step before they can respond to shocks. However, many social protection systems lack the contingency budgets, scalable tools and integration with early warning and disaster risk management needed to do so. Centralised IT systems are especially vulnerable, and without redundancies such as mirrored databases, decentralised storage and backup connectivity, delivery risks collapsing just when households need support the most.

Shifting the dial

Across these barriers to progress, the central message is clear: social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings is both feasible and urgently needed, but it faces entrenched obstacles.

Political incentives are misaligned, financing is scarce and risk averse, systems are fragile and connections across actors are weak.

The costs of inaction are high: spiralling humanitarian needs, institutional collapse and worsening instability.

The following section outlines how the High-Level Panel recommends that these challenges can be addressed, transitioning from recognition to action.

The catalytic agenda

The High-Level Panel's Catalytic Agenda sets out a shared vision: social protection as a driver of peace, stability and resilience in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Delivering on this vision requires clear commitments and tailored action from all stakeholders: humanitarian actors, development partners, governments, financial institutions, climate funds, the private sector, regional platforms and civil society.

Recognising that:

Social protection is a fundamental human right, enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, serving as a guarantee of dignity and agency for all people affected by conflict, providing access to health care, food, education and other human rights, including for those displaced across borders. Many international and national legal frameworks reaffirm this guarantee – underscoring a collective commitment to uphold it;

Contexts differ profoundly, requiring practical, sequenced, context-specific, conflict-sensitive and adaptive approaches rather than one-size-fits-all models, tailored to institutional capacity and political realities;

Social protection is not aspirational in fragile and conflict-affected settings, it is already a reality. Across diverse settings it is helping to protect development gains and enhance the health of society, thereby building peace, stability and legitimacy, while also enhancing economic resilience, self-reliance and helping vulnerable communities withstand shocks;

Climate and conflict risks can compound each other, requiring strengthened social protection systems that are risk-informed, adaptive, anticipatory and shock responsive – with investment continuing as much as possible even during conflict – and with stronger links to global climate finance and action;

International and domestic financing is under severe pressure, with aid budgets constrained, debt burdens at historic highs and risk tolerance at a low, leading to an overreliance on costly and unsustainable parallel systems and humanitarian responses.

The High-Level Panel sets out the following recommendations:

1



Recognise social protection as a strategic priority in peacebuilding and development

Make social protection central to peace, stability and economic strategies

Political leadership is essential to embed social protection in national and global agendas. This means recognising and promoting its role in peacebuilding, legitimacy, jobs and grounding action in human rights. Encourage peer exchange across fragile contexts through regional platforms and global networks to accelerate adaptation and support politically viable models for reform.

Systematically harness existing evidence and fill critical gaps to build a robust narrative on the effectiveness and sustainability of social protection. Integrate social protection into humanitarian and refugee response plans, macroeconomic reform and recovery planning as a stabilising pillar of transitions – not an afterthought. All this requires sustained engagement with policymakers and the public, political economy analysis, and clear communication of both the successes from fragile and conflict-affected settings and the costs of inaction.

2



Put people first

Design programmes that uphold dignity, drive gender equality and empower those most affected

Social protection must go beyond basic assistance to strengthen livelihoods and resilience. Displaced people, women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and others affected by conflict and crises must be engaged in design and delivery and recognised as active contributors to recovery – not passive recipients.

Interventions need to be intentional about inclusion of the most vulnerable people, with tailored approaches for diverse needs. Mechanisms for participation, feedback and accountability must be embedded to ensure that systems are responsive, transparent and trusted by the communities they serve.

3



Back National Systems

Work with and through national systems as the default, where feasible

Parallel systems should only be temporary and clearly justified, guided by conflict-sensitive protocols that determine when to work with, around, or re-engage with national systems. A broader acknowledgement of *do no harm* is needed – one that extends beyond individuals to the national capacity, institutions and systems essential for long-term impact and stability.

Respect for both humanitarian and social protection principles is critical. Interventions must protect people today while, where feasible, safeguarding the systems that will sustain recovery and stability tomorrow. The goal is to progressively strengthen national capacity and ensure systems can continue functioning even during crises.



Digital registration in Western Tigray, Ethiopia.

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An elderly woman in Transcarpathia receives cash assistance through WFP's complementary programme for people with lifelong disabilities, implemented in partnership with Ukraine's Ministry of Social Policy.

© WFP/Yurko Dyachyshyn

4



Plan transitions from the outset

Design humanitarian and social protection systems with clear pathways to and from nationally led or hybrid arrangements

Transition planning must be considered from the start, with protocols and safeguards that support continuity, flexibility and long-term stability. Humanitarian systems must include viable exit strategies and pathways into nationally led or hybrid systems, where feasible and appropriate, ensuring coordination across actors continues beyond the crisis phase into recovery.

Equally, social protection systems must plan for and be ready to pivot when their normal functioning is disrupted – whether due to conflict, displacement, or contested governance. Clear protocols for data sharing and handover between humanitarian and national systems are essential to maintain support and safeguard beneficiaries.

5



Diversify and sustain financing

Invest in long-term financing strategies to support nationally led systems

Recognise from the outset that financing social protection is an investment in peace and stability. Complement humanitarian assistance with sustained development investment in social protection to build and maintain national systems, ensuring crisis response lays the groundwork for long-term resilience rather than entrenching parallel structures. Increase the share of social protection finance going to fragile and conflict settings.

Diversify funding sources by embedding social protection in climate adaptation and anticipatory action financing, strengthening linkages to disaster risk financing, and harnessing alternative mechanisms such as debt swaps, diaspora contributions, Zakat, solidarity taxes and innovative fintech tools. Create regional frameworks and support portability for displaced populations.

6



Expand domestic financing

Increase domestic contributions by linking social protection to the social contract and demonstrating its value to economic stability and recovery

Broaden fiscal space through measures such as tax reform, debt swaps and budget reprioritisation. Actively engage the private sector by showing how social protection supports workforce stability, consumer demand and business continuity, while also strengthening the wider economy.

Make the case that social protection's long-term gains outweigh the short-term costs. Even in fragile settings, domestic financing must progressively grow to ensure long-term sustainability and national ownership.

7



Maintain systems during turbulence

Support social protection systems to withstand shocks and continue functioning during crises

This means shifting from risk avoidance to controlled risk engagement, ensuring that support is maintained when it is needed most. Flexible implementation approaches should be built in, including mechanisms to move between nationally led delivery and third-party support through actors such as the UN or NGOs.

IFIs and other development partners should deploy the right people, analytical tools and delivery approaches to remain engaged in conflict contexts. Continued backing for decentralised institutions and frontline workers must also be maintained to prevent costly system collapse and loss of capacity.

8



Strengthen core systems

Invest in the foundations of social protection, including legal and policy frameworks and digital solutions

Work across key social protection pillars, including social assistance (beyond cash transfers alone), social insurance and social care services. Embed a jointly developed vision in national strategy, policy and legislation. Ensure that systems are resilient and flexible enough to function during shocks and conflict. Step up efforts to develop effective and interoperable digital solutions that are aligned with national capacities and digital transformation strategies, including digital social registries, programme-specific management information systems, payment platforms, grievance mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.

In doing this, safeguard against digital exclusion, privacy violations, or misuse, and incorporate security features so that no single party in a conflict can dominate or weaponise systems. Where relevant and feasible, integrate risk-informed features such as early warning systems and rapid registration and payment mechanisms.

9



Harness local partners and capacities

Recognise and strengthen the role of local governance structures, frontline workers and civil society actors

These are essential for social protection design, delivery and accountability. Strengthen local workforce capacity and ensure that any centralised project units avoid bypassing these actors. Informal mechanisms of social solidarity and mutual assistance also play a vital role in community resilience and should be integrated into hybrid models that reinforce – rather than replace – local systems.

Building sustainable and contextually grounded social protection requires empowering those closest to the communities they serve, including empowering citizens and civil society to hold social protection providers accountable for delivering real, sustained results.



An instructor is guiding beneficiaries of the Economic Inclusion Component of the Baxnaano programme through an electrical skills training, helping them gain practical experience for future work opportunities.

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Children walking on a road in Gaza
Credit: World Bank / Natalia Cieslik

Call to action

The agenda sets out the recommendations, and now political will, financing and collective action are needed to deliver them. To drive implementation, the High-Level Panel has outlined the following Call to Action – a series of steps aimed at catalysing a changed mindset and approach, turning consensus into action.

Fragile and conflict-affected states:

- ▶ Prioritise investment in social protection. Institutionalise social protection as a legal right – enshrined in national frameworks and protected from political shifts – to help build public trust and ensure continuity of support through transitions and crises.
- ▶ Continue expanding domestic financing for social protection through fiscal reforms, debt swaps and budget reprioritisation, while strengthening underlying public financial management systems to address fiduciary risks.
- ▶ Embed social protection in peace accords, recovery strategies and stabilisation plans, strengthening legitimacy and resilience.
- ▶ Work with development and humanitarian partners to ensure that social protection reaches people most left behind, including in areas affected by ongoing conflict.

Bilateral development partners, including OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), those working together through the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), the G20 and the EU as it develops its framework for an integrated approach to fragility:

- ▶ Commit to increasing the share of development financing for social protection directed to fragile and conflict settings, recognising social protection as a peace and stability investment.
- ▶ Shift from risk avoidance to controlled risk engagement, including the development of a conflict-sensitive framework and indicators to decide when to work with, around and/or re-engage with national systems – while progressively strengthening these systems in the meantime.
- ▶ Incentivise humanitarian actors to shift their modality of support in contexts with functioning, inclusive social protection systems. Humanitarian funding requests should require agencies to analyse how interventions will align with or complement national systems, with parallel approaches clearly justified.
- ▶ Ensure a strong focus on fragile and conflict-affected settings when developing and implementing international commitments, including those related to increasing coverage of social protection.

IFIs supporting macroeconomic reform and wider development in fragile and conflict-affected settings, including to the World Bank as it revises its Fragility, Conflict and Violence Strategy:

- ▶ Continue positioning social protection as a central pillar of engagement in fragile and conflict-affected settings, contributing to peacebuilding, macroeconomic stabilisation and the jobs agenda, through workforce stabilisation, consumer demand and business continuity.
- ▶ Increase the operational footprint of social protection experts in fragile and conflict-affected settings and systematically include conflict and peace experts in analysis and programme design.
- ▶ Replace stop–start cycles with adaptive financing frameworks and stay engaged through turbulence. Design programmes with activation and deactivation triggers and modalities for temporary switches from government-led to alternative delivery mechanisms.
- ▶ Ensure macroeconomic reform packages are systematically accompanied by social protection to mitigate risks to the most vulnerable people and to stability, and ensure that public financial management efforts consistently consider opportunities to improve budgeting for social protection.

The humanitarian community as it delivers the Humanitarian Reset:

- ▶ Ensure understanding of the existence and coverage – geographic and scope – of social protection systems when developing humanitarian response plans, contingency plans and programming.
- ▶ Design humanitarian assistance as entry points for transitions to nationally led or hybrid systems, including capitalising on the drive to increase the use of cash as a path to sustainable development and peace.
- ▶ Adopt a broader approach to ‘do no harm’: protect people while also safeguarding the institutions and systems needed for future impact and stability.
- ▶ Especially for dual-mandate agencies: capitalise on years of learning to ensure conflict sensitivity is deeply and iteratively included in social protection programme design and implementation and further strengthen coherence across development and crisis response.

UN Peace Operations:

- ▶ Use peace operations to create political space for embedding social protection in the implementation of peace accords and in recovery frameworks.
- ▶ Integrate social protection into peace operation exit strategies, working closely with national authorities to avoid vacuums as missions depart.
- ▶ Strengthen local delivery capacity for social protection as a core part of mission objectives, supporting municipalities, civil society and peacebuilders.

Climate funds (Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility, Fund for responding to Loss and Damage and others) and COP30:

- ▶ Continue recognising social protection as a key part of anticipatory action and a frontline climate adaptation tool in fragile and conflict-affected settings, with stronger links to disaster risk financing, ensuring processes to embed this vision in climate commitments and plans.
- ▶ Establish dedicated risk-tolerant windows or quotas for fragile states that struggle to access climate finance.

The Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty:

- ▶ Champion political recognition of social protection as a resilience and stabilisation tool.
- ▶ Mobilise broad coalitions – including private sector, diaspora and philanthropy – for innovative financing of social protection and systems in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
- ▶ Encourage partners to scale up technical assistance and responsible digital solutions to build core delivery systems in protracted crises – which can become the foundations of national systems or build on existing systems – while embedding protocols and safeguards applicable to fragile contexts.

The g7+:

- ▶ Champion the Catalytic Agenda, ensuring it remains visible and central in international debates on fragility, peace, climate and development. Mobilise relevant actors to define a dedicated engagement strategy for social protection in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.
- ▶ Lead peer learning and knowledge-sharing on fragile-state social protection models, including documenting and disseminating good practice across members.
- ▶ Support members in embedding social protection in peace processes, recovery frameworks and macroeconomic reforms.

Regional organisations (African Union, Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS], Intergovernmental Authority on Development [IGAD], Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN], League of Arab States and others):

- ▶ Develop regional social protection frameworks and financing mechanisms for displaced people and migrants on the move.
- ▶ Promote national and cross-border standards on data protection, and on the portability of social protection entitlements, in alignment with Digital Convergence Initiative efforts.
- ▶ Serve as regional platforms for coordinating risk-informed social protection in multi-country crises.

Civil society including social partners, trade unions, women’s rights organisations:

- ▶ Foster greater support for social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings and further promote it in national dialogues and global agendas. Elevate the perspectives of affected groups, including youth, women, persons with disabilities, older people and displaced populations.
- ▶ Play an even greater role in design, monitoring and accountability, to ensure systems are responsive, trusted and locally grounded.



Pregnant and lactating women in Sudan's River Nile State enroll in UNICEF's Mother and Child Cash Transfer Plus (MCCT+) programme. MCCT+ supports mothers and children during the first 1,000 days of life through cash assistance, healthcare, nutrition, and essential child protection services.

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Conclusion

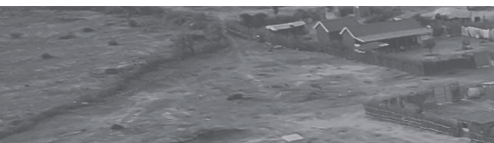
Fragile and conflict-affected settings are at the heart of today's global challenges – poverty, displacement, climate shocks and instability. They are also where the costs of inaction are highest. Social protection is one of the few tools that can simultaneously protect vulnerable people, strengthen legitimacy and foster peace and resilience.

This outcome document and the recommendations it contains outline a shared compact for bringing that vision to life. It calls on all actors – governments, development partners, humanitarian agencies, IFIs, the private sector, climate funds and civil society – to act urgently and ambitiously.

The message of the High-Level Panel is clear:

social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings is not only possible, it is essential.

Delivering it will save lives today, sustain institutions tomorrow, and build the foundations for stability and peace in the future.



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The High-Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings was funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office through the Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (STAAR) Facility – a service implemented by DAI Global UK Ltd.

Suggested citation: High-Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings (2025) Social Protection for Stability: A Catalytic Agenda. Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (STAAR) Facility, DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom.

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