

Why it matters

In 2022, over 100 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, with refugees and internally displaced people living in increasingly protracted contexts. By 2030 nearly half of those living in extreme poverty will live in fragile and conflict-affected states. **Women and girls face specific and heightened risks in crises**, such as increased exposure to violence and insecurity, restrictions on their mobility, school drop-out, job losses and additional care, domestic and livelihood responsibilities. These vulnerabilities and risks are further exacerbated for women and girls facing intersecting discrimination because of disability, LGBT+ status, race or ethnicity.

The impacts of crises threaten progress made in girls' education:

An estimated **11 MILLION GIRLS** may not return to school after the Covid-19 pandemic



It is estimated that

1/5 OF FORCIBLY DISPLACED WOMEN in humanitarian crises have been subjected to sexual violence



STRONG SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS mitigate risks and advance gender equality in the contexts of poverty and crises



Social protection measures can be combined with **complementary interventions** such as awareness raising, social behaviour change communication, skills training, savings, and nutrition supplements

What is social protection

Social protection systems prevent and protect people from poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout the course of their lives. Access to social protection is a human right and, done right, can be a powerful tool to empower women and girls and promote gender equality. Strong social protection systems increase women's income, assets and financial decision-making, support women and girls' health and nutrition, reduce violence against women, support girls to stay in school, delay early marriage and pregnancy, and provide economic and social security in later years.

Social protection is a right and the responsibility of the state, but in many contexts, it is also financed and delivered by non-governmental actors. This is often the case **in conflict and fragile settings** where social protection systems are nascent or disrupted, and **both development and humanitarian-focused national and international agencies play a larger role** in supporting the state to deliver social protection.

Social protection systems can range from **gender discriminatory and gender blind** (those that may actively exclude women and girls or unintentionally ignore their needs) to **gender-sensitive** (such as collecting gender-disaggregated data on programme participation and outcomes) to **gender-responsive and transformative systems** that recognise and respond to gendered needs and address root causes (such as programmes which aim to build women's resilience, prevent violence against women and girls, link to complementary interventions which promote women's livelihoods, knowledge and skills training interventions or support girls' education).



Opportunity

Social protection can **help households build resilience in advance of a crisis and plays a critical role in delivering support to crisis-affected populations** during and after a shock or in protracted crises. This can be through supporting households to save or accumulate assets. It can also be through topping up transfer values or expanding the coverage of existing social protection programmes or using beneficiary lists or payment systems to deliver humanitarian assistance to affected populations quickly. **Well-designed and implemented social protection**, informed by understanding the specific risks that women and girls face in a crisis, has potential to increase women and girls' resilience to shocks.

Cash transfers and labour market programmes

INCREASE WOMEN'S ABILITY TO SAVE

a critical coping mechanism to manage the impacts of climate-related shocks

Cash transfers combined with complementary programmes – such as access to GBV prevention, safe spaces, parenting and life-skills courses – can help

REDUCE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILD MARRIAGE

and increase enrolment in school

Some countries

PRIORITISED single-parent households, women and persons with disabilities in their targeting criteria to expand coverage of social protection programmes in response to COVID-19

Practical tips

- » **Conduct a gender-informed risk assessment** to determine gender and intersectional risks by analysing the potential impacts of hazards, conflict and protracted crisis.
- » Identify the key stakeholders delivering social protection and humanitarian assistance at national and local levels to **identify entry points for integrating gender**. Map the role of women-led and gender-focused organisations to identify entry points for collaboration.
- » **Link social protection approaches to complementary services** to contribute to women's and girls' empowerment objectives through, for example, targeting women for economic inclusion programmes and financial services, and to reduce protection risks through, for example, linkages to safe spaces for adolescent girls, specialised protection, health and GBV services.
- » Consider the coverage, adequacy and comprehensiveness of social protection benefits in crisis, **ensuring they address women and girls' specific needs**. Include considerations of women's disproportionate care responsibilities and increased risks of violence.
- » Institutionalise **risk mitigation and safeguarding measures**, including establishing protocols for the protection of women and girls, and referral mechanisms.

Policy tips

- » **Communicate the importance of** gender-responsive social protection (GRSP) to support resilience in crises:
 - Stimulate discussion by **convening space for policy dialogue** amongst local and international organisations and champions working on gender, humanitarian assistance and social protection. For example, support discussion between the Cash Working Group and Protection Cluster.
 - **Work with local and national women's organisations working in the humanitarian and development sectors** to capitalise on creating and sustaining gender equality gains over time through social protection interventions.
 - **Commission and disseminate evidence** to government and development partners on social protection policy and programme design on the risks and impacts of crises for gender equality and what works to support women and girls' resilience in crisis.
- » Ensure that GRSP, with a focus on women and girls' resilience to crisis is part of development partners' **influencing agenda in all international engagements** with the UN and other multilateral agencies.
- » Identify national and international **commitments, policies, or international observance days** relevant to GRSP and humanitarian action as an opportunity to influence the agenda, such as World Humanitarian Day.

Key references

- » [The effect of cash-based interventions on gender outcomes in development and humanitarian settings.](#)
- » [Cash and Voucher Assistance and Gender-Based Violence Compendium: Practical Guidance for Humanitarian Practitioners.](#)
- » [Gender-responsive social protection post-COVID-19.](#)