

ERF Policy Brief

The Importance of the Transformative Angle for Advancing the Social Protection Agenda in Jordan

Mary Kawar, Zina Nimeh and Tamara A. Kool

About the authors

H.E. Mary Kawar is the Former Minister for Planning and International Cooperation, Jordan.

Zina Nimeh is an Associate Professor of Public Policy at the United Nations University MERIT and Maastricht University in the Netherlands.

Tamara A. Kool is a Research Fellow at Maastricht Graduate School of Governance and UNU-MERIT.

In a nutshell

- The publication of the National Social Protection Strategy (JNSPS) 2019-2025 (JNSPS, 2019), marked an important juncture in the evolution of Jordan's social protection sector, with an emphasis on improved targeting, strengthened institutional capacity, and enhanced coordination.
- The Mapping of social protection programmes discussed in this brief highlights that programmes are mainly reactive in nature, and an overarching harmonization is still missing.
- A proper understanding of the social protection landscape in Jordan helps to uncover the potential for the further development and implementation of the existing social protection agenda, while focusing on the transformative implementation of the agenda.
- Transformative social protection can be best grasped as a conceptualization which looks at social protection as a process, whose goal is to promote sustainable social justice for the most vulnerable groups, improve social equity, build sustainable social institutions and prevent the that achieved impacts on poverty and vulnerability remain scattered.
- In moving forward, Jordan does not need to start from scratch. It has an established and long history of producing visions, strategies, plans and policies. Transformative social protection policies and programmes in Jordan should incorporate both development and humanitarian objectives. This will reduce benefit dependency, and it will preserve and augment the human capital of citizens so they can contribute to economic growth while reducing the need for fiscal outlays.

The authors appreciate the support of the Ford Foundation, through a grant to the Economic Research Forum for the project "A New Social Contract: Reimagining Social Protection in Jordan and Tunisia."

Introduction

Social protection can be defined as the set of policies and programs designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout the life cycle (ILO, 2017). While the core of social protection is concerned with preventing, managing, and overcoming situations that adversely affect people's well-being (UNRISD, 2010), it must be viewed in a transformative way that incorporates a process that ensures sustainable and long-term effects for the reduction of poverty and vulnerability.

The provision of formal Social Protection (SP) in Jordan involves a multiplicity of national and international actors, covering a comprehensive set of programs, from cash transfer schemes to subsidies, tax exemptions, social services, and employment and skills development. Among the most prominent national actors on social protection are: The National Aid Fund (NAF), which operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), and is the main social assistance facility in Jordan; The Zakat Fund, which operates under the Ministry of Awaqaf Islamic Affairs and Holy Places, which represents another significant but smaller source of social assistance; and lastly, The Social Security Corporation (SSC) which is the national institution that is mandated with the administration of social insurance and covers approximately 65% percent of the labour force.

Over the past years Jordan has notably been struggling with a substantial population increase, slowed economic growth, rising public debt, and challenging geopolitical events. This has led to a worsening of poverty and unemployment in the country. Next to the impact of the pandemic, and the protracted refugee presence, it is important to consider the interaction between the prolonged decline in economic activity and the patterns of high unemployment levels, especially among the youth. The publication of the National Social Protection Strategy (JNSPS) 2019-2025 (JNSPS, 2019), marked an important juncture in the evolution of Jordan's social protection sector, with an emphasis on improved targeting, strengthened institutional capacity, and enhanced coordination. The strategy highlights the need for improving the underlying structural necessities, such as macroeconomic management as well as enhancing efficiency, effectiveness and investment to ultimately make impactful use of social protection spending. As such, the strategy provides an opportunity to begin addressing issues through a transformative lens.

To think about the future road map for social protection in Jordan and how to create the proper environment for the implementation of the JNSPS, and as part of the project

“Reimagining Social Protection in Jordan and Tunisia” 2021-2022, the paper “From protection to transformation: Understanding the landscape of formal social protection in Jordan” provided an extensive mapping of formal contributory and non-contributory social protection programs. This mapping was conducted against the backdrop of the Social Risk Management Framework (Holzmann & Jørgensen, 2001) and the Transformative Social Protection conceptualization (Holzmann & Jørgensen, 2001). As discussed in the paper, transformative social protection can be best grasped as a conceptualization which looks at social protection as a process, whose goal is to promote sustainable social justice for the most vulnerable groups (Jones & Shahrokh, 2012), improve social equity, and build sustainable social institutions (World Bank, 2001). This process extends from the already existing Social Risk Management Framework conceptualized by Holzmann and Jørgensen (2001) that includes prevention, mitigation, and coping strategies to protect basic livelihoods and promote risk taking. Thus, transformative social protection goes beyond merely providing “safety nets” or resource transfers. A proper understanding of the social protection landscape in Jordan helps to uncover the potential for the further development and implementation of the existing social protection agenda and its future outlook. More specifically, such an understanding contributes to a transformative process which tackles persisting structures and forms of inequality and poverty (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler's, 2004) through the proper understanding and design of social protection systems and programs.

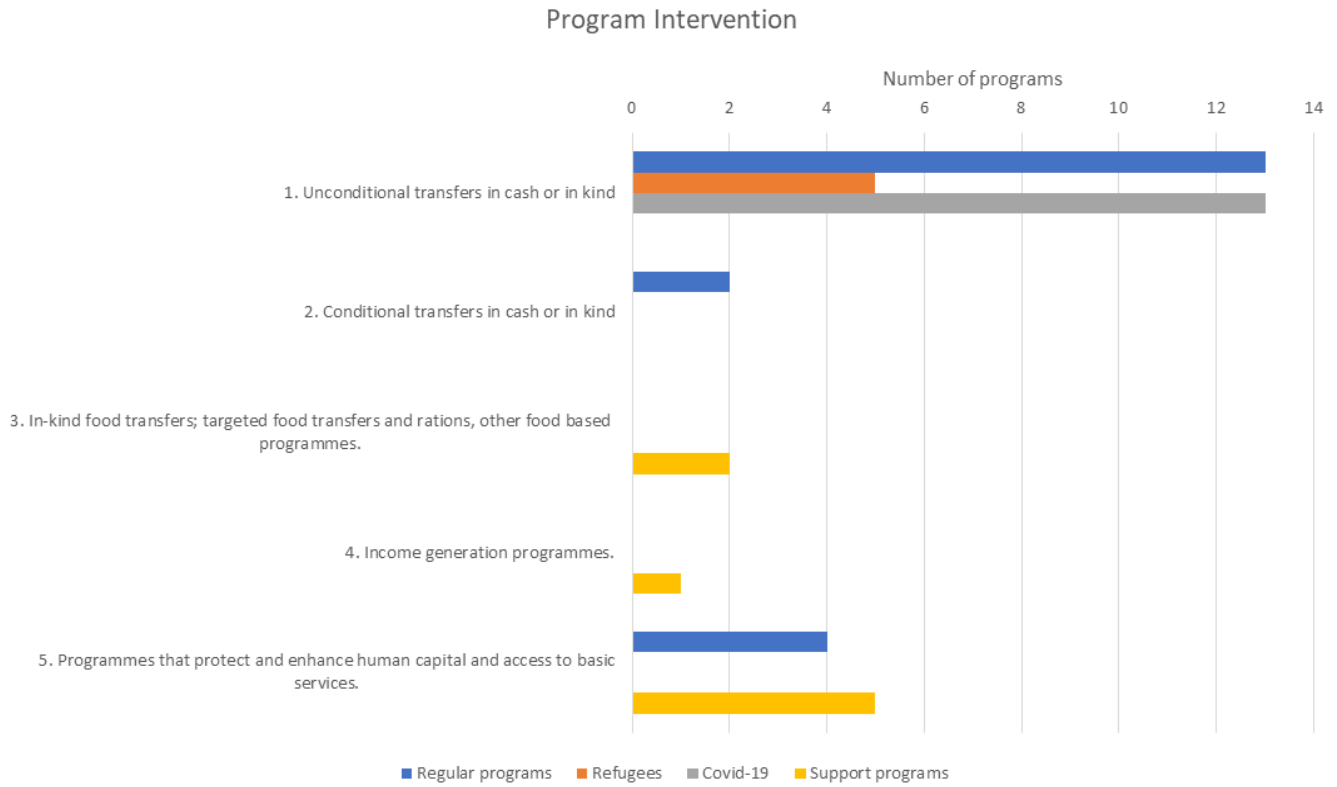
What does the mapping tell us?

The mapping for the [paper](#), was conducted between May and September 2021, illustrated that Jordan continues to approach social protection from primarily a reactive mode.

The paper exclusively focused on cash assistance by the National Aid Fund, the social insurance program as part of the Social Security Corporation under Social Security Law 2014, amended 2019, and programs run by the Ministry of Social Development; as well as key humanitarian cash and voucher assistance programs by UNHCR, UNICEF, UNRWA, and WFP. The mapping firstly analysed what type of programme intervention the different types of social protection programs belong to (Figure 1), and secondly, to what extent these measures are protective, promotive, preventive or transformative in nature (Figure 2).

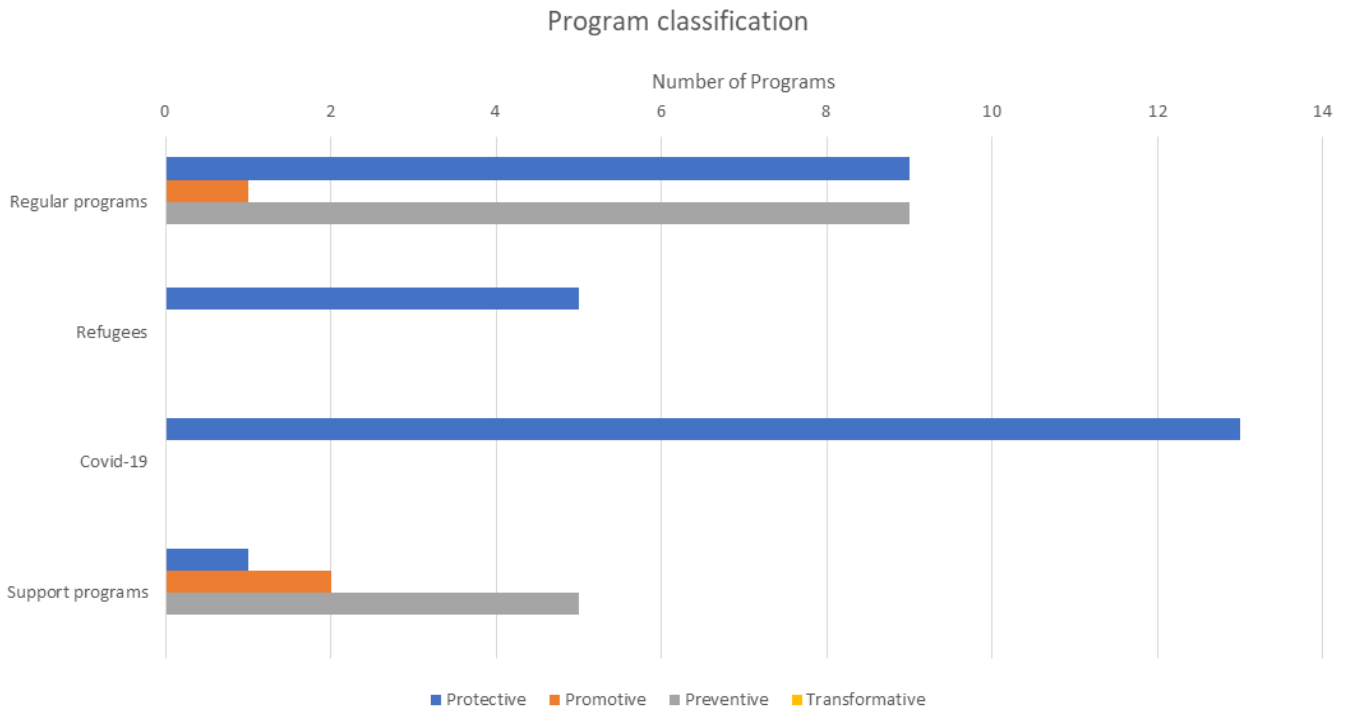


Figure 1: Overview of Program Intervention Type



Source: Authors own compilation on the basis of the mapping

Figure 2: Overview of Program Classification



Source: Authors' own compilation on the basis of the mapping



The examination of these programs resulted in the following key findings; first, that the programs provided by the NAF, SSC and international actors are largely unconditional transfers in cash or in kind. Second, these programs are primarily either protective or preventive in nature; including programs aimed at refugees and the COVID-19 responses. Third, the promotive programs currently in place tend to have a clear link to enhancing human capital. The latter type of programs are generally offered through either the MoSD or some support programs by the NAF.

To sum up, the mapping of social protection revealed that most programs (social assistance for Jordanians and refugees alike) are either protective or preventive in nature. It is understood that the conditions in the past decade in the country meant that programs were mostly reactive in nature, but this is an issue that needs to be well understood and built upon. Additionally, the programs surveyed show a lack of integration and coordination between the different programs. As such, their intended impacts on poverty and vulnerability remain scattered. This signals a clear need to shift towards transformative social protection programming.

On the road to transformative social protection – in a nutshell

Moving from strategies to execution entails coherent and accountable pathways which include operational plans and processes for implementation. Transformative social protection programming can only properly work if it is coupled with structural economic transformation and a rethinking of the social protection system as a whole. To ensure policy coherence and complementarity of efforts, it must also be part of well-defined coordination between all the agencies involved, as well as the relevant national counterparts. Social protection should be designed combining development and humanitarian objectives. This will reduce benefit dependency, and it will preserve and augment the human capital of citizens so they can contribute to economic growth while reducing the need for fiscal outlays.

From a long term and consistent standpoint, poverty and vulnerability will not be reduced unless economic growth is inclusive and sustainable through the promotion of productive and equitable labor markets. And while social protection is a vital tool to address different risks during an individual's lifecycle, the need for protective social protection measures will remain the norm unless a more holistic approach is adopted that includes all the relevant macroeconomic and microeconomic elements. Jordan

needs a social protection system that is prepared to tackle social risks in ways beyond coping and mitigation, and move into more preventive, transformative approaches which are fiscally sustainable.

In moving forward, Jordan does not need to start from scratch. It has an established and long history of producing visions, strategies, plans and policies. On numerous occasions however, implementation has been reactive, was not followed till the end, lacked rigorous monitoring, and the results of evaluations, if carried out, were not fully utilized in follow up efforts. However, this doesn't have to be the case when building on the JNSPS 2019-2025. The Strategy can provide the springboard for transformative reforms. This will require two foundations: first, an effective implementation modality with the necessary political will and technical capacity. Second, a detailed analysis needs to be conducted as to the fiscal requirements for establishing a Social Protection Floor.

Ensuring an all-inclusive approach based on a national Jordanian vision entails a joint focus on policy and programs, relevant international technical assistance, fiscal support and inter-agency government coordination at central and sectoral levels can improve the design. To be effective, social protection strategies should be articulated in an integrated manner and discussed with all relevant societal actors as agendas are an opportunity to rethink the country's social contract. With that said, it is important to stress that while the specific social protection related interventions are essential, this can only work if it is coupled with structural economic transformation and a harmonization of the social protection system.

References

- Devereux, S. & Sabates-Wheeler, R., 2004. Transformative social protection. In: s.l.: (Vol. 232). Institute of Development Studies.
- Holzmann, R. & Jørgensen, S., 2001. Social Risk Management: A new conceptual framework for Social Protection, and beyond. *International Tax and Public Finance*, 8(4), 529-556.
- JNSPS, 2019. Jordan National Social Protection Strategy , Amman: GoJ .
- Jones, N. & Shahrokh, T., 2012. Social protection pathways: shaping social justice outcomes for the most marginalised now and post-2015. Background Note. , London : ODI.
- World Bank, 2001. Attacking Poverty. World Development Report, 2000/2001 - Chapter 7: Removing Social Barriers and Building Social Institutions , Washington, DC : World Bank.





ERF at a Glance: *The Economic Research Forum (ERF) is a regional network dedicated to promoting high-quality economic research for sustainable development in the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey. Established in 1993, ERF's core objectives are to build a strong research capacity in the region; to encourage the production of independent, high-quality research; and to disseminate research output to a wide and diverse audience. To achieve these objectives, ERF's portfolio of activities includes managing carefully selected regional research initiatives; providing training and mentoring to junior researchers; and disseminating the research findings through seminars, conferences and a variety of publications. The network is headquartered in Egypt but its affiliates come primarily from different countries in the region.*

Contact Information

ERF Office

Address: 21 Al-Sad Al-Aaly St. Dokki, Giza, Egypt

PO Box 12311

Tel: +202 333 18 600 - 603

Fax: +202 333 18 604

Email: erf@erf.org.eg

Website: <http://www.erf.org.eg>

Follow us

