NO LOST GENERATION (MIN ILA) CHILD-FOCUSED HUMANITARIAN SAFETY NET

Overview

NLG/Min Ila is a child-focused refugee safety net program implemented in Lebanon since 2016. It seeks to reduce reliance on negative coping strategies harmful to children (e.g., reduced meals, early marriage, child labour etc.) and help households invest in the human capital development of children (i.e. education, health) to avoid a ‘lost generation’ of children displaced by the crisis in Syria. NLG/Min Ila currently serves 50,000 children living in 27,000 households.

The program applies a safety net approach to the protracted refugee crisis in Lebanon. It responds to the multi-dimensional challenges to child well-being through an integrated approach with other programs & sectors.

Why a ‘Humanitarian Safety Net’?

- Poverty is an inter-generational trap
- Poor parents cannot afford to consistently invest in children’s education & health
- Poor parents are forced to resort to negative coping strategies to meet basic needs
- Children thus have less resilience against poverty, limited opportunities, life-long health issues, etc.
- An entire generation of Syrians is at risk of falling into this poverty trap
- Regular cash transfers & referrals help break this cycle & contribute to children’s human capital development

Base Cash Transfer for all children enrolled in 2nd shift schools, for investment in children, including the indirect costs of school

Top-up Cash Transfer for those aged 12+ to reduce reliance on negative coping strategies (child labour, early marriage)

Referrals to complementary services for support with issues not related to costs for children at higher risk of child labour/early marriage, disabled children, etc.
Given the challenging context in which the program was implemented, a range of M&E tools were employed to measure results. Together these tell the story of a child-focused safety net approach, beyond a poverty-targeted household cash grant, applied to the protracted refugee crisis in Lebanon.

Impacts and Outcomes

While a wealth of evidence on Social Protection exists, research on its humanitarian applications is thin. UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti and American Institutes for Research (AIR) conducted a rigorous study to measure program impacts.

Despite the risks of implementing rigorous research in a complex refugee context the study went forward to strengthen the global evidence base* around social protection in protracted displacement, particularly on cash-based safety nets.

The study findings show broad child well-being gains:

- Increase of 20 days/year School Attendance
- Increase of $54/year Education Expenditure
- Increase of $8/month Child Health Expenditure
- 13% less likely to skip a meal
- 76% Optimism, 73% Assertiveness increases
- 10% less time spent on chores
- 19% more likely to eat breakfast

*midline survey
Enrolment Data

While the study found no direct impact on enrolment, this may be explained by households in the study having been sampled from around existing 2nd shift schools, 50% of which reached full enrolment capacity during baseline data collection.

However the official enrolment data tells a different story showing an increase of 51% in program areas (2016/17) compared to 41% in non-program area.

For older children (12+), who received the program top-up assistance, enrolment increased by 100%. While enrolment of older children in non-program area increased by just 56%.


MIS Data

In line with international best practice for large-scale safety nets, the program uses an auditable, custom Management Information System (MIS) to support the operational cycle & boost transparency and efficiency. The MIS enables the program to use administrative data to monitor basic metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Households</th>
<th>26,903</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Children</td>
<td>49,787</td>
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</tbody>
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Children by Gender

All Children: 49,787

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th>23,532</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26,307</td>
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Student visits by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6,345</td>
<td>6,597</td>
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49% 51%

During the household visit children and their families were referred to other complementary services depending on the need of the child and the family. A set of 8 complementary services were used to provide information to beneficiaries to reach the service, such as “Health”, “Protection”, “Education” and others. The aim of the household visit was not limited to referral to other services; the families were also receiving awareness of the importance of education for the children.

In 2017/18, the majority of household referrals were to health services, education (e.g. ALP, BLN), and cash assistance programs (e.g. MCAP, WFP e-voucher). In 2016/17 60% of children who had dropped out and were visited were returned to regular school attendance after only a single visit and referral.
In addition to the internal monitoring, a 3rd party firm was also engaged to carry out both qualitative and quantitative external monitoring of the program, with a focus on understanding beneficiary satisfaction and how well the program performed against its intended design.

**3rd party Monitoring**

64% Of Beneficiaries said: The assistance was sufficient to cover their children wellbeing

84% Of Beneficiaries said: The assistance had positive impact on their children.

The three biggest expenditures with the assistance

- Education
- Winter - related specific to child
- Food

The household visits were considered a valuable part of the program

49% said: It allows them to communicate the situation and challenges enabling to receive individualized advices and solutions through referrals

22% said: It allows them to be referred to specific services needed and didn’t know about

“If it wasn’t for UNICEF’s assistance we wouldn’t have been able to continue the education of our children” – Female Beneficiary, Akkar

“Before I used to receive the financial assistance, my three children used to work. They all returned to school after we started receiving the financial assistance” – Male Beneficiary, Akkar

“Cash is better [than buses]. The difference is that you choose the driver you prefer” – Female Beneficiary, T5

“I would not have been able to send my children to school if it weren’t for this cash assistance” – Male Beneficiary, T5

**Conclusion**

Min Ila/NLG was Lebanon’s only child-focused social assistance programme for refugee families, reaching around 50,000 children over two years with regular, predictable social assistance. Through the provision of a regular cash transfer, household visits, and an integrated referral mechanism, families were supported to invest in their children themselves, demonstrating significant positive impacts. Improvements were recorded in areas including spending on children, food security, school enrolment and regular attendance, as well as optimism. When asked about the Min Ila programme, more than 8 out of 10 beneficiaries stated that the assistance had a positive impact on their children including reducing child labour.

Lessons learnt include proving the possibility and importance of carrying out an impact evaluation for a social assistance programme in a humanitarian context; the need to ensure when cash is provided that service supply keeps pace with demand; and lastly that the concept of holistic social assistance in humanitarian contexts is still less well understood than that of cash transfers, thereby jeopardizing the sustainability of funding for such programmes.