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Special issue

National social protection responses to the socioeconomic impact of the conflict and its repercussions for the Arab region

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1 Economic fallout of the crisis and monitoring of response measures

The military escalation that erupted on 28 February 2026 generated severe economic and social impacts on populations across the Arab region, compounding pre-existing vulnerabilities related to low social protection coverage, fiscal pressures, fragility and declining external assistance.[1,2] The conflict disrupted trade, energy markets, transport routes and food supply chains, while intensifying displacement and humanitarian needs. Estimates by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) suggest that a one-month escalation could result in gross domestic product (GDP) losses of $146 billion in the Arab region,[3] while United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates indicate that losses could reach $194 billion, potentially erasing the regional growth achieved in 2025.[4]

Regardless of country income level, Arab Governments are facing compounding pressures related to inflation, market disruptions, displacement, and rising demands for social and economic support. They have implemented a range of measures in response to the crisis, including social assistance, general subsidies, labour market policies, and administrative relief actions.

As at 15 May 2026, ESCWA has monitored 39 conflict-response measures across the region using a combination of automated data collection, desk research and government verification. Annex 1 provides a detailed methodological note, and annex 2 sets out the data collection template.

Box 1. Voices from Arab countries

During their 12th meeting in a round-table discussion format held on 30 April 2026, the members of the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform in the Arab Region (EGSPR) widely acknowledged that the conflict and its economic ripple effects had placed additional demands on social protection systems and, in many cases, on humanitarian action. They also highlighted that the conflict and insecurity would further intensify poverty, vulnerability and food insecurity. They noted that growing demand for economic and social assistance would place additional strain on State budgets at a time when external support was declining. This underscores the need to adopt a long-term and sustainable approach to financing recovery while avoiding additional debt burdens, including through progressive and solidarity-based tax policies.

Source: ESCWA, Outcome report of the twelfth meeting of the EGSPR (forthcoming).

2 Policy implications and directions

The conflict has generated significant economic and social pressures across the Arab region, requiring sustained and coordinated policy responses. While Governments moved rapidly to contain rising living costs and support affected populations, the findings suggest that responses have largely relied on temporary measures, generalized subsidies and ad hoc interventions.

At the same time, rising poverty-related financing needs and constrained fiscal space are compounding pressures on national social protection systems. The monitored responses also reveal important gaps in targeting, system preparedness, and coordination between humanitarian assistance and national social protection mechanisms. The following sections present six key policy directions emerging from the analysis of conflict-response measures across the region.

A. Policy direction 1: The compounding effects of the conflict require additional and coordinated responses

The conflict has generated multidimensional and compounding shocks across the Arab region. Beyond immediate destruction and displacement, the escalation has intensified inflationary pressures, disrupted labour markets, weakened trade and transport systems, and increased risks of poverty and food insecurity. The combined effects of unemployment,[5] rising living costs and declining central government revenues could push millions more people into poverty across the region.[6] ESCWA estimates indicate that even a 20 per cent increase in food prices could push an additional 5 million people into food insecurity.[7]

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The effects of the conflict are being felt across Arab countries, albeit to varying degrees depending on income levels and exposure to its impact. Low-income and fragile countries are experiencing worsening humanitarian conditions and service disruptions. Prior to this escalation, 210 million people, or 43 per cent of the region's population, already lived in fragile and conflict-affected settings, including 82 million in need of humanitarian assistance.[8]

Meanwhile, middle-income countries are facing increasing fiscal constraints as additional resources are being directed towards stabilizing the prices of essential commodities and providing exceptional support to vulnerable households. In several countries, these pressures are compounded by the direct impact of military attacks, as in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine; and by the continued responsibility of hosting large refugee populations, as in Jordan.

High-income countries have also experienced disruptions to trade, tourism, energy exports and strategic transport routes, weakening economic activity and increasing market instability, potentially undermining States' ability to provide social welfare and protection to citizens and residents.

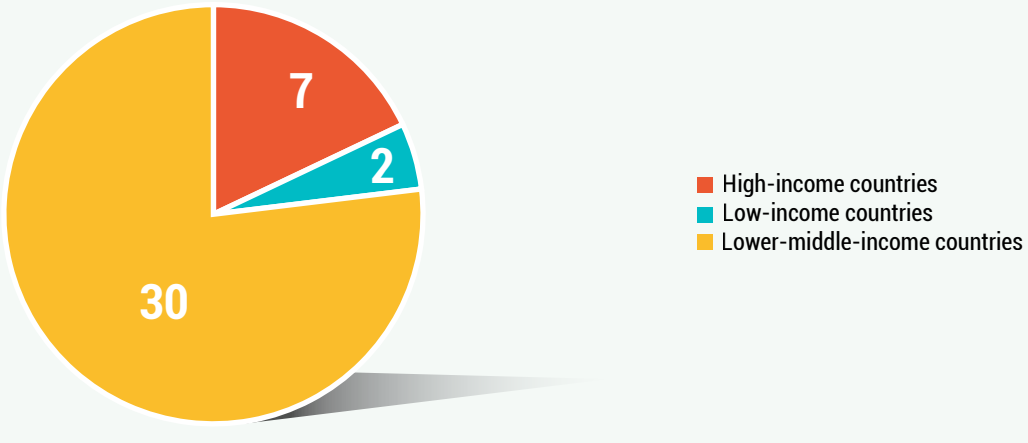
Box 2. Emergency response measures by Gulf countries

All six Gulf countries have been directly affected since the beginning of the conflict, leading to major disruptions in tourism, trade, transport and other aspects of socioeconomic activity. Many undertook immediate actions to mitigate the economic and social disruptions caused by the conflict. For example, Kuwait[a] and Qatar[b] introduced automatic visa extensions to support visitors staying in their territories. Saudi Arabia[c] and the United Arab Emirates[d] provided temporary accommodation support to stranded visitors, while Oman[e] and the United Arab Emirates[f] facilitated their return to their home countries. The United Arab Emirates[g] also provided entry and exit facilitation for visitors unable to travel legally in and out of the country due to transport disruptions.

As these measures were adopted primarily to mitigate the repercussions of the conflict on non-citizens and non-residents, they were not included in the statistical analysis presented in the present bulletin. Nevertheless, they remain important to highlight, as they illustrate both the broad impacts of the conflict and the range of government responses adopted to address them.

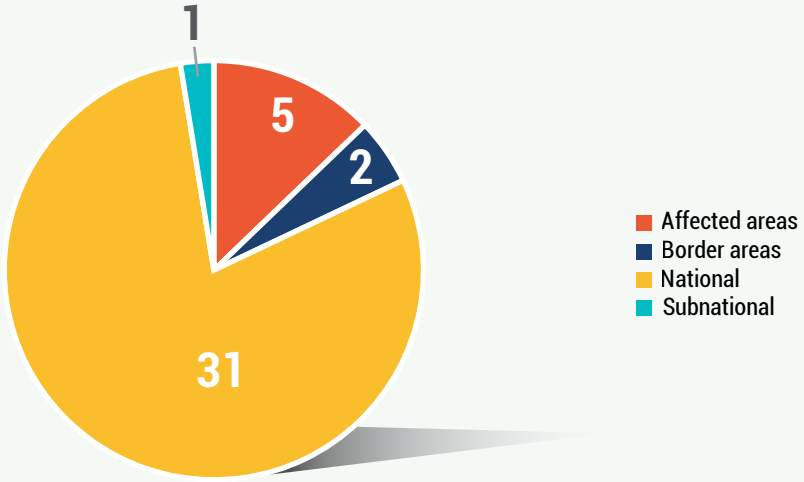
a EY, Kuwait announces automatic extension of visit visas and absence permits, 9 March 2026.
b EY, Qatar announces automatic one-month extension for all entry visas, 5 March 2026.
c Saudi Gazette, Makkah Chamber allocates 2,500 hotel rooms to host stranded GCC citizens, 2 March 2026.
d Gulf News, Abu Dhabi to cover hotel costs for stranded guests, 1 March 2026.
e Muscat Daily, Oman is leading humanitarian efforts to assist travellers from friendly nations in returning home, 5 March 2026.
f Emirates News Agency, ICP facilitates 30,913 travellers amid UAE flight suspensions, issues 15,327 entry visas, 3 March 2026.
g Emirates News Agency, Federal Authority for Identity, Citizenship waives overstay fines for those affected by airspace closure, 4 March 2026.

Figure 1. Distribution of conflict-response measures by country income group



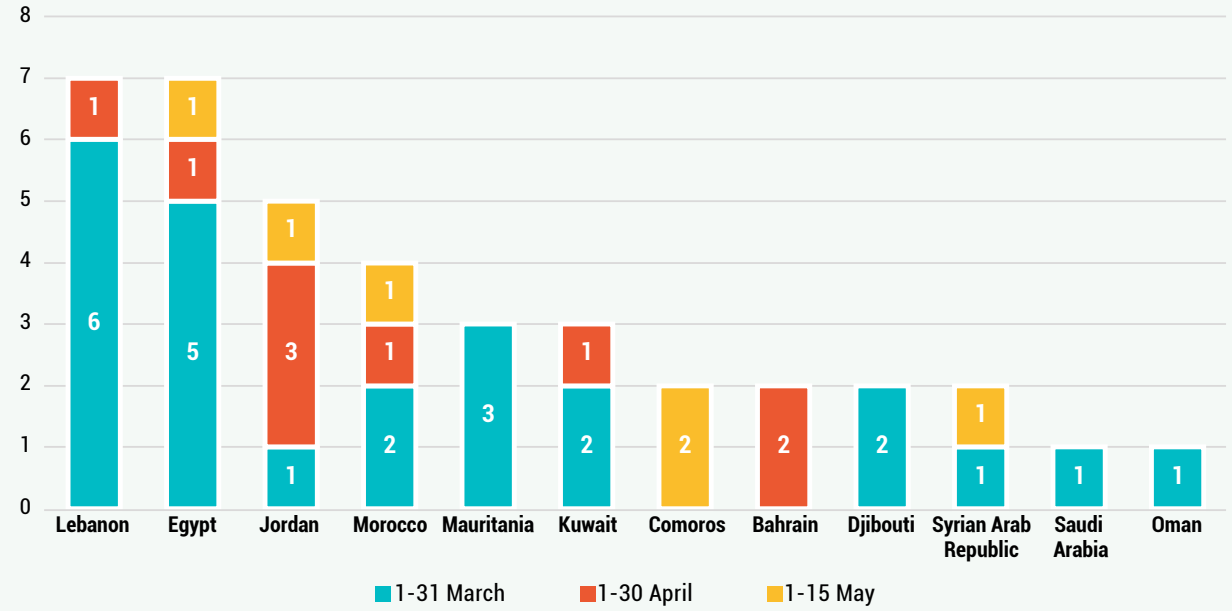
Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Figure 2. Distribution of conflict-response measures by geographic scope



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Figure 3. Distribution of conflict-response measures by country, 2026



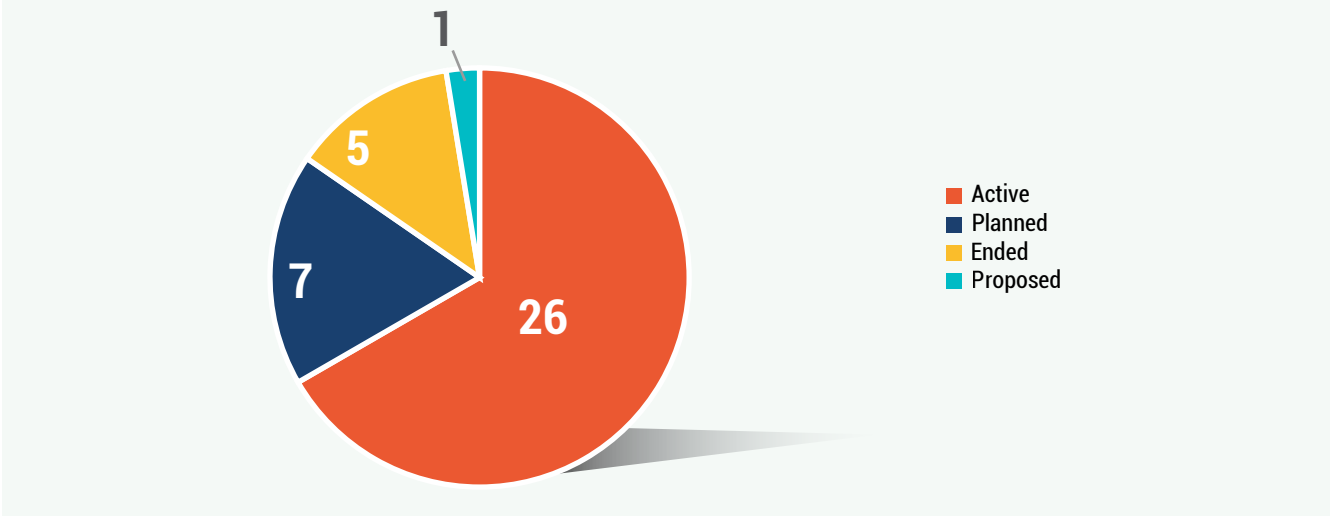
Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Overall, the majority of the 39 measures identified were adopted by lower-middle-income countries (77 per cent), due to their large populations and the existing vulnerabilities of low-income households (figure 1). In addition, most response measures were implemented at the national level, indicating that Governments viewed the economic and social consequences of the conflict as economy-wide rather than localized shocks (figure 2).

Among the 39 policy measures identified in response to the unfolding crisis, Lebanon accounted for the highest number of measures, as it was already grappling with multiple, overlapping crises before the military escalation (figure 3). Intensified air strikes and ground operations in southern Lebanon further exacerbated displacement and increased the need for both government-led and humanitarian assistance.

Egypt, as an import-dependent country, also adopted several measures to curb rising costs of living and protect the purchasing power of its population. Most of the measures monitored were adopted within the first month of conflict, indicating the rapid onset of disruptions and the swift response by Governments.

Figure 4. Distribution of conflict-response measures by implementation status



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Figure 5. Distribution of conflict-response measures by objective

Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Government responses further demonstrate that the conflict is generating sustained and evolving pressures rather than a short-term shock. As shown in figure 4, most of the measures monitored remained active as at 15 May 2026. The relatively limited number of measures that have ended suggests that Governments expect protracted economic and social impacts requiring sustained interventions.

The objectives of the announced measures also reflect the broad and cumulative nature of the crisis. Figure 5 shows that protecting purchasing power represents the dominant policy objective, while the number of measures aimed at systemic reform is limited. This concentration indicates that Governments are primarily focused on containing rapidly rising living costs, rather than building long-term resilience.

Overall, the monitored measures indicate that Governments across the Arab region responded rapidly to contain the immediate socioeconomic consequences of the conflict. However, the persistence of inflationary pressures, food insecurity risks, labour market disruptions and fiscal constraints suggests that the effects of the crisis are likely to continue in the medium term.

Policy recommendations

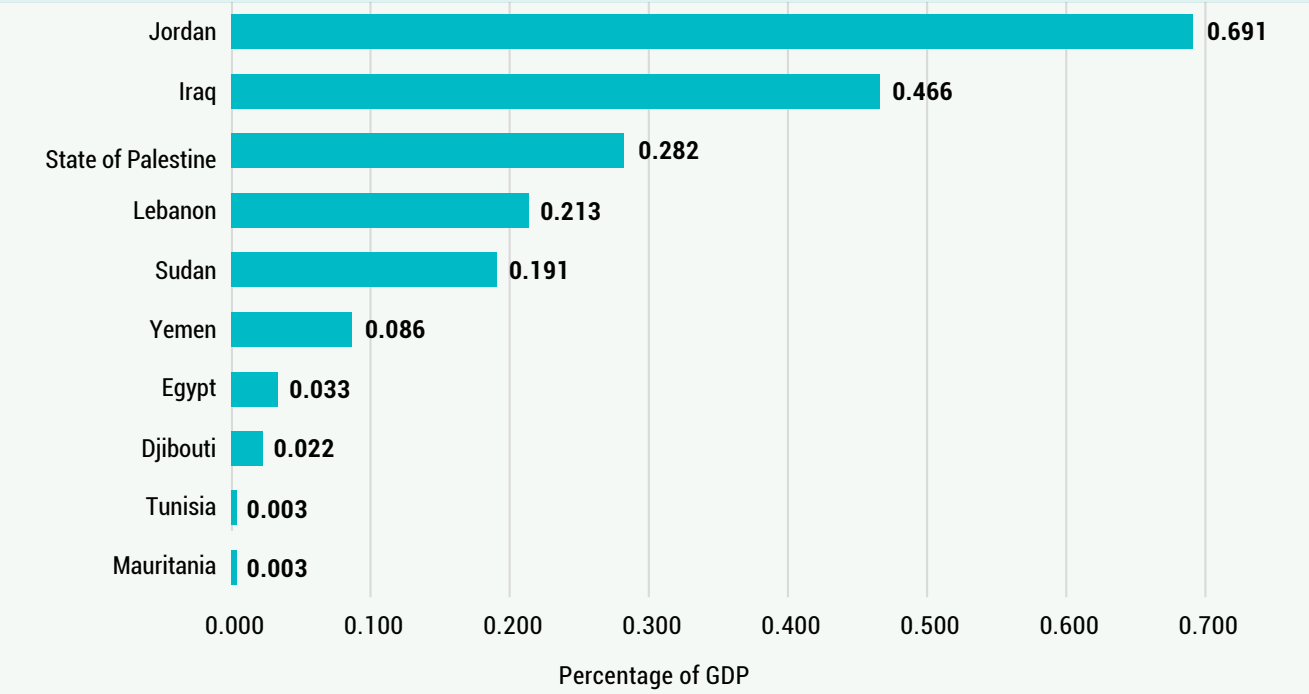
- Governments should consider strengthening regional coordination mechanisms to address cross-border economic and social spillover effects, particularly those related to food security, displacement and supply chain disruptions.
- Countries should consider gradually transitioning from short-term stabilization measures to medium-term crisis-response and adaptation strategies that strengthen resilience, preparedness and the continuity of social protection support.

B. Policy direction 2: Conflict-related economic shocks substantially increase the fiscal costs of mitigating and reducing poverty

The shockwaves of the military conflict extend beyond immediate damage and loss. A report by UNDP warned that for net energy-importing countries, the disruption of key energy and trade channels could trigger a triple shock consisting of reduced energy affordability and availability, rising food prices, and GDP downturns.[9] Based on scenarios established in the same report, ESCWA conducted an analysis to quantify the additional fiscal burden associated with increased poverty resulting from a war-related macroeconomic shock. The exercise compared a business-as-usual scenario with a shock scenario characterized by lower economic growth and higher inflation in 2026. Using the upper-middle-income-country poverty line of $6.85 per capita per day (2017 purchasing power parity (PPP)), differences between poverty headcount rates and poverty gaps were estimated under each scenario.

Based on those calculations, the additional fiscal cost (delta cost) was simulated to quantify the financial resources required[10] to offset the deterioration in household welfare resulting from the war-induced shock, and restore poverty levels to their projected business-as-usual trajectory. The simulation was based on macroeconomic assumptions drawn from the UNDP report. The analysis was limited to the subset of Arab countries for which scenario-based macroeconomic projections were available, while countries lacking such data were excluded.

Figure 6. Additional fiscal cost of poverty alleviation due to conflict-related changes in the cost of living (Percentage of GDP)



Source: Authors' calculations based on UNDP, Military Escalation in the Middle East: Reversals in Global Development, Policy Response Options, 13 April 2026.

The results presented in figure 6 suggest that the economic consequences of the war could generate a substantial increase in fiscal pressures associated with social assistance across the region. The additional resources required are estimated at approximately $5.06 billion (2017 PPP), equivalent to around 0.12 per cent of the region's combined GDP in 2026. According to this simulation, Jordan records the highest burden relative to GDP, at approximately 0.69 per cent, indicating greater fiscal strain relative to the size of its economy. Iraq accounts for the largest increase in absolute terms at $2.73 billion (0.46 per cent of GDP), reflecting the strong transmission of the macroeconomic shock to household welfare outcomes. Lebanon, the Sudan and Yemen exhibit smaller absolute increases, but comparatively significant welfare deteriorations given their existing economic fragilities and limited resilience to inflationary and growth shocks.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that conflict-driven macroeconomic shocks can rapidly deepen poverty and increase pressure on national social protection systems, particularly in countries already facing fiscal constraints and structural vulnerabilities.

Policy recommendations

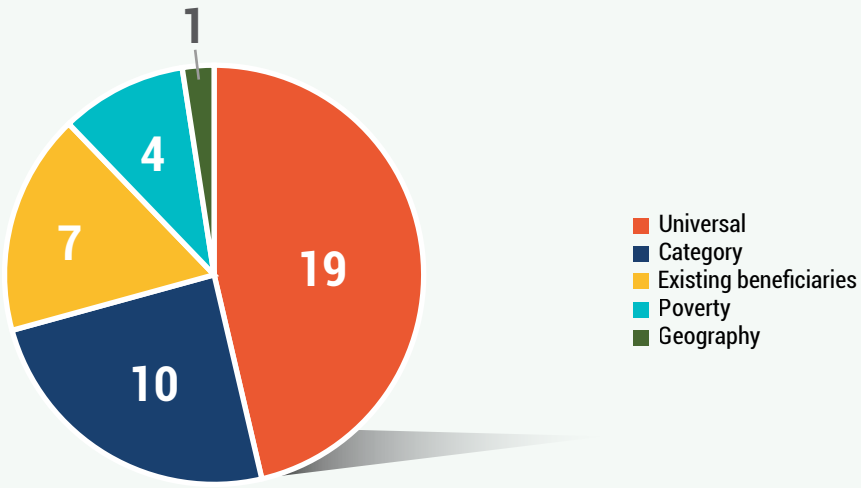
- Governments should prioritize the establishment of shock-responsive financing mechanisms, including contingency funds and adaptive financing arrangements, to enable the rapid scaling up of support during times of crisis.
- Development partners should expand concessional financing and coordinated support for countries facing severe poverty-related fiscal pressures and declining revenues.
- Governments and development partners should consider the feasibility of establishing a regional disaster risk financing facility, similar to the harmonized arrangements between the African Disaster Risk Financing Programme and the African Risk Capacity Group. Such a facility could pool resources from member States and development partners and, in the event of a crisis or covariate shock, provide financial support to supplement domestic responses.

C. Policy direction 3: Regressive universal measures may leave the most vulnerable groups behind

A large share of the measures adopted in response to the conflict are universal in nature and, in many cases, may have regressive distributional impacts (figure 7), particularly those involving blanket subsidies, price controls and market stabilization measures. Specifically, 46 per cent of the measures targeted the general population rather than groups facing heightened vulnerability (figure 8). Although Governments introduced support measures for displaced populations and low-income households, relatively few measures directly targeted informal workers, migrant workers, or workers employed in highly exposed sectors such as transport, tourism, trade and construction.[11] Similarly, only a limited number of measures specifically supported persons with disabilities, despite evidence that they are disproportionately affected during crises.

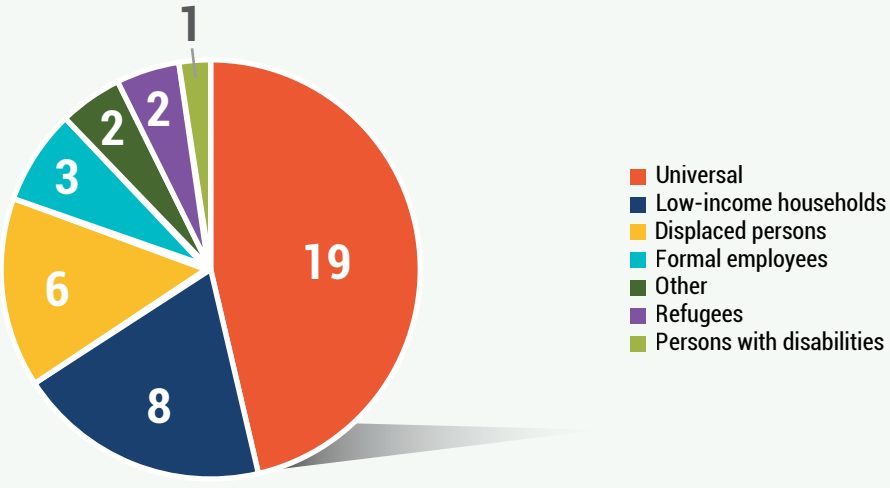
While these interventions helped contain immediate inflationary pressures, they may not have adequately reached the populations most vulnerable to the impacts of the crisis.

Figure 7. Distribution of conflict-response measures by eligibility criteria



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Figure 8. Distribution of conflict-response measures by target group

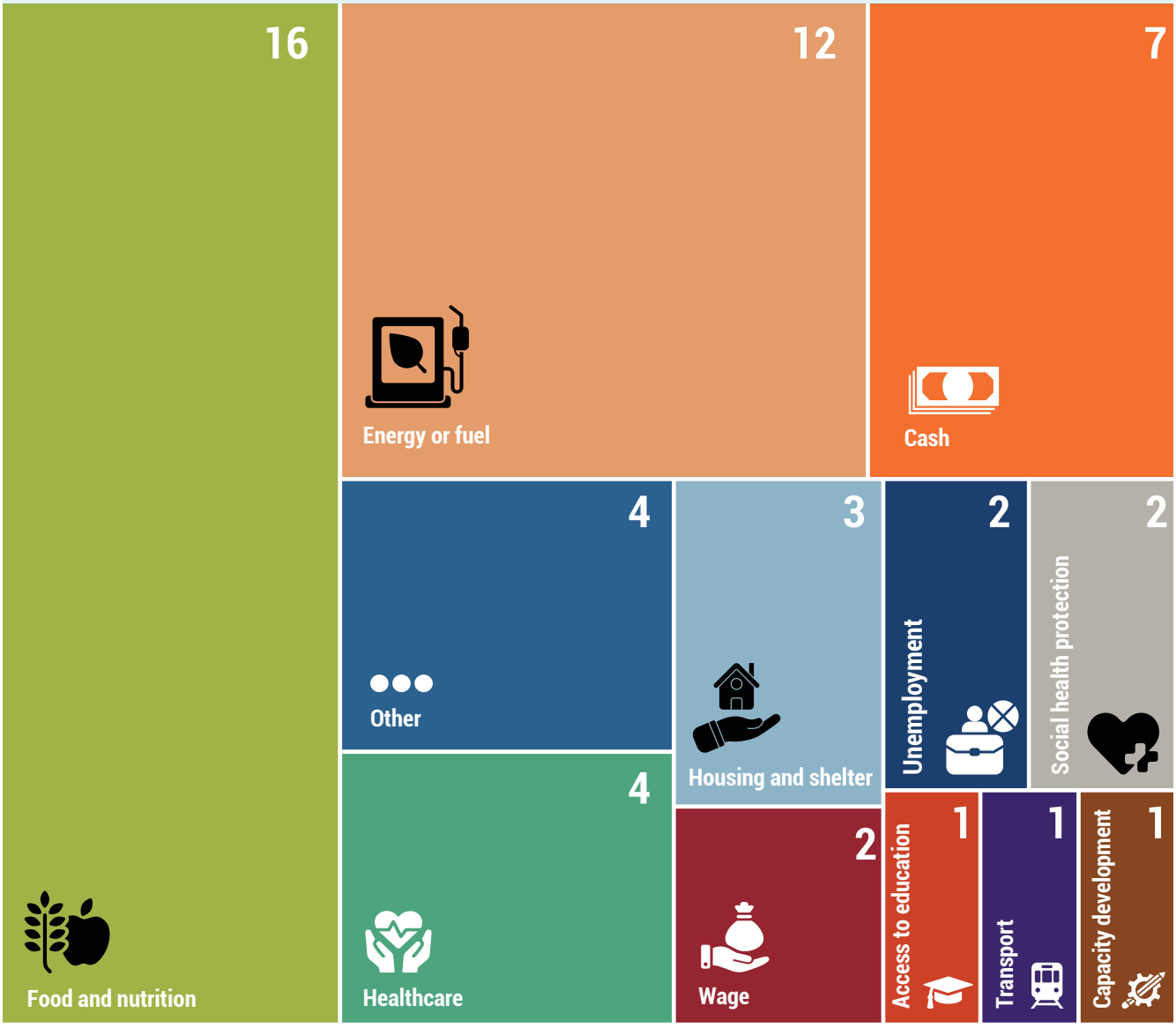


Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

The distribution of benefits and services also reveals a concentration of measures around food, fuel and cash support (figure 9). While these measures were essential for stabilizing household consumption, relatively few addressed broader dimensions of vulnerability, such as employment insecurity, disability inclusion or long-term income protection.

Overall, the findings suggest that while universal measures can play an important stabilizing role during periods of widespread economic stress, they may not sufficiently protect populations facing structural exclusion or heightened vulnerability.

Figure 9. Distribution of conflict-response measures by type of benefits and services



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Policy recommendations

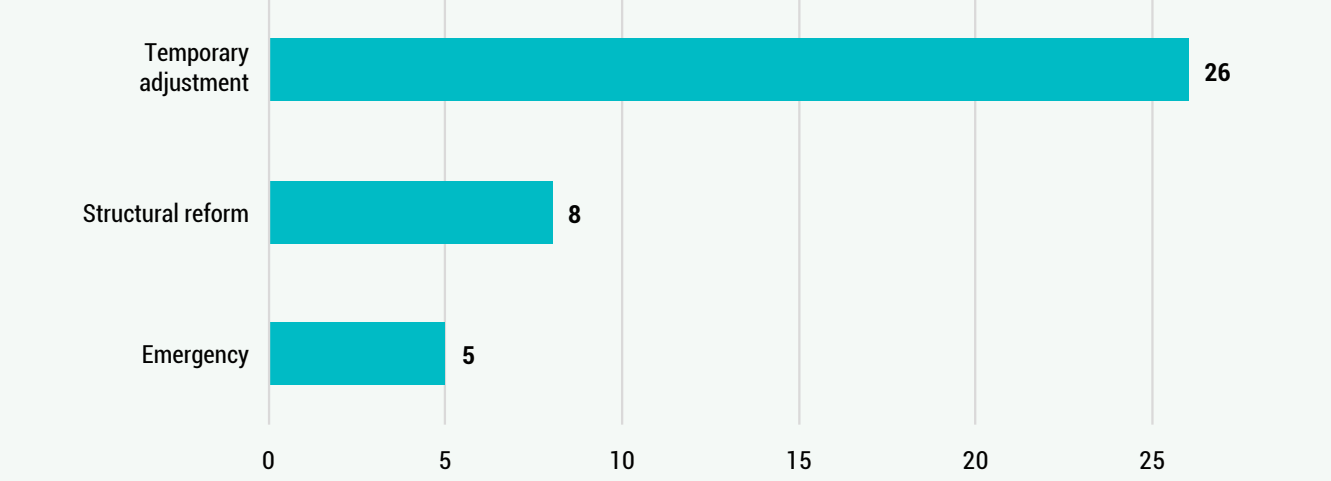
- To enhance the responsiveness and temporary scalability of national poverty-targeted cash assistance in the event of a covariate shock, Governments should consider strengthening targeting systems and social registries to improve the identification and inclusion of vulnerable groups, which often derive limited benefit from broader policy measures such as energy subsidies.
- Crisis-response measures should place greater emphasis on informal workers, persons with disabilities, displaced populations, and workers employed in highly affected sectors or areas.

D. Policy direction 4: Overreliance on universal subsidies and temporary measures may stretch fiscal spaces

Most conflict-response measures adopted across the region were temporary or emergency measures introduced to alleviate immediate economic and social pressures. Two thirds of the monitored measures consisted of temporary adjustments, while only a limited number aimed to introduce longer-term structural reforms (figure 10).

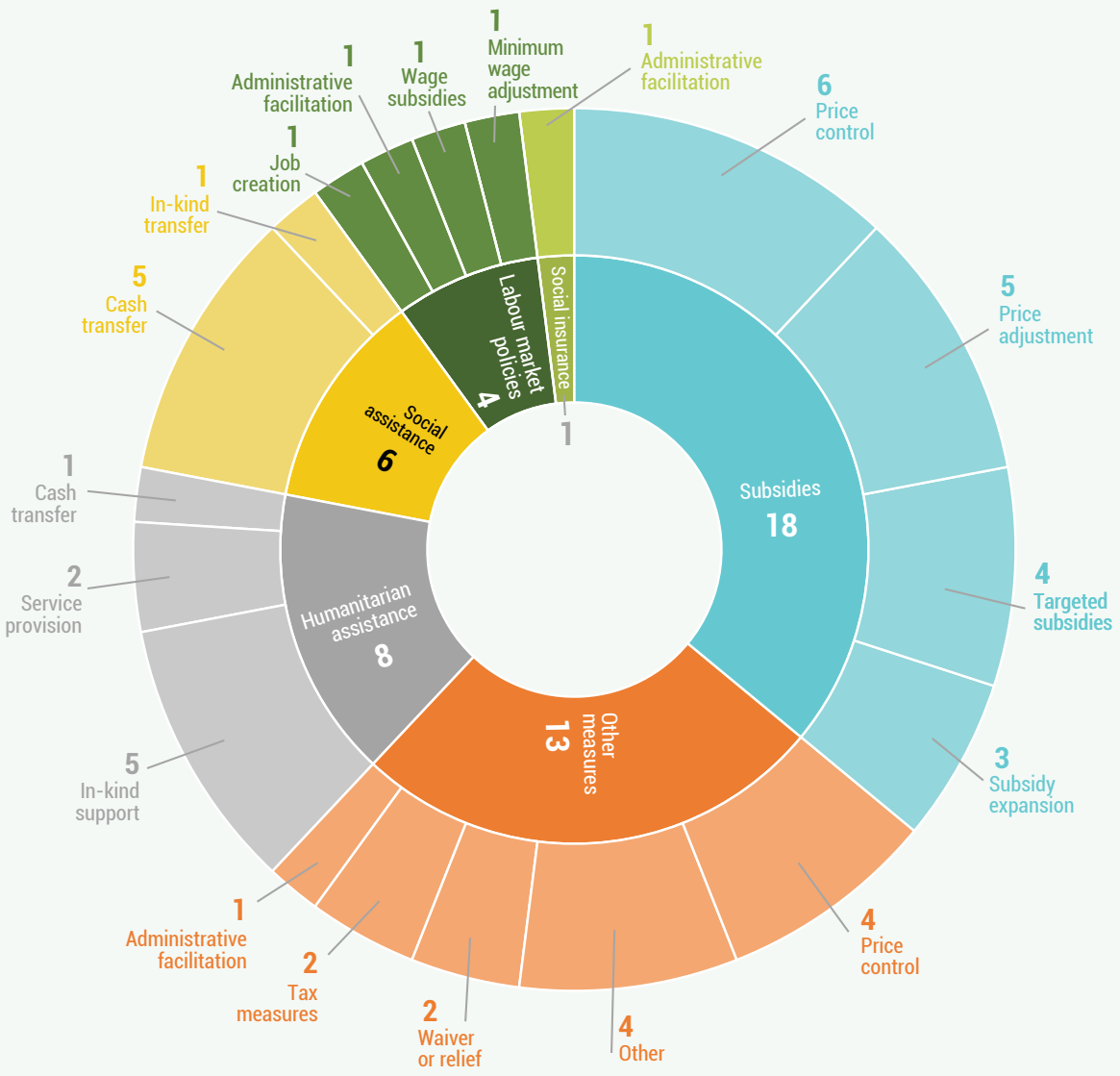
Governments relied heavily on subsidies, price controls and market interventions to stabilize the prices of food, fuel and essential commodities. Social assistance and subsidy-related measures represented the largest share of the monitored responses (figure 11).

Figure 10. Distribution of conflict-response measures by response nature



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Figure 11. Distribution of conflict-response measures by category and subcategory



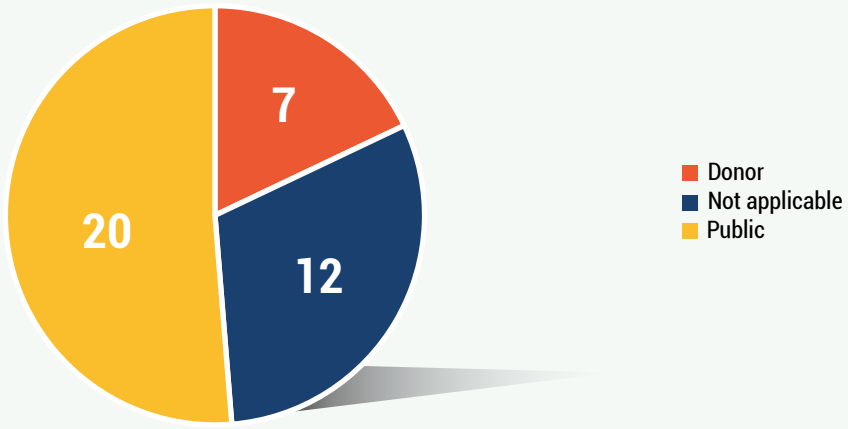
Source: Authors' calculation based on the ESCWA internal documentation database for social protection developments.

This strong reliance on generalized subsidies reflects Governments' efforts to preserve purchasing power and contain inflation following the rapid increase in food and energy prices (figure 5). However, generalized subsidies, such as those for energy or fuel products, are often regressive, as households with higher consumption levels tend to benefit disproportionately from subsidized goods and services. An overreliance on subsidies could further strain fiscal space, especially when the global price of subsidized products increases. According to UNDP estimates, annual government revenues across Arab countries could decline by 3 to 5 per cent under different conflict scenarios.[12] The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) further warned against the use of blanket subsidies, which could impose substantial fiscal burdens. Instead, it emphasized the importance of targeted support measures to more effectively reach vulnerable rural households.[13]

As shown in figure 12, the heavy dependence on public financing further illustrates mounting fiscal pressures. Half of all monitored measures were financed through public resources despite already constrained fiscal conditions. Although donors supported a number of humanitarian and social assistance measures, including the European Commission, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Governments continued to bear the primary financial burden of crisis response.

The findings suggest that many responses remained reactive and consumption-oriented, with comparatively limited investment in scalable or structurally sustainable social protection mechanisms.

Figure 12. Distribution of conflict-response measures by financing source



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Policy recommendations

- Governments should consider gradually shifting from broad universal subsidies to more targeted and fiscally sustainable support mechanisms linked to social protection systems.
- Countries should strengthen medium-term fiscal planning for crisis response to reduce dependence on ad hoc emergency measures and generalized market interventions.

E. Policy direction 5: Existing social protection mechanisms support some conflict-response measures, yet significant gaps in system preparedness remain

Box 3. Case study: Bahrain authorized exceptional wage subsidies for one month

In April 2026, Bahrain amended the Unemployment Insurance Law to authorize the use of the Unemployment Insurance Fund to cover the wages of insured Bahraini workers in the private sector for April 2026. Employers became eligible for reimbursement of salaries paid to employees, up to the total amount of the insured salary minus social insurance contributions. This targeted wage subsidy measure aimed to reduce the economic pressure on employers affected by economic disruptions and thereby prevent layoffs. The legal amendment enabled social insurance mechanisms to expand benefits by leveraging pre-existing records and available financial resources. Notably, Bahrain adopted similar measures during the COVID-19 pandemic as part of its economic relief package.

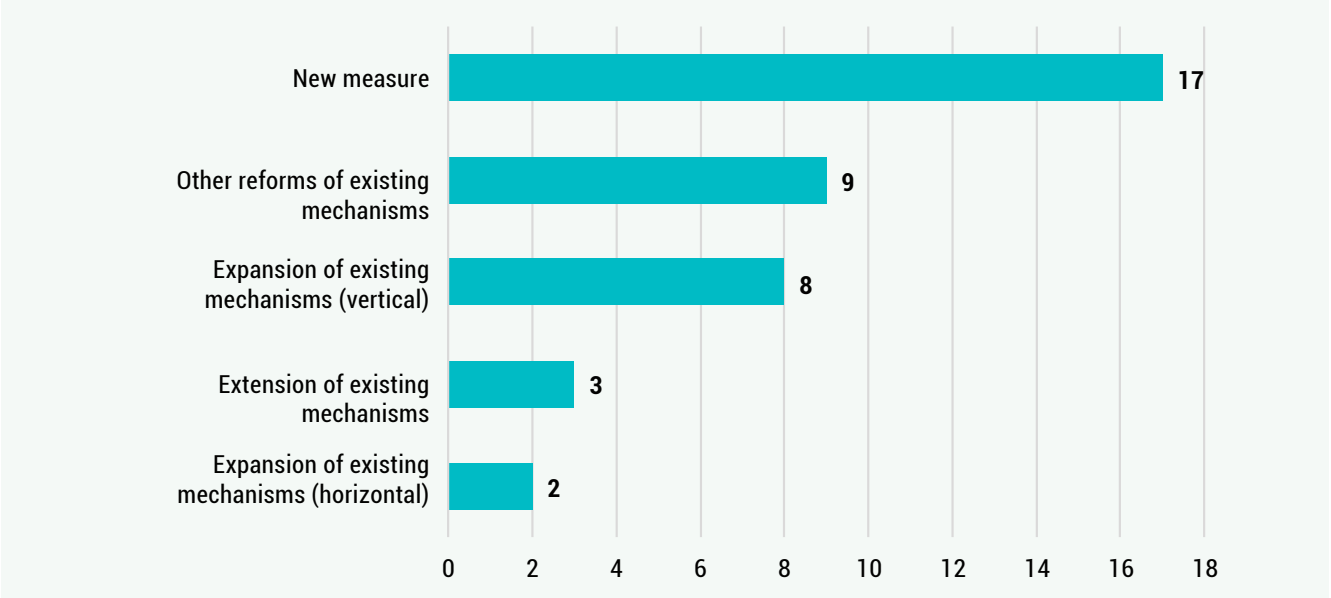
Source: Gulf Business, Bahrain to pay private sector salaries with $570m Covid-19 relief package, 9 April 2020.

Several Governments leveraged existing programmes, registries and social protection mechanisms to respond to the crisis. These responses included temporary benefit top-ups, adjustments to subsidy systems, administrative facilitation measures, and the use of existing beneficiary databases to deliver emergency assistance.

However, nearly half of the monitored measures were entirely new interventions introduced specifically in response to the conflict (figure 13). Most responses consisted of temporary or ad hoc measures, while only a quarter of cases demonstrated horizontal or vertical expansions of existing programmes. This suggests that social protection systems in the region continue to face limitations in terms of rapid scalability, preparedness and institutionalized shock responsiveness.

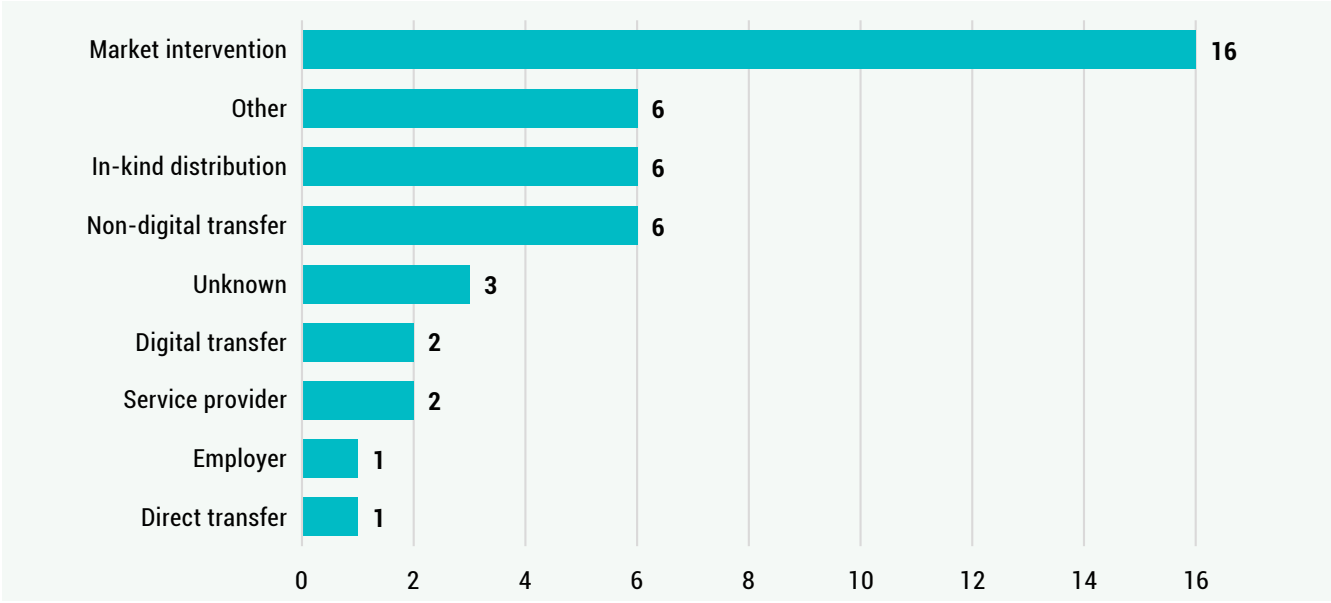
Given that a majority of the adopted measures were related to subsidies, market interventions became the most prominent support channel (37 per cent). In-kind distribution and non-digital transfers (14 per cent each) were also widely used for the delivery of cash assistance and humanitarian aid.

Figure 13. Distribution of conflict-response measures by type of linkage to existing programmes or mechanisms



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Figure 14. Distribution of conflict-response measures by delivery mechanism



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

The following table presents a summary of government responses to the conflict that built on or were linked to pre-existing programmes or mechanisms.

Overview of linkages between new measures and existing programmes or mechanisms

Conflict-response measures	Linkage to an existing programme or mechanism	Name of the existing programme or mechanism
Bahrain authorized the use of the Unemployment Insurance Fund to support private sector employees.	Other reforms of existing mechanisms	Unemployment Insurance Fund
The Comoros announced an expansion of social assistance to vulnerable households.	Expansion of existing mechanisms (horizontal)	Projet Filets Sociaux
Djibouti unveiled plans to protect vulnerable households amid regional conflicts.	Other reforms of existing mechanisms	Targeted subsidies
Djibouti is set to strengthen social safety nets to mitigate external shocks.	Other reforms of existing mechanisms	Social safety net, food assistance
Egypt implemented new electricity price schemes in response to global energy crisis.	Other reforms of existing mechanisms	Electricity subsidy
Egypt announced additional cash assistance for vulnerable households.	Expansion of existing mechanisms (vertical)	Takaful and Karama programmes, ration card programme
Egypt maintained subsidized prices of basic goods amid inflationary pressures.	Extension of existing mechanisms	Ration card programme
Egypt extended, for one year, the exemption of certain food products from import cash-cover requirements.	Extension of existing mechanisms	Exemption of food import from cash-cover requirements
Egypt is set to receive $1 billion from the World Bank to support job creation and the green transition in the private sector.	Expansion of existing mechanisms (horizontal)	Universal Health Insurance System
Jordan reduced the prices of flour and wheat to offset the impact of rising fuel prices.	Expansion of existing mechanisms (vertical)	Bread subsidy
Jordan maintained gas prices and gradually increased oil prices to reduce the impact on citizens' purchasing power.	Expansion of existing mechanisms (vertical)	Fuel subsidies
The European Union allocated €45 million to support social protection reforms in Lebanon amid security crisis.	Expansion of existing mechanisms (vertical)	AMAN Programme
Lebanon is set to distribute cash assistance to displaced families.	Other reforms of existing mechanisms	Shock-Responsive Safety Net
Lebanon is set to provide one-off cash assistance to persons with disabilities.	Expansion of existing mechanisms (vertical)	National Disability Allowance

Conflict-response measures	Linkage to an existing programme or mechanism	Name of the existing programme or mechanism
Lebanon eased access requirements to health services for displaced persons covered by social insurance.	Other reforms of existing mechanisms	Health insurance schemes
Mauritania raised fuel prices while maintaining electricity tariffs amid rising global energy costs.	Other reforms of existing mechanisms	Electricity subsidy
Mauritania announced cash assistance to vulnerable households.	Expansion of existing mechanisms (vertical)	Social registry
Morocco maintained fuel and electricity prices despite rising global energy costs.	Extension of existing mechanisms	Electricity and fuel subsidies
Morocco devoted $165 million per month to contain rising energy costs.	Expansion of existing mechanisms (vertical)	Electricity and fuel subsidies
Morocco allocated $2 billion to ease the impact of global energy market disruptions.	Expansion of existing mechanisms (vertical)	Energy subsidies
Saudi Arabia suspended maritime license requirements amid regional tensions.	Other reforms of existing mechanisms	Maritime license requirements
The Syrian Arab Republic reduced the weight of subsidized bread while maintaining the same price.	Other reforms of existing mechanisms	Food subsidies

Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Box 4. Voices from Arab countries

The conflict-response measures and their linkages to existing social protection systems do not necessarily provide a comprehensive picture of system preparedness or cross-sectoral readiness. During the EGSPR round-table discussion held at its twelfth meeting, representatives of Arab Governments shared examples of existing or planned shock-responsive mechanisms.

For example, Jordan highlighted the existence of a well-established response system coordinating all governmental and non-governmental actors involved in social protection.

The Sudan mentioned that the Government was supporting a large number of displaced persons through coordinated interventions guided by the National Social Protection Strategy.

Algeria referred to ongoing efforts to integrate social protection with risk management so as to adopt a more proactive approach to shock response and disaster risk management.

Iraq noted that a draft protocol was being developed to strengthen institutional preparedness for shocks, including those arising from economic crises, conflict, health emergencies and natural disasters.

Arab countries have also demonstrated an ability to learn from past shocks, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. During interviews conducted by ESCWA with EGSPR focal points, many referred to lessons learned from the global health crisis, particularly regarding strengthening electronic payment systems, digital solutions and cross-sectoral coordination. These experiences suggest that efforts are under way across the Arab region to strengthen the responsiveness and adaptability of social protection systems.

Source: ESCWA, Outcome report of the twelfth meeting of the EGSPR (forthcoming).

Policy recommendations

- Governments should consider strengthening the scalability and interoperability of existing social protection systems to enable rapid horizontal and vertical expansion during crises.
- Countries should consider institutionalizing shock-responsive social protection frameworks through pre-agreed protocols, early warning systems, interoperable databases, and crisis-response targeting and delivery mechanisms.

F. Policy direction 6: Stronger coordination between humanitarian responses and national systems enhances the overall coherence, effectiveness, financial sustainability and affordability of crisis response efforts

In the context of the current conflict, international humanitarian actors have played an important role in providing emergency support. Evidence of coordination between humanitarian actors and national systems can also be observed, as illustrated in box 5.

Box 5. Case study: Lebanon sought to strengthen coordination between disability assistance and humanitarian aid

As one of the countries most affected by the ongoing escalation, Lebanon sought to build on existing social protection mechanisms to mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of the crisis. On 6 March 2026, the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) temporarily eased administrative requirements to facilitate access to benefits for displaced persons covered by social insurance.[a] These temporary measures were aimed at ensuring continued access to health services amid the ongoing war, demonstrating NSSF capacity to respond rapidly and adapt to evolving circumstances while maintaining access to health services for displaced populations. On 11 March 2026, the Ministry of Social Affairs, in collaboration with UNICEF and ILO, announced that 6,000 families enrolled in the National Disability Allowance programme and affected by the conflict would receive an emergency allowance.[b] The country example illustrates the dynamism of a national social assistance programme that temporarily expanded vertically to meet additional needs, while also achieving effective coordination with humanitarian actors during times of crisis.

a 961Today, Special facilities for treatment approvals and health services for insured displaced persons, 9 March 2026.

b ILO, Ministry of Social Affairs of Lebanon, UNICEF and ILO announce emergency cash support for children and persons with disabilities affected by the conflict, 12 March 2026.

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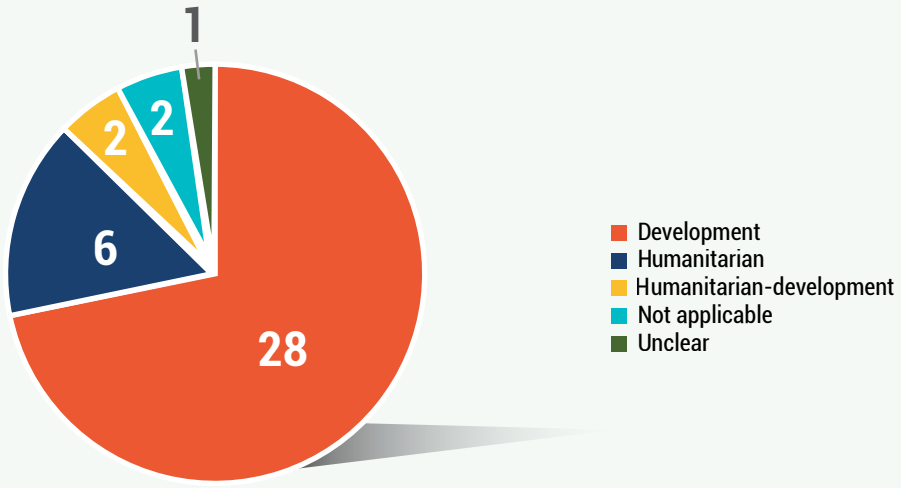
Figure 15. Distribution of conflict-response measures by nexus classification



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

However, many other responses continued to operate through parallel or short-term arrangements rather than through nationally integrated systems. This may limit efficiency and long-term sustainability, coordination and continuity of assistance during protracted crises. The monitored responses reveal limited coordination between humanitarian interventions and national social protection systems. Around 72 per cent of monitored measures fell under the development pillar, while a smaller share was classified as humanitarian responses (figure 15). Only a limited number of measures demonstrated a humanitarian-development nexus approach, indicating that coordination between emergency assistance and national social protection systems remains relatively limited across the region.

Despite these examples, broader regional coordination among Governments, humanitarian actors and development partners remains limited. Strengthening coordination across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus will become increasingly important as the economic and social consequences of the conflict continue to unfold. National Governments, particularly disaster and crisis management authorities and social protection institutions, must assume a leadership role in coordinating crisis responses across international, national and local actors. Interoperability of databases is vital for such coordination, enabling accurate identification of affected populations during crises, and supporting the implementation of scalable, efficient and adequate protection measures. Furthermore, national authorities, donors and humanitarian partners should promote coherence and collaboration across national budgets, development finance and humanitarian assistance to ensure complementary and sustainable financing of crisis response measures, ideally through government channels and mechanisms.

Policy recommendations

- In countries affected by protracted crises, nationally led and context-specific approaches that align humanitarian interventions with existing social protection mechanisms should be prioritized.
- Governments should ideally lead coordinated crises responses across the human-development-peace nexus, thereby ensuring coherence and overall effectiveness of joint efforts in addressing the socioeconomic repercussions of shocks.
- Humanitarian actors should consider piggybacking, aligning or, where possible, integrating their support with or into national systems and processes, thereby reducing reliance on parallel and fragmented mechanisms while ensuring sustainable financing of nationally coordinated and integrated responses.

3 Summary of national measures

Types of benefits or services	Summary of measures	Category of measures
Bahrain		
Other	On 2 April 2026, members of the Bahraini Parliament put forward four proposals of urgent measures to alleviate the impact of ongoing crisis in the region.[14] The proposals included fee relief for companies for six months, tighter oversight on subsidized flour prices, and temporary suspension of fishing bans to minimize supply chain disruption.	Other measures
Wage; Unemployment	On 22 April 2026, the Bahraini Parliament adopted an amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Law, authorizing the Government to use the surplus of the Unemployment Insurance Fund to cover the wages of insured Bahraini workers in the private sector for the month of April.[15] The measure, introduced to alleviate economic pressures resulting from the regional conflict, is expected to benefit approximately 105,000 Bahraini employees.	Labour market policies
Comoros		
Energy or fuel; Food and nutrition; Healthcare	On 9 May 2026, the Comoros announced a package of measures to protect the most vulnerable households in response to the recent energy price increases linked to the conflict. The measures include a 40 per cent reduction in customs duties on essential goods, such as ordinary rice, flour, sugar, cooking oils, poultry, meat products and medicines, for a period of three months. The cost of the measure is estimated at approximately 0.7 billion Comorian francs (approximately $165 million). In addition, the Government announced fuel subsidies for SONELEC, the national electricity company, to stabilize electricity prices. It also introduced support measures for bakers to offset rising production costs and prevent increases in the price of bread.[16]	Subsidies
Cash	On 9 May 2026, the Government announced the expansion of social assistance to vulnerable households through the Filets Sociaux project, increasing the number of beneficiary households from 40,000 to 60,000. The estimated cost of expansion ranged from 3 billion to 3.2 billion Comorian francs (approximately $706 million to $752 million).[17]	Social assistance

Types of benefits or services	Summary of measures	Category of measures
Djibouti		
Other; Energy or fuel; Food and nutrition	On 18 March 2026, the President of Djibouti announced a comprehensive plan in response to the ongoing regional military conflict: to preserve the purchasing power of vulnerable households, the Government would enhance market surveillance, stabilize or cap the prices of selected basic goods, and strengthen targeted subsidy mechanisms.[18]	Subsidies
Food and nutrition	On 18 March 2026, the President of Djibouti also announced that the Government would reinforce social safety nets and provide food assistance to protect the most vulnerable households from external shocks.[19]	Social assistance
Egypt		
Other	On 5 March 2026, the Central Bank of Egypt extended the exemption of imports of rice, beans and lentils from the 100 per cent cash-cover requirement for letters of credit, with a view to facilitating import procedures and ensuring the availability of essential food commodities in the local market.[20] Under the standard regulations, importers are required to deposit the full value of imports in advance to obtain a letter of credit from their bank. The exemption was extended for an additional year.	Other measures
Cash	On 11 March 2026, the Government of Egypt announced additional temporary support for low-income households enrolled in the Takaful and Karama programmes and ration-card holders. Additional aid would be provided for two months to help cope with rising living costs.[21]	Social assistance
Food and nutrition	On 11 March 2026, the Government of Egypt announced that prices of subsidized basic goods would remain unchanged until Eid al-Adha.[22] The measure included continued subsidies on essential commodities, including bread, with the Government absorbing higher production costs to protect vulnerable households from increases in living expenses.	Subsidies
Food and nutrition	On 12 March 2026, the Ministry of Supply issued a directive capping the price of unsubsidized bread sold outside the State bread programme to alleviate inflation pressures on consumers. Under the new measure, the price of an 80-gram loaf was capped at 2 Egyptian pounds ($0.04), with proportionally lower price ceilings applied to smaller loaves.[23]	Other measures
Energy or fuel	On 29 March 2026, the Government of Egypt announced a package of measures aimed at reducing energy consumption and addressing fuel supply pressures resulting from rising global oil prices.[24] The measures included earlier closing hours for shops and restaurants, and a reduction of fuel allowances for government vehicles by nearly a third. On 26 April 2026, following requests from the private sector, the Government reversed the policy on earlier closing hours.[25]	Other measures

Types of benefits or services	Summary of measures	Category of measures
Energy or fuel	On 4 April 2026, the Ministry of Electricity and Renewable Energy announced that in response to the global energy crisis, new electricity prices would be imposed to restructure energy subsidies and encourage efficient energy use.[26] While prices for lower-consumption residential customers would remain unchanged, significant price hikes would be imposed on the commercial sector and highest residential consumption brackets, ranging from 16 to 91 per cent.[27]	Subsidies
Capacity development; Unemployment; Social health protection	On 9 May 2026, it was announced that Egypt would receive an additional $300 million as part of a World Bank development financing package to help address the economic repercussions of the conflict in the region, bringing the total financing package to $1 billion. The package, consisting of $800 million in World Bank financing and a $200 million guarantee from the United Kingdom, is intended to support private sector-led job creation, macroeconomic stability and the green transition. The operation also includes the automatic enrolment of Takaful and Karama programme beneficiaries in the Universal Health Insurance System.[28]	Labour market policies
Jordan		
Energy or fuel	On 4 March 2026, the Cabinet adopted measures aimed at easing logistical pressures on supply chains arising from regional conflicts. Among these measures was the authorization of containerized imports through land crossings, which had previously been restricted to the Port of Aqaba.[29] The Cabinet also approved a six-month exemption from customs duties and taxes on sea freight imports to offset rising maritime shipping costs, effective from 5 March 2026. In addition, all duties and taxes on fuel imports by the National Electric Power Company were waived to ensure a stable fuel supply for the domestic economy.	Other measures
Energy or fuel	On 1 April 2026, Jordan increased fuel prices by 11 per cent in response to the ongoing regional conflict, contributing to higher prices for a range of goods and services. However, the existing fuel tax, set at 45 per cent, will not be applied to the new price increases, with a view to shielding consumers from additional costs.[30]	Other measures
Food and nutrition	On 1 April 2026, at a meeting with the representatives of the import and manufacturing industries, the Minister of Industry, Trade and Supply indicated that while supplies of vegetable oils remained sufficient and available on the market, the Government might take actions to address unjustified price increases. Such measures could include imposing price caps that take into consideration production and import costs and logical profit margins.[31]	Other measures
Food and nutrition	On 1 April 2026, the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply announced simultaneous reductions in the prices of wheat and muwahad flour, the main ingredient in the production of subsidized Arabic bread. The measure aimed to lower production costs across the bread manufacturing sector, thus protecting consumers' access to this essential food staple.[32]	Subsidies

Types of benefits or services	Summary of measures	Category of measures
Energy or fuel	On 30 April 2026, Jordan announced fuel prices for May 2026, indicating that the Government would absorb part of the increase in oil product prices through subsidies to protect the purchasing power of households. With government support, the prices of two products, kerosene and household gas cylinders, remained unchanged, while other products witnessed gradual and moderate increases. Based on announced cost and retail price data, the Government is estimated to absorb between 6 and 51 per cent of the actual cost of selected fuel products.[33]	Subsidies
Kuwait		
Food and nutrition	On 1 March 2026, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Kuwait issued ministerial decision No. 20 of 2026, prohibiting unjustified increases in the prices of food commodities.[34] Under this measure, any price increase above levels prevailing before 28 February 2026 requires prior approval from the Ministry, with violations subject to penalties. The price stabilization measure is set to remain in effect for one month.	Other measures
Food and nutrition	On 1 March 2026, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Kuwait issued ministerial decision No. 21 of 2026, banning the export of all food commodities for one month.[35]	Other measures
Food and nutrition	On 2 April 2026, in response to inflationary pressures associated with the ongoing conflict, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry announced a package of measures to stabilize the prices of selected essential food commodities. The products covered include rice, flour, lentils, vegetable oils, sugar, whole frozen chicken, tomato paste, milk for children under the age of two, powdered milk, canned goods (such as beans, chickpeas, tuna, corn and peas) and bottled water.[36]	Subsidies
Lebanon		
Food and nutrition; Healthcare; Housing and shelter	Since the onset of the conflict, the Ministry of Social Affairs, WFP and other humanitarian partners have been securing shelters for displaced persons and providing food assistance to those residing in them. As at 30 April 2026, the Disaster Risk Management Unit was operating 626 shelters across the country. Support packages provided at those sites included food assistance, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, healthcare and protection services.[37]	Humanitarian assistance
Food and nutrition; Healthcare; Housing and shelter	On 2 March 2026, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education jointly put forward a coordination mechanism for managing displacement shelters set up in public schools. The mechanism is aligned with the national emergency response plan, with a clear separation of responsibilities.[38]	Humanitarian assistance

Types of benefits or services	Summary of measures	Category of measures
Cash; Food and nutrition	On 6 March 2026, the Ministry of Social Affairs and WFP provided emergency cash assistance to 50,000 families affected by the renewed conflict. Displaced families were invited to register through an online platform established by the Government.[39] Subsequently, the programme was expanded to include displaced families residing outside shelters, reaching over 140,000 displaced families as at 17 May 2026.[40]	Humanitarian assistance
Social health protection	On 6 March 2026, NSSF adopted temporary administrative measures to facilitate access to benefits for displaced persons covered by social insurance. The adjustments included allowing delayed submission of work certificates and proof of education for insured children, accepting expired identification documents, and permitting prior or delayed hospital approvals for medical procedures. The measures aimed to ensure continued access to health insurance services amid ongoing conflict in the country.[41]	Social insurance
Cash	On 11 March 2026, the Ministry of Social Affairs, UNICEF and ILO announced emergency cash support for children and persons with disabilities affected by the ongoing conflict. The support would reach around 6,000 affected families enrolled in the National Disability Allowance (NDA) programme, helping vulnerable households cope with the impact of the ongoing crisis.[42] Meanwhile, the NDA regular disbursement for all 34,000 beneficiaries was advanced to meet their rising needs during the emergency. A second phase of the NDA shock-responsive expansion was expected to begin on 30 March 2026, covering an additional 3,500 Lebanese families.[43]	Social assistance
Healthcare; Housing and shelter; Cash; Access to education	On 16 March 2026, the European Commission announced that it would allocate €100 million to provide humanitarian assistance to those affected by the war, including emergency healthcare, basic assistance for families who lost their home and property, protection services, shelter, and education for children out of school.[44]	Humanitarian assistance
Cash	On 30 April 2026, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the European Union jointly announced a support package of €45 million ($53 million) for the country's social protection sector. Of this amount, €40 million ($47 million) is allocated for the implementation of the national cash assistance programme AMAN, while €5 million ($5.9 million) will support institutional reforms within the Ministry, including beneficiary registry upgrades to improve targeting accuracy.[45] The funding comes as Lebanon continues to recover from a prolonged economic crisis while facing heightened security challenges associated with the ongoing conflict.	Structural reform
Mauritania		
Energy or fuel	On 1 April 2026, the Government of Mauritania increased diesel and gasoline prices by 10 and 15.3 per cent, respectively, with a view to alleviating pressure on the State budget caused by rising global oil prices. At the same time, electricity tariffs were maintained at existing levels to protect households from further energy cost increases.[46]	Subsidies

Types of benefits or services	Summary of measures	Category of measures
Cash	On 1 April 2026, the Government introduced temporary measures to support vulnerable families amid the regional crisis, including a one-off cash transfer of 30,000 Mauritanian ouguiyas ($75) to around 124,000 households enrolled in the social registry.[47]	Social assistance
Wage	On 1 April 2026, the Government raised the minimum wage from 45,000 Mauritanian ouguiyas ($113) to 50,000 Mauritanian ouguiyas ($126). In addition, around 50,000 public sector employees who earned less than 130,000 Mauritanian ouguiyas ($326) per month would receive a one-time check worth 45,000 Mauritanian ouguiyas ($113) to help them absorb the impact of rising living costs.[48]	Labour market policies
Morocco		
Energy or fuel	On 30 March 2026, following a special ministerial committee meeting on the impacts of geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East, the Government of Morocco announced that domestic prices of butane gas and electricity would remain unchanged despite rising oil prices. The Government indicated that the additional costs would be absorbed through public subsidies.[49]	Subsidies
Energy or fuel	On 30 March 2026, the Government of Morocco announced that transport professionals and operators would receive a one-time direct cash aid to offset fuel price increases. Eligible beneficiaries would receive a fuel subsidy of 3 dirhams per litre for fuel consumed between 15 March and 15 April 2026. More than 87,000 applications were reportedly submitted through the official online platform.[50] On 16 April 2026, the Ministry of Transport and Logistics announced that the support measure had been extended, and that the amount of fuel subsidy had been increased by 25 per cent.[51]	Subsidies
Energy or fuel	On 2 April 2026, the Government announced that it would allocate 1.65 billion dirhams ($165 million) per month to address rising energy costs arising from the regional conflict. The funds would be used to maintain gas and electricity prices at pre-war levels and support transport professionals.[52]	Subsidies
Energy or fuel	On 15 May 2026, the Government announced a plan to inject an additional 20 billion dirhams ($2 billion) into its 2026 budget to protect households and stabilize the economy against growing energy shocks linked to the regional conflict. This additional allocation would support subsidy programmes covering cooking gas, electricity and public transport sectors, which are heavily exposed to global fuel price fluctuations.[53]	Subsidies
Oman		
Food and nutrition	By 8 March 2026, Oman had implemented a package of measures to maintain the stable prices of essential products and protect the purchasing power of consumers. These measures included keeping the Dhofar border open to facilitate the movement of commercial goods, maintaining oversight of food prices and banning the export of agricultural crops.	Other measures

Types of benefits or services	Summary of measures	Category of measures
Saudi Arabia		
Other	On 23 March 2026, in response to ongoing regional tensions, Saudi Arabia announced the temporary suspension of certificate and documentation requirements for the issuance or renewal of navigation licenses and work permits for maritime vessels.[54] The measure was aimed at easing operational pressures on maritime activities and ensuring uninterrupted services. It was set to remain in effect for one month and applied to Saudi and foreign vessels operating within the country's territorial waters in the Gulf.	Other measures
Syrian Arab Republic		
Food and nutrition; Transport	By 9 March 2026, more than 80,000 Syrians had entered the Syrian Arab Republic from Lebanon due to military escalations.[55] Since 2 March 2026, the Ministry of Emergency and Disaster Management, in coordination with UNHCR, has been providing in-kind assistance at border crossings, including water, blankets, basic relief items and transport support.	Humanitarian assistance
Food and nutrition	On 9 May 2026, the Syrian Ministry of Economy and Industry reduced the weight of the subsidized bread bundle to 1,050 grams, instead of 1,200 grams, while maintaining the same price.[56]	Subsidies

4 Synthesis of insights

The conflict has triggered overlapping shocks and economic ripple effects across the Arab region, extending beyond immediate destruction and displacement to intensify inflation, disrupt labour markets, weaken trade and transport, and heighten the risks of poverty and food insecurity. Many of these economic and social impacts continue to be felt across the region and are likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

Against this backdrop, the shock responsiveness of social protection systems in the Arab region presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, responses to the crisis have been characterized by a wide range of policy measures aimed at ensuring the rapid provision of support. These include temporary vertical expansions of benefit values, piggybacking on existing mechanisms to provide emergency assistance, and adjustments to existing programme design to better respond to emerging needs, particularly through subsidy policies.

On the other hand, in many countries, system preparedness remains at a relatively nascent stage. While vertical expansions and the use of existing registries and programmes in several countries demonstrate a degree of built-in responsiveness, the limited use of horizontal programme expansions and the continued reliance on ad hoc measures suggest persistent gaps in preparedness, scalability and overall dynamism of existing programmes and delivery mechanisms.

Moreover, although blanket subsidy measures can play an important stabilizing role during crises, prolonged reliance on them may compromise fiscal sustainability, efficiency and the ability to prioritize support for the most vulnerable populations over time.

Based on these findings, Arab countries should consider enhancing regional cooperation to institutionalize disaster preparedness and related financing mechanisms and to address the cross-border effects of the crisis, particularly those related to food security, displacement and disruptions to trade and supply chains. Governments should also consider moving beyond temporary measures and investing in longer-term approaches that strengthen resilience and ensure continuity of support during future shocks. In particular, the identification and inclusion of vulnerable populations in national registries and, where appropriate, in social protection programmes should be strengthened, including for informal workers, persons with disabilities, displaced persons and workers in heavily affected sectors, while ensuring the fiscal sustainability of support measures.

Lastly, Arab countries should consider reinforcing the institutional foundations of shock response by improving the adaptability of social protection systems, expanding the use of integrated databases and early warning systems, and establishing financing arrangements that can be activated rapidly and sustainably during emergencies. Closer collaboration among Governments, donors and humanitarian actors will also be essential to ensure that humanitarian responses are better aligned with national systems and delivered through coordinated, nationally owned mechanisms that reflect the needs and priorities of affected populations.

Annex 1. Methodological note

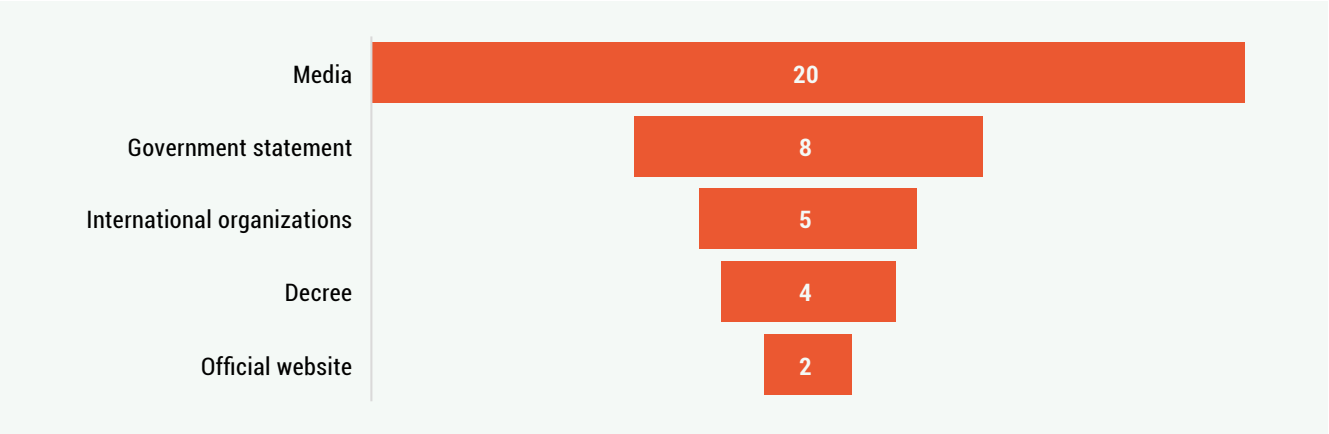
To prepare the present special issue of the "Social protection reform bulletin", ESCWA broadly followed the methodology adopted and elaborated in the Annual Digest of Social Protection Reform in the Arab Region.57 A triangulation approach, combining automated web-scraping tools, manual desk research and direct communication with government officials, was adopted to collect data on government measures announced or implemented in response to the military escalation. However, to ensure that the measures collected and analysed reflect the compounding nature of this new round of shocks and the broad range of policy instruments used by Governments in response, the present edition analyses the following categories of measures:

- Social protection measures, including social assistance and social insurance.
- Labour market policies, including wage adjustments and the creation of additional jobs.
- Measures related to subsidies, including expanding or increasing subsidies and other price-related measures.
- Humanitarian assistance, including the provision of temporary cash support and in-kind services.
- Other measures related to tax policies, fee waivers or relief measures.

In addition, the monitoring scope went beyond the 15 functions of social protection used in the Annual Digest of Social Protection Reform to include additional types of benefits and services, such as wages, healthcare, transport, capacity development and logistical support. A detailed template for collecting and categorizing shock-response measures is sent out in annex 1.

As at 15 May 2026, 20 of the 39 measures identified were captured through media reports. Another 14 measures were drawn from government sources, including statements issued by State-owned media, decrees and official websites of ministries and government agencies. As the conflict intensified humanitarian needs, five measures were sourced from announcements issued by international organizations (figure A.1).

Figure A.1. Distribution of conflict-response measures by source type



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ESCWA internal database on conflict-response measures.

Annex 2. Data collection template of conflict-response measures

Header	Allow multiple	Labels	
1. Identification and country context			
Country	No	/	
Conflict impact	No	Direct, indirect	
Income group	No	High-income country, upper-middle-income country, lower-middle-income country, low-income country	
2. Source and verification			
Source type	No	Official website, decree, government statement, international organizations, media, communication with the Government	
Source link	N/A	/	
Date checked	N/A	/	
3. Measure description			
Title	N/A		
Short summary	N/A		
Objective	No	Protect purchasing power, stimulate economic growth, support vulnerable groups, support affected populations, implement systemic reform, recover war damages, preserve access to services, other	
Category and subcategory	Yes (only for subcategories)	Social assistance	Cash transfer, in-kind transfer
		Social insurance	Fine exemption, parametric adjustment, administrative facilitation
		Labour market policies	Minimum wage adjustment, wage subsidies, job creation, public work programmes
		Subsidies	Subsidy expansion, price adjustment, price control (if subsidies are involved), targeted subsidies
		Humanitarian assistance	In-kind support, service provision
		Other measures	Tax measures, waiver or relief, price control (if subsidies are not involved), other
Response nature	No	Emergency, temporary adjustment, structural reform, recovery	
Linkage to an existing programme or mechanism	No	New measure, expansion of existing mechanisms (vertical), expansion of existing mechanisms (horizontal), extension of existing mechanisms, other reforms of existing mechanisms	
Name of the existing programme or mechanism	N/A	/	

Header	Allow multiple	Labels
4. Governance/institutional arrangement		
Nexus classification	No	Humanitarian, development, humanitarian-development, humanitarian-development-peace, unclear, not applicable
Implementers	N/A	/
Financing source	No	Public, donor, unknown, not applicable
5. Status and timing		
Implementation status	No	Proposed, planned, active, ended
Duration	N/A	/
Start date	N/A	/
End date	N/A	/
6. Targeting and reach		
Target group	Yes	Low-income households, informal workers, formal workers, refugees, displaced persons, host communities, older persons, persons with disabilities, women-headed households, universal, other
Geographic scope	No	National, subnational, affected areas, border areas, host areas
Eligibility criteria	No	Poverty, category, geography, existing beneficiaries, universal, not applicable
Type of benefits or services	Yes	Access to education, capacity development, cash, employment injury and occupational diseases, energy or fuel, food and nutrition, healthcare, housing and shelter, logistic support, maternity, pension, sickness, social health protection, survivorship, transport, unemployment, wage, other
Benefit value	N/A	/
Delivery mechanism	Yes	Digital transfer, non-digital transfer, in-kind distribution, service provider, employer, market intervention, other, unknown
Coverage	N/A	/
Comments	N/A	/

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