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Improving livelihoods outcomes for forcibly displaced populations: a Rapid Review

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Improving livelihoods outcomes for forcibly displaced populations: a Rapid Review

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Abstract

Globally, the number of forcibly displaced individuals has surpassed 100 million, with approximately 80 percent situated in low- or middle-income countries. In these resource-constrained settings the magnitude and protracted nature of displacement poses an increasing challenge. Recent policy discourse has begun to shift away from emergency response interventions towards those that promote investments in the human capital and self-reliance of displaced populations. This paper reviews evidence of the impacts and costs of eleven interventions designed to improve the livelihoods of forcibly displaced people in low-and middle-income settings. The study team finds suggestive evidence that graduation-style approaches and cash transfers can improve people's self-employment, wages, engagement in paid work and wellbeing. However, too few studies have been conducted among the exact populations and settings of interest to discern clear strategies for adapting interventions for success in every context. To address this gap, the authors introduce a primitive taxonomy of contextual factors, which encourages more robust discussion of how context impacts interventions. It will be important for future research to both evaluate a broader range of interventions, and to more systematically identify the effects of context to advance our understanding of how to improve the economic wellbeing of displaced people.

Keywords— forced displacement, refugees, livelihoods interventions, low- and middle-income settings, rapid review

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1 Introduction

The rapid rise in the number of forcibly-displaced populations worldwide has stressed the social, economic and educational institutions of the communities that host them. As of May 2023, around 110 million people are displaced, two-thirds of them internally (UNHCR 2023). Of those refugees and others displaced abroad, eight out of every ten are hosted in low- or middle-income countries, where available resources are stretched thin.

What's more, three-fourths of refugees worldwide live in protracted situations (UNHCR, 2020). As a result, the international community has begun to shift away from the prevailing humanitarian approach to displacement that emphasised providing protection, temporary shelter, and emergency relief. In its place, policymakers promote investing in the human capital and self-reliance[1] of displaced populations—e.g. access to decent work, and reducing constraints to human agency—to support the creation of sustainable livelihoods[2] wherever they land.

Few rigorous impact evaluations have been conducted of interventions that seek to integrate displaced populations into local labour markets or to build their human capital and self-reliance. Indeed, this rapid review is motivated by a prior investigation and mapping of evidence[3] which revealed little evidence pertaining to the livelihoods of displaced youth in LMIC settings (e.g. Kluve et al. 2019). In this review, we expand the population criteria to include livelihood interventions among forcibly displaced people in LMIC settings while retaining rigorous, primary impact evaluations as the main data input for the review.

1.1 Aims & Objectives

This study aims to review existing evidence of the impacts and cost of interventions designed to improve the livelihoods of forcibly displaced people. This category includes refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and asylum seekers in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Additionally, ultra-poor and conflict-affected populations are included because these groups share some similar characteristics and constraints. The review aims to answer the following four questions:

1. What evidence exists regarding the effectiveness of interventions in improving sustainable livelihoods for forcibly displaced populations?
2. What are relevant contextual factors that affect the policies in this area?
3. What is the cost and cost-effectiveness of interventions designed to improve sustainable livelihoods?
4. What are the evidence gaps in the research literature?

2 Methods

This rapid review followed the guidance of the Cochrane Rapid Reviews Methods Group (Garritty et al. 2021). A protocol for this rapid review is published in the Open Science Framework Registries. In line with PRISMA guidelines and systematic review reporting standards, all deviations from the protocol are reported below.

2.1 Deviations from Protocol

This rapid review deviates from the pre-specified protocol in four ways: 1) we removed the age specification from our search terms because the youth-focused literature is sparse. The search focused on livelihoods interventions for people ages 15 years or older; 2) we amended our fourth research question to exclude an originally included sub-question:

[1] The concept of self-reliance among refugees includes meeting basic needs and social capital in addition to economic stability at the individual level, see Seff et. al. 2021 for recent discussion.

[2] A sustainable livelihood is a strategy for making a living (i.e. securing food and income through economic activity) that enables a person to manage and cope with stress and shocks; maintain their assets and capabilities; extend livelihood opportunities to the next generation; and contribute to the net social benefit of one's community.

[3] Available on request from the authors.

"what innovative and scalable approaches to sustainable livelihoods have yet to be evaluated?", because analysis of the universe of existing policies and programs is outside of the scope of this review; 3) due to time constraints, we amended our grey literature search to include VoxDev and exclude Google Scholar, Open-Grey, Grey Literature Report, Social Science Research Network (SSRN), Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), Global Development Network Inter-American Development Bank, DFID Research for Development (R4D), USAID, UN Habitat, OECD Library, and UN iLibrary; last 4) we systematically extracted additional information on context from each included study. This data was used to document and better describe relevant policies and other factors governing the conditions of displacement for the affected population (See Data Extraction for more details).

2.2 Study Identification

Our search strategy combined systematic searches of bibliographic databases and manual searches of relevant institutional repositories. Bibliographic searches were conducted in the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), Web of Science, EconLit - American Economic Association (AEA), PubMed, and PsycINFO databases on 21 November 2021. The complete database search strategy and search string can be found in the supplementary materials. Database searches were supplemented with: 1) manual searches of an Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) project database, 2) backward citation searching of the IPA studies to cross-check with our search, and 3) references provided by subject matter experts who were contacted via email.

2.3 Study Selection

Studies for this review were selected based on the population, intervention, comparison, and outcomes (PICO) criteria presented in Table 1. The population of interest includes refugees, internally-displaced persons, and asylum seekers in low-and middle-income country settings (LMICs)[4] We additionally include interventions for adjacent ultra-poor, and conflict-affected populations that face similar economic and social marginalisation, but may not experience the same mobility and labour market constraints as forcibly displaced populations. We include any intervention that seeks to improve employment, wage, and livelihood outcomes published from 2010 onward.

The retrieved studies were uploaded to EPPI-Reviewer for systematic screening and were screened independently by two researchers on title, abstract, and the full text. Conflicts between the reviewers were resolved by consensus and with input from the project lead as needed.

We limit our review to high quality impact evaluations that use experimental or quasi-experimental methods to identify the causal impacts of livelihoods interventions. Studies of displaced populations are challenging because the population of focus is highly mobile and difficult to track over time. When combined with non-causal evaluation methods, these factors threaten internal and external validity and introduce biases and confounding variables that may confuse the interpretation. Including only experimental and quasi-experimental studies improves the reliability of the evidence presented in this review.

2.4 Data Extraction

We extracted three types of data following study selection: bibliographic information, study design and findings, and contextual information relevant to the study setting. Bibliographic information, e.g. study title, author, date, and journal, was automatically extracted by the reference management software (EPPI-reviewer). Descriptive information related to the study sample such as population origin, country of implementation, and setting, as well as intervention details, and evaluated outcomes were collected by a single researcher for each study.

[4]Note that this study focuses focus on LMICs because most all countries hosting significant numbers of displaced people are included in this classification, as are their neighbours (with the exception, perhaps, of Ukraine's neighbours). According to UNHCR, neighbours host 69% of those displaced across borders. The sizeable livelihoods evidence on displaced populations in high-income countries may not be applicable to LMIC settings where 1) there is less investment in infrastructure, 2) resources are more scarce, 3) the concentration of displacement is much more intense (For instance, refugees account for 27% of Lebanon's population, compared to 2% in Germany. UNHCR 2023).

	Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
P	Population	Refugees, IDP, asylum seekers, ultra-poor, conflict setting; 15+ years old	Non-forced migrants
	Context	Low- or middle-income countries	High-income countries
I	Intervention	Review will not exclude based on intervention	
C	Comparison	Any comparison	
O	Outcomes	Related to employment, wages, and livelihoods per the conceptual framework outlined below	No employment, wages, or livelihood outcomes assessed. E.g., studies strictly assessing mental health
S	Study design & characteristics	RCTs or quasi-experimental designs, pre & post testing	Systematic reviews[5]
	Date	Published from 2010 onwards	
	Language	English	All other languages

Table 1: In/Exclusion criteria based on the review PICOs.

Contextual constraints cited in the research on refugees, IDPs, and asylum seekers were extracted to pinpoint the multiple and intersecting layers of context in situ. We extracted general, country and population-specific contextual constraints and factors; individual level constraints; and key information about the intervention's problem definition, mechanisms and theory of change.

A single researcher undertook data extraction. All extracted data were reviewed by a second researcher to ensure compliance with the study's inclusion and exclusion criteria. The data extraction relied on deductive coding and was informed by a predefined and prespecified conceptual framework of interventions organised by substantive domains, sub-domains, and key outcomes. Below we present a diagram of interventions by type and subtype Figure 1, followed by a description of the outcomes used in this review:

The outcome categories selected for the review of livelihoods interventions is broadly defined to include the direct outcomes from active labour market programs, such as employment and wages, in addition to outcomes for education, health, and wellbeing. We include these more extensive measures of education and wellbeing because they present a more complete view of the inputs to and results of people's economic livelihoods. The studies do not apply a common framework for the measurement of outcomes. As a result, our definition is more inclusive, and recognises the multiple-purposes that livelihoods interventions have on vulnerable populations.

List of outcomes:

- Employment, wages and livelihoods outcomes: Access to decent employment and participation in work can accelerate development outcomes for individuals and their families and improve economic and psychosocial wellbeing (Kluve et al. 2019; Rankin et al. 2015; Bakrania and Ghimire 2018). Outcomes include employment status; entrepreneurship or self-employment; earnings, income, wages; expenditure or consumption; job or employment quality; financial self-reliance; business-related outcomes.

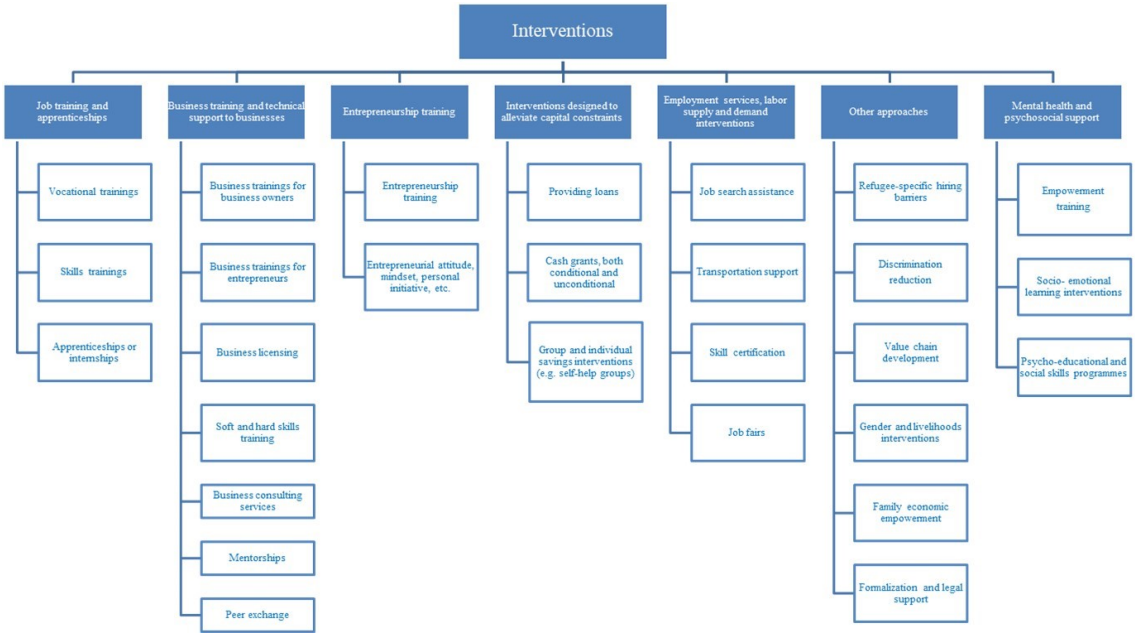

Figure 1: Intervention categories developed for the conceptual framework.

- Education, knowledge and skills: Knowledge and the development of new skills is a critical mechanism for future employability or successful entrepreneurship (Kluve et al. 2019; Rankin et al. 2015; Bakrania and Ghimire 2018). Outcomes include education achievement; education attainment; language and literacy; hard and soft job skills; life skills and attitude.
- Physical, mental and social wellbeing outcomes: Participation in economic activity may impact physical, mental and social well-being (Kluve et al. 2019; Rankin et al. 2015; Bakrania and Ghimire 2018; van der Noordt et al. 2014; Bell and Blanchflower 2009). Outcomes include physical health, nutrition; mental health; wellbeing; crime and antisocial behaviour; empowerment; and resilience.

2.5 Data Analysis & Synthesis

The studies identified for this review included a wide range of interventions that were implemented in different contextual settings and among varied displaced populations. The outcomes measured and indicators used are inconsistent across studies and it is impractical to aggregate them using meta-analysis. Instead a narrative method of evidence synthesis is used to capture the central themes and important nuances of each study (Higgins et al. 2023). The team classified the interventions by type based on a pre-specified conceptual framework described above. We analysed and synthesised the interventions and their relevant livelihoods impacts. We also classified contextual factors using the framework introduced in Figure 3.

2.6 Emerging Trends

In addition to the published literature, we searched for relevant, pre-registered trials and studies to identify emerging trends in the academic research on livelihoods interventions targeting refugee, internally-displaced, conflict-affected and ultra-poor populations. Through this search we found six relevant registrations. The details of each registered study are available in Supplementary Materials.

3 Results

In this section we present our findings based on the 11 included studies (see Figure 2). We first summarise the included studies based on population, study type, and intervention. A narrative synthesis of the study outcomes follows. A final section discusses key barriers and facilitators.

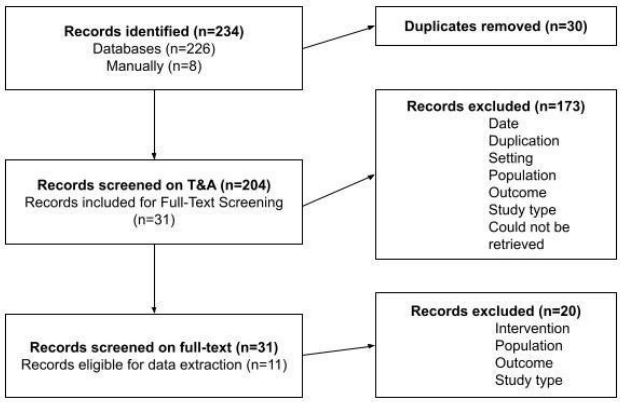

Figure 2: Prisma flow diagram illustrating the characteristics and summarised results of included studies.

3.1 Population

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the included studies based on their population of interest. The majority of studies were centred on Sub-Saharan Africa and Southwestern Asia and North Africa, with very limited literature emerging from Latin America despite relatively high levels of displacement in the region. Additionally, the included studies show a preference for urban relative to rural settings with only three studies focused on rural populations.

Moreover, two studies (Stark et al. 2018 and Crawford et al. 2021) centred their evaluations specifically on youth livelihoods and only two studies (Stark et al. and Blattman et al., 2015) evaluate interventions specifically targeting girls/women.

3.2 Type of Interventions

Job training and apprenticeships. Crawford et al. (2021) provide the only evidence on apprenticeship and vocational education interventions. The studies focus on youth ages 15-24 in Nigeria. The apprenticeship intervention provided literacy, numeracy and business soft skills training in addition to a 9-12 month assignment to a cluster of mastercraft

Region	Country	Refugees & IDPs	Ultra poor
Southwest Asia and North Africa	Jordan	Obi (2021), Caria et al. (2020)	
	Lebanon	Masterson & Lehmann (2020)	
	Afghanistan		*Bedoya et al. (2019)
	Iraq	Phadera et al. (2020)	
Sub Saharan Africa	Ethiopia	#+Stark et al. (2018)	
	Kenya	Delius & Sterck (2020), MacPherson & Sterck (2019)	
	Nigeria		*+Crawford et al. (2021)
	Uganda	#*Blattman et al. (2015)	
Latin America	Colombia	ˆ Bahar et al. (2021)	

*Rural settings, + Youth-focused, # Gender-focused, ˆ Venezuelans displaced abroad

Table 2: Studies based on the country of the population of interest

persons (MCPs) for trade-specific skills through learning-by-doing. The vocational program (COSDEC) offered 9-12 months of trade-specific technical training in classrooms equipped with workshops and production facilities.

Business training and technical support to businesses. Delius and Sterck (2020) investigated the business and market impacts of a business licensing intervention in two refugee camp settings in Kenya. Notably, the camp refugees in this setting were required to spend their monthly mobile money transfers on food purchases from the licensed businesses only.

Interventions that alleviate capital constraints. Four studies investigated interventions that provide cash directly to affected households. The cash interventions are distinguished by the discretion given to refugee households both through the incentives imposed by the intervention design, and the availability of products and services in the markets accessible to refugee households. For example, refugees in camp settings may only be allowed to spend cash in camp businesses that sell food.

Caria et al. (2020) investigate three treatments, including the impact of providing a cash transfer on the labour market outcomes of Syrian refugees in Jordan. The cash intervention valued at 65 JOD ($92 USD at the time of the intervention in 2019) was "labelled" as a subsidy for job search costs such as transport, personal care, or childcare. However, the study did not enforce how recipients actually used the cash assistance.

The cash assistance in two other studies was intended for specific use. Masterson and Lehmann (2020) study the impact of providing direct cash assistance to 1,360 Syrian refugee households in Lebanon. The cash assistance valued at $575 in 2013 dollars was given to families at higher elevations to keep them warm and dry during the winter months.

Phadera et al. (2020) examined the effect of Iraq's universal Public Distribution System (PDS), which consists of a social protection program offering a universal food subsidy, on internally displaced households in Iraq.

Combination interventions. Two studies investigate programs that bundle entrepreneurship training with interventions to alleviate capital constraints. Blattman et al. (2015) examine the impact of WINGS, a modified graduation-type program, targeting ultra-poor women in conflict-affected, rural Uganda. The intervention offered

five days of business skills training, a $150 cash grant (valued at $375 in PPP terms), supervision from a local NGO, and the option to join a self-help group centered on communal savings, lending, and work. Half of the treatment villages also received a three-day group dynamics training. Bedoya et al. (2019) study a one-off "big push" package known as "Targeting the Ultra Poor" (TUP) for impoverished households in Afghanistan. The package includes a transfer of livestock assets, cash consumption stipend, skills training, and coaching.

MacPherson and Sterck (2019) compare the experiences of refugees assigned to camp settings that are distinguished by their approach and policy towards providing assistance. The first camp uses a "self-reliance" approach which offers camp residents a bundle of income-generating and market development opportunities in addition to a cash transfer. The second employs a set of policies consistent with a "humanitarian" approach, where in-kind food aid is provided.

Employment service interventions. One of the three treatment arms in the study conducted by Caria et al. (2020) investigated the impact of providing refugees with psychological support to prepare them for a formal job interview in Jordan. A 4-week planning calendar was used together with video and face-to-face instructional support from a member of the Employment Service Office (ESO) and SMS reminders. A separate "information" treatment arm of the study informed Syrian refugees of their legal rights regarding employment and labour laws in Jordan. The intervention sought to counter Syrian refugee's widely held perception that engaging in formal work in Jordan would cause them to lose their UNHCR financial assistance package.

Mental health and psychosocial support interventions. Stark et al. (2018) examine the effects of a social empowerment program – Creating Opportunities through Mentoring, Parental Involvement and Safe Spaces – on the economic vulnerability of participating adolescent refugee girls in Ethiopia.

Other approaches. Other interventions evaluate the impact of country-level policies governing the lives of displaced populations. Bahar et al. (2021) investigate the impact of granting nearly half a million Venezuelan immigrants the legal right to work and access to basic public services (not conditional on any eligibility criteria). Obi (2021) studies the impact of being a Syrian refugee hosted by Jordan in a camp vs. a non-camp setting.

3.3 Study type

Five studies included in the review used randomised evaluations, and six studies utilised quasi-experimental methods. Of those using quasi-experimental methods, two studies used Difference-in-differences regression (Bahar et al. 2021; Obi 2021), one study used regression discontinuity design (Masterson & Lehmann 2020). Two studies used matching methods (Delius & Sterck 2020; Phadera et al. 2020).

4 Findings

4.1 Employment, wages and livelihoods outcomes

We present the effect sizes for employment metrics using forest plots in Figure 3 The metrics studied capture employment status (whether employed), income-generating activities, labour force participation (employed or actively searching), and time spent working, e.g. the average number of days or hours of work.

Employment status and hours worked. In Colombia, the act of granting undocumented migrants with a right-to-work visa (Bahar et. al., 2021) did not move labour force participation of Venezuelan migrants, but modestly increased their participation in formal employment. Cash transfers (Caria, et. al., 2020) had very modest positive effects on the employment of Syrian refugees in Jordan up to four months after they were distributed.

The vocational and apprenticeship programs in Nigeria substantially improved beneficiary's participation in income-generating activities and modestly increased their wages. The vocational training had larger impacts in comparison to the apprenticeship training. Notably, both programs were resource intensive and required a substantial time-commitment from participants (Crawford et al. 2021).

Participation in the Targeting the Ultra-Poor (TUP) did not affect men's labour force participation, but substantially increased women's labour force participation in Afghanistan (Bedoya et al. 2019). In contrast, girls who participated in the social empowerment program in an Ethiopian refugee camp showed no change in their participation in paid work (Stark et al. 2018).

There is some evidence that the timing of the follow-up survey matters for detecting significant impacts of the intervention being studied. For example, Caria et al. (2020) report that neither of their interventions of interest significantly impacted employment status after six weeks. Marginally significant impacts on Syrian employment emerged, however, two months after the program.

In terms of hours worked, two studies demonstrate increases. Participation in WINGS substantially increased the average number of hours that beneficiaries spent working in both agricultural and non-agricultural labour according to Blattman (2015). In addition to labour force participation, the TUP program in Afghanistan increased the number of days of full-time work (including unpaid work) for women (Bedoya et al. 2019).

The work visa program in Colombia had no impact on the number of hours worked by Venezuelan migrants in either the formal or informal sector, according to Bahar et. al. (2021). Similarly, Masterson & Lehmann (2020) find no effect on the number of days worked by all household members.

Income from wages or labour. Just two interventions substantially improve people's incomes. The largest impacts came from bundling entrepreneurship training together with cash and supervision (Blattman et al. 2015). WINGS positively increased the incomes of mostly female participants who had not previously engaged in enterprise, with larger effects among those in the group-training study arm. Even encouraging people to form self-help groups was enough to boost incomes. Vocational training (Crawford et al. 2021) had modest effects on the wages of participants, but apprenticeships did not. The investment return to vocational education was higher in comparison to the apprenticeship program because vocational skills earn a higher market wage.

Providing cash to refugees in search of work (Caria et al. 2020) marginally increased their earnings after 4 months. However, providing psychological support or job search information had no discernable impacts on the wage or labour income they were able to attain several months after treatment. Granting a business licence to vendors in a refugee camp (Delius & Sterck 2020) increased total household income but had no significant impact on non-business income.

There is some evidence that the setting of displacement affects wage and poverty outcomes for refugees. Obi (2021) finds that income for refugees living in camps was significantly lower in comparison to refugees in urban settings. Refugees living in camps also experienced an increased risk of abject poverty compared to those living out-of-camp, likely as a result of fewer opportunities for work.

Other programs found little impact on wages, such as Bahar et al. (2021) who reported no significant impact on wages for those in either the formal or informal sector, and Masterson and Lehmann (2020) who found no effect on household labour income or daily wages.

Self-employment. Providing a package of cash, business training, and ongoing supervision, together with group training (Blattman et al. 2015) doubled the number of new non-farm enterprises formed. Participating in the apprenticeship and vocational training programs (Crawford et al. 2021) improved self-employment and attempts at starting a business. Importantly, this appears to be driven by female participants, and in particular by female students enrolled in Islamic Quranic Education.

Consumption and assets. Several studies show that treatment resulted in increased total consumption expenditure (Bedoya et al. 2019, Phadera et al. 2020), though others reported only food or non-food consumption. Masterson & Lehmann (2020), Macpherson & Sterck (2019), and Phadera et al. (2020) all saw increases in food consumption. Blattman reported sizable increases in non-durable consumption for both group but even more so for those in the group training (Blattman et al. 2015).

Other studies show that treatment resulted in increased asset ownership (Blattman et al., Crawford et al. 2021, Delius & Sterck 2020), and livestock asset value (Bedoya et al. 2019). Macpherson & Sterck (2019) report no change in assets or non-food spending. Obi also does not see significant change in assets.

Food security. Some studies detail improvements in food security, with Delius & Sterck (2020) reporting increased

food diversity, and Blattman et al., reporting that the treatment group went hungry less often and ate more meals per day. Phadera et al. (2020) report reductions in hunger. MacPherson & Sterck (2019) report increased food diversity and calories per adult.

Financial self-reliance. Several interventions improved financial self-reliance. Bedoya et al's TUP program, Crawford et al. (2021)'s apprenticeship program and vocational training program (COSDEC), and Blattman's WINGS intervention all led to increased savings. TUP also improved access to credit. Phadera et al. (2020) report less reliance on negative coping strategies such as eating fewer meals. Obi (2021) finds a marginally significant reduction in the share of treatment households (i.e. those living in camps) that were able to lend above a certain threshold.

Effects on debt are more mixed. Bedoya et al. (2019) report that the TUP program led to a large and significant reduction in total household loans. Masterson and Lehmann (2020) did not see a significant effect on debt, nor on savings. Interestingly the WINGs program, when paired with group formation, saw a rise in total debts as the training led to an increase in loans between group households.

Business-related outcomes. Only two studies report business-related outcomes. Crawford et al. (2021) find decreases in business-related debt for participants in the apprenticeship and vocational training programs. According to Delius and Sterck (2020), operating a licensed business in the refugee camp setting positively and significantly increased the businesses' number of employees, labour productivity per worker, and the variety of goods sold. It also improved the licensed business' revenue and profits in comparison to those businesses that did not receive a licence, however it may have contributed to market distortions that harmed unlicensed businesses.

4.2 Education, knowledge and skills

Bedoya et al. (2019) find marginal improvements in child school enrollment, seeing improvements for both boys and girls. They also find a decrease in absenteeism for children overall and for boys in particular. Stark et al. (2019) find that the girl's social empowerment intervention did not have a statistically significant impact on girl's school enrolment.

4.3 Physical, mental and social wellbeing outcomes

Several of the programs studied improve wellbeing for displaced populations. Phadera et al. (2020) find that displaced households that continue to receive the Public Distribution System (PDS) experience less vulnerability compared to those that lost access to the subsidy. Despite increases in household expenditure, retaining the PDS benefit did not improve the overall economic outlook of displaced households. There was no significant association between a household's subjective perception of their overall economic situation and receipt of the ration program, despite the real welfare gains.

Obi (2021) finds that people living in a refugee camp experience a lower quality of life overall relative to those living outside of a camp setting. Living in a refugee camp has a significant, negative impact on overall quality of life, on the risk of living in overcrowded conditions, and on access to water and electricity. MacPherson & Sterck (2019) report that the package of services provided to refugees can make a difference. Refugees in the "development" settlement felt happier and scored higher on measures of self-reported wellbeing. The use of cash transfers in place of food aid and, to a smaller extent, the wider promotion of kitchen gardens were found to drive the observed effects.

Bedoya et al. (2019)'s study finds improvements to psychological wellbeing for men and women. The effect on women's psychological wellbeing was especially large. When considering a simple index of women's empowerment (focused on household finances and expenditures), results are insignificant. However, after expanding to include other dimensions, the index becomes significant, primarily due to increases in women's participation in decisions about their own body and time, income-generating activities, and political involvement and social capital.

Crawford (2021) reports no significant effects of the apprenticeship intervention on wellbeing, self-esteem, attitudes, and network measures, though it did have a small effect on self-esteem for women only. Contrastingly, the vocational program, COSEC did have positive effects on caregiver attitudes on women's empowerment and range of

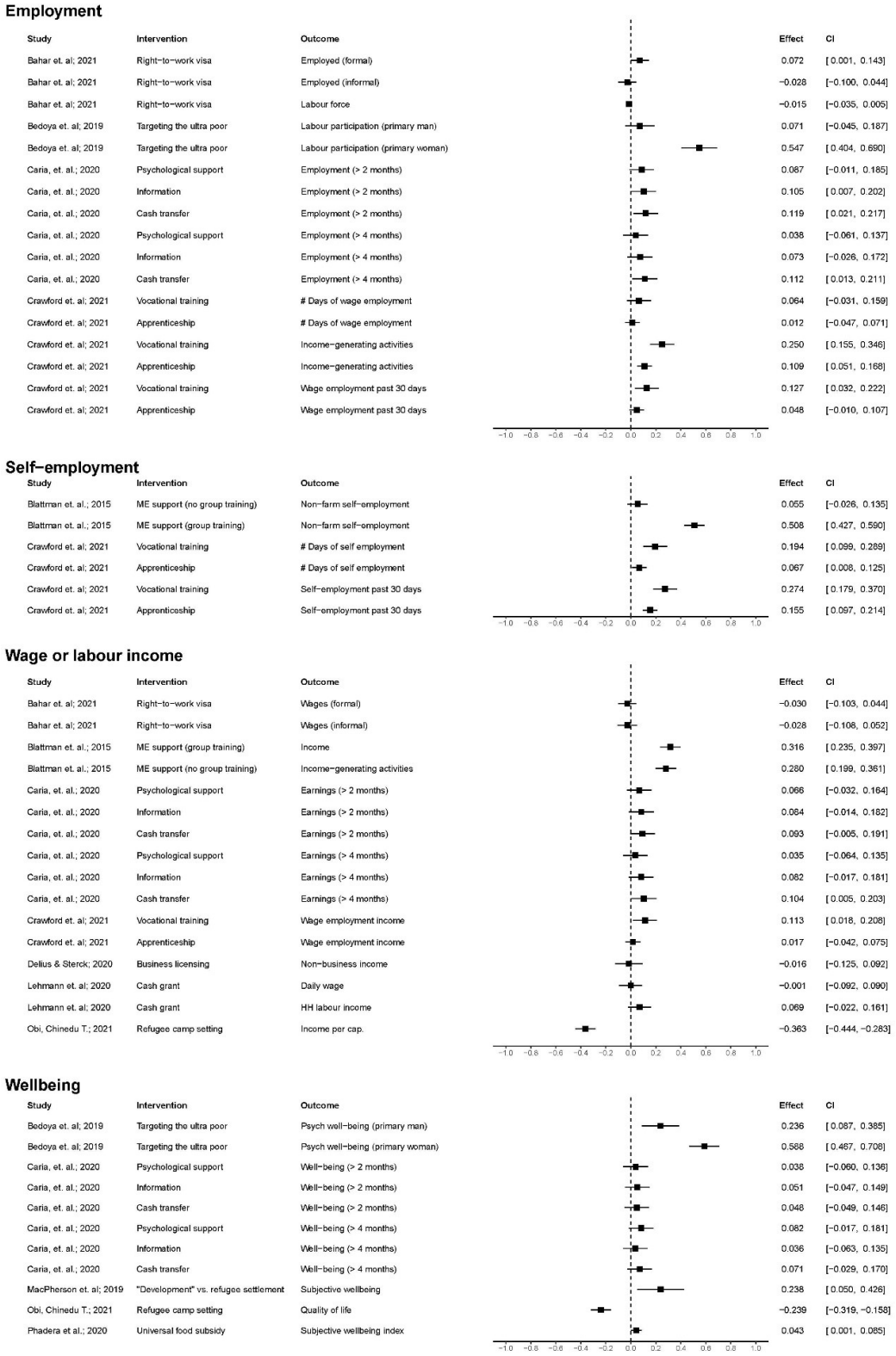

Figure 3: Forest plots for outcomes related to Employment, Self-employment, Wage, or Labour income and Wellbeing

social networks. In Caria et al. (2020)'s study, none of the treatment arms had significant effects on wellbeing (of either Jordanians or Syrians) or social integration and intentions to migrate of Syrians.

Neither of the two studies that reported physical health (Blattman et al. 2015 and Bedoya et al. 2019) had significant results. Blattman et al. (2015) show that the WINGS program increased community participation, but had only marginal or insignificant effects on levels of abuse, partner control, or relationship quality. Similarly, Stark et al. find no statistically significant impact on girls' experience of sexual exploitation. Masterson and Lehmann's cash transfer increased the likelihood that the Syrian refugees reported helping Lebanese community members (2020).

4.4 Context and how to think about it

Tailoring livelihoods interventions to serve refugees, IDPs, ultra-poor and conflict-affected people is complex. First, there are very few evaluations from which to draw evidence. Second, the unique setting of displacement can impose specific constraints on IDPs and refugees that may not be replicated elsewhere.

Research should seek ways to disentangle how context acts on forcibly displaced populations. To our knowledge, the literature offers guidelines on external validity and generalisation claims (Egami and Hartman, 2023; Glennerster and Bates, 2017) but does not yet have a taxonomy to enable researchers to systematically classify contextual factors.

We developed a preliminary taxonomy for classifying context based on our review of the main barriers and contextual factors mentioned in the included studies (see Supplementary Material for the data extraction). We undertook this exercise because it was difficult to differentiate which aspects of context are most salient. This resulting taxonomy is useful for thinking more systematically about context and could be developed with further research. Our review finds that four intersecting levels of context shape the labour market conditions of displacement, as shown in Figure 3

Level	**Type**	**Examples**
Multinational	Multilateral declaration	New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016)
National	International compacts, national-level programs and policies governing the conditions of displacement including resettlement, the right to work, or access to social services	Jordan Compact (2016), Kenyan Refugee Act (2006), Colombia's (2018) Permiso Especial de Permanencia (PEP)
Settings	Conditions in which a displaced person is resettled and their access to labour markets (and the strength of those markets), such as in urban or rural settings; refugee camps, informal settlements	Urban labour markets in Jordan; Informal settlements in Lebanon; Refugee camps in Kenya; Rural ultra-poor in Northern Nigeria
Population	Characteristics common to specific population groups of refugees and internally displaced people, ultra-poor men and women, adolescent girls in LMIC settings	Age, gender, and nationality; Often low levels of literacy, education, training, and language skills; Prior experiences with trauma, conflict-exposure, sexual violence; Ongoing PTSD and persistent stress; Low financial capital, assets, savings; Low income, wages, and consumption; Weak social networks, social exclusion, marginalization, and relative poverty

Table 3: Multiple layers of context shape the conditions for displacement

At the *multi-national level*, the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted by the United Nations General Assembly shapes prevailing norms in the shift from humanitarian assistance to self-reliance. At the

national level, policy is governed both by international compacts such as Jordan's 2016 Compact–receiving billions in grants and loans in exchange for easing work access to Syrian refugees–and national policies such as Kenya's 2006 Refugee Act.

The *setting* of resettlement for displaced people varies widely at the sub-national level. For example, whether a person is assigned to an isolated refugee camp or an informal urban settlement governs their ease of mobility and broad access to legal work and social services. Finally, the individual characteristics of a specific, affected *population* — e.g., their past experience of trauma, age and stage of life, gender, education, literacy, language and culture of origin — further shape the context of displacement. Differences can exist within settings, and experiences of displacement, even within borders, can be traumatic and can sever networks.

Refer to the appendix (Document 07) to read more specifics about contextual barriers and facilitators to the programs and policies of study, categorised according to the above framework.

4.5 Cost-Effectiveness

Just four of eleven studies in this rapid review report any analysis of the intervention's cost. Table 4 summarises the primary information on cost and cost-effectiveness from these studies. Importantly, the estimates of cost per beneficiary reported in the table should be interpreted with great care. They merely provide a rough estimate and are not adjusted for inflation given incomplete information in the original studies. Also, the studies use different methodologies and time-horizons to compute the return on investment.

	Blattman et al. (2015)	**Bedoya et al. (2019)**	**Crawford et al. (2021)**	**Crawford et al. (2021)**
Intervention	Graduation-type intervention	Graduation-type intervention	Vocational program	Apprenticeship program
Monetized benefit	Total household non-durable consumption gains	Household consumption gains	Total monthly income (wage and self- employment)	Total monthly income (wage and self- employment)
Internal Rate of Return	24%	25%		
Return on investment			10%	4%
Time horizon	12 Months	12 Months	30 years	30 years
Discount rate (primary)	5%	5%	5%	5%
Unadjusted cost per beneficiary as reported in the evaluation	$860 2015 USD US $2,150 in PPP	$1,688 2019 USD US $6,198 in PPP	$ 634.59 2019 USD 194,757 2019 Naira	$ 518.98 2019 USD 159,278 2019 Naira

*Cost is for the standard program, 2015. **The 2019 exchange rate is 306.9 Naira to one USD using the official exchange rate (LCU per $US, period average)

Table 4: Information reported on cost and cost-effectiveness

Blattman et al. (2015) and Bedoya et al. (2019) each estimate the expected annual growth rate in the monetized benefit deriving from participation in a graduation-type intervention after 12 months. These are 24% and 26% respectively. In contrast, Crawford et. al (2021) present analysis of the return on investment to the vocational (10%) and apprenticeship (4%) training programs which are expected to accrue over a 30-year time horizon.

The table additionally presents information on the cost per beneficiary. These costs were taken as reported in the evaluation and were not adjusted for inflation. Differences in the cost per beneficiary may reflect different inclusion criteria, for example, Bedoya et. al. include indirect costs in their estimate, whereas Blattman's $860 per beneficiary seems only to include direct costs. As a result, it is not clear what exactly explains observed differences in the cost per beneficiary between these studies.

The available cost evidence falls short in addressing the perennial question: which interventions deliver the greatest impact at least cost? First, not enough studies estimate a cost per beneficiary or return on investment. Further only two provide the kind of high quality and detailed cost evidence that is needed to evaluate the efficiency of intervention design. When more impact evaluations incorporate cost analysis they will provide valuable evidence for decision-making. A more detailed discussion of the cost evidence presented in the studies is available in the Supplementary Materials.

5 Discussion

5.0.1 What evidence exists regarding the effectiveness of interventions in improving sustainable livelihoods for forcibly displaced populations?

Despite a global surge in forcibly displaced populations and a shift towards promoting "self-reliance" over rapid humanitarian response, only seven valuations in LMIC settings are tailored to this group (Bahar et al. 2021, Caria et al. 2020, Delius & Sterck, Masterson & Lehmann 2020, MacPherson & Sterck, Obi et al. 2021, Stark, L., 2018).

This review includes the literature on ultra-poor and conflicted-affected people to expand what is known about the effectiveness of interventions for displaced populations because both groups face similar constraints. These studies mainly focus on cash or in-kind transfers, often coupled with entrepreneurship training. A weakness of this more expansive look is that displaced populations additionally experience explicit labour market access and mobility constraints, which limit the available routes to self-reliance.

From our relatively small sample, holistic programs and multi-layered interventions such as the graduation approach appear to hold the most promise in achieving the desired impact. In settings among ultra-poor and conflict-affected populations, graduation-style programs have shown demonstrable impacts on livelihoods outcomes. Likewise, cash transfers have shown substantial impacts on short and medium-term livelihoods outcomes and now are being tested at scale among refugee populations (Lanthorn et. al. 2020). However, there is little evidence to judge the relative expense of these interventions since just four of the eleven studies present a cost estimate.

Vocational training and apprenticeship programs do not consistently deliver the desired results, which appears to be fueled in part by the dearth of labour market data used to tailor the program design and support participants' transition to paid work. An important dimension here seems to be the intensity of the intervention design; the most impactful apprenticeship program included nearly a year's worth of training sessions.

Our review of forthcoming evaluations suggests that the pace of evaluation research production is intensifying. Our search of the emerging literature conducted in late 2021 found six pre-registered evaluations with forcibly displaced populations, a quantity of prospective studies that is equal in number to the six that were published in the decade prior. This suggests early momentum behind the call to test whether interventions that purport to improve the self-reliance of forcibly displaced people and their families actually work.

Several forthcoming evaluations of bundled interventions– i.e. graduation-type programs that address multiple constraints–adapted to serve the specific needs of displaced populations will offer important insights if they help to explain how and why specific intervention components worked or did not work among the new populations of study (Karlan, Malone, & Brune 2021; Sequeira 2020). The three other studies will look at the effect of cash (Stein & Bergemann 2020) or training (Adjognon 2020; Loiacono & Silva Vargas 2021) alone.

5.0.2 What are relevant contextual factors that affect the policies in this area?

The literature recognises that context contributes to refugee outcomes, but little groundwork is in place to enable a more systematic exploration. A few studies used natural experiments to directly investigate the impact of context on refugee outcomes. For example, MacPherson & Sterck (2019) explore being assigned to a settlement with a "development" vs. "humanitarian" policy for distributing aid in Kenya. However, in many studies, "context" comes across as an entanglement of complex and undifferentiated factors.

Program designers and researchers are often well aware that the economic and social context will affect observed outcomes. For example, Stark et al. (2018) conclude that the girls social empowerment training program did not produce the hoped-for behavioural changes because the environment did not support it. Elsewhere, Crawford et al. (2021) find that the absence of social networks and financial capital constrained would-be entrepreneurs from starting businesses.

However, evaluations do not systematically describe the binding contextual factors using descriptive detail. We propose a primitive taxonomy for classifying contextual factors as an aid to distil context by administrative or policy level. A more systematic understanding of context may help research inform the decision making of policymakers and to both study and adapt interventions to the circumstances of displaced populations. For example, it is important for policymakers to consider that cash programming may introduce unintended consequences when implemented in refugee camps–such as those documented in the research from Delius and Sterck (2020). We present the organised structure for this type of description in Table 3 which can be applied to the design, results, and policy sections of any research report.

Analysing context in layers is useful for pinpointing the dimensions of context that do and do not generalise to other settings. For example, we include interventions studied among asylum-seeking, ultra-poor, and conflict-affected populations because these groups likewise experience high mobility and economic uncertainty, higher levels of mental health difficulties, and low social, financial, and cultural capital. Interventions designed to assist populations with these characteristics may be usefully adapted for another setting as long as local constraints such as the legal right to work for displaced people do not trump their successful adaptation.

Additionally, researchers should exploit variation in policy environments to better control for and identify the impact of local context on intervention impacts as interventions are scaled-up. It is also important to consider these contextual factors when determining the time horizon of a new study. For instance, a study of a policy or program in the context of a protracted crisis may benefit from longer-term follow-up, whereas a study of a rapid response intervention might necessitate a tighter survey period. Bahar et al. (2021) cite their 14 month follow up as a potential explanation for the regularisation program's negligible effect on formal employment of Colombians. As the average length of refugee crises continues to increase, studying the persistence of desired outcomes over periods beyond a year or two becomes more salient.

5.0.3 What are the evidence gaps in the research literature?

Given the vast number of programs and policies that target livelihoods for displaced populations, more evidence is needed across the board. Most intervention types are supported by one or two impact evaluations, which does not provide enough information to glean generalizable insights. For example, the effectiveness of numerous cash intervention modalities including in-kind transfers, and small vs. larger cash transfers remains understudied in displacement contexts. Questions around the intensity, frequency, and persistence of treatment also are understudied.

Considering the geographic variation of the published and emerging research, while no place is sufficiently studied, there are significant gaps in Central and South America, South and East Asia, and parts of Africa, all of which have significant numbers of displaced people. The Horn of Africa and Afghanistan are two particularly large gaps given the scope of the displacement crises in those areas. Most planned or published studies are in East Africa or Nigeria.

Much of the existing literature on forcibly displaced youth that we found during our initial scoping for this review documented the higher prevalence of mental health challenges they face. It is difficult to understand if these

population level characteristics act as a constraint on displaced people's ability to create livelihoods based on this review. No interventions directly addressed people's mental health through their programming content, or combined a therapeutic approach with soft and hard entrepreneurship training and cash. The study of girls' empowerment in Ethiopia came the closest through its focus on girls' empowerment, but this training was focused on empowerment and not girls' livelihoods.

The debate surrounding which refugee livelihoods approaches have the most potential for scale is relatively shallow. However, learnings from the descriptive literature suggest that scalable programs are ones that are successful in restrictive and challenging contexts. For instance, at the population level, many refugees do not have access to formal financial services. A scalable program is one that does not rely on access to a bank account or mobile wallet, e.g. savings group formation. Scalable technologies developed for non-displacement contexts (e.g. a phone application for financial literacy training) may not be feasible in the setting of resettlement for displaced people if internet access or reliable electricity are lacking. Last, the political feasibility of the intervention may be unique to the setting. For example researchers compared in-kind with cash transfers in Kenya (MacPherson and Sterk) but implementing cash transfers in neighbouring countries may not be politically feasible.

5.1 Areas for Further Research

The rapid review identifies a few important questions that future literature should address:

- How do the settings of displacement such as living in a camp vs. an urban area affect people's livelihoods outcomes? We need programs of research that test the same intervention across multiple sites, with sites varying in specific ways from one another. Studying the same type of intervention across multiple sites in non-displacement contexts has proven an effective way of learning about the viability and scalability of programs. Some recent examples such as the Metaketa Initiative and the Ultra Poor Graduation Approach can serve as models. In the context of displacement, this type of work will be important for deciding how to intervene in ways that benefit displaced people.
- What can we learn about how interventions differentially affect people within a given study? Studies should be powered, where possible, to look at heterogenous effects by gender, age, and other important demographic characteristics. In particular, it will be important to differentiate program impacts by age wherever possible to facilitate learning and better serve the needs of the youth whose trauma experiences and difficulty accessing education and training or livelihoods leave them particularly vulnerable. Relatedly, Crawford et al. (2021) suggest that gender-specific program design could promote gender equality.
- Why do employers not take advantage of new labour? Employers' attitudes will be explored in Loiacono and Silva Vargas' forthcoming Uganda study. Ideally, implementers could bolster refugee and IDP employment without hurting the jobs prospects of the host population. For example, policymakers might attempt to 'lift all boats' by subsidising labour-intensive technologies that encourage existing firms to expand and new ones to enter communities managing a large refugee labour supply.
- Decisionmakers need to learn at scale. Displaced people are often perceived to be temporary residents, and as such, are systematically excluded from many large administrative demographic and health surveys (Eurostat 2018). When they are included, they are often insufficiently represented and identified because it is difficult and expensive to track a mobile population. Establishing comprehensive, longitudinal datasets with representative samples of forcibly displaced populations has the potential to facilitate learning about the welfare of individual refugees/IDPs and their families over time. Studying populations over longer time horizons – including the movement of refugees in and out of camps, countries, poverty and employment – can facilitate a deeper understanding of how to help them in the short, medium and long run. For example, the Syrian Refugee Life Study has established a representative panel of 2,500 refugee households in Jordan. Researchers have established similar panels in Bangladesh, Colombia, and Kenya in recognition of the academic and policy value of these datasets.

- Do livelihoods outcomes improve when displaced people receive a therapeutic intervention that addresses their mental health challenges? Our review focuses only on labour market interventions, but Schuettler and Caron suggest there is minimal evidence linking mental health with job interventions and that more attention is needed. In the broader literature, psychosocial support has been shown to improve economic outcomes (Lund et al. 2011; Blattman, Jamison, and Sheridan 2016; Campos et al. 2017). Descriptive evidence from conflict-affected settings suggests that integrating mental health and livelihoods programming can improve people's psychosocial and economic wellbeing (Kumar & Willman 2016). However, it is unclear whether these improvements would carry over to forced displacement contexts where levels of trauma and PTSD can be particularly acute.

5.2 Limitations

Time constraints prompted us to adapt the steps of a complete systematic review, based on the approach outlined by the Cochrane Rapid Reviews Methods Group (Garritty et al. 2021). We did not undertake forward or backward citation search or comprehensive searches of the grey literature. We include only English-written publications issued in or after 2010. Our scope was limited to English-written publications from 2010 onwards, which may overlook valuable studies in non-English speaking host countries like Turkey, Venezuela, and Pakistan. Data extraction was conducted by a single researcher, and we did not apply additional quality assessments beyond our selection criteria. Although these limitations reduce the internal and external validity of the final results, our search strategy was comprehensive enough to capture most of the relevant literature on the topic. Additionally, our data extraction and synthesis process is appropriate to reflect what the most promising interventions are in this field.

6 Conclusion

This review presents a narrative synthesis of evidence on the impact of livelihoods interventions on the employment, wage and other livelihoods outcomes of refugee, IDP, ultra-poor and conflict-affected populations.

Evidence available to guide decisions about what works – and what it costs – to improve the livelihoods of forcibly displaced populations is extremely limited. We do not find a silver bullet program or policy that works in all displacement settings. However, available evidence from studies among ultra-poor populations suggests that graduation-style approaches and cash transfers can be effective drivers of improved livelihoods outcomes.

The evidence suggests that context, including policies governing displaced people's rights and access to work in addition to other factors contribute to the effectiveness of livelihoods interventions. It will be important for future research to study these relationships more systematically. We recommend that future research continues to build on the taxonomy of contextual factors as a mechanism to better think through the unintended consequences of intervention design given context. This work will contribute even more systematic thinking to needed experimentation where interventions found to be effective elsewhere are tested in new and expanding displacement settings.

It will be important for future research to expand the range of interventions studied among forcibly displaced populations. Future research should also work to better differentiate sub-populations of interest e.g. refugees, internally-displaced people, asylum-seekers, vs. adjacent populations, to facilitate better linkages between the needs of specific populations and their settings or context of displacement.

Last, researchers should include – and journals should push for – more contextual and descriptive detail, including both time-invariant and time-varying characteristics before rushing headlong into their impact results. More studies that intentionally vary study sites for the same intervention are critical so that we can learn more about what binds and at what levels.

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