



The Global
SDG Synthesis
Coalition



Social Assistance for the Furthest Behind: What Works & How Across SDGs 1-5

Launch of the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition's People Pillar Synthesis
June 30th 2026



Social Assistance for the Furthest Behind Launch of the People Pillar synthesis



30 June 2026 | 9:00–10:30 AM EST | Online



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Our Mission

Harnessing the power of
evaluation and synthesis to
accelerate the achievement
of the 2030 agenda.



The Global SDG Synthesis Coalition



Leadership
Group

Secretariat



IEO | Independent
Evaluation
Office
United Nations Development Programme



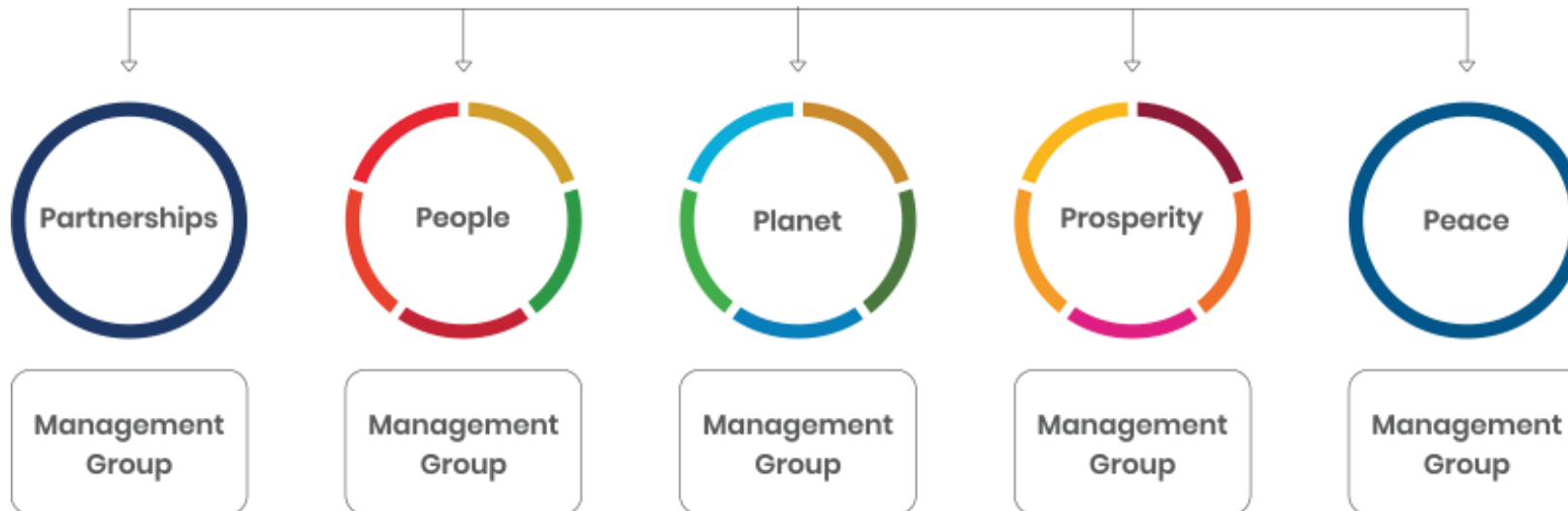
ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK



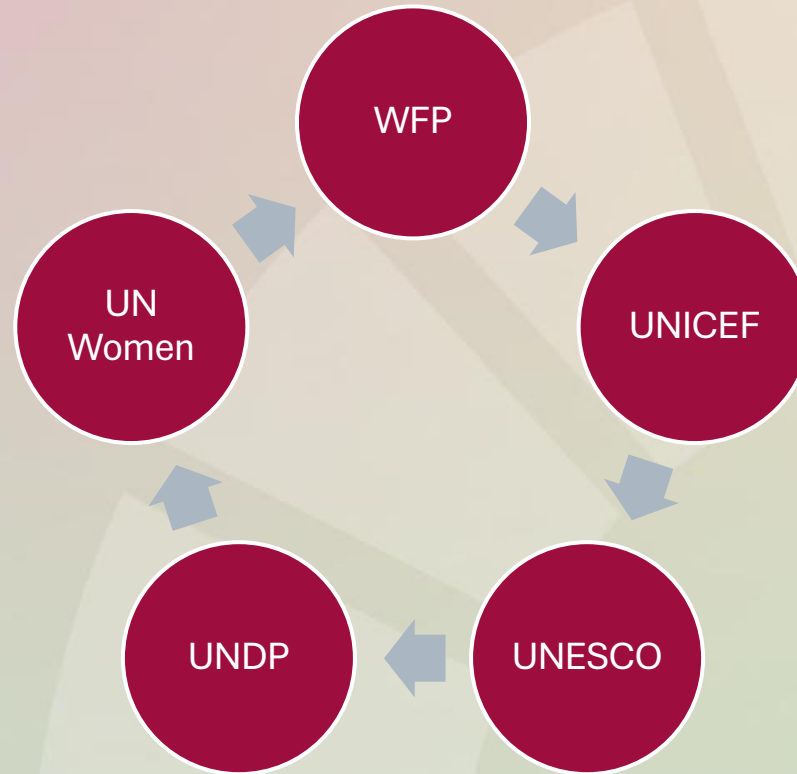
Campbell
Collaboration



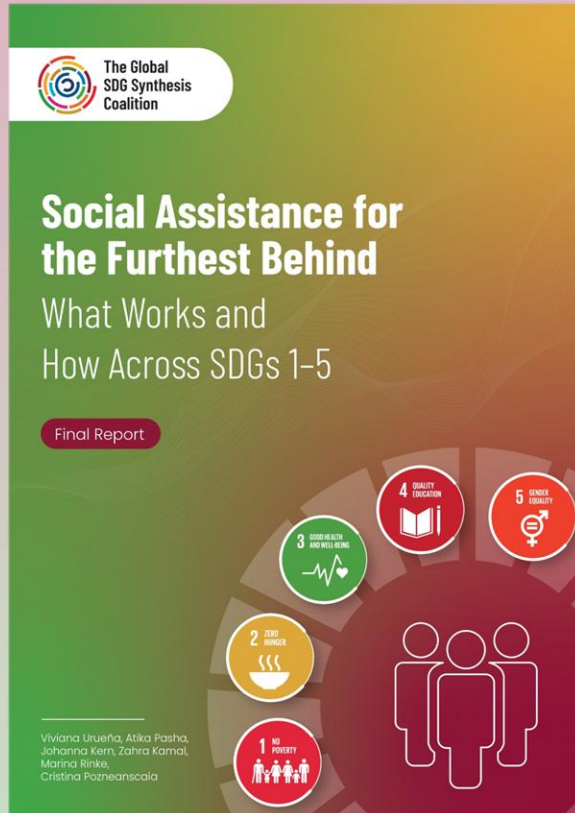
UN SDG System Wide Evaluation
Office



People Pillar Management Group



A suite of products for use and uptake



Gender-, Age-, and Disability-Responsive Vouchers and In-kind Transfers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Evidence Gap Map

Vouchers and in-kind transfers are widely used social protection mechanisms targeting poverty alleviation and inclusion but have varied effectiveness in reaching the most marginalized, particularly age, and disability. This EGM systematically maps available evidence to illuminate where interventions have been effective and where knowledge gaps remain.

By revealing patterns in responsiveness and highlighting under-researched intersections, this tool guides policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to improve program design and evidence generation to equitable progress toward SDGs 1 to 5 under the People Pillar's commitment to "leave no one behind."

		Outcomes (under People-Pillar SDGs)									
		SDG1: No Poverty (evidence from impact evaluations)				SDG2: Zero Hunger (evidence from impact evaluations)				SDG3: Health and Well-Being (evidence from impact evaluations)	
		Housing, electricity and WASH infrastructure	Household income	Non-food consumption and non-productive household assets	Employment and entrepreneurial skills	Food security	Food consumption	Agricultural production	Livestock production	Child health	Sexual reproductive and maternal health
Social Assistance Interventions	Vouchers										
	School vouchers										
	Monetary voucher										
	Commodity voucher										



Synthesis scope

Focus on SDGs 1 – 5: Voucher-based interventions and in-kind transfers

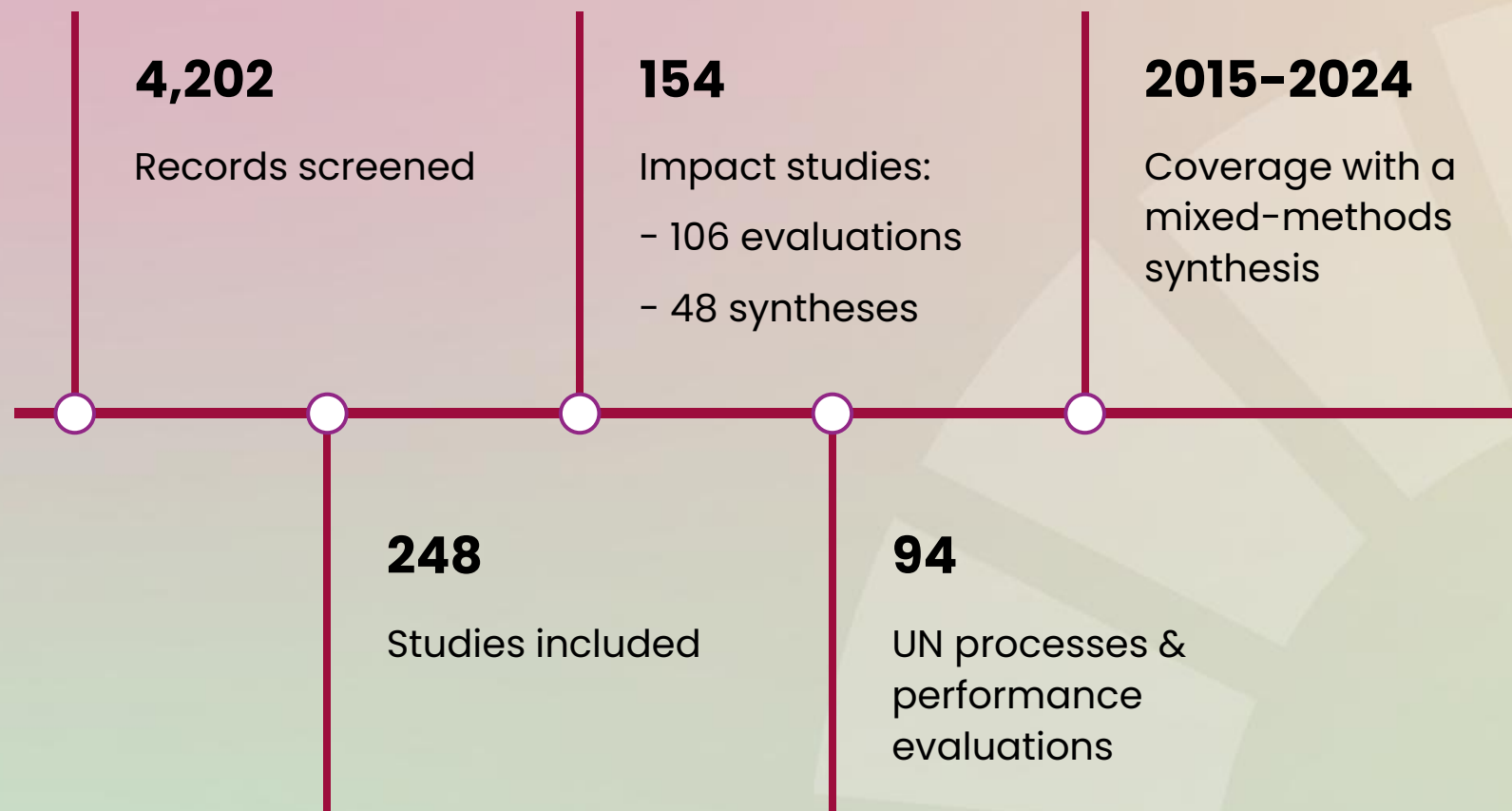
SDG	Outcome areas covered
SDG 1: No Poverty	Housing/WASH infrastructure, household income, non-food consumption, employment and entrepreneurial skills; social protection systems
SDG 2: Zero Hunger	Food security, food consumption, agricultural production, livestock production
SDG 3: Health and Well-being	Child health, maternal and reproductive health, mental health, access to health services, nutrition and dietary diversity, child labour
SDG 4: Quality Education	Access to education, learning outcomes and achievement
SDG 5: Gender Equality	Reduction of gender gaps, production decisions, control over household resources, intimate partner violence



Synthesis questions

- 1. What works? For whom?** What voucher and in-kind transfer programmes improve outcomes across SDGs 1–5 for those left behind?
- 2. How and why does it work?** What designs, implementation approaches, and contextual factors influence the performance of voucher and in-kind transfers?
- 3. Strengthening systems.** How do these programmes strengthen (or struggle to strengthen) the wider social protection system, including policies, services, and institutions?
- 4. What evidence gaps remain?** What evidence gaps remain in what works and in how programmes are designed?





Advanced Analytical Tools

Use of machine learning and theory-driven coding ensured thorough screening and consistent analysis.

Governance and Quality Assurance

Multi-agency management and expert advisory panel ensured credibility and policy relevance of findings.



Age-Responsive Vouchers and In-Kind Transfers Improve Nutrition and Health



UN Photo

Tailored age-specific design works best

Interventions matched to developmental stage (0–5 vs. school-age) drive the strongest, most consistent nutrition and health gains.

Children benefit most; evidence thins with age

Strong effects for child health/nutrition (SDG2, SDG3); much weaker or absent evidence for adolescents, adults, and the elderly.

Contextual relevance in Fragile settings

Effects weaken in conflict-proximate or humanitarian settings (Mali, Somalia), underscoring a real evidence gap rather than a guaranteed "stabilizing" effect.

Vouchers excel for SRH outcomes

Voucher-based approaches (e.g., Pakistan, India) are particularly effective for sexual and reproductive health and maternal care.



Disability-Responsive Approaches Require Inclusive, Multi-Component Design

Multi-component design drive results

Disability-responsive programs succeed when combining financial aid with training, accessibility improvements, employer engagement, and psychosocial support (China, India — Gross 2020; Hunt 2022).

Evidence base is extremely thin

Significant gaps exist in disability-responsive studies (4 across all SDGs; 0 for SDG4), limiting understanding of equity of outcomes.

Targeted health vouchers work

Health (eyeglasses) vouchers in rural China increased use among children with myopia—no gender difference in uptake, despite that being a stated goal.



UN Photo



Integrated Social Assistance Programmes Outperform Stand-Alone Interventions



UN Photo

Integration consistently beats single-modality support

Combining transfers with complementary services improves nutrition, health, education, and wellbeing outcome significantly.

Addressing Multifaceted Barriers

Integrated programs tackle financial, behavioral, informational, and structural obstacles limiting transfer effectiveness.

But integration isn't a guarantee

In Somalia, nutrition counselling — alone or with cash — had no effect during a humanitarian emergency, because the intervention wasn't adapted to the realities households faced (Kalid, 2022).



Integrated Livelihood and Skills Packages Generate Sustained Income Gains



UN Photo

Integrated Livelihood packages beat single component

Coordinated livelihood packages combining skills training, capital, and mentoring improve employment/earning outcomes sustainably.

Capital unlocks what training alone cannot

Productive grants and in-kind assets enable participants to apply skills, overcoming start-up barriers and risks.

Complementary Support Services

Business coaching, financial literacy, and mentoring help participants manage income and adapt to challenges.

Inclusive program design

Accessible infrastructure and tailored support ensure vulnerable groups like youth and disabled persons benefit fully; but nuances exist (Rosas, 2017).



Voucher and In-Kind Design Can Reduce Structural Access Barriers



UN Photo

Targeted barrier mitigation

Vouchers effectively address mobility and access barriers for vulnerable groups like women, adolescents, and disabled persons.

Simplifying household decisions

In-kind transfers link support directly to priority goods or services.

Mechanism matters as much as modality

Vouchers reduce financial/time costs and can "legitimise" women's movement in public/health spaces; in-kind transfers reduce cognitive burden in low-information settings.

Global evidence of impact

Country cases like Uganda and Botswana show improved health and nutrition outcomes from thoughtful voucher and in-kind use.



Resource Constraints Undermine Scale, Quality, and Sustainability



UN Photo

Lack of financial resources and funding shortfalls

Insufficient or poorly structured funding delays implementation and reduces beneficiary coverage, weakening program performance & sustainability.

Resource constraints exacerbated in conflict settings

Unpredictable /short-term humanitarian funding, difficulty maintaining services during crises, higher donor funding volatility in fragile countries.

Challenges in procurement and quality of assets

Poorly timed provision of inputs & lack of replacement parts undermine program achievements.

(Innovative) resources as facilitators of change

Appropriate technological or material investments facilitate inclusion and efficiency.



Evidence on Inclusion Remains Thin Despite Strong Commitments



UN Photo

Limited Evidence on Inclusion

Research often overlooks who is reached or left behind, focusing mainly on program effects without detailed subgroup analysis; programs/evaluations show high-level commitment but lack insights into differentiated implementation.

Inclusion of sub-groups uneven

Women and children more covered than elderly and persons with disabilities.

Cultural Norms and Intra-Household Dynamics often overlooked

Few studies explore how benefits are allocated within households, limiting understanding of decision-making and underlying mechanisms of equity.

Ticking the box vs. meaningful understanding of sub-group needs

Focus of evaluations on whether evidence generation, planning, monitoring and accountability mechanisms are in place, not if and how well they worked for those often left behind.





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Panel discussion and Q&A

What implications do the synthesis findings have for design, policy, financing and evaluation practice?





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1 NO
POVERTY



2 ZERO
HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



5 GENDER
EQUALITY



Thank you!

- Champion and apply the evidence
- Contact us if you have specific comments or suggestions for further People Pillar policy priorities
- The future of SDG synthesis: static to interactive access to evidence
- The Coalition as an evidence connector

