

Non-contributory social protection through a child and equity lens in Kuwait¹

International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)

Kuwait is an oil-rich country in the Middle East bordered by Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Its strategic location and substantial oil reserves make it one of the highest-income Gulf countries. In 2016 the country's population was estimated at 4,052,000, of whom 316,000 were under the age of 5 and 988,000 were under the age of 18. About one third of the population are Kuwaiti nationals, while the other two thirds are expatriates and migrant workers. Poverty estimates for Kuwait are not publicly available, but with an Human Development Index of 0.800 in 2015 (above the Middle East and North Africa region's average of 0.704), the country is considered to have 'very high' human development and is in 51st place out of 188 countries globally.

Much like other MENA countries, the Government of Kuwait allocates a large amount of its budget to universal subsidies of fuel, food, housing, electricity, water and telecommunications. Energy subsidies accounted for about 7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016. One of the oldest social protection programmes in Kuwait is the housing welfare programme, which started in 1954 and was amended in 1994. This programme includes housing allowance for families who want to build a house or who are still waiting for construction approval. Priority is given to families of martyrs, prisoners, orphaned minors and with household members with disabilities. In 2009 the programme covered around 40 per cent of Kuwaiti families (93,040 households), and the total value of disbursements on housing projects up to June 2010 was estimated at KWD2.3 billion.

A school feeding programme aims to incentivise school enrolment and improvements in children's nutritional status. It is estimated to have offered school meals to around 136,000 students in 2011. As for unconditional cash transfer programmes (UCTs), the Public Authority of the Disabled offers Physical Disability Grants to those who have medical proof of suffering from a physical disability. Additionally, the General Assistance Programme offers monthly cash benefits to single, widowed and abandoned women, families with children of school age, orphans, elderly people, families whose main breadwinner has a chronic illness, families of imprisoned household heads, and

Kuwaiti women who are married to expatriates and cannot cover the costs of basic subsistence.

A chief non-contributory social protection programme in Kuwait is the Zakat Fund, which is managed by the Zakat House. The programme offers UCTs and in-kind assistance to vulnerable groups, including divorced and widowed women, orphans, elderly people, indebted people, families whose main breadwinner suffers from a chronic illness, low-income families, and students at school, at university and studying abroad. It has multiple components, including interest-free loans, social assistance (cash and in-kind transfers such as food, clothes and medical devices), building mosques, schools, hospitals, houses for poor people and orphanages as well as an emergency relief component targeting Muslim countries suffering from conflict or natural disasters, such as Syria and Somalia.

Overall, a number of social protection programmes in Kuwait specifically target children or have a child-sensitive design. However, lack of data limits the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of these programmes and their impact on children's well-being.

Note:

1. This One Pager is taken from a comprehensive study developed in partnership between the IPC-IG and UNICEF MENARO. All data are thoroughly referenced in the full report:

Machado, A. C., C. Bilo, R. G. Osorio, and F.V. Soares. 2018. *Overview of Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region through a Child and Equity Lens*. Brasilia and Amman: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth and UNICEF Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa: <<https://goo.gl/QfmKwK>>.