

Lebanon: Design, implementation and child-sensitivity of social protection responses to COVID-19¹

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This One Pager is part of a series based on the report 'Social protection responses to COVID-19 in MENA: Design, implementation and child-sensitivity', developed in partnership by the IPC-IG and UNICEF MENARO (Bilo, Dytz, and Sato 2022). The study reviewed the design and implementation features of the social assistance measures implemented in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region up to the end of March 2021, and the extent to which they took children's needs and vulnerabilities into account.

Lebanon has experienced a number of major crises in the last few years, including an economic and financial crisis, followed by COVID-19, and the explosion at the Port of Beirut in August 2020. The economic crisis caused the country's real per capita gross domestic product (GDP) to decrease by 37.1 per cent between 2018 and 2021 (World Bank 2021). These crises particularly affected people of all nationalities who were already living in poverty or facing specific vulnerabilities, including the 1.5 million Syrian refugees who live in the country (European Commission 2022).

Up to the end of March 2021, the IPC-IG mapping of social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South² identified five government-provided responses in Lebanon: three social assistance and two labour market interventions. The main mechanism was the National Social Solidarity Programme (NSSP), which provided five payments of LBP400,000 to 500,000 households. The original objective was to provide seven monthly payments, but this number was reduced, and payments did not take place monthly. Lists of eligible households in the first phase were set up through exchanges with several other databases, including the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP) for households that were not already receiving food e-vouchers. While the NSSP can be considered a major achievement, several implementation challenges were reported, including delays in the transfer of funds, and the verification of the targeting data, among other issues.

The other social assistance measures considered were subsidies for wheat, fuel and medicines, and a basket of basic goods, including food and household items, which were introduced as a dual response to the devaluation of the currency and high inflation rates experienced by the country prior to the pandemic.

Besides these government-provided responses, another eight cash and in-kind humanitarian social protection interventions³ were mapped by the IPC-IG. It should be noted that many of them were not only responses to the pandemic, but also to the economic crisis that Lebanon was already facing before the pandemic and which worsened further in 2020–2021.

Five of the eight interventions consisted of *ad hoc* distributions of in-kind benefits (e.g. food and hygiene items), implemented by UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), targeting particularly vulnerable groups such as forcibly displaced

people. WFP also adapted its national school feeding programme, ensuring the delivery of meals after school closures during the pandemic. Two emergency cash transfers were implemented: IOM developed a one-off emergency multi-purpose cash assistance for migrants, and the WFP assisted over 1 million vulnerable Lebanese and forcibly displaced people through cash-based transfers of LBP 400,000. Furthermore, in November 2020, UNICEF provided a one-off payment of 120 USD per child (up to three children per household) to 70,000 children identified as vulnerable in UNICEF programmes.

In terms of child-sensitivity, eight of the nine social assistance measures considered had at least one of the six child-sensitive features that were analysed in the assessment. The most common features observed were measures targeting children (5) and promoting access to food and nutrition (5), followed by those that promoted access to health (4).

Based on the analysis of the social assistance responses to COVID-19, some of the key lessons learned for Lebanon in terms of shock-responsive and child-sensitive social protection are the following.

- The pandemic highlighted the importance of strengthening the preparedness of existing programmes, such as the NPTP, to respond to emergencies, and establishing social grants that address life-cycle vulnerabilities (now agreed in national policy documents) such as for children, persons with disabilities and older people, who are typically disproportionately affected by shocks and crises.
- Improving interoperability between databases is key to improving shock-responsiveness and the efficiency of social protection systems.
- It is necessary to collaborate with humanitarian actors and coordinate responses to cover as many people as possible and prevent duplication. At the same time, humanitarian actors need sufficient funding from the international community to assist Lebanon in supporting those most in need.

References:

Bilo, C., J.P. Dytz, and L. Sato. 2022. "Social protection responses to COVID-19 in MENA: Design, implementation and child-sensitivity". *Research Report*, No. 76. Brasília and Amman: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth and United Nations Children's Fund Middle East and North Africa Regional Office.

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Notes:

1. For the full list of references and a description of all social protection measures mapped, see the full study.
2. See: <<https://socialprotection.org/social-protection-responses-covid-19-global-south>>.
3. Only cash, in-kind and school feeding measures led by UNICEF, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, IOM, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or WFP were considered in the scope of the study.