

Palestine: 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.

At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the rapid halt of economic activity in the State of Palestine (SoP) led to a decrease in gross domestic product (GDP) of 3.4 per cent in the first quarter of 2020, followed by a 19.5 per cent decrease in the second quarter (World Bank 2021). These record contractions took place in a context of economic stagnation and overall deteriorating socio-economic conditions resulting from the long-lasting Israeli occupation. The socio-economic situation was further crippled by heavily declining aid revenues.

Up to the end of March 2021, the IPC-IG mapping of social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South² identified six government-provided responses in the SoP: four social assistance and two labour market interventions. An additional mapping of humanitarian responses further identified 12 cash and in-kind responses.³

The main government measure consisted of emergency financial aid targeting families severely affected by the pandemic. The aid consisted of a one-off cash transfer of ILS500 (USD155.20)⁴ provided by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) to 39,504 households in both Gaza and the West Bank. Families registered through an online form, which allowed the MoSD to create a database of newly poor households.

The Palestinian Authority also increased the coverage of its National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP), including 9,204 new Gaza households who were previously on the waiting list, reaching an overall number of 114,721 households, which could constitute an important step towards building a more robust State-sponsored social assistance system in the future. The World Bank helped bridge the temporary financing gap and financed the second quarterly payment in 2020 for 23,025 households. Also in cooperation with the World Bank, a one-off cash transfer of NIS700 (USD196) was created to benefit 68,000 vulnerable households not previously enrolled in the NCTP.⁵

Regarding child-sensitivity, 11 out of 14 responses (including both government and humanitarian) were considered child-sensitive. The assessment considered measures child-sensitive if they supported children's access to child protection, education, nutrition or health services, increased the benefit value with household size and/or directly targeted children. Only cash, in-kind and school feeding programmes were considered.

Most of the humanitarian measures mapped by the IPC-IG consisted of in-kind benefits (10 out of 12 measures). In terms of nutrition support, organisations relied on food distribution. For instance, the WFP and the MoSD distributed a monthly emergency food voucher to vulnerable individuals affected by the pandemic, especially elderly people and persons with disabilities, including 67,600 newly registered non-refugees.

UNICEF also undertook cash-based interventions, providing a one-time payment of NIS700 (USD196) to 687 newly poor households with children or persons with disabilities, and implementing a multi-purpose cash grant to 687 households headed by females and with persons with disabilities.

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

- In a context of persisting conflict and political crisis, humanitarian actors are crucial providers of support to vulnerable groups and require financial assistance to continue.
- Registration campaigns for new beneficiaries used for the emergency financial aid programme and the extension of the NCTP are potential ways to expand the coverage of existing social protection programmes.
- To improve shock-responsiveness and efficiency, the SoP should improve the interoperability between databases, to quickly identify families and individuals who need support.
- Finally, most measures mapped were emergency interventions and one-off in-kind benefits. While these measures are necessary, given the long-lasting crises faced by the SoP, it is crucial that more continuous support for vulnerable households is provided.

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.

World Bank. 2021. *Palestinian Territories' Economic Update — April 2021*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/westbankandgaza/publication/economic-update-april-2021>>. Accessed 14 July 2022.

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, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or the World Food Programme were considered in the scope of the study.
4. All exchange rates are those of 8 April 2022.
5. The World Bank measures were not considered within the scope of the study.