

Yemen: 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.

Since the escalation of the current conflict in 2015, Yemen has been going through one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. The COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, represented a 'crisis within a crisis' and aggravated people's extreme vulnerability. The pandemic led to higher inflation and caused the country's real gross domestic product (GDP) to decrease by 5 per cent in 2020, following a decrease of 2.1 per cent in 2019 (IMF 2022). Since the onset of the conflict, an estimated 80 per cent of the population have been living below the poverty line (UNICEF 2022), and around 64 per cent of the population are expected to face food insecurity until the end of 2022 (IPC 2021). Displaced households, particularly female- and child-headed households, suffer from even higher levels of food and protection insecurity, including gender-based violence.

The long-standing conflict in Yemen has hindered the capacities of the national social protection system to respond to the pandemic effectively. Up to the end of March 2021, the IPC-IG mapping of social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South² identified only one government response in the country: a fuel subsidy. Given the lack of government capacities, the role of humanitarian and development actors was fundamental, and a total of nine humanitarian responses were mapped.³

In some cases, responses were provided based on or in cooperation with national structures. For example, within the Humanitarian Cash Transfer initiative and in close collaboration with the country's Social Welfare Fund (SWF), Handicaps Care and Rehabilitation Fund and payment agencies, the Integrated Model of Social and Economic Assistance and Empowerment project was expanded to include *Muhamasheen* ('the marginalised ones' in Arabic). Moreover, starting in June 2020, UNICEF provided top-ups of 45–55 per cent of the usual benefit amount to beneficiaries of the Yemen Unconditional Cash Transfer Project (previously named the Emergency Cash Transfer Project). The programme used the beneficiary list of the SWF, which was the country's main cash transfer programme before the crisis.

In terms of child-sensitivity, five of the nine humanitarian responses mapped had at least one child-sensitive feature, according to the criteria used for the assessment. Four of them explicitly targeted families with

children, and four helped provide access to health/water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), nutrition and/or education. UNICEF's 'cash plus' initiative within the Unconditional Cash Transfer Project is worth highlighting: trained SWF case referral officers screened children for malnutrition and referred them to birth registration, education and health services, and social workers visited households regularly. In July 2020, over 8,000 households were reached. In terms of children's nutrition, following school closures, the World Food Programme distributed take-home rations to 1.13 million school children in April 2020.

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

- With 80 per cent of the population living below the poverty line, protracted conflict and deteriorating socio-economic conditions, sustainable financial resources from the international community are of paramount importance to provide social protection.
- In addition to emergency cash and in-kind assistance, humanitarian actors should support Yemen's development in the long term by building national capacities and enhancing an integrated, inclusive, sustainable and shock-responsive social protection system.
- Clear coordination and division of roles and responsibilities among humanitarian actors is vital to ensure no one is left behind, reduce potential tensions between internally displaced persons, refugees and host communities, and ensure fair distribution of assistance among those most in need.
- Women and children and people with disabilities are the most affected by the conflict and need further support for their nutrition, health and education. UNICEF's cash plus initiative and similar initiatives are fundamental elements of support in the country.

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, 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.

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