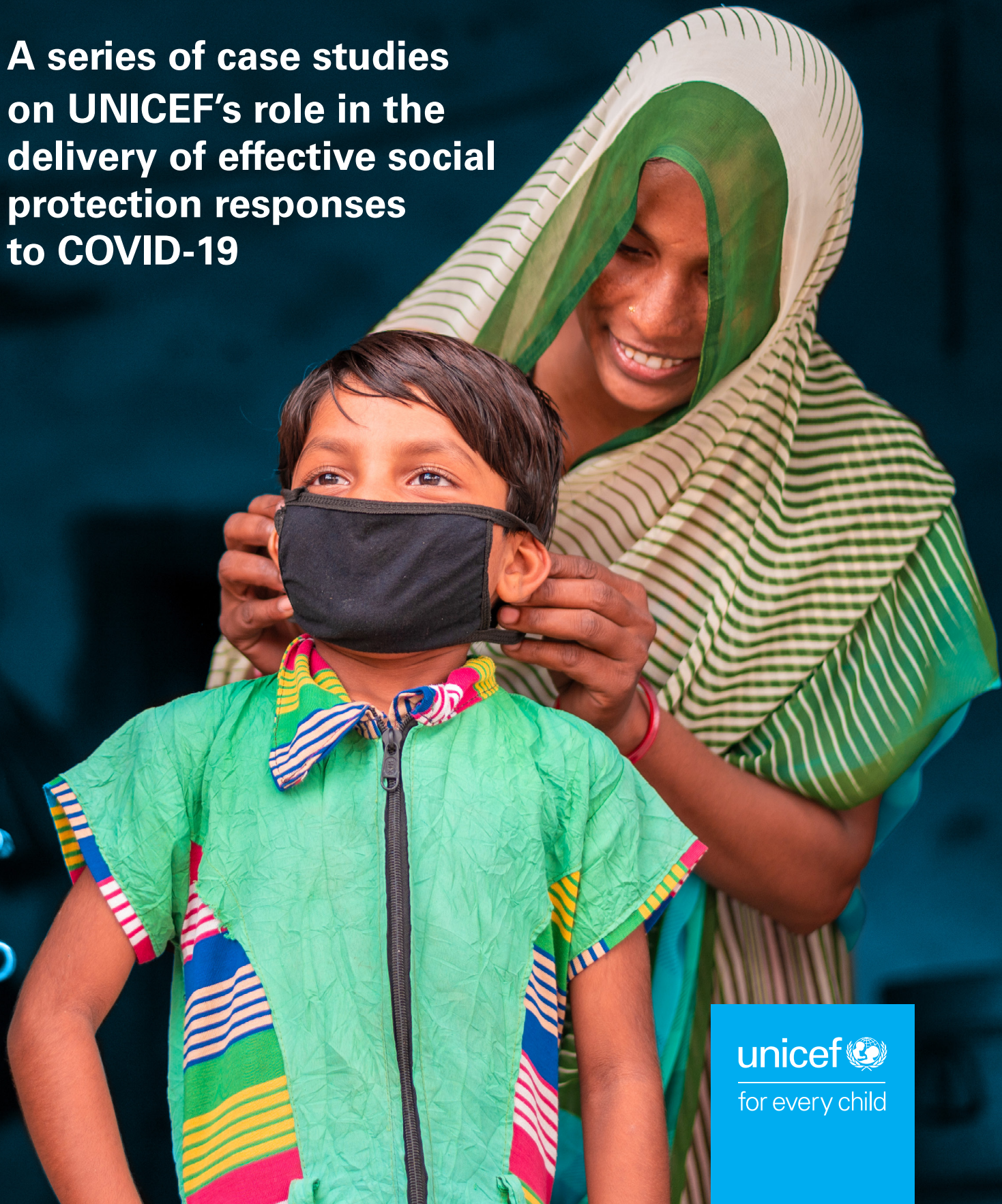


# BEING PREPARED AND ACTING FAST:

A series of case studies  
on UNICEF's role in the  
delivery of effective social  
protection responses  
to COVID-19





Prepared by  
UNICEF Social Policy and Social Protection  
Programme Group  
3 United Nations Plaza New York, NY, 10017, USA

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Visual Communication Design:  
Benussi & the Fish

Copy editing:  
Laura Evans

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# Table of Contents

- Introduction** ..... 5
- Georgia:** Enhancing the social protection system through a child poverty analysis and a systems readiness assessment..... 8
- Ghana:** Enhancing the agility of the national social protection system to respond to the COVID-19 crisis ..... 15
- Guatemala:** Strengthening system capacities and supporting rapid innovation to deliver at-scale emergency payments ..... 22
- Jordan:** A swift operational response strengthens the building blocks of a shock-responsive social protection system ..... 28
- Madagascar:** Leveraging the national social protection system to enable a rapid humanitarian response ..... 34
- Mongolia:** Drawing on successful programmes to deliver a swift and effective social protection response ..... 40
- Sri Lanka:** Contributing to evidence-based policy elements of the social protection response ..... 46
- Yemen:** Delivering an effective humanitarian response while strengthening social protection systems..... 53



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# Introduction

## **COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on the lives of children, particularly the most vulnerable.**

Although global poverty was declining prior to the pandemic, it is estimated that the COVID-19 crisis has pushed an additional 119 to 124 million people into extreme poverty (defined as living on less than \$1.90 a day).<sup>1</sup> The impacts on children are particularly severe: children are twice as likely than adults to live in poverty and the pandemic is estimated to have increased the number of children living in monetarily poor households by 142 million in 2020, bringing the total number to 725 million.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the impact of falling incomes along with disruptions to essential services including education, nutrition, healthcare, water, child care, sanitation, and child protection have had dire impacts on the lives of children, with an estimated 1.2 billion children now living in multidimensional poverty, up from 1 billion prior to the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the pandemic highlighted structural inequalities that continue to affect children, including in terms of gender, age, geographic location, ethnicity, migration status.

**Social protection was one of the critical pillars of the socio-economic response to COVID-19.** Overall, more than 220 countries and territories expanded their social protection coverage in response, with expenditure of more than \$2.9 trillion, representing 3% of global GDP in 2021<sup>4</sup>. Social protection systems have been proven to have significant impacts on the lives of children and families<sup>5</sup> including through food security, increased access to health and education services. And where appropriately designed they can have transformative impacts on particularly vulnerable groups including women and girls and children with disabilities.

The pandemic response further illustrated that strong social protection systems, particularly when they are prepared for crises, can be used to quickly and effectively respond to the needs of children and families in an emergency.

**UNICEF's response to COVID-19 was built on two decades of experience providing social protection support to governments worldwide including the capacity to deliver in humanitarian contexts.** Over the last twenty years, UNICEF has been committed to supporting governments to build resilient, shock-responsive, inclusive and sustainable social protection systems in a variety of contexts. Moreover, UNICEF has been at the forefront of humanitarian response for many years, including delivering cash-based responses to children and families. Underlying UNICEF's approach to COVID-19 response and recovery efforts has been the implementation of social protection responses through national systems, based on the progressive realization of rights-based, universal social protection, as well as the ability to effectively use humanitarian and emergency tools and approaches to develop build blocks for nascent systems. With teams working on social protection on the ground in over 115 countries, UNICEF was able to rapidly expand its social protection response and support to governments, including in cash operations. This included providing evidence for programme design; operational support for social protection scale-up; identifying financing modalities; and developing approaches to integrated programming, administration and service delivery. The work spanned the development-humanitarian nexus including support in humanitarian, fragile and risk prone contexts with a strong focus on rights based, inclusive social protection (see Box 1).

1 Lakner et al. (2021). Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Looking back at 2020 and the outlook for 2021. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-looking-back-2020-and-outlook-2021>

2 UNICEF and Save the Children. (no date). Children in monetary poor households and COVID-19: Technical note. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-in-monetary-poor-households-and-covid-19/>

3 UNICEF. (2020). Averting a lost COVID generation. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/averting-lost-generation-covid19-world-childrens-day-2020-brief>

4 (May, 2021) <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33635>

5 See the Transfer Project – <https://transfer.cpc.unc.edu/> – and the cash transfers project at UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti: <https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/cash-transfers-project/>

**Box 1: Building on a foundation of work on social protection across multiple contexts**

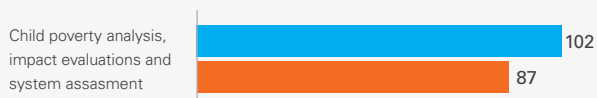
**UNICEF has supported 115 countries to build inclusive and shock-responsive social protection systems**

**UNICEF supported cash transfer programmes have reached over 130.7 million children in 93 countries**

**1 in 4 children has access to a child and family benefit with coverage lowest in areas with the highest child poverty**

**A foundation of evidence**

UNICEF supported the generation of evidence and knowledge to determine social protection priority needs and responses to the COVID-19 crisis including multidimensional socio-economic impact assessments and social protection readiness assessments.



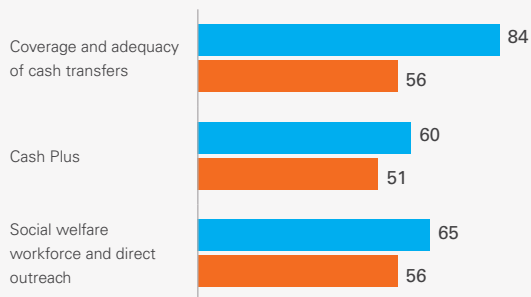
**Policy, legislation, financing and coordination**

UNICEF support strengthened strategies, policies, legislation, coordination and the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of the national financing of social protection systems.



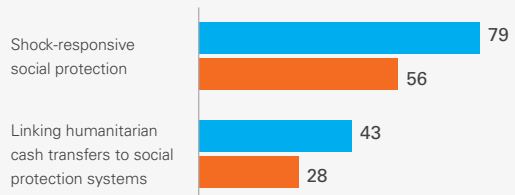
**Integrated programme areas of child sensitive social protection systems**

UNICEF enhanced its support to countries in the design, operations and scale up of cash transfer programmes and cash plus programmes (ensuring transfers were linked to accessing critical services), and strengthened capacities in the social welfare workforce, among others.



**Social protection in humanitarian, fragile and risk-prone contexts**

Core components of UNICEF support including making social protection systems shock responsive, direct delivery of humanitarian cash transfers and supporting the development of policy and programme capacity to respond swiftly to crises.



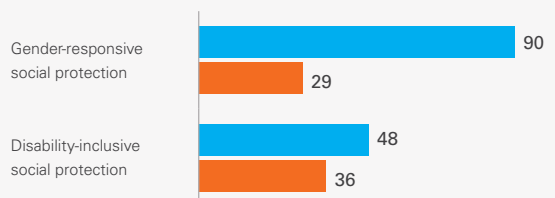
**Administration and integrated service delivery**

UNICEF provided support to develop and enhance integrated management information systems to enhance coordination allowing for better and rapid planning, design, implementation and monitoring



**Rights-based and inclusive**

UNICEF continued to support governments to ensure inclusive, gender-transformative and disability-inclusive social protection system, while enhancing delivery capacity across multiple country contexts.



Number of countries where UNICEF is working: 2019 (orange), 2020 (blue)

## Being prepared and acting fast: Detailed lessons from country experiences

This compendium provides a detailed look at the impacts COVID-19 had on children and UNICEF's role in the effective delivery of social protection responses through eight country case studies from Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, Jordan, Madagascar, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, and Yemen. Each case study briefly outlines the country's socio-economic context, identifies what measures had already been put in place prior to the pandemic, then

highlights the specific actions taken in the COVID-19 response and concrete results achieved. The case studies provide reflections on strategic partnerships, lessons learned and perspectives on what worked well and what challenges were experienced, and finally suggest ways forward for strengthening social protection systems to respond to ongoing crises.





# Georgia:

## Enhancing the social protection system through a child poverty analysis and systems readiness assessment

*As part of the response to COVID-19, UNICEF led the development of a microsimulation model for estimating the impact of COVID-19 on child poverty, which contributed to the government providing a one-time emergency cash benefit to all children. A social protection systems readiness assessment was conducted to determine whether the system was prepared to expand and absorb new recipients. Since 2013, UNICEF and the World Bank have supported the reform of the Targeted Social Assistance (TSA) programme, which targets the most vulnerable families. Reforms included the launch of a child benefit programme for all vulnerable families with children under 16 years of age. UNICEF and the World Bank continue to support the government in the further refinement of the TSA programme, including revision of the eligibility criteria, benefit amounts, and improvement of the overall programme performance. Since 2009, UNICEF has also been conducting a Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS), which tracks poverty and inequality trends and is a key tool for policy decisions on social protection. UNICEF continues to work with the Government of Georgia on systems strengthening and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of its social protection programmes.*





Source:

<https://www.unicef.org/georgia/stories/unicef-helps-vulnerable-families-affected-covid-19-pandemic>

Ketevan shares her bedroom with her three children, and soon will have to make space for the fourth one. “I’m expecting soon,” she says as she makes dinner in a rundown kitchen, where bricks peek through the crumbling plaster on the walls.

With her husband away, serving in Georgia’s peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan, the 28-year-old makes a hand-to-mouth living in the Georgian village of Nikozi, an area fraught with separatist tensions. “I don’t work, but the children are keeping me busy,” she says.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, UNICEF, in cooperation with government authorities and with support from the UK government, delivered essential supplies. That was part of the humanitarian support provided to vulnerable households particularly affected by the restrictions, including those in the vicinity of conflict zones. Through this programme, Ketevan and her family received an assistance package containing essential food and hygiene items. “The kids don’t really like to eat a lot, but in that box we found some of their favorite food items,” says Ketevan.

## Context

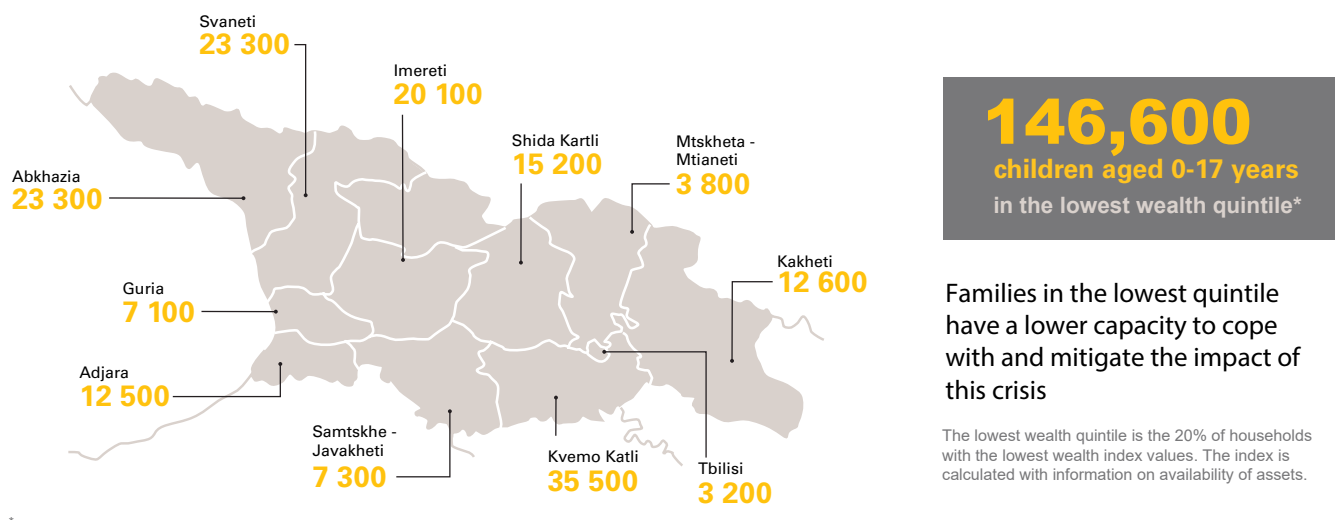
Poverty dynamics in Georgia are such that there is significant movement of families in and out of poverty. This fluctuation is caused by various shocks including unemployment, illness<sup>1</sup> or death in the family, and most recently sudden loss of income caused by COVID-19. The absolute poverty rate is higher for children at 26.4 per cent compared to 21.3 per cent for the total population (National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT), 2020).

A state of emergency was declared in March 2020 with significant restrictions including closing schools and borders. The map in Figure 1 provides a disaggregated illustration of the number of children in the lowest wealth quintile and indicates their varying levels of vulnerability to the crisis across the country. The socio-economic impact

of the pandemic has been devastating to the people of Georgia, resulting in many families falling further into poverty, particularly the most vulnerable families living in over-crowded households.

Georgia invests 7 per cent of GDP in social protection initiatives (UNICEF, 2020). However, its GDP is predicted to contract by 6 per cent due to the pandemic (IMF, 2021). There are three main cash transfer programmes, which have all been implemented for at least 15 years: Targeted Social Assistance (TSA), the old-age pension and a social package, with 67 per cent of households having access to at least one of these cash transfers. TSA, the flagship social protection programme, is a proxy means-tested transfer that covers 11 per cent of households and reaches 133,725 families.

**Figure 1:** Number of children aged 0-17 years in the lowest quintile by region



## UNICEF's Response and Results

### Generating evidence and analysis to formulate the appropriate response:

A series of UNICEF-led analyses supported the government in the process of vertical and horizontal expansion of the TSA programme and to ensure the most vulnerable families were being reached. The analyses conducted included the following:

- *Microsimulation model for estimating the impact of COVID-19 on child poverty:* UNICEF, in collaboration with national partners, commissioned a microsimulation model using the biennial panel household survey (the 2017 WMS) as the primary data source, using a sample of 4,697 households. Child poverty and inequality were recalculated based on a low, medium and severe shock, and were linked to various cash transfer

1 Out-of-pocket health expenditures represented nearly 48 per cent of current health expenditure in Georgia in 2018, a rate more than double the European and Central Asian average. Unplanned health expenditure is therefore a significant source of vulnerability for households in Georgia.

options including universal and targeted options. The analysis assessed the rate of poverty reduction, cost effectiveness, benefit incidence and coverage for each scenario. A key conclusion was that in all scenarios, a universal child grant for children from 0 to 17 years of age, or targeting the bottom 40 percentile of non-TSA households, would lead to the most significant reduction in poverty.

- *Social protection systems readiness assessment:* Recognizing the need to strengthen social protection initiatives across the humanitarian and development nexus, UNICEF developed a tool prior to the pandemic, piloted in five countries (Armenia, Tajikistan, Serbia, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan), to understand the opportunities and challenges in delivering cash transfers through national social protection systems during crises. The tool provided insights on the political, technical, operational and financial feasibility of the national social protection system to support the most vulnerable families during shocks and disasters. Georgia's social protection system was assessed as being able to handle shocks, including from COVID-19, and the TSA programme was identified as the optimal instrument for distributing emergency cash transfers.
- *MICS+ Real-Time Monitoring (RTM) Survey:* This is an ongoing initiative conducted by GEOSTAT and UNICEF, with financial support from USAID, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and UNICEF. This mechanism was used to monitor the situation of families affected by the pandemic. The RTM was conducted using a mobile phone-based survey targeting a sample of the MICS population (over 2,000 households), as part of a series of five surveys conducted every quarter initiated in August 2020. The survey gathered information on the effect of the pandemic on household incomes and employment; perceptions of the COVID-19 vaccination; access to health services; the mental health of children; disciplining methods during the pandemic; and early childhood development. The range of protective measures used to cope with COVID-19 employed by households, as well as the impact on children's education, were also explored. The survey found that at least 32 per cent of households had lost a job temporarily or permanently during March to December

2020, with the average monthly income of 53 per cent of households decreasing.

- *Targeted Social Assistance Programme (TSA) impact evaluation:* An impact evaluation of Georgia's TSA was carried out based on data from 7,000 families, as well as administrative data, to assess the impact of the TSA on reducing child poverty, in addition to assessing if these contributions considered equity and child rights. The results will be used to enhance the TSA and other social protection initiatives

### **Supporting the policy response to ensure the most vulnerable families and children are protected:**

At the onset of the pandemic, before the government introduced measures to support vulnerable families and to demonstrate another model of assistance, UNICEF provided direct humanitarian support to families with multiple children and families living in less accessible geographical locations. Humanitarian boxes containing basic food and hygiene items were distributed with support from representatives of the central government and respective local authorities. Families found this support necessary and timely during the hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Policy measures subsequently introduced by the Government of Georgia to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on families and children included:

- *Horizontal expansion of the TSA – 70,000 families* previously registered in the database who had not qualified given their welfare score were entitled to a cash transfer of 70-100 GEL (US\$22-30) for six months.
- *One-time child benefit of 200 GEL for all children under 18 years –* this benefit covered approximately 900,000 children, amounting to approximately US\$65 million from the state budget. In addition, TSA recipients with three or more children registered in the database with a welfare score below a minimal threshold (approximately 21,000 families) received 50 GEL (US\$16) per month per child.
- *A top up of the social package cash transfer for 40,000 persons with severe disability,* while children with disabilities received an additional 100 GEL (US\$31) per month for six months.



In June 2021, the Prime Minister announced a further increase in child benefits. Given the importance of the existing system of targeted social assistance to better meet the needs of families with children, children living in socially vulnerable families with a welfare score of less than 100,000 received a 100 per cent increase in child benefit from 50 GEL to 100 GEL (US\$16-32) per month. In addition, a supplement of GEL 100 per child was issued to families with children with a welfare score of less than 120,000. An additional 145 million GEL (US\$46 million) from the state budget was allocated for this purpose and an additional 25,000 children entered the system. The total number of children covered across the TSA system reached 215,000 children (around 25 per cent of the child population, slightly lower than the official poverty figure for children, which is 26.4 per cent).

**Evidence-based advocacy to promote disability-inclusive social protection:** The response was also an important opportunity to strengthen the inclusive components of the social protection system in Georgia through analytical contributions and advocacy. UNICEF had previously conducted a mapping of social protection measures for children with disabilities in Georgia, which was presented to state agencies, organizations for persons with disabilities, UN sister agencies and other stakeholders, to support national efforts to optimize social protection measures for children with disabilities. UNICEF also initiated work to conduct a study on the goods and services required for the inclusion of children with disabilities and is supporting the costing of social protection measures for children with disabilities. This evidence will be used to design new packages of social protection measures for children with disabilities that better reflect their needs, in collaboration with DPOs and state partners.

## Partnerships

UNICEF works closely with government partners, particularly the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs, and the committee on health and social affairs of the Parliament of Georgia. This work comprises providing evidence and data as well as policy recommendations based on UNICEF global, regional and country-wide experience.

UNICEF maintains close cooperation with GEOSTAT in producing real-time data reflecting the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Georgian households. UNICEF provides methodological support as well as support to identify modules for the survey and concrete questionnaires. Apart from producing valuable data, UNICEF is supporting the capacity development of GEOSTAT to create data in relatively short period using telephone/mobile surveys.

UNICEF has also worked closely with the World Bank on the shared objective of ensuring that the most vulnerable children and families are effectively reached and that social inclusion is at the forefront of TSA reform. Both organizations also previously produced a joint statement which established a vision and principles for a fiscally sustainable and progressive social protection system.

## Lessons Learned

**Producing timely, relevant, and rigorous analysis was key to the success of the response:** UNICEF's strategy to engage in timely and relevant evidence-based advocacy was successful in promoting reforms that focused on the most vulnerable children and families. The evidence generated through child poverty analyses and simulations, as well as through the real-time monitoring of household socio-economic parameters, supported the policy developments necessary to strengthen the social protection system, making it more adaptable to shocks. The assessments also provided comparative analysis on concrete child benefit modalities and insights on which programmes would have the largest impact. UNICEF's support in providing evidence at a critical time in the decision-making process provided the government with a clear and specific set of policy options as well as strong analysis of costs and potential impacts.

**Long-term investments in systems strengthening led to results:** Investment in systems strengthening to promote comprehensive programmes for children was a precursor to the effective work on shock response, allowing UNICEF and the government to build on and adapt existing programmes to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Prior to the pandemic, the work on supporting TSA design, implementation, adaptation and expansion was key in the

timely and relevant response provided by UNICEF to the Government of Georgia.

**Strong intensive partnerships with government and other stakeholders kept the focus on children's needs:**

During the pandemic, UNICEF was part of stakeholder platforms developed by the Government of Georgia to coordinate the country's COVID-19 response and sustain the well-being of Georgian households. In addition, UNICEF was part of intensive consultations and partnerships with the Government Administration, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs, GEOSTAT and the Parliament of Georgia. UNICEF utilized its global, regional and country-wide experience, as well as knowledge and evidence generated before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that approaches and policies applied by the government considered the best interests of the child. Through this approach, UNICEF ensured that the focus on children was maintained, and that meeting children's needs stayed high on the government agenda.

## Way Forward

**Strengthening the coverage and delivery of social protection programmes at the local level:**

UNICEF is currently engaging with municipalities to support the implementation and deliver social protection programmes. In 2019, Georgia adopted the Code on the Rights of the Child, supported by UNICEF, covering all rights and freedoms of the child, and providing stronger mechanisms for their protection and realization. This includes a particular focus on social protection and strengthens the role of municipalities to support the process of identifying the most vulnerable children who are currently excluded from the TSA and providing them with needs-specific support.

**Supporting the government in strengthening the social protection system:**

Together with other development partners, UNICEF plans to support the Government of Georgia in developing a comprehensive legal act – the Social Code – that will define the legal framework for the future social protection system in Georgia. The government has already expressed its broad vision in respect to the Social Code and highlighted its importance to support Georgian citizens from an early age. The WMS in 2022 will provide evidence on poverty resulting from the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and this study is intended to contribute to the new Social Code. In July 2021, the Chair of the Parliament and the Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs announced the launch of this initiative. The overarching legal act will unite all social protection measures and provide a new approach to social protection in Georgia, with child social protection forming an important part of this legislation. EU delegation and UN agencies, including UNICEF, have been invited to support the government in this undertaking. UNICEF plans to provide technical expertise to ensure that children's best interests and their right to dignified standards of living and social security are protected and fully reflected in this new legal framework.

**Continuing to provide data and evidence to inform policy decisions:**

UNICEF plans to conduct a new round of the WMS, which will inform the government about the welfare of the Georgian population and reflect the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of vulnerable social groups. This study will also serve as a baseline for the development of the Social Code. UNICEF will continue to support GEOSTAT in conducting a new series of real-time monitoring to further track the effects of the pandemic on Georgian households. This latter activity will also strengthen capacity of GEOSTAT to perform and administer mobile surveys, which provide valuable basic information about different aspects of the societal life and can be applicable during emergencies.

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# Ghana:

## Enhancing the agility of the national social protection system to respond to the COVID-19 crisis

*As soon as the looming impact of COVID-19 in Ghana became apparent, UNICEF, in partnership with the World Bank and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), supported the government to initiate the expansion of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme. In combination with regular payments, 'extraordinary payments' (equal to four months' social assistance in one single payment) were transferred to LEAP recipients including over 332,000 households to help alleviate economic pressures and to enable them to apply safe health and social distancing practices. LEAP and its partners – ranging from social workers and local financial institutions to community focal persons – used this opportunity to disseminate COVID-19 public health and anti-stigma messages to hard-to-reach populations. In addition, UNICEF and the World Bank supported the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) in their plan to reach an approximately additional 125,000 vulnerable people, including people with disabilities, homeless people, and women and children living on the street.*



Mawusi, a mother of three children, was struggling even before the COVID-19 crisis. “When I first moved here, I wanted to begin a farm, but no one would give me land because of my disability. Then, last year, I started going to people’s homes to sweep so I could get something to eat for my children. Sometimes I get. Sometimes I don’t.”

The impact of COVID-19 made things more difficult for many people in Mawusi’s community. “Many of the people whose homes I used to sweep say the disease has destroyed their work. If they don’t get money, how can I also get?” Mawusi was a recipient of the LEAP programme’s ‘extraordinary payments; “Whenever that money comes, it’s a life saver.”

Source: UNICEF Ghana Country Office

## Context

Ghana has experienced significant economic growth in recent years, alongside a reduction in the country's income poverty rate from 52.6 per cent (1991) to 23.4 per cent (2017). However, the most recent Ghana Living Standards Survey (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2019) indicates increasing inequality and a slowing down in the declining rate of poverty and extreme poverty. Currently, 6.8 million people live below the poverty line. According to the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC), nearly three out of four Ghanaian children (73.4 per cent) are multidimensionally poor, one in every ten children lives in extreme poverty, and children are 40 per cent more likely to be poor in comparison to adults. With less than a decade to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Ghana faces significant challenges to reduce multidimensional child poverty by half.

LEAP, Ghana's national flagship social protection programme, was launched in 2008 with the objective of reducing poverty by increasing consumption and enabling access to services, particularly among poor and vulnerable households. Since its initial launch as a cash transfer pilot to 1,654 extremely poor families in 21 districts, UNICEF – in collaboration with the World Bank, FCDO, USAID and other partners – has provided technical, operational, analytical and advocacy support to enable the government to continue reaching existing and new recipients, while also strengthening the efficiency of LEAP's operational procedures and coordination systems and supporting delivery improvements and innovations. This has included, for example, expanding the eligibility criteria to include households with pregnant women and infants, strengthening the Management Information System (MIS), and digitalizing both the targeting and payment systems. By the end of 2020, LEAP reached 330,438 households.

While the initial scale of the pandemic and potential impact on Ghanaians was not clear, the government focused on putting in place appropriate public health measures and on adapting service delivery. Despite this, Ghana found itself amongst the top three countries in West and Central Africa with the largest number of positive cases. It soon became clear that, in addition to severe health impacts, this crisis would lead to

devastating impacts on the economy. Hence a social protection response was needed, particularly to safeguard the livelihoods of the most vulnerable communities.

## UNICEF's Response and Results

**Advocating for vertical expansion of the flagship social protection programme:** When the first COVID-19 cases appeared in Ghana in March 2020, UNICEF and the World Bank worked closely with the government to formulate a response that would address both the short-term and long-term consequences of the pandemic. A swift and effective response was essential, not only to protect the most vulnerable families from the potential economic impact, but also to enable them to follow public health measures such as social distancing, wearing masks and handwashing. While the government was focused on the immediate impacts on people in major urban areas affected by lockdown, UNICEF emphasized the need to also focus on the medium-term impacts on vulnerable households more generally, including LEAP's largely rural programme participants. UNICEF and the World Bank produced recommendations outlined in a joint social protection response advocating for an expansion of the programme. Soon after, the MoGCSP implemented COVID-19 relief assistance in the form of extraordinary payments to over 332,000 extremely poor households (reaching over 1.45 million people, including 671,000 children), intended to help alleviate economic pressures on poor and vulnerable households.

**Hands-on support to deliver cash transfers safely:** Delivering the extraordinary payments safely and in a way that supported broader public health messages was a key priority. Working closely with the LEAP team, the World Bank and FCDO, UNICEF supported important programme modifications to deliver payments safely, applying appropriate health and social distancing practices. Firstly, in order to limit interactions, the extraordinary payment was combined with ongoing payments, totalling four months' worth of social assistance. Secondly, due to COVID-19 restrictions, LEAP was unable to use its usual disbursement method of cash collection at community pay points (within 5 kilometres of each community), so recipients were instead required to collect the transfers from bank branches. Given the distances recipients



needed to travel to receive the benefit, an additional amount to cover transportation costs was added to the overall benefit amount. In addition, an amount was also provided for personal protective equipment (PPE), including soap and water. Thirdly, guidance and communication materials were developed and disseminated to ensure frontline workers and programme participants wore masks, that social distancing was in place when participants collected payments from banks (lockdown was only in certain urban areas, and movement was allowed for critical activities), and that handwashing facilities were freely available. LEAP and its local partners – including social workers, local financial institutions and community focal persons at district level – also used this opportunity to disseminate COVID-19 public health and anti-stigma messages to this hard-to-reach population.

**Using the social protection system to reach additional vulnerable people:**

While the LEAP extraordinary payments cushioned impacts for existing programme participants, the ongoing economic consequences clearly affected many more households. Therefore, in the second half of 2020, UNICEF and the World Bank supported the MoGCSP to reach an approximately 125,000 additional most vulnerable people affected by the pandemic with cash transfers. Recipients include persons living in alleged witch camps (women accused of being witches and banished from their communities), homeless people, head porters (a form of goods transportation conducted almost entirely by young women), women and children living

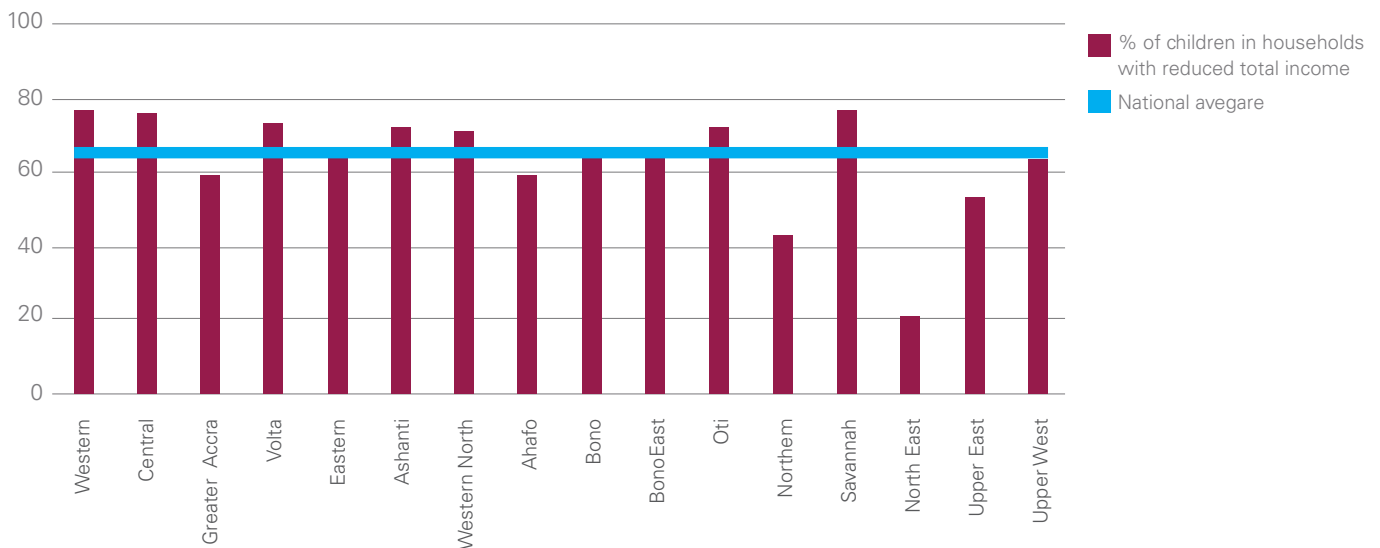
on the street, persons with disabilities, and households classified as extremely poor under the Ghana National Household Registry (GNHR). COVID-19 relief transfers were delivered using existing components of the social protection system, including GNHR data and human resources for targeting and verification, and LEAP’s MIS and payment systems for enrolment and payment of households.

From December 2020, recipients began to receive transfers that ranged from 110-550 GHC in two tranches, using a new payment modality of mobile money. As of June 2021, 53,000 recipients have received transfers. These transfers used and tested several innovations. For example, the use of mobile payments also enabled the use of SMS text messages to communicate with recipients and monitor payments. Modifications were made to LEAP’s MIS to enable temporary enrolment and smoother use of GNHR data.

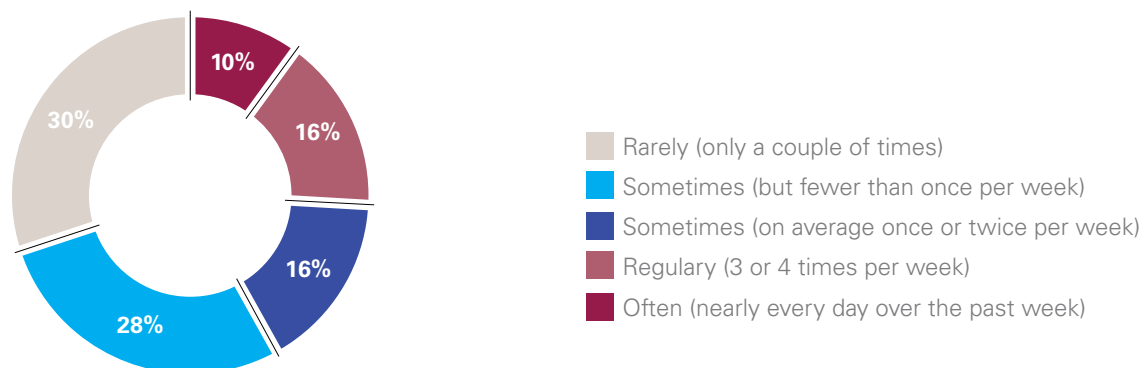
**Using evidence to understand the impact of the pandemic on people’s lives:**

UNICEF and the World Bank supported the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) to conduct a household panel survey on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on households and children in all 16 regions of Ghana. This survey consisted of phone interviews with 3,000 households and 2,000 caregivers. According to the findings, more than half of households interviewed reduced their food consumptions to cope with COVID-19.

**Figure 1: Percentage of children in households with a reduction in total household income, by region (2020)**



**Figure 2:** Frequency of children aged 6 months to 14 years with fewer meals than usual (2020)



The survey also revealed other hardships children had experienced because of COVID-19 disruption: 27 per cent of children missed scheduled vaccinations due to mobility restrictions; 28.9 per cent of children were exposed to physical punishments; and more than 29 per cent of households felt more irritated with children after the occurrence of COVID-19.

### **Integrating innovative post-payment monitoring mechanisms:**

Building on a long history of UNICEF support to LEAP monitoring and impact evaluation, UNICEF offered support in monitoring and documenting ongoing lessons both for the LEAP extraordinary payments and the COVID-19 relief payments. Working closely with LEAP, UNICEF tested the use of RapidPro<sup>2</sup> as a tool for monitoring and receiving feedback. Monitoring of the LEAP extraordinary payments took place about three months after the first payments, focusing on programme households, community focal points and district social welfare offices. The questionnaire requested feedback on whether communications were clear, payments had been received, and bottlenecks that needed to be addressed. The recipients were also informed about grievance and redress mechanisms, and where to call for further information. During the COVID-19 relief transfers, UNICEF supported the use of RapidPro for ongoing and more immediate monitoring, and also expanded its use to post-payment communication in the form of free SMS surveys to alert programme recipients on when to expect transfers and the amount they should receive credited to

their mobile money account. SMS communications were also used to alert recipients about mobile money fraud and scams; remind recipients not to share their secret pin with others; and to disseminate general COVID-19 communication messages.

A second innovation used to follow up on the programme was civil society post-payment monitoring through a partnership with the National Civil Society Organization (CSOs) Platform on Social Protection. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF had already been supporting a partnership of three social protection CSO platforms to strengthen social accountability in the sector. The monitoring exercise involved sampling across the country, with members visiting 32 communities in 16 districts, reaching 2,800 recipients and 5,600 community members. The intention was to receive more in-depth feedback from three groups involved in the programme – households, community focal points and district social welfare officers – on delivery, impact, use and other related issues such as access to shops/markets and affordability. The results of these two exercises can be used to: (i) Inform programme improvements and modifications, particularly to strengthen the system's shock-responsiveness; (ii) Document LEAP's COVID-19 response and recovery and enhance LEAP's communications strategy; and (iii) Test innovative monitoring mechanisms that can be eventually integrated into the operational components and the MIS of LEAP.

2 RapidPro collects data via free SMS to enable real-time data collection and mass-communication with target end-users, including beneficiaries and frontline workers. UNICEF supports the use of RapidPro by government and NGO partners as a free open source software that allows users to easily build and scale mobile-based applications from anywhere in the world. RapidPro also powers U-Report, UNICEF's youth and citizen engagement platform.

## Partnerships

Since 2008, UNICEF has worked closely with the MoGCSP to support strengthening of the country's social protection system, working closely with the World Bank, USAID, FCDO and other development partners. The COVID-19 response has tightened partnerships and coordination which have been critical to successes to date. UNICEF's work with CSO partners has been key in laying the foundations for LEAP's standardized monitoring and reporting framework. These strategic partnerships with CSOs are improving demand-side interventions by empowering beneficiaries and communities to hold the government accountable in the delivery of social protection services.

## Lessons Learned

**Social protection system preparedness affected response:** Ghana presents an interesting case in the use of the existing social protection system for mitigating shock response. On the one hand, Ghana already had in place several strong programmes and operational systems prior to the pandemic which provided the basis for the social protection response – including data and MIS systems, targeting and payments systems, digitized monitoring, and strong human capacity at national and district level. Nonetheless, in both vertical and horizontal scale-up of cash transfers, multiple challenges impacted the agility and scope of the response. These included operational challenges to the speed with which changes could be introduced, and decision-makers' understanding of the role of social protection in emergency response.

**More dynamic data was needed to identify and support the most vulnerable populations:** While both LEAP and GNHR had critical data on poor and vulnerable households, this data and its collection methods were not set up to pre-identify or swiftly capture data on individuals or households impacted by either slow or rapid onset crises. Data collection was also primarily centrally driven. These factors enhanced the risk of potentially excluding people impacted by the crisis. While LEAP households received the extraordinary cash payments

delivered as part of the initial response, another group of hard-to-reach communities severely impacted by the crisis were not included in the initial response. Hence, UNICEF supported the government to ensure these vulnerable families subsequently received support. UNICEF continues to work with LEAP to adopt innovative strategies to strengthen its administrative data systems and institutional capacity.

## Way Forward

**Strengthening the shock-responsiveness of the social protection system:** Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the MoGCSP and UNICEF had already agreed on a programme to strengthen the shock-responsiveness of Ghana's social protection system, in collaboration with the World Bank and FCDO. Partners are currently working to synthesize lessons learned and gaps from the pandemic response, as a basis for longer-term systems strengthening to ensure that Ghana's social protection system is better prepared to anticipate and respond to diverse shocks and crises in the future. For example, this includes building on lessons learned from the new mobile money payment modality and strengthening coordination mechanisms across programmes and ministries – for example coordinating data with Ghana's National Disaster Management Organization. These will be incorporated into a broader assessment of system readiness for shock response and the subsequent operational road map for developing a shock-resilient and shock-responsive government social protection system.

**Strengthening the enabling framework for a shock-responsive social protection system:** UNICEF is also supporting the MoGCSP to develop a new legal framework for social protection, the Social Protection Bill. One of the key recommendations from a review of the draft Bill was the need to incorporate a section on emergencies and shock response. As part of the systems strengthening work mentioned above, UNICEF also plans to work with partners on identifying options for national contingency financing mechanisms, in order to allow government to more easily and rapidly finance scale-up of social protection programmes as needed.

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# Guatemala:

## Strengthening system capacities and supporting rapid innovation to deliver at-scale emergency payments

*As part of the response to COVID-19, UNICEF and the World Bank supported the Government of Guatemala with the design and implementation of Bono Familia, an unconditional emergency cash transfer programme to cover the most vulnerable families impacted by COVID-19. More than 2 million poor and vulnerable families were reached across the country, representing 80 per cent of all households in Guatemala. Alongside a concerted effort from government entities, commercial banks, electricity companies, telecommunication companies, ATM providers and call centres, UNICEF, in partnership with the World Bank, supported the creation of an innovative platform to identify, register and pay benefits to affected families. Innovations included electronic registration, token distribution, as well as monitoring dashboards and electronic signatures to improve managerial and administrative processes within the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES).*



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Telma was one of the many parents who lost their main source of income during the pandemic and who were left scrambling to find a way to put food on the table.

Cash assistance from a government programme supported by UNICEF and the World Bank enabled Telma to find a new source of income – making face masks to protect against COVID-19.

Telma's first priority upon receiving the cash benefit was to buy food for her children. "My greatest fear was not being able to afford food for them," she says. The money also meant that Telma could buy flour to make pancakes, which she sells to try to make ends meet. Then, with the money she had left over, Telma bought fabric to make face masks based on a pattern she downloaded from the internet. "I make reusable masks, which I'm selling now."

Source: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/protecting-families-economic-impact-COVID-19>

## Context

Guatemala's poverty rate increased from 45.6 per cent to 47 per cent in 2020 (World Bank, 2021). Without the implementation of the social protection programmes, poverty was estimated to increase by three to four times. Poverty is projected to decrease to 45.9 per cent in 2021. Children are particularly vulnerable, with 68 per cent of them living in poverty. Chronic malnutrition affects 58 per cent of indigenous children and 47 per cent of children under the age of five. In addition, just under 70 per cent of the total employed population are informal workers. Between 2002 and 2018, migration of children and adolescents into Guatemala increased five-fold. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the most vulnerable households, with 82 per cent of households indicating at least one member had stopped working due to the measures imposed to contain the spread of the virus. Vulnerable households also faced further hardship due to the impact of tropical storms Eta and Iota in November 2020, which aggravated an already dire situation.

In 2018, Guatemala only spent 1.3 per cent of GDP on social protection programmes. The national cash transfer programme, Bono Social, managed by MIDES, continues to experience gaps linked to the design, registration, implementation and monitoring components of an incipient social protection system. Bono Familia, a cash transfer scheme implemented in response to the pandemic, was effective in supporting vulnerable families in Guatemala.

## UNICEF's Response and Results

### **Preparedness, coordination and strategic support:**

Since 2018, UNICEF and the World Bank have worked closely with MIDES to strengthen the social protection system with a focus on building an effective Management Information System (MIS) to support Bono Social. This programme aims to promote access to health and education services for girls and boys, ensuring Guatemalan children and youth living in poverty and extreme poverty, are able to fulfill their potential. At

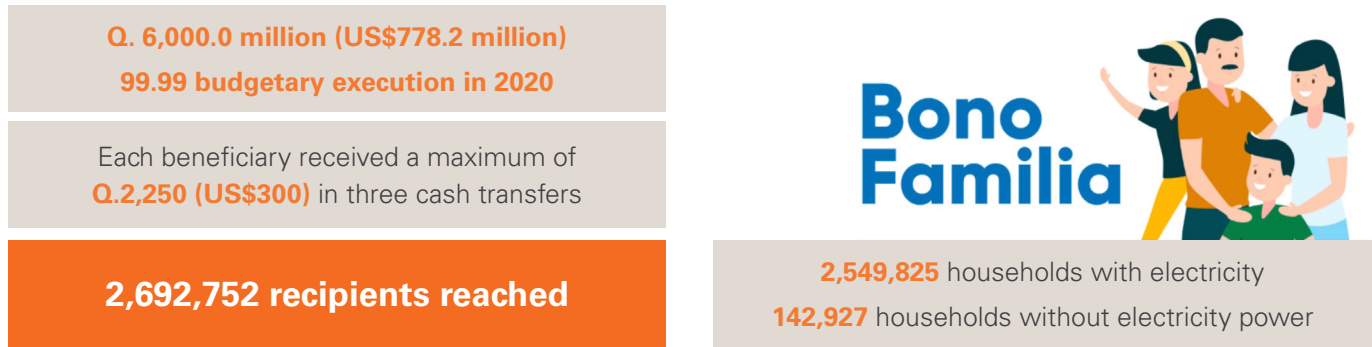
the onset of the pandemic, Bono Social, with coverage of approximately 175,000 households, was not able to respond effectively to meet the needs of vulnerable families that were impacted. The design did not include the use of a social registry, and therefore missed many of these families.

In just three months, UNICEF and the World Bank supported MIDES to implement Bono Familia, an emergency cash assistance programme to support vulnerable households impacted by COVID-19. Three cash transfers were provided to approximately 2.6 million recipients in 340 municipalities across the country, reaching 80% of the vulnerable population. An investment equivalent to 1 per cent of GDP (US\$769.23 million) was made to develop this programme using funds from the national budget. Due to the absence of a Social Household Registry, the criterion established for recipients was for families whose electricity consumption was less than or equal to 200 kWh in February 2020. In addition, electricity companies make monthly visits to all households that have their services to issue invoices, which also provided families with an opportunity to clarify their eligibility for the programme. Additional families without access to electricity were also included as special recipients given that 12% of households lack access to electricity. Bono Familia was the largest social protection intervention in the country's history, in terms of both investment and coverage. The programme had a significant impact on protecting vulnerable children and adolescents from the effects of family income loss, and also contributed towards reactivating the local economy.

### **Designing an innovative and comprehensive MIS:**

UNICEF's technical support to MIDES included developing an innovative platform that served as a social registry and allowed the government to swiftly expand its cash transfer response. The interface was developed to minimize personal contact, to support case management, and to deliver cash effectively to the most vulnerable families. The money was received through simplified bank accounts, either through ATMs and bank branches, or used to pay for goods in stores, pharmacies and gas stations which allowed for recipients who did not have bank accounts to receive the transfer.

**Figure 1: Bono Familia – target groups and investment**



The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other partners supported the process of communicating the availability and accessibility of the emergency cash transfers, especially to families without electricity. As of 31 December 2020, the platform registered 2,761,361 people who enrolled via text message, call centres, website registration, or through home visits in special cases. Furthermore, the technological

innovations also allowed a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the response; for example, adolescents and youth were found to be supporting their grandparents, neighbours and others in the community to access these benefits. This platform forms a key component of building a national integrated social protection system and is expected to serve as a basis for the design and implementation of new programmes.

**Figure 2: Bono Familia – number of recipients in each region**

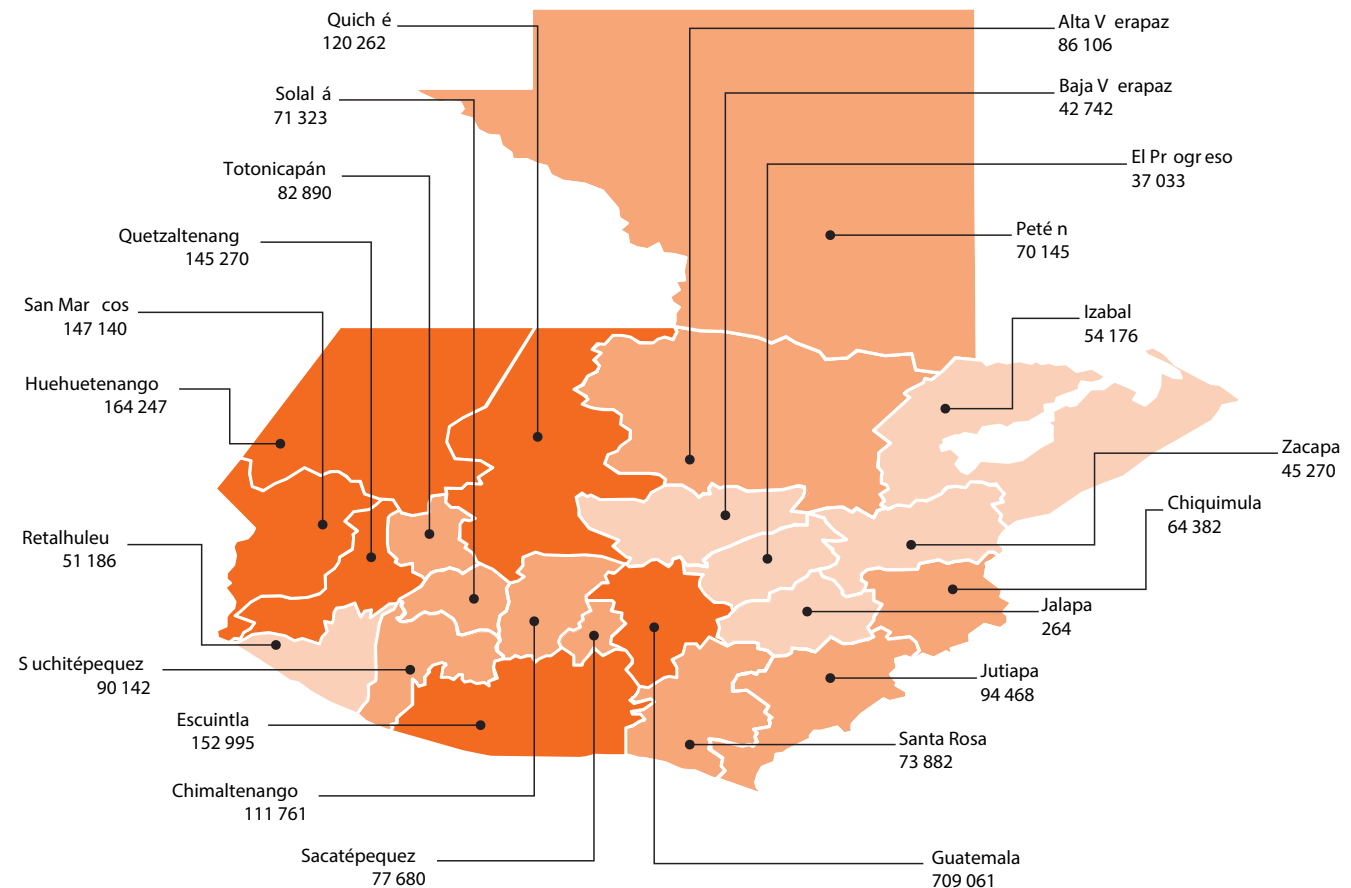




Figure 3: Bono Familia enrolment channels



## Partnerships

The experience with Bono Familia and the main findings of the Core Diagnostic Instrument (CODI) assessment, published in 2018 with the support from UNICEF, World Bank, UNDP, UNFPA, the World Food Programme (WFP) and UN Women, led to a strong consensus regarding the need to utilize a social registry in Guatemala. UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) are now working together to conduct a pilot with MIDES aimed at reaching 20,000 households as part of their efforts to develop a social registry in Guatemala. At the onset of the pandemic, partners were ready to support the government to undertake a swift social protection response, and this extensive partnership was key in raising people’s confidence and enhancing access to the emergency cash transfer programme.

## Lessons Learned

**Political will and a strong legal framework played an integral role:** In the period leading up to the first outbreak of COVID-19 in Guatemala, the government articulated a vision on how they wanted to respond to the crisis, with a focus on providing financial stimulus to the economy. On 8 April 2020, the Congress of Guatemala passed Government Decree 13-2020 to create the Bono Familia Fund, which stated the budget and the source of financing to be executed by MIDES to support the population most severely affected by the socioeconomic

effects of COVID-19 pandemic. The legislation defined prioritized groups, such as people living in poverty, single and female-headed households, the elderly, people with disabilities, people living with chronic or degenerative diseases, and families with children at risk of malnutrition. Another key aspect of the law was that it requested the National Banking Authority to issue the required measures and exceptions to allow financial entities to open bank accounts in a quick, socially distanced and accessible way. Throughout design and implementation, this intervention received high-level support, with close follow up by the Presidency.

**Frontline operational presence was critical every step of the way:** The fact that UNICEF was on the ground and ready to respond quickly to the needs of the government was critical. The previous collaboration between UNICEF, the World Bank and partners on promoting an integrated MIS in Guatemala was crucial in building confidence among key government stakeholders, in particular on how implementing a comprehensive social protection response would result in the type of economic stimulus they envisioned. As soon as the challenge was set for MIDES to deliver Bono Familia, UNICEF was with the government every step of the way. UNICEF provided support in the design phase, the implementation phase at the national and local level, coordinated with partners to ensure the most vulnerable families received the cash transfer, and supported the stocktaking phase on how lessons learned could be integrated to build a comprehensive social protection system. Specific areas of support included building organizational capacities to deliver, manage

and process the cash transfers. Working side by side with directors, technicians from MIDES and Information Technology specialists, UNICEF helped create and update monitoring dashboards on programme implementation and helped to digitalize internal processing of beneficiary lists and authorization of payments. These steps represented major progress in the Ministry's capacity to deliver assistance quickly.

**Public-private partnerships were pivotal:** Bono Familia created an alliance between the private and public sector which was unparalleled in Guatemala. Developing this platform required digitalizing the process, developing the infrastructure, introducing security precautions, and relied on developing new partnerships with telecommunication companies, call centres, 11 banks, the National Registry of Persons (RENAP), VisaNet Guatemala, and many others. This alliance was unique and proved to be a key factor in successfully ensuring an effective expansion of the cash transfer response.

## Way Forward

### **Pursuing a national child-sensitive social protection system:**

UNICEF will support the government to develop a consolidated social protection system which includes strengthening all child-focused social protection programmes, enhancing access to services as well as early childhood programmes, and augmenting humanitarian support. Furthermore, based on the experience of designing and implementing Bono Familia, combined with the fact that Guatemala ranks ninth in the world in terms of climate risk, UNICEF will continue to support the government to build a shock-responsive social protection system to mitigate the impact of future shocks.

UNICEF will support the Government of Guatemala in three main areas: (i) Consolidating and strengthening the social protection system, including developing a unified social registry and further enhancing the management information system; (ii) Supporting municipal governments with planning and budgeting; and (iii) Working with the Ministry of Finance and other key line ministries to ensure child services are effectively reflected in the budget.

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# Jordan:

## A swift operational response strengthens the building blocks of a shock-responsive social protection system

*At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF and partners worked with the Government of Jordan in a rapid and coordinated response strengthening key components of the national social protection system. UNICEF provided support for the formulation of Jordan's National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2019-2025, expansion of the National Aid Fund (NAF), and enhancement of the national unified registry, all of which were key in ensuring a timely and coordinated response. The lessons learned from the response, including coordination mechanisms and operational advancements, are now being integrated into ongoing efforts to ensure the national social protection system is well-equipped to face ongoing and future shocks.*



Sidra, 13 years, is in sixth grade. "Mom bought us shoes, notebooks, pens, sharpeners and erasers," says Sidra excitedly. "I love them so much because the old ones were ruined. I like school. I want to learn here and paint and read and write!"

"Hajati (a UNICEF cash transfer programme) helped solve a lot of the challenges that we face," says Amina, a mother of six children from Syria living in Jordan. "It's impossible to keep your children in school when you have no stationery, school bags or shoes."

"Now I have dignity," she says. "Hajati support comes in the form of a cash withdrawal. It makes a difference not to have to queue up at a charity to receive help."

Source: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/global-annual-results-2020-goal-area-5>



## Context

Jordan has a young population, with 63 per cent of its population under 30 years old, one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world, and growing levels of national debt. Furthermore, over 41 per cent of the labour force works in the informal sector. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative socio-economic impact on the country, with the economy estimated to have contracted by 1.6 per cent in 2020, unemployment increasing to 24.7 per cent in the last quarter of 2020, and youth unemployment reaching 50 per cent.

At the start of the pandemic, the Government of Jordan introduced a package of measures to protect the most vulnerable households affected by the pandemic. A Social Protection Response Committee (SPRC) was set up, headed by the Minister of Social Development, and included the Director Generals of the National Aid Fund (NAF) and the Social Security Corporation (SSC), as well as a representative from the private sector and three large local NGOs – Jordan Red Crescent, Tkiyet Um Ali (TUA), and the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO). The Committee announced a package of cash support to 355,000 poor and vulnerable households including recipients of the NAF monthly cash transfers, the recently launched Takaful cash transfer programme, as well as 200,000 additional vulnerable households who received temporary in-kind support in the form of food baskets for six months (financed by the SSC and NGOs).

## UNICEF's Response and Results

**Gathering evidence and analysis:** UNICEF contributed to the Inter-Agency Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The findings indicated a clear and immediate impact on refugees and vulnerable Jordanians in terms of their ability to access food, income and medical needs; however, the RNA also highlighted concerns regarding the continuity of education, access to WASH facilities, as well as increased protection risks for both adults and children, especially within the extremely vulnerable and marginalized populations living in Informal Tented Settlements (ITS). A socio-economic assessment of households with children

and youth also took place in the second half of 2020 when the government lifted the lockdown and sectors started to gradually open up. The findings indicated additional financial challenges on households, increased violence, a digital divide, and families adopting negative coping mechanisms to meet basic needs during the recovery period.

**Supporting coordination and preparedness:** UNICEF joined the COVID-19 Response Task Force and was assigned as co-chair of the Common Cash Facility (CCF), with a focus on promoting an interagency cash delivery platform. CCF members coordinated payment distribution by staggering payments, mapping recipients with the objective of avoiding any duplications, and reducing crowding by ensuring social distancing at ATM sites. Simultaneously, UNICEF, in collaboration with the World Bank, supported the government to strengthen the preparedness and response of the national social protection system, with a focus on ensuring a quick and effective response to vulnerable families: RapidPro (a two-way short message service (SMS) platform), shared by UNICEF, was used to facilitate communication, identification, registration, verification and information dissemination and was integrated with the NAF MIS system. Furthermore, enhancements were implemented on the cash transfer MIS to accommodate and reflect targeting and payment updates. Simultaneously, UNICEF and the World Bank provided technical assistance and advice in terms of targeting, payments and innovative communication modalities.

**System building and effective delivery:** Since 2018, UNICEF, in collaboration with the World Bank, has been a well-established partner to the NAF, supporting the development and operationalizing of the NAF expansion plan through the following:

- *Providing support to enhance the government's NAF MIS system to identify the most vulnerable households:* UNICEF supported NAF to develop their MIS to expand their existing programmes and develop new ones to support an additional 240,000 beneficiary households in a two-month period. Using lessons learned from support provided in the Hajati cash transfer programme, UNICEF was able to effectively enhance the NAF programmes in terms of design and

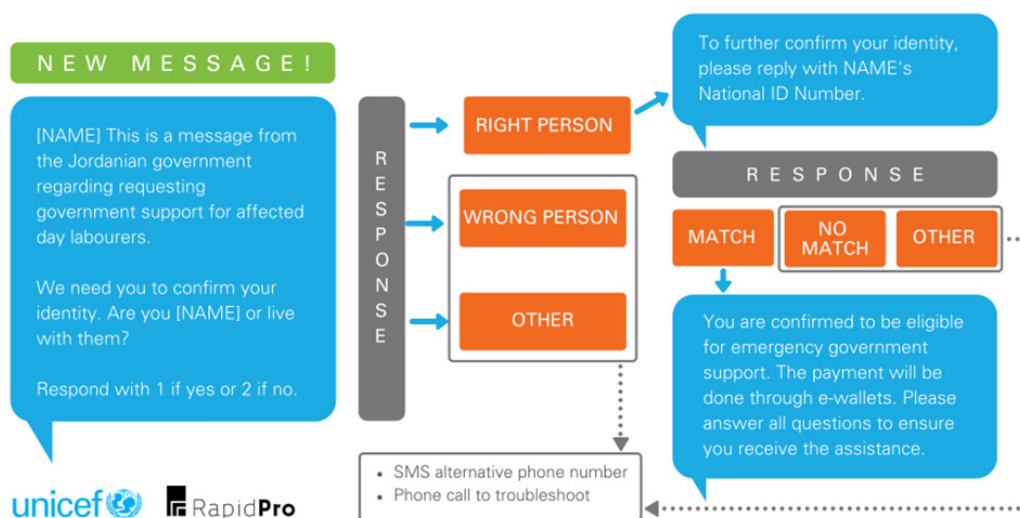
implementation, which led to the horizontal and vertical expansion in the social protection response<sup>3</sup>, which was technically and financially supported by the World Bank, UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF.

- *Expanding the Hajati programme to support vulnerable children, 94 per cent of whom were Syrian refugees:* In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF expanded its Hajati cash transfer programme, increasing the reach from 11,435 to 30,239 children living in host communities and ITS. Of the total recipients, half were girls, 15 per cent were children with a disability or chronic illness, and 30 per cent were from female-headed households (which is higher than the national average of 12 per cent). According to the April 2020 Hajati dashboard, nearly all (98 per cent) recipients thought that the assistance was provided in a timely manner, and recipients reported spending the cash transfer on food and water (66 per cent), followed by rent (17 per cent), medication (12 per cent) and hygiene products (4 per cent).
- *Developing a RapidPro SMS platform, a two-way SMS and digital communication tool,* to register applicants, collect key data and monitor the implementation of the programme. Over 240,000 vulnerable households received cash assistance. The platform was used for

identification, information validation, and to open and register mobile wallets. To date, over 98 per cent of the total population have been paid. The RapidPro verification process connected the SMS flows to the registration portals of financial service providers, which facilitated the opening and activation of beneficiary mobile wallets remotely. UNICEF is also using these tools to strengthen the grievances and complaints mechanism.

- *Providing an integrated package of social protection services through the Makani programme:* UNICEF supported the Makani programme which provides learning support services, community-based child protection, skills training and early childhood development activities through a network of community-based centres. Over 40 per cent of households that received cash assistance from UNICEF's Hajati programme also received these complementary services. At the onset of the pandemic, staff and volunteers supported these communities remotely by raising awareness on COVID-19 safety measures and the government's online platform, as well as resilience building practices, early childhood development activities and online support to parents, caregivers and children. In 2021, efforts began to effectively link the Makani programme to the NAF's Takaful programme, the Takaful plus initiative.

**Figure 1:** Flowchart illustrates the ID verification process conducted through SMS messages for the Hajati cash transfer programme.



3 Vertical expansion of an existing programme or set of programmes refers to temporarily increasing the benefit value or duration of the programme for some or all existing recipients (e.g. top-ups). New components may also be added. Horizontal expansion of an existing programme or set of programmes refers to temporarily including new beneficiaries from affected communities.

## Partnerships

Since 2018, UNICEF, the World Bank, UNHCR and WFP have been supporting Jordan's largest social protection programme with technical and financial support – including the National Unified Registry – in addition to the creation of the NSPS 2019-2025. UNICEF was able to leverage its established partnership with government and key partners to support an effective strategy to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the onset of the pandemic, UNICEF and the World Bank provided support to the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) and NAF to mobilize the national social protection system, identifying options and measures, enhancing the targeting model to include informal workers, and strengthening social assistance and integrated social protection services, reaching almost 400,000 beneficiaries. In operationalizing the NSPS, UNICEF has also formed critical partnerships with local NGOs, particularly through the Makani programme.

## Lessons Learned

**The pandemic provided an opportunity to strengthen the shock-responsiveness of the system:** The national social protection system played a key role in responding to the crisis. Work on preparedness and strengthening different components of the system, including different coordination mechanisms and management information systems continues. Building on this experience, UNICEF is working with the government to strengthen the existing system and to articulate a new shock-responsive social protection chapter to the NSPS, which UNICEF helped develop and launch.

**The scalability and flexibility to make rapid adjustments to programme design features and administrative systems was key:** Time was of the essence as the lockdown impacted people's livelihoods and included an imminent bank closure. In just two weeks, UNICEF Jordan was able to scale up Hajati to include 18,804 additional vulnerable children. Furthermore, the ability to ensure communities benefited from both the cash assistance and complementary services, linking the Hajati and Makani programmes, was key in enabling UNICEF to tailor its interventions to meet community needs.

**The COVID-19 response illustrated the need to support the MOSD to ensure efficient and sustainable social spending:** This entailed analyzing social protection expenditures from an equity perspective, in addition to undertaking an analysis of the distributional implications of selected reforms linked to contributory and non-contributory social protection measures using both static and dynamic modelling.

## Way Forward

**Working towards a shock-responsive social protection system:** Work is underway to distill and apply the lessons learned from the social protection response to COVID-19 and support the government to further strengthen the system to respond to future crises, in addition to addressing longer-term poverty and social vulnerabilities. Work is focused on:

- *Social protection policy and system strengthening* to expand coverage and children's access to integrated and inclusive social protection services.
- *Generating evidence on child poverty and social protection.* The socio-economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will push a significant number of children below the poverty line and lead to higher levels of multidimensional poverty and deprivation. UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and Department of Statistics, is conducting a nationally representative survey to understand the types and extent of multidimensional deprivation(s) faced by children and youth in Jordan. The report will provide practical information on deprivation to inform the design and implementation of policies and programmes to enhance the ongoing COVID-19 and humanitarian response as well as longer-term recovery and reconstruction.
- *Direct social protection programme implementation.* UNICEF is working with the MOSD to develop a shock-responsive social protection system for the country. The first steps towards this include inclusion of a chapter on shock-responsive social protection in the NSPS, and establishing an Implementation Support

Unit (ISU) hosted at MOSD to support the management and coordination of activities related to the NSPS.

- *Conducting a social protection public expenditure review*: In collaboration with ILO, UNICEF is supporting

the government to produce a social protection public expenditure review to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of public spending on social protection and the impact of these investments on sector outcomes, especially for targeted groups.

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# Madagascar:

## Leveraging the national social protection system to enable a rapid humanitarian response

*UNICEF, together with the World Bank, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Union, the Red Cross and key non-governmental organizations, supported the government's strategy to channel a rapid response through existing social protection programmes and expand coverage to children and families most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The immediate response focused on ten cities, with particular attention to urban communities where income was severely affected by confinement measures. The emergency cash transfer (100,000 Ariary or US\$26 per payment) reached over 368,000 families by the end of 2020, with some cash plus interventions facilitating access to basic services in the poorest households focusing on water and sanitation and prevention of gender-based violence.*



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More than two thirds of children in Madagascar live in multidimensional poverty – without access to education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation or safe water. Their already-dire situation has been compounded by socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

With support from UNICEF and partners, the government established “Tosika Fameno” – an unconditional cash transfer allowance providing 100,000 Ariary (US\$26) for households identified as vulnerable and economically impacted by COVID-19.

“Tosika Fameno allowed us to pay two months’ rent,” says 49-year-old Emelie, who is paraplegic. “And we could also buy food for my grandson.”

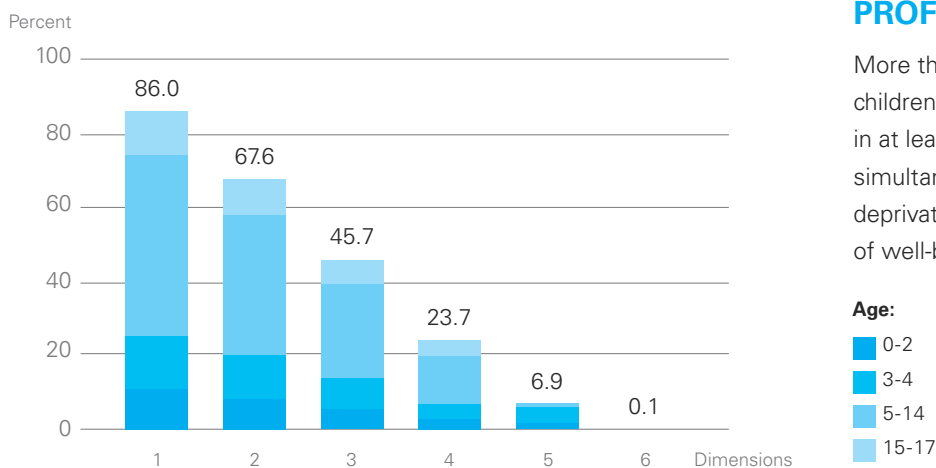
Source: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/protecting-families-economic-impact-COVID-19>

## Context

There are nearly 14 million children living in Madagascar, of whom 9.4 million were living in multidimensional poverty in 2018 according to the latest Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS-6), and 11.6 million (82.9 per cent) were living below the monetary poverty line (Silva-Leander, 2020; UNICEF, 2021). Madagascar's investment rate in social protection is one of the lowest in the world, with the government spending 0.7 per cent of GDP on social protection in 2014 (roughly US\$3 per capita). The National Social Safety Net (NSSN) programme only covers about five per cent of extremely poor families and three per cent of children. It reaches 7 out of 22 regions, with

conditions related to school enrolment and attendance. The National Social Protection Strategy 2019-2023 was approved with the commitment to expand coverage in the country to reach half a million poor families. However, the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, intensified by the current food security crisis in the southern part of Madagascar, is likely to push an additional 475,000 to 2.3 million Malagasy people below the monetary poverty line. This could jeopardize progress made over the past decade in the fight against extreme poverty in Madagascar, with the extreme poverty rate (<US\$1.90 per day) reaching 78 per cent in 2021 (the same rate as in 2009).

**Figure 1:** Children suffering from deprivation in at least 0-6 dimensions of well-being, by age group



## PROFILE OF POOR CHILDREN

More than two thirds (67.6%) of Malagasy children suffer from material deprivation in at least two dimensions of well-being simultaneously and 23.7% suffer from deprivation in four or more dimensions of well-being.

### Age:

- 0-2
- 3-4
- 5-14
- 15-17

## UNICEF's Response and Results

**A swift and effective response:** The social protection response, known as "Tosika Fameno" (or Filling the Gap) initially reached 189,000 households in three major cities – Antananarivo, Toamasina and Fianarantsoa – and progressively expanded to ten cities, reaching more than 368,000 vulnerable households (8,500 directly supported by UNICEF) whose income was severely affected by confinement measures, and who were at high risk of food insecurity. The first payment was made only four weeks after the beginning of the lockdown in urban areas. Fonds d'Intervention pour le Développement (FID) – the national agency for social protection – and WFP, with support from UNICEF, collaborated to develop a new registration

process (registration of almost 200,000 households was completed in about 12 days), in addition to developing a post-monitoring system to receive recipient feedback. Payments were distributed through mobile payments and the postal system.

**Aligning the national and humanitarian response:** In response to COVID-19, and with financial support from the World Bank, the President requested the national agency, FID, to expand the social protection programme in urban areas. In parallel, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, the European Union (through NGOs Action Against Hunger, CARE, SOS Village d'Enfants and HI) and the Red Cross (through the International Federation of Red Cross) mobilized additional humanitarian funds to further expand the

implementation of the cash response. As technical co-lead of the Cash Working Group (CWG), UNICEF supported the development of a rapid and unified response to the pandemic, working in close partnership with the World Bank, WFP and the government. Moreover, UNICEF drafted a strategy to integrate and to help define the national plan with the emergency responses adopted by the CWG, including the harmonized parameters of the interventions (amount of transfer, length, targeting criteria, monitoring and evaluation system and a common communication strategy). Regular meetings of the CWG ensured continuous dialogue and coordination for each step of the programme design and implementation and ensured that new partners were aligned with the national strategy in the months that followed. Emphasis was placed on improving the inclusiveness of the national social protection programme and integrating social protection into other services provided to the population.

#### **Cash Plus and inclusive social protection**

**programming:** Since 2016, UNICEF has helped strengthen the national social protection programme through both technical assistance and support for the expansion of cash transfers that promote primary and secondary education in areas covered by the national social protection programme. In collaboration with WFP, ILO and UNFPA, UNICEF continued to support the Government of Madagascar in strengthening its national social protection system and making it more sensitive to the needs of vulnerable households, especially women and girls and people living with disabilities. The impact of the cash transfers was also further enhanced by links to complementary elements such as positive messaging and communication focused on preventing violence against women, WASH cluster action, and communication on positive behaviour practices such as social distancing and wearing masks.

#### **Coordination for sustainable financing and recovery:**

UNICEF contributed to the coordination of the US\$15 million leveraged for the social protection response to COVID-19 through the CWG, ensuring funds were aligned to the national social protection strategy. Advocacy efforts to increase the fiscal space for social protection are currently underway, and UNICEF successfully advocated for including the expansion of social protection as one of the indicative measures supported by the Rapid Credit

Facility tranches made available by the IMF in April and August 2020. UNICEF also continued to work with other development partners, notably the World Bank and the EU, to improve the budget transparency of the Open Budget Survey (OBS) results, and advocated for the government to take concrete reform measures. The World Bank recently provided an additional US\$150 million grant to continue expanding the coverage of the national social protection programme.

## **Partnerships**

Since 2016, UNICEF in collaboration with the World Bank have supported the government to strengthen the national social protection system that proved effective in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the pandemic, UNICEF and the World Bank supported the National Institute of Statistics to carry out a rapid survey on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. Plans are underway to carry out an evaluation of the efficiency of social spending (Public Expenditure and Institutional Review) with the World Bank and the Ministry of Economy and Finance covering health, education and social protection. In addition, in cooperation with the World Bank, the European Union and the French Development Agency (AFD), UNICEF recently concluded a Public Expenditure Tracking Survey for the education section. UNICEF also led a coordination effort across agencies through the CWG involving WFP, UNDP and the European Union, the Red Cross and NGOs, to support the government's strategy to ensure a rapid and unified response.

## **Lessons Learned**

#### **Rapid mobilization to respond to the pandemic was possible due to existing structures and systems:**

UNICEF was able to effectively support the government to coordinate an efficient response bringing together the UN country team's efforts and the CWG. Using the national social protection system to support the swift and effective expansion of cash transfers was key and provided an opportunity for UNICEF to take a lead role in providing critical coordination support to the government.



### **Taking advantage of the response and expansion of coverage to promote inclusion and adequacy in urban areas:**

Prior to the pandemic, the national agency for social protection (FID) implemented the national social protection programme, which only reached a few rural regions and did not include urban or peri-urban areas. The pandemic response in 2020 needed to cover several urban areas where families were severely impacted. UNICEF was able to provide critical technical support to support the government to formulate common tools for the registration, targeting and monitoring of the cash transfers. The response created an opportunity to strengthen the government's efforts to expand coverage, but also improved the adequacy and inclusivity of the system.

## **Way Forward**

### **Scaling up shock-responsive social protection systems and preparedness to climate-related shocks, including droughts:**

In Madagascar, collaboration between humanitarian and social protection programmes was already in place to respond to other type of crises, particularly droughts. Some humanitarian actors have been using the national social protection system to respond to humanitarian needs since 2018. A national manual to coordinate the response of humanitarian and social protection actors was developed in 2019, focused on drought response. This manual will now be revised and adapted to encompass other types of crises (including epidemics and cyclones), based on the experience of the COVID-19 response.

### **Increasing the inclusiveness of the national social protection programme through a Universal Child Benefit with a focus on the most vulnerable children, particularly children with disabilities:**

UNICEF supported the government to conduct a programmatic review, in preparation for a programme that will be jointly conducted by ILO, WFP and UNFPA. The review provides recommendations on design modifications to improve the inclusivity of the programme. The review focuses

on coverage gaps, levels of benefits and linkages with additional social services and recommends scaling up the NSSN to a universal child benefit. This joint programme on integrated social protection (the Joint SDG Fund) includes a combination of cash transfers and gender-based violence support, agricultural insurance and livelihood promotion activities. The ultimate objective of the programme is twofold: i) to promote the social and economic inclusion of households living in extreme poverty in Madagascar, particularly persons with disabilities, by providing them with complementary social protection interventions aimed at supporting consumption, managing socio-economic risks and promoting human and productive investments and; and ii) to reinforce the national social protection institutional framework by supporting the government in developing an efficient model that could be scaled up nationally. This initiative provides an opportunity for UNICEF and partners, through a series of evidence-based analyses and discussions, to support the government to adopt and implement a Universal Child Benefit.

### **Investing in gender-responsive social protection:**

The "Tosika Fameno" programme was designed rapidly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: registration of beneficiaries was completed two weeks after the declaration of the state of health emergency and, within one month, beneficiaries started to receive the first payment. The programme is a large-scale social protection recovery programme financed by the World Bank in some of Madagascar's main cities and will become a more permanent long-term urban safety net programme as part of the new financing from the World Bank. As the government moves to the recovery phase, it is committed to ensuring that the programme design is adapted and implemented in a gender-responsive manner. An online survey (small sample size) revealed that half of the female respondents had faced gender-based violence during the pandemic. UK Aid is supporting the government by conducting a gender review, providing recommendations which draw on global lessons on gender-responsive social protection in order to influence the design and implementation of the national safety net programme.

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# Mongolia:

## Drawing on successful programmes to deliver a swift and effective social protection response

*Mongolia's existing, near-universal Child Money Programme (CMP) was identified as the most suitable system to deliver an emergency cash transfer COVID-19 response, given that 96.6 per cent of children in Mongolia benefit from this flagship national programme. Furthermore, lessons learned from a recent government pilot implemented by UNICEF delivering shock-responsive cash transfers to mitigate climate risks were used in helping to implement a swift and effective response to the pandemic, building on the existing CMP implementation mechanism, its beneficiary database, payment and reporting systems, and national and local human resources. The government responded to the pandemic with a top-up to the CMP, increasing the benefit level by five times.*



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Dambadarjaa, a herder from Tosontsengel soum, Zavkhan province, explains how an emergency cash transfer helped his family. “Our third daughter received the cash support. We don’t have regular income, so the cash was very timely and helpful in preparing for and coping with the winter.” He adds, “Zavkhan province had a severe winter at the time.”

UNICEF Mongolia and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection designed a pilot programme through the national government social protection delivery system for the swift delivery of an emergency cash transfer to help vulnerable families cope with the impact of the winter months.

As Dambadarjaa’s wife Nansalmaa explains, “My daughter received cash into her child money account. We bought material to make a deel (traditional clothing). It keeps her warm. So I don’t have to worry. She likes her deel very much. She wears it all the time.”

Source: UNICEF Mongolia Country Office



## Context

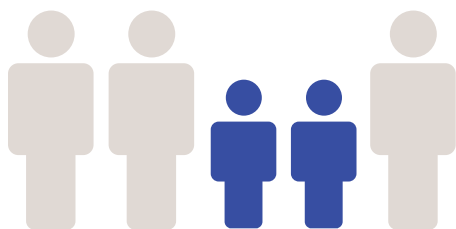
Children comprise one-third of Mongolia's population, representing the largest demographic group in the country. According to the National Statistics Office of Mongolia and the World Bank (2018), two in five people living in poverty are children under the age of 15, with poverty most prevalent amongst pre-school children. Mongolia is a landlocked country experiencing multiple and frequent weather related shocks. *Dzud* – a periodic winter weather disaster – occurs regularly, presenting challenges to deliver basic social services, and has a significant impact on child and family well-being lasting years, from enhanced risk of food insecurity and malnutrition to disruptions in school attendance.

In April 2019, UNICEF supported the Government to identify measures that were most effective in reaching vulnerable families during shocks, particularly climate-related risks including via the development of a feasibility assessment on shock-responsive social protection.

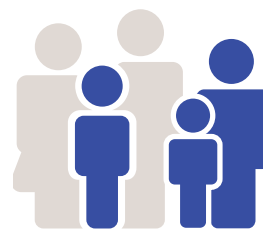
In 2019, UNICEF worked with the Government of Mongolia to assess the role of the existing Child Money Programme (CMP) in effectively reaching vulnerable families in the event of shocks, particularly climate-related risks. Given its near universal coverage, reaching 96.6 per cent of children, the CMP was identified as a critical system to strengthen for enhanced support. As a result, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the Zavkhan Provincial Government to implement a pilot programme, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), by expanding the government's monthly CMP by 200 per cent. This early action response for young children from herder households who were at risk of *dzud* was doubled for three consecutive months from February to April 2020. The evidence generated from this pilot and lessons learned proved to be of utmost relevance to support the government's strategy to formulate an appropriate response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Figure 1:** Rates of poverty in Mongolia

### Who are the poor?



**42%** of the total poor are **children** (14 years old or younger).



**Half** of households with **3 children or more** are poor.

## UNICEF's Response and Results

### **Transferring lessons from climate-responsive to shock-responsive social protection programmes:**

Beginning in early 2020, the pandemic had a significant impact on the well-being of vulnerable children and their families. UNICEF worked alongside the Resident Coordinator's Office, and the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, who were managing the coordination of the pandemic response, to advocate for the expansion of the CMP programme for families most affected by the pandemic. Critical to the government's response was drawing on lessons learned from the pilot programme from December 2019, when the CMP delivery system was successfully tested and expanded to support families vulnerable to climate-related shocks. The government identified this measure as an effective modality, recognizing the impact on food security, particularly for children who were now staying at home along with the loss of household income due to restriction measures.

The government responded in April 2020 with an initial increase in the cash transfer of MNT 10,000, but soon realized this was inadequate to address the needs of vulnerable families. Consequently, the government increased the CMP to MNT 100,000 reaching 1.2 million children (more than two thirds of households) and leveraging about 850 billion MNT (US\$300 million). Monthly food stamps were doubled for five months for all household members. Persons with disabilities without social insurance, orphaned children, children with single parents and senior citizens not receiving pension benefits from social insurance also received an additional cash transfer for five months. UNICEF continued advocating for maintaining this programme, highlighting the multiplier effect of cash transfers on the local economy, resulting in an additional state budget allocation of US\$200 million which aimed to maintain the child benefit top-up for the first half of 2021.

In relation to the government's plan to discontinue the CMP top-up from July 2021, UNICEF continued to advocate for government and decision makers to sustain the measure given the continued hardship that households still faced. Recommendations were provided to the Prime Minister

of Mongolia, relevant ministers, Parliamentary Standing Committees and the newly elected President to keep the top-up and to reduce the size of the benefit gradually, if necessary. As of August 2021, discussions are ongoing at various levels of decision making.

### **Monitoring the effects of the child benefit on the most vulnerable families:**

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection to monitor the child benefit top-up in order to continue generating evidence on how to effectively integrate shock-responsiveness into the social protection system. UNICEF partnered with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to conduct a simulation exercise using the 2018 Household Socio-Economic Survey which showed how vertical expansion of the CMP would reduce poverty from 28.4 per cent to 24.7 per cent. The ADB assessment also concluded that the CMP top-up benefited the most vulnerable households. The review also looked at implementation mechanisms, how the top-up was being used by families to cope with the challenges they faced. The methodology was informed by the previous pilot, building on local research capacity to design and implement shock-responsive social protection programmes. The findings of this study are now being used to inform the government's decision on CMP programming.

## Partnerships

The previous, ongoing and future technical support provided by the partnership of UNICEF and ADB was critical in guiding the development of the social protection system in Mongolia, building confidence and credibility among key decision-makers including the Ministry of Finance, international financial institutions, and development partners.

UNICEF collaborated with UN agencies, including ILO and FAO, as part of the SDG fund to extend social protection with enhanced shock-responsiveness to herders, and collaborated with UNDP and UNFPA in Mongolia on rolling out an integrated approach to SDG financing. These UN joint programmes enhanced collaboration with high levels of government, as well as improved coordination.

## Lessons Learned

**Preparedness enabled rapid mobilization to respond to the pandemic:** Having the foresight to invest in the adaptive components of the social protection programme was key in successfully advocating for a response that would benefit the most vulnerable children and their families in Mongolia. The approach was previously tested, the evidence was clear, and the adjustments were relatively straightforward to implement. The clarity in UNICEF's strategic focus was critical in supporting the government to build a shock-responsive social protection system that was universal, inclusive and able to counter the negative coping strategies caused by shocks, whether climate-related or otherwise, including a health-related pandemic.

**System-readiness facilitated additional financial support during a crisis:** The provision of timely evidence on the design, implementation and impact of the child benefit was critical in making the case for securing the required budget allocations, both from domestic sources and from ADB, to maintain the top-up of the child benefit during the crisis and beyond. The sustainability of this programme is a concern for UNICEF, but evidence generation and policy advocacy with multiple partners increases the possibility of ensuring that the government will continue to invest in and strengthen this social protection programme.

## Way Forward

**Generating evidence to develop a national shock-responsive social protection strategy:** UNICEF will continue to generate evidence on the impact of the CMP on poverty and inequality, particularly focusing on monitoring and evaluating the vertical expansion of the programme. Furthermore, UNICEF will continue to support a long-term strategy of investing in shock-responsive social protection systems with a focus on adaptability to multiple shocks and preparedness, institutional coordination mechanism including with non-governmental organisations and humanitarian agencies, as well as the affordability of such a programme.

**Refining the national social protection system to address the needs of the most vulnerable children and families:** The pilot programme and pandemic response revealed some exclusion and inclusion errors (both families who were excluded from the programme who should have received the transfer, and those that were included but who were no longer eligible), which points to the need to update the governmental Integrated Household Database. Presently, receiving the CMP is conditional on being registered in the database. The government is assessing requests of households who are not in the database for inclusion, and those who do not want to be in the database will make similar requests, increasing coverage to about 97 per cent. UNICEF is preparing to collaborate with the partners to work on various components of the system, to ensure the government is able to deliver a universal child benefit.

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# Sri Lanka:

## Contributing to evidence-based policy elements of the social protection response

*From the outset of the crisis, UNICEF's strategic engagement and advocacy with the Presidential Secretariat, Department of National Planning, and the Presidential Task Force for the COVID-19 Response contributed to a quick and large cash transfer response. UNICEF Sri Lanka, in collaboration with the UN country team, developed recommendations based on the UN Framework for the Immediate Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19, provided capacity building support for key government counterparts, and presented a series of strategic analyses and assessments to the Government. The cash transfer is estimated to have initially benefitted 47 per cent of households nationally and was subsequently expanded to reach 66 per cent of households in 2020.*



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Before the pandemic, Wasana and her family lived a relatively comfortable middle-class life in Colombo. But a stringent curfew aimed at stopping the spread of COVID-19 turned the small family's import business – and their lives – upside down. As business evaporated, so too did their savings. Forced to cut back on food, Wasana says she became desperate, even turning to social media to sell some of their furniture.

Working with government partners, UNICEF advocated for cash transfers to support families like Wasana's. In the two months payments were provided, around two-thirds of households in Sri Lanka are estimated to have been reached.

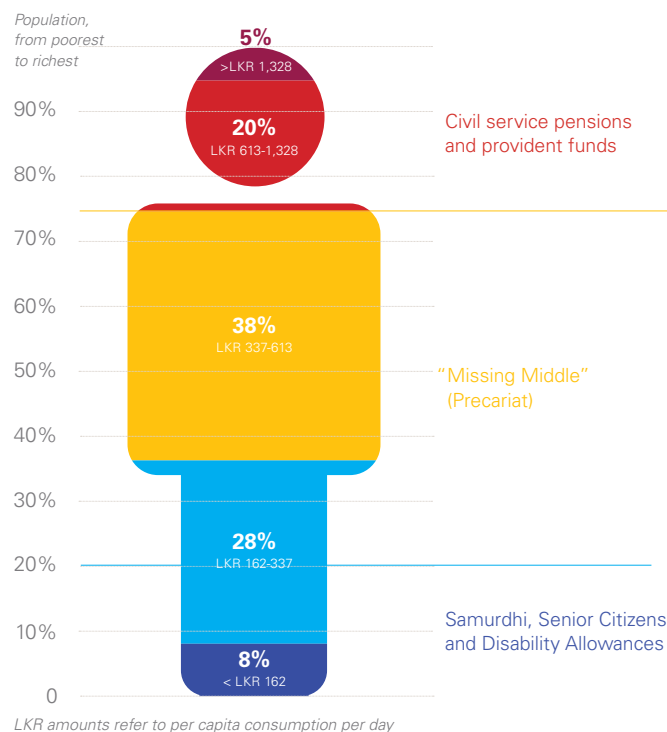
"The emergency cash transfer from the government provided some immediate relief," Wasana says. "We were able to buy some food." But she says that even this support hasn't been enough to make ends meet. "Our family is suffering. Just imagine how it was for those who were already struggling before COVID-19."

Source: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/protecting-families-economic-impact-COVID-19>

## Context

Sri Lanka has endured multiple waves of the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in severe health and social and economic impacts. Prior to the crisis, Sri Lanka was already facing challenges. In 2019, annual economic growth was 2.3 per cent, and approximately three quarters of Sri Lankans were living on US\$10 per day or less when measured in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms (World Bank Group, 2021). The COVID-19 response measures further eroded an already challenging fiscal position. Government revenues declined by 3.4 per cent of GDP in 2020, the largest annual fall recorded, while government expenditure increased due to COVID-19 related expenses. Public debt increased to unprecedented levels, surpassing 100 per cent of GDP, in addition to interest payments equivalent to 6 per cent of GDP. This fragile financial position left very limited fiscal space for spending on key social and economic sectors, particularly social protection measures, at a time when household incomes were also impacted. The World Bank estimates an increase of 27 per cent in the US\$3.20 poverty rate in Sri Lanka compared to 2019.

**Figure 1:** Representation of Sri Lanka's social protection system



Prior to the pandemic, Sri Lanka had the largest coverage amongst South Asian countries through its social assistance programme, Samurdhi, reaching 27 per cent of the population. UNICEF had been working with the government to strengthen the social protection system. With support from key partners, the Sri Lankan Government was able to effectively mobilize its existing social protection system to respond to the crisis. However, due to existing critical gaps in the system, such as high exclusion errors, a significant proportion of the population requiring support remained unprotected, resulting in many people falling deeper into poverty and the emergence of a 'new poor'. The 'new poor' are often living in urban areas, and are from families working in the informal sector with above average levels of education. The emergence of the 'new poor' has created additional challenges to the existing social protection system.

## UNICEF's Response and Results

**Providing swift recommendations on social protection responses which contributed to a large emergency cash transfer:** As the initial lockdown was announced in March 2020, UNICEF was requested by the Presidential Secretariat to provide recommendations on how to respond to the unfolding pandemic. UNICEF promptly recommended immediate and short-term responses utilizing Sri Lanka's long-established social protection schemes, such as Samurdhi, the elderly allowance, and the disability allowance, to quickly reach households and keep the economy moving. The next step was to move towards more universal approaches to reach all children, older people and people with disabilities. Soon after, His Excellency the President announced a large cash transfer in line with the recommendations for immediate response. The vertical and horizontal expansions<sup>1</sup> initiated in April 2020 provided LKR 5,000 (US\$25) emergency benefit to existing participants of existing programmes and those on waiting lists, as well as to around two million self-employed people, benefiting an estimated 47 per cent of all households in the country.

1 *Vertical expansion* of an existing programme or set of programmes refers to temporarily increasing the benefit value or duration of the programme for some or all existing recipients (e.g. top-ups). *Horizontal expansion* of an existing programme or set of programmes refers to temporarily including new beneficiaries from affected communities

**Figure 2:** Changes in household income (2020)



Nationally representative telephone survey, 2,120 respondents (conducted between October-December 2020).

**Q: In September 2020, compared to before lockdown (February 2020), what was the status of your household?**

**Generating and disseminating high-quality evidence to inform further interventions and policies:** UNICEF proactively and promptly set out to generate evidence on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on households, on the economy at large, and on the effectiveness of the government’s social protection response, including through analyses of national survey and economic data, surveys with households, and [human interest stories](#). UNICEF produced and disseminated to the government in-depth analyses on who would likely benefit from or [miss out](#) on the initial package of measures; the adequacy of the [transfer size](#); and the impact on the [economy](#) and [household](#) incomes. Within five weeks of the announcement of a national lockdown, UNICEF, together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and launched a nationally representative telephone survey to gauge the socioeconomic impact of the lockdown on households. The results were shared with the Government of Sri Lanka and development partners to inform their response; four rounds were undertaken throughout 2020, with a fifth one in 2021. The initial emergency cash transfer response was subsequently expanded to an estimated two thirds of households and extended for another month.

The [surveys](#) conducted revealed a number of negative impacts on household incomes and food security. Over 70 per cent of respondent households affirmed their income was negatively impacted. Between one fourth and one third of families reported reduced food consumption,

particularly of nutritious food. The loss of income, amid other factors, resulted in most respondents taking extra measures to pay for basic needs, such as using savings, borrowing money, pawning items or selling assets.

All the evidence generated was used to inform UNICEF – as well as broader UN – policy recommendations and advocacy to the government. UNICEF proposed a [costed universal lifecycle cash transfer response](#), with economic modelling estimating the impact of such measures, which was included as one of the key policy recommendations in the UN Advisory Paper on Socioeconomic Recovery submitted to the government. Advocacy was strong around universal lifecycle transfers and, particularly, the establishment of a permanent Universal Child Benefit, including through high-level meetings with the Prime Minister, the Presidential Task Force on Economic Recovery, Ministry of Finance, think tanks and civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as through media and social media engagements and webinars to initiate a public debate on, and demand for, universal approaches to social protection.

**Convening multiple partners to align responses and build capacity of key stakeholders on social protection:** As the lead of the UN Social Protection Results Group, UNICEF served as a convener of international financial institutions (IFIs), bilaterals and UN agencies to coordinate efforts on social protection, aiming to align various approaches to support the





government. Moreover, UNICEF invested in building capacity of government officials, as well as think tanks, trade unions and CSOs on inclusive, shock-responsive social protection, as well as on pension policy. Through different efforts, in partnership with the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITC-ILO) and Development Pathways, UNICEF trained around 80 key stakeholders. These efforts led to a more significant understanding of child-sensitive social protection by government officials, increased demand for improved systems by local academics and CSOs, and developed a stronger public discourse around inclusive social protection. Government officials who received trained subsequently tabled a proposal for a universal old age pension, and experts who submitted a proposed chapter for the upcoming new Constitution of Sri Lanka included universal child benefit (UCB) as a fundamental right. In 2021, UNICEF developed and delivered a capacity building opportunity for UN agencies and IFIs in Sri Lanka on inclusive social protection to help all those working on social protection to discuss common goals and common understandings of what is needed and how to advocate together.

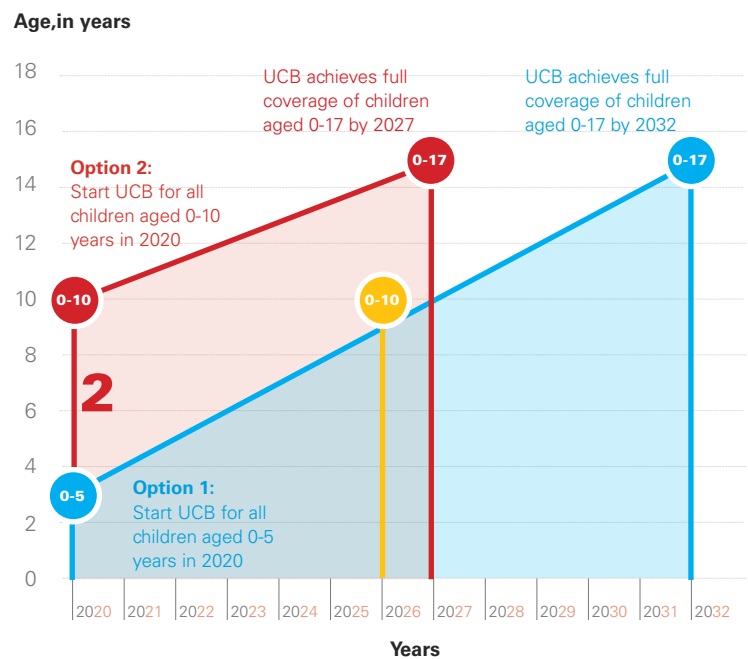
**Integrating the COVID-19 response strategy with the overall pathway towards a UCB:** At the outset of 2020, an investment case for the establishment of a UCB in Sri Lanka was developed, including the rationale, costs and estimated impacts. Findings were presented to many levels and sectors of government throughout the year, highlighting the linkages to effective COVID-19 crisis response and recovery. Although the idea resonated with

many in government, CSOs and development partners, the feasibility was questioned. Motivated by the fiscal challenges that Sri Lanka currently faces in implementing an effective socio-economic response, UNICEF and UNDP produced a briefing note to explore some pathways to reducing the debt burden. The aim was to suggest options for management of the debt situation and creation of fiscal space for greater socio-economic spending, which was requested by the Prime Minister as a response to UNICEF's advocacy for a more inclusive social protection response, including the establishment of a UCB. The note has been shared with the Ministry of Finance and some preliminary discussions were held, with further engagement planned for the months ahead. UNICEF Sri Lanka Country Office also engaged with UNICEF HQ and Regional Office on this matter to push forward advocacy at a global level.

## Partnerships

UNICEF convened IFIs, bilateral organizations and UN agencies to coordinate efforts and strengthen partnerships in social protection. Engagement with academia, think tanks and CSOs were also valuable in building a dialogue around improved social protection systems. The pandemic response highlighted the impact of 'speaking with a common voice', and while partners were effective in

**Figure 3:** Universal Child Benefit options



supporting the government in the response, further strengthening and alignment of these partnerships, particularly in times of crises, will have a profound impact on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable children and families.

## Lessons Learned

### **Advocacy efforts focused on building on existing programmes to work towards achieving a UCB:**

UNICEF pushed for the progressive establishment of a UCB - made more urgent due to the crisis - by generating evidence, building capacity and advocating at the highest levels. However, the introduction of a large and new policy/programme can be seen as an insurmountable task for policymakers, particularly during crises periods. An important lesson and shift in UNICEF's advocacy was the importance of not only offering a pathway to progressively achieve a UCB, as proposed by UNICEF in its investment case, but to ground or base such a pathway in existing programmes. For example, Sri Lanka currently offers a scheme which provides vouchers to all pregnant mothers for ten months, which could form a basis for building a programme that could help all children in Sri Lanka during the first 1,000 days of their lives, giving them the best possible start in life, which is particularly crucial in the context of a crisis. UNICEF is advocating with the government to expand the age of eligibility for the scheme and strengthen its operational delivery, so to ensure that mothers continue to receive the support until their children reach their second birthday. This would be a more practical and concrete steps towards the establishment of a UCB and is an avenue worth exploring further.

**Working in tandem with the government before and during the crisis was key:** UNICEF's extensive collaboration with the government prior to the pandemic focused on building an effective and inclusive social protection system created a strategic window for UNICEF and partners to support the government's response to the COVID-19 crisis. Building trust through a series of initiatives – such as training events, focused and strategic analytical assessments and effective dissemination of findings among key stakeholders – led to a mutually beneficial partnership that helped identify challenges and contributed to the government's response.

## Way Forward

**Advocating for the expansion of the pregnant and lactating mothers voucher scheme:** Currently, pregnant and lactating mothers receive 10 vouchers of Rs. 2,000 each for nutritional foods, for six months of pregnancy and four months post-delivery. UNICEF will continue advocating for the expansion of these nutritional food vouchers to ensure that mothers receive this support until their child reaches the age of 2 years, thereby supporting the vital first 1,000 days of life.

**Producing a policy proposal on Samurdhi reform:** Having identified some limitations of Samurdhi, Sri Lanka's flagship social protection programme, UNICEF is developing a policy proposal on Samurdhi reform. The policy reform proposal will explore options for universal social protection based on the lifecycle approach, thereby ensuring that vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities will be covered by social protection systems. This proposal will use the social protection gaps exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic to advocate for a more universal social protection system.

**Producing a social protection Public Expenditure Review (PER):** Given Sri Lanka's fiscal constraints, UNICEF is developing a PER of the government social protection expenditures to highlight the space for investment in social protection. Building on these initiatives, UNICEF will then, in collaboration with government, conduct a comprehensive fiscal analysis to identify concrete options to promote an ambitious fiscal stimulus, promoting rapid economic recovery and an opportunity to implement a UCB.

**Engaging further with civil society:** UNICEF will increase its engagement with civil society and work towards building public demand for child-sensitive social protection. UNICEF has partnered with CSOs to engage in awareness building by providing the wider population with the information and knowledge they need to demand reforms that are meaningful to them.

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# Yemen:

## Delivering an effective humanitarian response while strengthening social protection systems

*Following the suspension of the Social Welfare Fund (SWF) – the government’s national social protection programme – due to the escalating conflict in 2015, the Yemen Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) project was launched in 2017. The programme is a collaboration between UNICEF and the World Bank, with UNICEF tasked with implementing the project and the World Bank’s International Development Association providing financial and technical support. UNICEF established a Project Management Unit (PMU) within UNICEF Yemen Country Office to oversee all aspects of this comprehensive programme. The programme provides unconditional cash transfers to recipients of the SWF identified as the poorest and most vulnerable households. The PMU has conducted ten cash payment cycles reaching over 1.43 million people, implementing a range of innovative operational and systemic aspects to enable an effective humanitarian response. With COVID-19, a top-up of approximately 45 per cent of the base benefit was provided in the eighth cycle and increased to approximately 55 per cent in the ninth and tenth payment cycles. Several measures were taken to strengthen operational components of the response and to ensure the safe delivery of cash payments. The implementation of the programme is now being transferred to a national entity, the Social Fund for Development (SFD), with the long-term goal of handing back to the SWF when conditions are right.*





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Khaled fled the conflict in Al Hudaydah with his wife and children. They now live in a tent made from pieces of wood and plastic sheeting in Aden. Life before the COVID-19 pandemic was already a struggle, but the pandemic has made things even more challenging, including the fact that Khaled is no longer able to find work.

However, Khaled was informed by a local Aqel (community leader) about the start of the payment cycle of the emergency cash transfer project. "Today, when I went to the payment site to receive the cash, I read the sign showing there was an increase of 45 per cent. I was happy. My dream is like any other person's dream, to live a simple life. My dream is to have a house and for my children to be happy, but under these circumstances it is impossible."

Source: UNICEF PMU Monthly Newsletter (July 2020)

## Context

With the onset of the conflict in Yemen in 2015, the social protection support delivered through the government's Social Welfare Fund (SWF) was suspended, having severe consequences on the lives of more than nine million recipients. The programme had focused on the poorest and most vulnerable children and their families, and with the increasing spread of deprivation and poverty due to the war, the loss of this programme deepened the challenges faced by these vulnerable households. Yemen suffers from high rates of communicable diseases, severe acute malnutrition among children under 5 years, and limited access to essential services, including inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene systems.

In 2016, the World Bank approached UNICEF to jointly provide technical support and to secure delivery of cash transfers to the recipients of the SWF social assistance programme, to support them to meet their most basic needs and cope with the deepening crisis. In 2017, the Yemen Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) was launched, providing quarterly cash transfers of 15,000 YER per quarter per household, on average. UNICEF established a Project Management Unit (PMU), a dedicated management structure, to oversee the operational components of the project, including risk identification, monitoring and mitigation. Funds and technical support were provided by the World Bank's International Development Association, with contributions from the UK's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office and the United States Department of State – Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, both through parallel funding and through the World Bank's Multi-Donor Trust Fund. The ECT Project is now UNICEF's largest managed cash transfer project across the globe. During the seventh payment cycle (March–April 2020), even before COVID-19 cases were reported in Yemen, protection measures were put in place to ensure service providers and recipients were safe. COVID-19 further disrupted the lives of children and their families who were already affected by years of conflict, but having a social protection system and management structure in place has proven to be a lifeline for the most vulnerable children and families.

## UNICEF's Response and Results

**Strengthened operational elements in place to respond to crises:** UNICEF designed Yemen's ECT project by building on existing SWF parameters. This included maintaining the SWF recipient list, policies (including benefit amount) and legislation, with the aim of strengthening the national social protection system and ultimately enabling the government to eventually resume operations when conditions prove right. UNICEF relied on frequent communications with the national authorities through regular meetings with SWF, orientation of SWF staff, maintaining close engagement and envisioning a future when the initiative would be handed back to SWF.

In such a volatile environment, it was crucial to add critical system components to ensure effective cash delivery. A rigorous risk-informed management approach and operational adjustments are presented in Figure 1 below.

Specific system components for Yemen's ECT project include:

- A robust one-time verification measure, using a project-approved photo ID as a pre-condition for receiving the payment.
- MIS system payment lists with protection measures, using flags to ensure payments are made to eligible recipients only.
- A grievance redressal mechanism, using a mobile app and toll-free number accessible to anyone who would like to file a complaint or ask for information, serving as a control measure against fraud and corruption.
- A third-party monitoring organization (TPMO), using quantitative and qualitative analysis to ensure that processes follow project protocols. The monitoring mechanisms allow UNICEF to ensure financial and legal accountability amongst service providers.
- Contract management and administration protocols, used to contract private sector institutions to support the facilitation, payment, third-party monitoring and fraud investigation components of the project, with embedded clauses to prevent the loss of project funds in case of fraud.
- Integration of a facilitation component, with continuous dialogue with the authorities in Sana'a and Aden to secure buy-in and access, and to ensure cash recipients were duly informed of the project parameters and protocols to mitigate the risk of social tensions.

**Figure 1: Risk-informed management approach**



**Mobilizing operational components of the programme to effectively respond to COVID-19:** As soon as the potential impacts of the COVID-19 crisis emerged, UNICEF conducted a rigorous exercise to identify the risks and mitigation measures needed to implement payment cycles

safely. Overcrowding was identified as a significant risk, and key adjustments were made to the cash delivery model to reduce the likelihood of crowding during every phase of delivery. These measures were first introduced in payment cycle 7 and strengthened in payment cycles 8, 9 and 10.

**Figure 2: Percentage of targeted recipients reached in the tenth payment cycle**

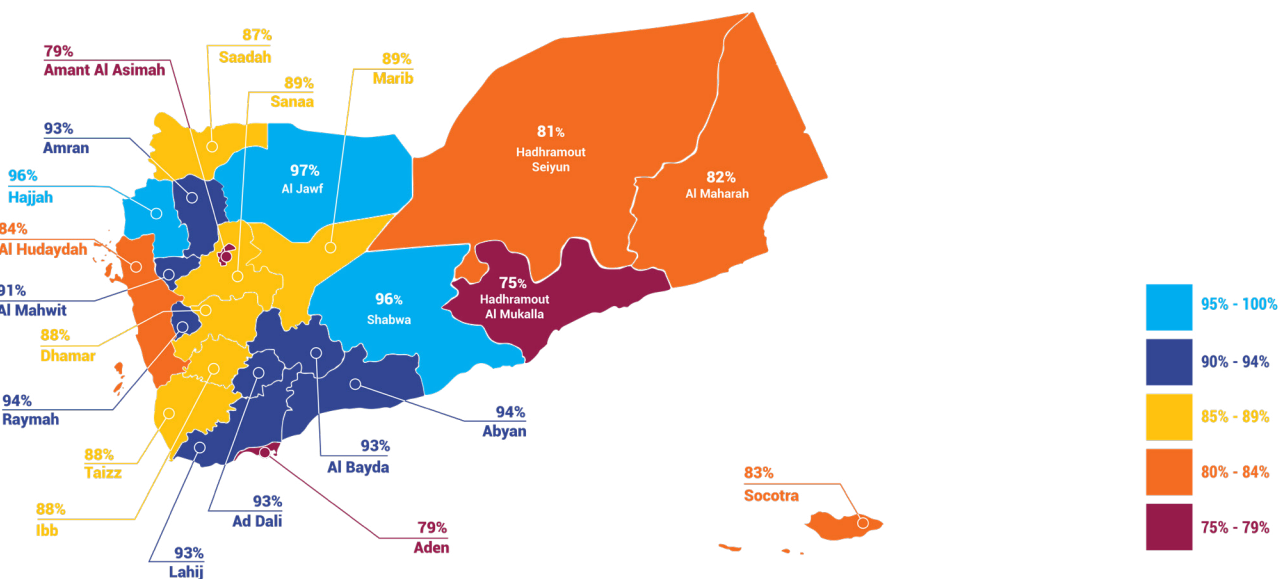


Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of targeted recipients reached in the tenth payment cycle. Measures taken in response to COVID-19 included:

- *Top-up to the benefit amount:* In payment cycle 8, a 45 per cent increase to the benefit amount for each beneficiary case was distributed to 1.43 million recipients to help them cope with the impact of the pandemic, with careful communication emphasizing that this was a one-time measure to manage recipient expectations. In payment cycles 9 and 10, additional funding was secured to enable the provision of a 55 per cent top-up to support families to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic.
- *An extensive communication and outreach strategy:* To reach the most vulnerable and affected communities, the PMU built on the existing outreach strategy used to communicate payment parameters and dates to the households to also deliver messaging on COVID-19 preventive measures and symptoms. In payment cycle 7, using the extensive ECT field operational presence, service providers distributed 253,000 leaflets and 1,300 banners in 49 districts, focusing on 31 urban districts, 18 rural districts and 48 IDPs shelters. These communication materials were developed by UNICEF Communication for Development (C4D) and the Ministries of Health in Sana'a and Aden and distributed at the payments sites as well as public areas. In payment cycles 8, 9 and 10, messaging was embedded in all outreach materials including 40,000 posters, 27,000 scheduling banners/posters, and 300,000 scheduling cards, as well as disseminated through other ECT outreach channels such as radio, SMS, and social media.
- *New protocols and safety measures put in place for delivery of payments:* COVID-19 preventative measures were embedded in the terms of reference for all service providers, becoming a contractual requirement. These measures included ensuring physical distancing between recipients at payment sites, as well as requiring the use of protective gear such as gloves and masks by service providers, provision of hand sanitizers for all cash recipients at all payment sites, adoption of measures to safely handle cash, and requesting all cash recipients cover their nose and mouth during

interactions with staff. Other measures included strengthening the existing scheduling mechanism; limiting the number of recipients who could receive the transfer per cashier on a given day; increasing the number of payment sites; extending the working hours at payment sites; and implementing a token system to manage the queues where feasible. Additionally, clear guidance was provided for outreach activities to limit the number of participants in community meetings at village level and to encourage gatherings to be held outside.

- *Delivery of a cash-plus programme:* The 'plus' components of the programme, first launched in the sixth payment cycle, enhanced the response to the pandemic by linking recipients to additional services at the time of cash delivery through a needs assessment of each enrolled household. This includes monitoring children's weight; offering support to lactating women; providing food salt iodine tests, iron and folate supplements and deworming tablets; and offering micronutrients for children under the age of 5. Referrals were also made using the MIS system to alert health centres, and support was provided to help families receive birth certificates for their children.

## Partnerships

Since the launch of the ECT, the partnership between the World Bank and UNICEF has been mutually beneficial, supporting the implementation of a much-needed support system to the people of Yemen. The two organizations have a unified vision in terms of generating evidence and learning, ensuring flexibility in terms of project design, and making actual adjustments to meet the needs of the most vulnerable communities and mitigate emerging risks. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank and UNICEF have continued frequent communication.

A unique aspect of the ECT project is that the PMU only uses private sector service providers engaged through a contracting modality, which enables the PMU to maintain tight control measures related to the protection of beneficiary data and the prevention of the loss of project funds.

Given the political situation in Yemen, donor requirements prohibit UNICEF from formally engaging with the government for implementation, but in the spirit of collaboration, UNICEF has used its own funds to maintain regular engagement with all government parties through consultative platforms. Given the fact that this programme cuts across the humanitarian-development nexus, it has also brought together various parts of UNICEF to collaborate to ensure effective implementation of the programme.

## Lessons Learned

### **A swift and critical humanitarian social protection response was mobilized to support the most vulnerable families:**

Although the situation in Yemen is complex, the most vulnerable communities were able to access cash benefits. With a well-established and functioning system in place, UNICEF was able to swiftly respond through a vertical expansion of the transfer. Despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, the use of the SWF beneficiary list and other key innovative mechanisms allowed the system to respond effectively to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

### **Addressing COVID-19 challenges contributed to system strengthening:**

The risk of COVID-19 spread due to overcrowding led UNICEF to further strengthen the scheduling mechanism and introduce a token system to help manage crowds. Both remote monitoring and online training were broadened and enhanced to limit the need for face-to-face interaction. Responding to these challenges therefore led to significant improvements in building the shock-responsiveness of Yemen's social protection system.

### **Close monitoring layers ensured programme accountability:**

PMU contracted a TPMO to conduct qualitative and quantitative monitoring of the programme's various components to ensure operational compliance and to strengthen transparency. The TPMO activities range from conducting spot checks and verifying transfer amounts to gathering feedback from recipients and investigating fraud cases. This comprehensive monitoring system allowed the PMU to understand the implications of the pandemic on the project's operations. The monitoring tools provided real-time data on how effectively PMU and service providers was able

to implement COVID-19 measures. TPMO activities were complemented by field monitoring carried out by UNICEF staff and consultants, deployed across the country to assess the payment process, as well as media monitoring.

## Way Forward

### **Transferring knowledge and skills to national authorities:**

With the plan to hand back the management of the programme to the SWF, steps have been taken from the first payment cycle to ensure a smooth transition with little or no disruption to the recipients of the programme. UNICEF put specific components of the system in place, such as the development of a strong and effective MIS, to facilitate this transition process. To ensure the transferability of the system, the MIS was developed using open-source software. The MIS was also developed in-house to meet the specific requirements of the ECT project and was designed to be highly flexible and responsive to the needs of operating in a volatile context such as Yemen. During the COVID-19 pandemic response, this flexibility enabled the MIS to be quickly adjusted to include the top-up amount in addition to the base benefit amount.

### **Strengthening support through a gender-responsive social protection action plan:**

In a conservative socio-cultural context such as Yemen, the interaction between men and women is limited and not all aspects of society are accessible to women. Given the socio-cultural context in Yemen, to ensure female recipients could collect their entitlements, the ECT project incorporated several measures such as female-only payment sites, separate queues for women, female-only focus group discussions to raise concerns, trainings on gender-based violence (GBV) disclosure and referrals, and strengthening of grievance redressals. A critical area was strengthening the GBV response of the social protection system, and a series of assessments and workshops were held to bring clarity to risks, in addition to formulating an action plan. The action plan, which is due to be rolled out in 2021, focuses on communication and outreach, training on GBV-related responses and ensuring the safety of female workers, as well as reviewing monitoring approaches.

### **Leveraging the PMU to establish a cash delivery model and protocols:**

Leveraging the risk-informed protocols



and mechanisms developed for the ECT, UNICEF has supported a variety of cash and voucher initiatives. These include cash disbursement to support teachers and school-based staff implemented in northern governorates, payment of incentives to temporary teachers in southern governorates, payment of salaries to female teachers in

rural areas, provision of school grants, and payment of per diems to health public sector staff and community health and nutrition volunteers. The extensive operational knowledge and skills gained from the implementation of the ECT project can support a number of initiatives both in the region and beyond.

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## For every child

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**United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**  
UNICEF Social Policy and Social Protection  
Programme Group  
3 United Nations Plaza New York, NY, 10017, USA