

RECOVR Roundup Vol. 6: Social Protection in the Time of COVID-19

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In this sixth installment—our last one for 2020—of our RECOVR Roundup series, we are sharing new findings and analysis from the [RECOVR Research Hub](#) and from our partner organizations—as well as links on what is happening in the Social Protection landscape in response to COVID-19. Read the [first](#), [second](#), [third](#), [fourth](#), and [fifth](#) installments if you missed them, and [sign up for our mailing list](#) if you'd like to receive this roundup series directly to your inbox.

We look forward to resuming this Roundup series in the new year, and encourage you to [write to our team](#) with ideas for features. Best wishes for the holiday season!

New Findings & Analysis

Colombia: Households face mounting challenges as virus endures

Households that report increased take-up of social protection programs reported less food insecurity in the second round of the RECOVR Survey

To assist the government in understanding how Colombians have fared during the pandemic and what challenges they continue to face, IPA recently interviewed more than 1,000 households' to learn about their health, education, and economic experiences. While the findings of the survey reveal a picture of acute economic impact—particularly for women, those who work in the informal economy, and those who live in rural areas—there are also pockets of progress thanks to timely and targeted social assistance programs.

Jordan: How did the lockdowns impact vulnerable populations?

While all groups experienced some recovery after restrictions were lifted, highly educated and high-wage workers seemed to do better

Data on the economic impacts of lockdowns, especially on vulnerable subpopulations such as refugees and informal workers, in low- and middle-income countries is continually emerging. Researchers Luisa Cefalà, Michael Gechter, Nick Tsivanidis, and Nathaniel Young [examine the impacts of lockdown policies in Jordan](#) by merging a bimonthly panel survey with high-

frequency cell phone metadata. Preliminary findings from cell phone data show daily mobility dropped by 57 percent, more so in wealthier neighborhoods. Earnings decreased by 42 percent from pre-pandemic levels on average, and low-wage workers and refugees earned only a small fraction of their pre-lockdown earnings during restrictions. Though there have been gains in employment and wages since lockdowns were lifted, much remains to be done to reach pre-pandemic levels.

What We're Reading and Watching

- How have **Latin American countries built on their existing social protection programs to support their citizens** through COVID-19? [A new report from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean](#) offers a deep dive into the policy responses of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay. They find a wide range of differences in responses, for example contrasting Brazil's support for unemployment insurance versus Mexico's emphasis on continuing workers' rights. Uruguay moved quickly, copying Germany's strategy of subsidizing continued employment to reduce layoffs. Costa Rica did the same and also offered the same generous support to both formal and informal sector workers, but was hampered by politics when it came time to reauthorize it.
- Jordan stands out within the Middle East for the **speed and scope of its social protection response to the pandemic**. Check out [this report from UNICEF and the Jordan Strategy Forum](#) to learn about the unique elements of its response, including a new digital payments program for informal workers, and a national cash transfer program which offers benefits to both citizens and refugees.
- How has Ghana strengthened its safety net through **an expanded cash transfer and public works program** to help residents weather the pandemic? The World Bank details the country's experience and [calls for continued social protections](#) as the virus continues to threaten hard-won gains in Ghana's human capital.
- If you'd like to do a deep dive into **the percentage of people who have access to social protection programs in countries around the world**, the ILO's new [World Social Protection Data Dashboards](#) are a fantastic resource.
- FinDev Gateway shared an analysis of [data from the World Bank's high frequency monitoring phone surveys](#) that shows that **in most countries, social assistance interventions in the early months of the pandemic were highly inadequate and not well-targeted to those who are affected by the crisis**. On average, only 20 percent of households reported receiving assistance across countries included in the analysis.

Upcoming Events

The Digitization of Cash Assistance During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Colombia

December 15, 2020 | 11am-12pm EST

Colombia moved quickly to roll out a new digital cash transfer program—the VAT Compensation—to millions of beneficiaries. But the country also built in rigorous evaluations to track impacts on a range of outcomes such as financial health, food access and security, and political attitudes. Quickly developing a platform for digital transfers in a country where that was not yet common also provided the opportunity to explore how digitization affected behavior during quarantine and barriers to new technology adoption by beneficiaries. **This webinar will present findings from a randomized evaluation on the impact of the digital cash transfer program.**

Panelists

- **Juliana Londoño-Vélez**, *Assistant Professor of Economics (University of California, Los Angeles)*
- **Pablo Querubín**, *Associate Professor of Politics and Economics (New York University)*
- **Olga Lucia Romero**, *Director of Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies (National Planning Department, Government of Colombia)*

The Impact of Cash Transfers During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa

December 18, 2020 | 10am-11:15am EST

Can cash transfers help people to cope when a pandemic hits on top of the lean season, when people are already going hungry? How does cash assistance affect food security and public health behavior within refugee populations, who may be uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19? To what extent do universal basic income programs help beneficiaries navigate unforeseen shocks? Did COVID-19 disrupt markets in rural areas, and to what extent did cash cushion the blow? **This webinar will share findings from three evaluations that consider these questions and assess the impacts of cash transfers on recipients' socio-economic wellbeing in Kenya, Uganda, Liberia, and Malawi within the context of the pandemic.**

Panelists

- **Tavneet Suri**, *Associate Professor of Applied Economics (MIT)*
- **Heather Lanthorn**, *Associate Director (IDinsight)*
- **David Sungho Park**, *PhD Candidate in Economics (University of California, Santa Cruz)*
- **Caroline Teti**, *Director of Recipient Advocacy (GiveDirectly)*

December 10, 2020