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RECOVR Roundup Vol. 15: Social Protection in the Time of COVID-19

In this fifteenth installment 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 [previous installment](#) if you missed it, and [sign up for our mailing list](#) if you'd like to receive this roundup series directly to your inbox.

As always, we encourage you to [write to our team](#) with ideas for features.

New Findings & Analysis

Bangladesh: Digital and traditional safety-net transfers in the first month of the pandemic

During lockdown, digital payments were faster and recipients fared better

As COVID-19 spread last year, governments in low-income countries had to balance lockdown measures to contain the virus with the harm caused by restricting movement and livelihoods, especially for the most vulnerable. In Bangladesh, the government tried to mitigate some of the impact by providing advance payment from two safety-net programs for the vulnerable. The government had already been in the process of testing moving payments to a digital system from a banking system which could take months and required travel. One month into lockdown, researchers [Abu S. Shonchoy](#), [Natalia Rigol](#), [Benjamin Roth](#), [Shreya Chandra](#), [Ana Paula Franco](#), and [Reshmaan Hussam](#) surveyed more than 7,000 beneficiaries. The median household reported no income in the prior two weeks, 51 percent of respondents reported reducing medication intake and 22 percent reported reducing food consumption in the past week. **Forty-one percent had not been paid their full benefit amount, but those with access to digital payments were more likely to receive transfers in a timely manner and suffered lower consumption and income vulnerability.** Read more about this study [here](#).

Mozambique: Using information to combat COVID-19

Information about social norms influenced behavior, but not everywhere

We'd previously highlighted results from the first wave of a phone survey of 2,405 households across 76 communities in Mozambique. A new [working paper](#) (National Bureau of Economic Research) by researchers [James Allen IV](#), [Arlete Mahumane](#), [James Riddell IV](#), [Tanya Rosenblat](#), [Dean Yang](#), and [Hang Yu](#), finds that **participants underestimated the rate of community support for social distancing, believing support to be only 69 percent, while the true share was 98 percent.** The research team informed a random subset of participants of the true rates of support, and told another random subset of participants about community leaders' support for social distancing. **They found no effect from leaders' endorsements, and the peer information only worked in communities with higher COVID prevalence.** Read more about this study [here](#).

Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Vietnam: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on young people

A wide range of mental health, well-being, and educational impacts could have lasting consequences

The longitudinal Young Lives Survey has been tracking thousands of kids from two age cohorts as they grow up in Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Vietnam. In the sixth round of surveys in 2020, researchers found that **relative gains in multidimensional well-being of the younger cohort they'd seen up to 2016 had largely disappeared. The significant downturn in self-reported well-being and economic circumstances was apparent in India, Ethiopia, and Peru. The downturn was not evident in Vietnam**, one of the countries which has had the most success at controlling the virus. Educational enrollment was negatively affected in all countries. More information about this study is available [here](#), and a number of country-specific policy briefs are available on [Young Lives' website](#).

What We're Reading & Watching

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- UNICEF is working with seven countries in the European Union **to pilot the next phase of a Child Guarantee to increase access to basic social services.** The program targets children with disabilities, those in precarious family situations, those residing in institutions, and migrant and refugee children by implementing evidence-based interventions to advance free healthcare, free education, free childcare, decent housing, and adequate nutrition to “break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.”
 - In low- and middle-income countries, many people who are most in need of social protection lack the formal identification or bank accounts that could help them to access these benefits. Indonesia [recently piloted an innovative program in Papua province which offered a “3-in-1” enrollment](#), helping poor families access formal ID, bank accounts, and a cash transfer for the parents of children under age 4, all with a

single visit from a social worker.

- The COVID-19 pandemic means that in-person outreach to social protection beneficiaries isn't always safe or feasible. In Paraguay, [the Tekopora cash transfer program](#) developed **an innovative series of video and audio messages, delivered by WhatsApp**, which provided beneficiaries with health and education resources during a time when social workers could no longer visit households in person.
- **Universal basic income programs** continue to expand in popularity around the world. New pilot programs were recently launched in [South Korea](#) and [Germany](#). In addition, a recent study of a [UBI program in Stockton, CA](#) showed that individuals who received \$500 a month for two years were happier, healthier, and more likely to be employed than similar individuals who didn't receive the grants.

IPA's Social Protection Program is Hiring!

The Social Protection Program is currently hiring a [Program Coordinator](#). The Coordinator will support IPA's work by translating our research findings on social protection programs into policy briefs and other outreach materials, and by carrying out landscape mapping for potential new lines of research within the program. This position has a rolling deadline, and will remain open until filled. Please [contact the Social Protection team](#) with any questions.

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