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RECOVR Roundup Vol. 17: Social Protection in the Time of COVID-19

In this seventeenth 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

India: How did migrant workers recover after lockdown?

As workers returned to the city of Chennai, men found jobs again, but women had more difficulty

In March 2020, when the government of India announced a lockdown, many local migrant workers returned from the cities, [often with great difficulty](#), to their native homes. Researchers **Supreet Kaur, Heather Schofield, and Luisa Cefala** tracked a sample of male migrant workers and their wives as restrictions eased (June-October 2020). Over time, they found more workers returned to Chennai and found work again: **45 percent of male workers were employed in May-June but almost 87 percent were by October. For women, 66 percent reported having worked before lockdown, but by June only 28 percent had found work and by October it had only risen to 38 percent.** Nearly all respondents were eligible for cash assistance from the government but about a quarter never knew about or received it, and 63 percent reported stigma related to assumptions about illness among migrants. [Read more here.](#)

Kenya: How do microenterprises respond to a one-time cash transfer?

An unconditional cash transfer allowed women-owned microenterprises to stabilize during the first months of the pandemic

Researchers **Wyatt Brooks, Kevin Donovan, and Terence Johnson** studied the impact of providing a one-time, unconditional cash transfer to women-owned microenterprises in Dandora, a large informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya. The grants of approximately US\$50, about one-month's profit, were delivered in May 2020 to 367 randomly-selected micro-entrepreneurs through the M-PESA mobile platform. **Compared to non-recipients, those who received the transfers increased their firm profits (40 percent, and a recoup of almost one-third of lost profits from January to May), inventory spending (66 percent), and food expenditures (7 percent).** The transfer substantially increased the likelihood of a closed business re-opening, and also spending on protective equipment and taking protective measures against COVID-19. **The authors note that businesses reopening potentially counters the goal of curtailing virus spread**, and that policymakers must balance competing pressures. [Read more here.](#)

What We're Reading & Watching

- [Version 15](#) of the working paper by Gentilini et al. is here! Seventeen authors track social protection and jobs responses to the pandemic, including a total of **3,333 social protection measures** which have been planned or implemented in 222 countries or territories. Cash transfers specifically have reached **1.3 billion people in 2020-2021**. Gentilini recaps more findings [on his website](#).
- New evidence from the Philippines suggests that cash transfers can have unintended negative impacts on non-beneficiary households under specific conditions where access to goods is limited, such as in remote areas. **Transfers under the government's Pantawid program were found to raise food prices and increase stunting by 34 percent among children from ineligible households in some poor areas.** While these conditions characterize less than 4 percent of households across the country, this is a good reminder that universal cash transfer programs may be better than targeted ones in places where ineligible individuals are still poor.
- A [new report](#) (English/Spanish) by UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth examines different Latin American countries' approaches to providing over **4.2 million Venezuelan migrants access to social protection systems before and during the pandemic**. The report calls for countries to explore methods for incorporating migrants into their social protection systems, while balancing existing gaps in care faced by countries' own populations.
- In the US, **an array of different cash transfer and voucher programs protect some households from poverty, but many still fall through the cracks**. Several recent articles examine how people who are unhoused [have struggled to access their](#)

federal stimulus checks; how the parents of young children sometimes can't afford
diapers because of strict limitations on the food stamp programs used to support
families; and how only 25 percent of eligible households receive benefits from the
Temporary Aid for Needy Families program due to the complex enrollment process.

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