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RECOVR Roundup Vol. 18: Social Protection in the Time of COVID-19

In this eighteenth 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

Ghana: The Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Learning and Development

Pandemic-related school closures have undermined educational and developmental outcomes for children in Ghana

As the pandemic and remote learning continue to affect youth education around the world, educators and policymakers need to be able to track students' progress to provide appropriate responses to learning losses, socioemotional challenges, and other issues that the pandemic may have exacerbated. In Ghana, researchers [Larry Aber](#), [Elisabetta Aurino](#), [Jere Behrman](#), [Edward Tsinigo](#), and [Sharon Wolf](#) leveraged an ongoing study to measure the pandemic's repercussions on child learning and development. They surveyed 1,844 children, 2,048 caregivers, and 514 teachers to assess such outcomes. **On average, private school students and students with high socioeconomic status had higher test scores at the end of the 10-month school closure period** compared with their public-school counterparts, even when controlling for their previous scores. Additionally, **72 percent of public school children missed daily lunches through the Ghana School Feeding Program and 30 percent of surveyed children said they had experienced hunger in the last 30 days.** [Read more here.](#)

Nigeria: Ethnicity, economic risk, and resilience during COVID

Market vendors from majority and minority groups experienced the shutdowns differently

COVID's impact has hit many places hard, sometimes exacerbating ethnic fault lines. In Lagos, Nigeria, researchers [Jessica Gottlieb](#) and [Adrienne LeBas](#) surveyed market vendors from the Yoruba ethnic majority (the ethnic group from which most elected officials and local bureaucrats come from), as well as minority groups. They found that **vendors from the Yoruba majority group were more likely to have applied for and received government benefits than vendors of similar economic status from minority groups. They were also 9 percentage points less likely to have their shops closed during lockdown.** The researchers also measured attitudes towards other ethnic groups, and found those from the majority were more likely to have negative attitudes towards minority groups, particularly among those who'd experienced more economic hardship from having their shops closed. [Read more here.](#)

What We're Reading & Watching

- What are the most common ways that governments have supported businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic? [Research from the World Bank in 55 low-and middle-income countries](#) shows that **91 percent of countries provided liquidity to firms** (through grants, loans, or the cancellation of utility payments), and **71 percent changed their labor regulations to facilitate teleworking and social distancing.** The majority of these policies were aimed at firms in the formal sector, although many countries did provide cash transfers to individuals employed in the informal sector as well.
- [New evidence from Brazil](#) finds fewer suicides among conditional cash transfer recipients in the country's social protection program. A 12-year study of over 69 million Brazilians, found **participants in the *Bolsa Familia* cash transfer program had suicide rates that were 61 percent lower** compared to those who didn't participate. Women and younger people appeared to benefit most from the protective effects of receiving cash.
- **Are cash transfer programs a smart political investment for governments?** In the state of Bihar in India, the ruling National Democratic Alliance party, in a surprise to many, won re-election in November 2020 with high support from the poorest voters. [Economists Shamika Ravi and Mudit Kapoor attribute this in part to the popularity of the Corona Sahayata Scheme](#), which provided digital cash transfers to 2 million vulnerable workers just weeks after the start of lockdown in March 2020.
- This [case study of Kenya's response to the pandemic](#) from Alexandra Doyle and Nivea Ikutwa highlights **how the government, aid donors, and NGOs worked together to scale up cash transfers.** The Kenyan government rolled out a new short-term cash transfer program for poor people not covered by existing social protection programs,

and launched a public works program as well. Donors and NGOs collaborated to provide top-up cash transfers to some particularly vulnerable beneficiaries of existing cash transfer programs, and also launched additional cash transfers to help people who weren't receiving assistance from the government.

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