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RECOVR Roundup Vol. 28: Social Protection in the Time of COVID-19

In this twenty-eighth 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: What interventions are effective for promoting mental health and well-being?

A brief, low-cost telecounseling program improved women's mental health, even months later

In low-income settings, women are vulnerable to the psychological distress caused by the social and economic impact of epidemics and other large-scale shocks. Researchers [Asadul Islam](#), [Michael Vlassopoulos](#), [Abu Siddique](#), [Debayan Pakrashi](#), [Md. Firoz Ahmed](#), and [Tabassum Rahman](#) evaluated a randomized telecounseling intervention in Bangladesh aimed at mitigating the mental health impact of COVID-19 on a sample of 2,402 women across 357 villages. They found that after one month, the telecounseling intervention led to a 26 percent decrease in the incidence of moderate and severe stress and a 60 percent decrease in depression relative to women who did not receive telecounseling in the control group. **After ten months, participants experienced decreases of 20 percent and 33 percent for stress and depression, respectively, alongside increases in food security and time invested in children.** Their results suggest that this type of low-cost intervention can be effective in providing rapid psychological support to vulnerable groups in times of crisis. **Read more [here](#).**

Philippines: How has the pandemic impacted remittances from migrant workers?

Income losses led to decreased remittances, but lower than the total income loss

Money sent home by migrants working abroad is an important source of income, particularly in low and middle-income countries. How have pandemic closures and restrictions affected migrants' remittances to the Philippines? Researchers [Kate Ambler](#), [Giuseppe De Arcangelis](#), and [Dean Yang](#) built on a previous study to conduct two rounds of phone surveys between Filipino migrants in the United Arab Emirates and their families in the Philippines. Half of the participants were randomly offered the opportunity to label their remittances for their preferred usages by the recipients. In an initial analysis, the research team found that **migrants who have experienced income declines due to pandemic restrictions reduced their remittances sent home, but the decline in remittances represents no more than a quarter of the size of the migrant income loss**. Additionally, they found that the ability to label remittances for specific purposes, via Padalapp, does not affect the relationship between remittances and income. More results from the study are forthcoming. [Read more here](#).

What We're Reading & Watching

- In Zambia, a [recent World Bank study](#) highlights the importance of social protection for poverty reduction. The Bank estimates that **the Social Cash Transfer program has the potential to reduce poverty by 6 percentage points** (from an [estimated baseline rate](#) of 54% of the population) by 2021.
- Are you looking for **data visualizations to understand how governments around the world have expanded social protection systems** in response to COVID-19? Look no farther than this [collection of graphs from IPC-IG](#), which covers topics such as program type, financing source, and intended beneficiaries.
- Poverty is often understood in purely monetary terms. However, [a new report from ATD Fourth World and Oxford University](#) highlights **the hidden dimensions of poverty**, including the “relational dimensions” of institutional and social maltreatment, and the “core experience” of both disempowerment and struggle and resistance to poverty. The report is based on participatory research with respondents in Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- **How can governments and humanitarian actors work together** to rapidly scale up social protection in emergencies? The WFP [shares an example](#) of a cash transfer program they implemented to support Venezuelan refugees in Colombia, which was designed in close collaboration with the Government of Colombia.

- Policymakers looking to assess the scalability of a social protection system can use a new “stress test” tool, developed by the World Bank, the Centre for Disaster Protection, FCDO, and the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program. The Stress Test Tool **simulates the potential impact of shocks of various intensities and attempts to capture the level of preparedness of the social protection system to respond to the heightened needs.**

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