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RECOVR Roundup Vol. 20: Social Protection in the Time of COVID-19

In this twentieth 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

Colombia: A broad emergency cash assistance program helped households during the COVID-19 crisis

Ingreso Solidario provided income stability, especially for the hardest-hit households

IPA teamed up with researchers [Diego Vera-Cossio](#), [Bridget Lynn Hoffmann](#), [Pablo Ibarrarán](#), [Marco Stampini](#), [Jorge Gallego](#), and [Camilo Pecha Garzon](#) to evaluate the effects of Colombia's new emergency unconditional cash transfer. *Ingreso Solidario* (Solidarity Income), launched in response to COVID-19, offers the equivalent of US\$42 (16.9 percent of household income) and will assist over 3 million lower-middle-income households not previously enrolled in other social assistance programs. **The study found that the cash transfer increased the probability that eligible households maintained an income source during the pandemic and did not disincentivize people from working.** *Ingreso Solidario* also increased bank account openings by 14 percentage points and the use of digital financial tools by 7.7 percentage points. ***Ingreso Solidario played a particularly important role in allowing the hardest-hit households to maintain a source of income.*** [Read more here.](#)

Bangladesh: Do mobile government-to-person payments reach men and women equally?

Digitization introduced efficiencies, but risks leaving more women behind

On the IPA blog, [Kate Glynn-Broderick](#) and [Liz Koechlein](#) report on an ongoing policy project on digital payments from Bangladesh's government during the COVID-19 crisis. Like many governments, Bangladesh has been transitioning to delivering support payments to vulnerable people digitally, over mobile phones. While, on average, digitization has saved recipients time accessing their cash and encouraged more transactions, it created more challenges for women than men. **For example, high rates of illiteracy among female beneficiaries (78 percent vs. 66 percent of men) made text notifications of available payments impossible to read. Also, more women than men—13 percent compared to 8 percent—reported that their transfer was spent by other family members instead of themselves.** Bangladesh's experience underscores the importance of collecting and analyzing data on how men and women are experiencing technological changes differently.

What We're Reading & Watching

- **A new comprehensive review of the impact of social protection programs (cash, food, and other in-kind transfers) on child development in crisis settings** finds that evidence on child growth and nutrition, health, labor, learning, and psychosocial outcomes is limited, and other critical gaps exist in the evidence base.
- In the Middle East and North Africa, 73 percent of countries in the region implemented emergency social protection programs during the pandemic. However, new research from Development Pathways indicates that **these programs were often not large enough to respond to a crisis of this scale**, as they frequently cost less than 1 percent of national GDP, compared to one recommended benchmark of 2 percent.
- **Which countries are experimenting with basic income programs?** This Vox article from 2020 maps out dozens of municipal and state-level programs in 12 countries around the world. Even more US states have launched programs since then, as you can see in this map developed by Mayors for a Guaranteed Income.
- The Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19: Expert Advice (SPACE) initiative has written an insightful article about how information systems for social protection can be designed to **accurately capture the needs of women and disabled people**. (Check out the key questions on p. 11!)

- In forthcoming research in the *Economic Development and Cultural Change* journal, a team of researchers finds that the combination of a government cash transfer program and a waiver for health insurance premiums **helped to empower women and reduce rates of intimate partner violence in Ghana.**

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