



Newsletter 48: September 2021

Welcome to the forty-eighth issue of the [Centre for Social Protection](#) Newsletter. The CSP is a global network of academics, policy-makers, NGOs and others who are working together to mainstream social protection in development policy and build social protection systems and instruments throughout the developing world that are national, comprehensive, long-term, sustainable, and benefit the poor.

'TALKING POINT'

Covid-19 - a wake-up call for urban cash transfers?

Covid-19 has shone a spotlight on the precarious lives of many city dwellers, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), more so than any other shock in recent memory. Despite various efforts to accelerate coverage in the years prior to the pandemic, the implementation of urban cash transfer schemes - and urban social assistance more broadly - was still limited at the onset of Covid-19. This left large swathes of the urban population at the mercy of the pandemic's socioeconomic consequences, compounding already insecure livelihoods, unstable housing conditions, and issues of poor hygiene and sanitation.

With countries implementing far-reaching constraints on movement to halt the spread of infection rates, many governments implemented new urban cash transfer schemes or expanded existing programmes to support at least some of the city dwellers badly hit by the crisis. This rapid rollout to previously under- or unserved urban populations begs the question: will urban cash transfers be here to stay?

A joint paper by ODI, IDS and SPACE - as part of a wider partnership between ODI and GIZ - finds that there are reasons to be tentatively optimistic about the future of urban cash transfers. Experiences around the world during the Covid-19 crisis have the potential to move the needle on debates on whether urban areas should be part of routine social assistance. The stark exposure of urban vulnerabilities during the pandemic may help to provoke a shift away from the blanket assumption that urban residents are less in need of assistance to a more nuanced understanding of how informal working and living conditions, coupled with high population density, transient livelihoods and large reliance on cash, make urban residents highly exposed to certain shocks.

At the same time few governments have committed to routine urban cash transfers post-pandemic. Much of the momentum appears to be focused on ensuring cash transfers can be more effectively deployed in response to future urban shocks. This is concerning, as the effective routine provision of social assistance, and the direct support it provides to urban households in building their resilience to shocks, is a crucial foundation for a strong, adaptive and shock-responsive system. Moreover, it is vital that future cash programming takes greater account of urban specificities.

Going forward, it will be important to capitalize more roundly on the window of opportunity that has been opened, to develop adaptive social protection systems that can comprehensively address the complex vulnerabilities of urban settings. At the same time, it is crucial to avoid a singular focus on cash transfers, or even social protection, but to consider them as part of a broader package of support that addresses the interlocking challenges and complex

nature of vulnerabilities in urban contexts.

This Talking Point was written by Christina Lowe, Keetie Roelen and Edward Archibald. The full paper can be found here: <https://odi.org/en/publications/covid-19-crisis-as-opportunity-for-urban-cash-transfer/>

SOCIAL PROTECTION NEWS AND EVENTS:

SOCIAL PROTECTION TRAINING AND COURSES

CSP Online Course ‘Social Protection: A Primer’

30 June 2020 - 28 February 2022, Institute of Development Studies

This free online course, developed by the Centre for Social Protection (CSP) at the Institute of Development Studies with support from Irish Aid, is designed to teach participants about the basics of social protection and its implementation around the world. Through this short, self-directed course, participants will learn what social protection is and how it works, explore key concepts and definitions, regional differences and core issues in building social protection systems. The course is suitable for policymakers, practitioners, researchers and project managers who have an interest in social protection or are working in social protection, and who wish to build their knowledge of social protection. Find out more information and enrol on our website [here](#).

Impact Story: Online learning about social protection, for everyone everywhere

Even before Covid-19 prompted our shift to online teaching, IDS was already exploring the potential for broadening access for a wider range of participants through online learning. Launched in June 2020, ‘Social Protection: A Primer’ was a timely short course offered to professionals - and has become a core part of our building leadership work in this field.

NEW PUBLICATIONS:

Five key reasons why basic income support for poor South Africans makes sense

Article, The Conversation, August 2021, S Devereux

The basic income grant debate has been rumbling in South Africa for two decades, ever since the grant was recommended by the Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive System of Social Security for South Africa in 2002. The reintroduction of the “social relief of distress” grant by President Cyril Ramaphosa, for unemployed people and unpaid caregivers who don’t receive any other social grant or unemployment insurance, provides the ideal moment to introduce permanent basic income support for poor and unemployed adults. This article argues for basic income support, rather than a universal basic income grant, and that what is needed is a social protection instrument that would address the country’s unemployment pandemic by assisting people aged 18 to 59 who are living in poverty.

Social protection responses to COVID-19 in Africa

Journal Article, SAGE Journals, June 2021, S. Devereux

Most African countries implemented measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 during 2020, such as restrictions on business activity and travel, school closures and stay-at-home lockdowns for several months. These restrictive policies had adverse economic and social consequences that triggered a follow-up wave of expansionist public interventions intended to mitigate these effects. ‘Shock-responsive’ social protection measures included increased benefits to existing beneficiaries (vertical expansion) and registration of new beneficiaries on existing programmes (horizontal expansion). These approaches had the advantages of being quick and administratively simple, but the disadvantage of bypassing people who were made most vulnerable by COVID-19, notably retrenched and informal workers with no access to social insurance. On the other hand, setting up new humanitarian relief or temporary social assistance programmes was slow and susceptible to targeting errors and corruption. COVID-19 also prompted a reassessment of the social contract regarding social protection, with some governments recognising that they need to become better coordinated, more inclusive and rights-based.

Urban-Sensitive Social Protection: How Universalized Social Protection Can Reduce Urban Vulnerabilities Post COVID-19

Journal Article, Progress in Development Studies, June 2021, S. Devereux and J. Cuesta

Experience with urban social protection programmes is relatively limited in the Global South. Extensions or duplicates of rural social assistance programmes do not reflect the distinct vulnerabilities of the urban poor, who face higher living costs and more precarious employment, and are not reached by social insurance schemes that are designed for formally employed workers. Neither the Sustainable Development Goals nor the New Urban Agenda reflect a specific focus on urban social protection. COVID-19 has exposed this major gap in coverage, given the disproportionate impact of lockdowns on the livelihoods of the urban poor. To 'build back better' post COVID-19, we propose rights-based national social protection systems with two components: categorical social assistance for non-working vulnerable groups (children, older persons, persons with disability) and universal social insurance for all working adults (formal, informal or self-employed), financed out of general revenues rather than mandatory contributions by employees and employers. These ideas are explored in the case of South Africa, which has comprehensive social assistance but inadequate social insurance for urban informal workers.

Pathways to stronger futures? The role of social protection in reducing psychological risk factors for child development in Haiti

Journal Article, World Development, June 2021, K. Roelen and A. Saha

It is widely recognised that poverty undermines early childhood development (ECD). In turn, poor childhood development reinforces the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Social protection could break this negative cycle by reducing poverty and addressing biological and psychosocial risk factors. In this study, we examine the effects of a relatively new wave of social protection and anti-poverty interventions - so-called 'graduation programmes' - on psychosocial risk factors in a context of widespread poverty and poor outcomes for children in rural Haiti. Using a mixed-methods approach, we find positive effects on maternal mental health and on children's exposure to harsh corporal punishment. We find no discernible impact on exposure to violence inside and outside of the home, attitudes to child disciplining practices or child stimulation practices. Greater ability to meet children's basic needs and positive support from programme staff contribute to positive effects. The ubiquity of violence, notions of play being replaced with a focus on discipline as babies turn toddlers and women struggling to combine child care with paid work and domestic chores serve as explanations for lack of impact. Findings point to the potential and limitations of social protection and anti-poverty interventions to address pernicious issues such as poor ECD outcomes and highlight the importance of a multi-sectoral approach.

Normalizing necessity? Support networks and racial inequality in Namibia

Journal Article, World Development, November 2021, A. Oppel

Community or interpersonal support is a critical source to sustain livelihoods in the Global South. At the same time, these practices can exhibit unequal dynamics such as disincentives, hierarchies, or adverse inclusion of individuals. However, an understanding of such is primarily tied to the conceptual space of poverty or small communities. Less is known about how social support systems might respond to structural inequalities within a society. This paper explores how support practices might be shaped by or respond to structurally inherited inequalities in the Namibian context. More precisely, I estimate the probability of supporting others that are notably worse off by comparing support practices of black and white Namibians across various age groups, gender, and socioeconomic standing. By drawing on primary network data, I assess racial inequality as a social dynamic within the space of practising solidarity towards others and further evaluate whether providing worse off others corresponds to consequences of former discriminatory practices under the apartheid regime.

The Right to Protection of Forcibly Displaced Persons During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Working Paper, IDS, August 2021, B. Rohwerder

The unprecedented shutdown of borders and restrictions on migration in response to the Covid-19 pandemic have put the core principles of refugee protection to test and resulted in the erosion of the right to asylum and violations of the principle of non-refoulement. Covid-19 is being used by some governments as an excuse to block people from the right to seek asylum and implement their nationalist agendas of border closures and anti-immigration policies.

Handbook on Social Protection Systems, with contributions from CSP (chapters 8, 14 and 20)

Book, Elgar Handbooks in Social Policy and Welfare, August 2021, Edited by E. Schuring and M. Loewe

This exciting and innovative Handbook provides readers with a comprehensive and globally relevant overview of the instruments, actors and design features of social protection systems, as well as their application and impacts in practice. It is the first book that centres around system building globally, a theme that has gained political importance yet has received relatively little attention in academia.

Country Reviews of Social Assistance in Crises: A Compendium of Rapid Assessments of the Nexus Between Social Protection and Humanitarian Assistance in Crisis Settings

Compendium, IDS, June 2021, H. Mohamed; C. Szyg; D. Thorsen; I. Bellwood-Howard; C. McLean; D. Bau; P. Harvey; J. Lind; D. Longhurst; R. Sabates-Wheeler; R. Slater and A. Warmington

This collection brings together brief overviews of the social assistance landscape in eight fragile and conflict-affected settings in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen. These overviews were prepared as part of Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research, a multi-year programme (2020-24) supported by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) of the UK government. BASIC Research aims to inform policy and programming on effective social assistance in situations of crisis, including for those who are experiencing climate-related shocks and stressors, protracted conflict and forced displacement.

UN World Food Programme (WFP) Strategy for Support to Social Protection

Policy Document, World Food Programme, July 2021, WFP Social Protection Team

This new thematic strategy explains how WFP will contribute to the development of high quality national social protection systems and programmes in contexts of food insecurity, as a complement to its work in responding directly to food security-related emergencies. It presents a coordinating framework which sets out WFP's two priorities in social protection—supporting the ability of social protection to help people meet their food security, nutrition and other essential needs, and to manage risks and shocks. It outlines the actions WFP will undertake to assist the achievement of those objectives. The document also describes WFP's added value in social protection, and the way in which it will partner with others to deliver on its mandate and to help governments to achieve Zero Hunger and related Sustainable Development Goals. The strategy is available at the link in both full and summary versions.

Social protection at a crossroad

Blog, UNU-WIDER, August 2021, A. Oppel

How can we ensure a resilient and inclusive recovery from COVID-19? How can we hold on to the target of eradicating poverty and hunger by 2030, with the pandemic still ongoing? Annalena Oppel recently had the opportunity to participate as a lead discussant at the UN DESA expert group meeting with many distinguished speakers sharing their insights on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2030 despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

Accountability in crises: public space or invite-only?

Blog, IDS, July 2021, P. Harvey and L. Seferis

Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems (SRSP) and efforts to link humanitarian assistance and social protection are hot on the agenda, driven in part by a huge expansion of cash-based assistance in response to Covid-19. These linkages are part of efforts to make sense of commitments to the nexus, as well as donors' hopes of finding an exit from long-running support in protracted crises.

The dichotomy of Lebanon's social protection and currency crises - Part 1

Blog, IDS, May 2021, P. Proudfoot and A. Reda

Lebanon faces a social protection crisis. Unemployment is rising, food is increasing in price, and essential infrastructure has ground to a halt. Not since the Civil War (1975 - 1990) has it been more challenging for people in Lebanon to meet their basic needs. In 2020, the government 'peg' - a financial measure holding the exchange rate between the US dollar and the Lebanese lira together - collapsed. The on-the-ground impact of the collapse has been illustrated viscerally by videos on Lebanese social media showing supermarket shoppers fighting over basic goods. Social protection in Lebanon cannot be achieved by the state, where it lacks a sufficient welfare programme, and an unstable labour market risks further aggravating the crisis.

The dichotomy of Lebanon's social protection and currency crises - Part 2

Blog, IDS, June 2021, P. Proudfoot and A. Reda

The latest World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor placed Lebanon's fiscal collapse within the top ten most severe crises since the 1850s. This is no exaggeration. More than 50 per cent of the population has fallen below the poverty line, unemployment is at 40 per cent, medical supplies have dwindled, and fuel is running out. The Lebanese pound has lost somewhere between 80 to 90 per cent of its value, showing little sign of recovery. This means that even those employed are suffering from plummeting purchasing power, given that the majority are paid in Lira. Such staggering contractions are more often associated with civil wars.

Why are social protection policies often missing in conflicts?

Blog, IDS, July 2021, Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research Programme

As part of the inception year of the Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research programme, we've been undertaking a series of reviews of key themes. Within this analysis, one of the things we've been doing is looking at the social protection policies of governments in places affected by conflict and fragility to see how they address humanitarian crises.

SECRETARIAT:

The Centre for Social Protection network now has more than 1,200 members. If you have events, research, or publications to promote, or are looking for partners or people with particular skills, send us an email and we will look to include it in future newsletters and e-mails. If you know others who you think would want to be part of the Centre, please ask them to email socialprotection@ids.ac.uk to be added to the mailing list.

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