

Algeria: Design, implementation and child-sensitivity of social protection responses to COVID-19¹

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This One Pager is part of a series based on the report ‘Social protection responses to COVID-19 in MENA: Design, implementation and child-sensitivity’, developed in partnership by the IPC-IG and UNICEF MENARO (Bilo, Dytz, and Sato 2022). The study reviewed the design and implementation features of the social assistance measures implemented in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region up to the end of March 2021, and the extent to which they took children’s needs and vulnerabilities into account.

The combined effects of COVID-19 lockdown measures in Algeria and the sharp contraction in oil and gas outputs severely impacted the national economy. The World Bank (2021) estimated a 5.5 per cent decrease in real gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020. Although the scenario improved in 2021, the country continues to face significant economic challenges.

Up to the end of March 2021, the IPC-IG mapping of social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South² identified 12 social protection responses in Algeria (8 labour market, 2 social insurance and 2 social assistance responses).

Announced in April 2020, the government’s main social assistance measure consisted of a one-off solidarity allowance of DZD10,000 (USD75.30)³ distributed to 576,262 poor and vulnerable households. The government relied on locally elected assemblies to identify eligible households in their municipalities. Moreover, a DZD10,000 cash transfer was paid for the month of Ramadan to over 1.7 million households not benefiting from any social protection programme in 2020. In 2021, the benefit was paid again to 2 million households. Before COVID-19, the annual Ramadan allowance had been DZD6,000 (USD45.20). However, there was no adjustment of the benefit based on household size, which in practice means smaller per capita benefits for households with more children.

The government placed a strong focus on labour market measures: on 1 June 2020, it implemented a permanent increase in the guaranteed national monthly minimum wage, raising it from DZD18,000 (USD135.60) to DZD20,000 (USD150.70). Additionally, the government announced that wages of less than DZD30,000 per month (USD226) were to be exempt from income tax. Yet the labour market responses mapped focused on providing support to formal workers, with the risk of leaving behind those working in the informal sector.

Moreover, 21.4 per cent of children in Algeria were living in multidimensional poverty in 2012–2013, and 68.1 per cent were not covered by any form of social assistance in 2019 (Ministère de la Santé,

de la Population et de la Réforme Hospitalière and UNICEF 2020). It is, therefore, worrisome to observe that, although children—as members of targeted households—benefited indirectly from the country’s social assistance responses, the programmes did not have an explicitly child-sensitivity design. None of the cash or in-kind measures mapped contained any of the design features used in the study to assess the responses’ child-sensitiveness, namely paying per capita transfer values, explicitly targeting children or having linkages to health, education, nutrition or child protection services.

Based on the analysis of the social assistance responses to COVID-19, some of the key lessons learned for Algeria in terms of shock-responsive and child-sensitive social protection include:

- Informal workers were particularly affected by the pandemic, with many of them unable to work and losing their income, without having access to unemployment benefits. Therefore, in future crises, Algeria should extend labour market responses to informal workers and work to extend social insurance coverage for the informal sector in the long term.
- The cash transfers mapped in Algeria only provided one-off benefits, and did not guarantee families adequate protection throughout the pandemic. It is, therefore, necessary to develop social assistance responses capable of supporting families for a longer duration during emergencies.
- To better address the hardships of larger families, cash transfers should take the size of the households into account and pay higher benefits to larger families.
- Both emergency and regular social protection measures should ensure families with children or children are explicitly targeted and linkages to health, nutrition, education and child protection services are created, where feasible.

References:

Bilo, C., J.P. Dytz, and L. Sato. 2022. “Social protection responses to COVID-19 in MENA: Design, implementation and child-sensitivity”. *Research Report*, No. 76. Brasília and Amman: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth and United Nations Children’s Fund Middle East and North Africa Regional Office.

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World Bank. 2021. Algeria Economic Update — April 2021. Washington, DC: World Bank. <<https://t.ly/Q6Ps>>. Accessed 13 July 2022.

Notes:

1. For the full list of references and a description of all social protection measures mapped, see the full study.
2. See: <<https://socialprotection.org/social-protection-responses-covid-19-global-south>>.
3. All values in US dollars at the exchange rate of 6 April 2022.