

Djibouti: 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 COVID-19 pandemic limited Djibouti’s gross domestic product (GDP) growth to only 0.5 per cent in 2020, but it is estimated to have reached 5.1 per cent in 2021. Even before the pandemic, according to the 2017 national household survey on social indicators, 35.8 per cent of the population were already living in poverty, with 21.1 per cent living in extreme poverty (Direction de la Statistique et des Etudes Démographiques 2018). A study by the World Food Programme (2022) found that the pandemic reduced the purchasing power of 69 per cent of the households in urban areas—mainly from women working in informal jobs and daily workers—jeopardising their food security and creating new pockets of poverty.

Up to the end of March 2021, the IPC-IG mapping of social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South² identified five social protection responses in Djibouti. Four were social assistance responses, and one was a labour market intervention. Among its main social assistance responses, Djibouti expanded the coverage of the pre-existing *Programme National de Solidarité Famille* (PNSF) to another 2,500 households in urban areas. In addition, 37,567 vulnerable households (10,000 of those financed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and 27,567 financed by the World Bank and the government), including some of those already registered in the social registry, day labourers unable to work due to COVID-19 and an additional 1,200 refugee households received vouchers for FDJ10,000 valid for 2 months. The Ministry of Social Solidarity partnered with UNHCR to actively identify these refugee households and displaced populations and included them in the registry.

In terms of child-sensitivity, the PNSF’s horizontal expansion with several ‘cash plus’ components was assessed as child-sensitive, promoting children’s access to education, nutrition and health/water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. During the pandemic, additional funding from the World Bank helped to extend this cash transfer to 2,500 new households in urban areas with poor children, children under 5, school-age children (6–16 years), and orphans and other vulnerable groups.

The benefit was announced to be accompanied by tailored community sessions to raise awareness on good parenting practices and breastfeeding methods, and to encourage school attendance of children, especially girls, who make up most out-of-school children. Food vouchers for families already receiving the PNSF cash transfer were also assessed as child-sensitive, as they promoted food security for families with children.

Yet, in terms of the share of children covered, there was a considerable gap between the number of children in need (47 per cent of the child population, using the USD3.20/day poverty line) and those covered by the social assistance responses. IPC-IG estimations show that only 1.7 per cent of the child population were reached by the PNSF coverage expansion (about 6 per cent were already in the programme before the expansion), and 23.5 per cent by the voucher programme for vulnerable families.

Based on the analysis of the social assistance responses to COVID-19, some of the key lessons learned for Djibouti in terms of shock-responsive and child-sensitive social protection are the following.

- Financing sources have to be identified to increase the fiscal space for social protection to expand coverage and provide regular and sufficient financial support to all poor and vulnerable people, both in regular times and in times of crisis.
- Gender-sensitive perspectives should be incorporated into social protection measures to tailor them to the needs of women and workers in the informal economy, who tend to be significantly affected by crises, and support them to access sustainable livelihoods opportunities.
- Continuing the inclusion and enrolment of vulnerable non-nationals in the social registry is vital to support their socio-economic integration and protect them from future crises.

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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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>>.