

RECOVR Roundup Vol. 2: Social Protection in the Time of COVID-19

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In this second 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 first installment [here](#), and [sign up for our mailing list](#) if you'd like to receive this roundup series directly to your inbox.

New Findings & Analysis

Did COVID-19 worsen seasonal food insecurity for poor rural farmers?

In rural Liberia and Malawi, lockdowns had little effect on seasonal hunger in the first months of COVID-19; cash helped

 A new [working paper](#) by authors Shilpa Aggarwal, Dahyeon Jeong, Naresh Kumar, David Sungho Park, Jonathan Robinson, and Alan Spearot looks at how the COVID disruptions have affected poor rural areas of Liberia and Malawi (very poor, <US\$0.30 per capita per day spending). As the graph of the control groups shows, the authors first find little overall effect of the COVID restrictions and market disruptions on several measures of hunger. They also don't find a consistent pattern in separate measures of food prices (which would normally be an indication of scarcity). The authors caution against over-extrapolating from their samples, but point out in their rural samples of primarily farmers with low food security to begin with, they did not see major long-term changes from the disruptions caused by the crisis. They do find having received cash transfers from a previously existing program helped with food security.

Does Universal Basic Income provide protection against an event like COVID?

Cash helped—but didn't completely shield—hard-hit households in Kenya

The findings above echo recent results from a [working paper](#) from Abhijit Banerjee, Michael Faye, Alan Krueger, Paul Niehaus, and Tavneet Suri. In Kenya, data collection had wrapped up on a big Universal Basic Income (UBI) study in late 2019, testing several different lengths of payments. The research team [quickly added](#) another wave of data collection after the

COVID restrictions hit. They find modest, but measurable improvements in hunger, health, and mental health among those who'd received UBI, even though two of the three treatment arms were no longer receiving the payments.

Colombia: How involved are gangs in the pandemic response?

Contrary to headlines, Medellín gang involvement in pandemic response has been rare and largely idiosyncratic

New results from IPA Colombia with Chris Blattman, David Cerero, Gustavo Duncan, Sebastian Hernandez, Benjamin Lessing, Juan F. Martínez, Juan Pablo Mesa-Mejía, Helena Montoya, and Santiago Tobón finds the sensationalized headlines from early in the COVID days about gangs enforcing quarantine don't hold up, at least in Medellín, Colombia, where gangs provide a lot of neighborhood municipal services. Using existing research on gang governance, a survey of all low- and middle-income neighborhoods showed the government was providing most public health and social services, except for in a few neighborhoods. (For more on the ongoing research into gang governance, and why, before COVID, gangs provided many municipal services, watch this recent talk by Chris Blattman.)

Women & COVID-19

COVID-19 exacerbated gender inequalities in informal settlements in Nairobi

A rapid phone survey assessing the risk perceptions and prevention behaviors of 7,500 heads of households across five informal settlements in Nairobi found that negative impacts of the pandemic are disproportionately borne by women. For example, while women were earning less than their male partners prior to COVID-19, the gap has widened due to the pandemic. Half of women, compared to a third of men, report earning nothing due to coronavirus. Of those in a partnership, 44 percent say both they and their partner are earning less now. Women are also twice as likely to take on more unpaid domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare compared to men due to coronavirus.

What We're Reading and Watching

- **How are women being protected during the pandemic?** UN Women and the UN Development Programme launched the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker to understand gaps and successes in countries' social protection and employment policies in prioritizing gender equality.
- **What policies have promoted economic inclusion of refugees amidst COVID-19?** In a new brief, UNHCR highlights emerging practices on livelihoods and economic inclusion to respond to the social and economic impacts of the pandemic on refugees.
- **Best practices have emerged with the rise of government-to-person**

emergency assistance during the pandemic. The World Bank's new G2Px initiative has [seven case studies](#) highlighting how different countries are rolling out new COVID-related social protection payments. In Pakistan, beneficiaries can withdraw their emergency payments from points of sale and biometric ATMs. Brazil has opened 10 million new digital social savings accounts since April, which link to app-based payments for goods, and Colombia's package of social protection measures includes a VAT refund targeted at the poor and elderly. (Other profiles include Ecuador, Jordan, Pakistan, Peru, and South Africa.)

- **How can governments finance enhanced social protection schemes?** There are no easy answers, given [ILO's latest estimates](#) that an *additional* US\$1.2 trillion is required for developing countries to sustain their commitments in 2020 (an increase of 30 percent since the onset of the pandemic).
- **Are you doing research on the politics of COVID-19 response?** Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) is offering [grants of up to US\\$10,000](#) for researchers who are based in the Global South and studying the politics of pandemic relief. Deadline: December 15, 2020.

October 08, 2020