



COVID-19 and Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific

GOVERNMENT AND WFP RESPONSES IN THE REGION

The COVID-19 pandemic is set to severely derail development gains, and could push millions more people into poverty. The number of food insecure people in the region could increase by over 80 percent as the incomes of already economically stressed populations fall further.

Alarmed by the potential rise in poverty and food insecurity, many governments in Asian and Pacific nations are adapting, extending and scaling up social protection measures to mitigate COVID-19's socio-economic impact. This includes advancing payments, waiving conditionalities, increasing benefits (including one-off or unconditional cash transfers, in-kind transfers, and subsidies) and coverage of social assistance schemes.

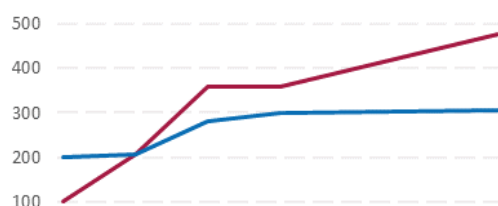
Several governments are already managing large-scale cash or food transfers or subsidies, e.g. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. Others are also expanding social insurance and/or financial obligation support (waiver of utility bills), e.g. Myanmar.

WFP is supporting the efforts of governments in Asia and the Pacific with several actions, including:

- help to understand additional needs and vulnerabilities arising from the pandemic;
- adapt existing safety nets to increase the value or coverage of in-kind or cash-based social assistance;
- establish new schemes to reach populations not covered by existing safety nets; and
- strengthen national social protection and emergency response systems and their coordination.

To do this, WFP plays a three-fold role, as a:

1. **Technical advisor:** In this 'enabling' role, WFP strengthens social protection capacities by deploying the technical strengths derived from its analytical and operational capacities.
2. **Service provider:** WFP provides services to governments in the implementation of their own social protection programmes and strategies.
3. **Complementary actor:** WFP delivers assistance using its own resources and own systems, in a way that contributes to the strengthening and augmentation of governments' social protection responses.



Across **East Asia and the Pacific** and **South Asia**, between 1 May and 12 June, governments increased the number of their cash transfer beneficiaries from 300 million to 781 million; cash transfers are the most common form of social protection assistance.¹

Highlights: WFP's Social Protection Role in Asia and the Pacific

Since the onset of COVID-19, WFP has acted in its three-fold role in supporting social protection across the region in a number of ways:



TECHNICAL ADVISOR

In **India**, WFP is assessing and providing technical support to the Government's Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) which reaches 800 million people monthly. This includes technical support for the Government in considering cash as an alternative transfer modality for the TPDS. This support led the Government to develop operational guidance for the shift of the transfer modality from in-kind to cash in two cities. WFP also supported the development of awareness videos in four regional languages on [health](#) and [nutrition](#) to be shared to targeted beneficiaries through government platforms. On analysis, WFP supported the 'Remote Assessment of Food and Nutrition Security Scenario During COVID-19 in Odisha', on which the '[Multi Sector Joint Rapid Needs Assessment Report on COVID-19](#)' was based.

In **Cambodia**, WFP supported a UN policy paper on social

protection. WFP is also offering assistance with targeting of assistance to the most vulnerable groups, such as through the Government's identification of poor households (IDPoor).

In **Laos**, WFP has been supporting the UN social protection working group with a policy brief to the Government on developing a COVID-19 shock-responsive national social protection system.

In **Indonesia**, WFP is working with UNDP and UNICEF on an extension of the Joint SDG 2030 Fund on Adaptive Social Protection, where WFP's additional component would train facilitators of the PKH conditional household cash transfer programme on nutrition-sensitive social protection.



SERVICE PROVIDER

In **Myanmar**, WFP is providing a mobile cash-based transfer service for government social protection beneficiaries through an existing contract with a mobile financial service provider. WFP is also reaching beneficiaries of the COVID-19 economic relief plan with information education communication (IEC) materials and nutrition counselling to promote positive behaviours on maternal health and infant and young child feeding. Under the Government's shock responsive social protection programme, WFP, as a complementary actor, supported the Government by distributing cash top-ups for 2,650 pregnant women and children under 2 years in internally displaced person camps in Kachin/Shan states.

In the **Philippines**, WFP used [SCOPE](#) to support the Ministry of Social Services and Development in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (MSSD-BARMM) with the registration and verification of more than 350,000 households to receive cash transfers through the Government's Social Amelioration

Programme. This was followed by assistance in conducting a remote vulnerability assessment among households affected by the pandemic in Metro Manila and BARMM, with enumerators deployed from the Government and WFP's third party partner, GeoPoll. WFP also promoted messages on dietary diversity for mothers and children via a social media campaign.

In **Sri Lanka**, WFP collaborates with the Government to scale-up shock-responsive social protection in Kalutara using digital technology, and to test the retargeting and registration process of the Samurdhi national social protection programme, with eventual use of SCOPE.

In **Fiji**, WFP launched a national mobile vulnerability analysis and mapping exercise for 2,400 households. This is intended to be expanded across several more countries across the Pacific.



COMPLEMENTARY ACTOR

In **Pakistan**, WFP is supporting beneficiaries of the Benazir Income Support Programme, by providing cash top-ups of USD 72 to 50,000 of the most vulnerable drought-affected households in Sindh and Balochistan over three months.

In **Afghanistan**, WFP implemented a pilot social safety net programme in drought-affected Badghis Province for 2,000 of the most vulnerable households, including internally displaced persons and host communities. WFP is also conducting a range of

studies (such as the Cost of the Diet and [Fill the Nutrition Gap](#) studies) which inform future programmes that could become part of the social protection system.

In **Bangladesh**, WFP is supporting plans for a vertical and horizontal expansion of the Mother and Child benefit programme, particularly in urban areas. This will include a social and behaviour change communication strategy to promote healthy nutritious behaviours.

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