



# Next Practices

Innovations in the COVID-19 social protection responses and beyond

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## Executive Summary



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**Next Practices—Innovations in the COVID-19 social protection responses and beyond**

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## Innovations in the COVID-19 social protection responses and beyond

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# **Executive summary**

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The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated large-scale, rapid responses from governments to ensure that the negative effects of the crisis on people's livelihoods are mitigated. Countries with more well-established social protection (SP) systems in place prior to the crisis (e.g. through the use of social registries) were able to respond faster, but almost all countries required innovative practices to quickly deliver SP to those usually excluded from benefits, such as informal-sector workers, refugees and migrants.

This paper aims to systematise the SP innovations implemented in response to the COVID-19 crisis, which can be leveraged to build more inclusive and sustainable SP systems in the medium and long term. It highlights the factors that enable 'inclusive innovation,' focusing on the levers of success, and the lessons learned from the process for the future—i.e., the 'next practices.' The paper also calls attention to innovative lessons from countries in the Global South on how to include traditionally excluded groups in SP responses, especially in times of crisis. It also shows how innovations can inform the sustainable expansion of SP systems to help countries achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 1.3: "Implement nationally appropriate SP systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable."

Innovations in the context of the COVID-19 crisis specifically should be understood as changes and practices that rapidly and effectively enhance the inclusion of those in need into SP systems. Throughout this report, 'innovation' is understood as a multidimensional concept, including technologically-focused innovations, governance innovations and process innovations. The last two include institutional changes to decision-making processes and hierarchical structures that enhance citizen engagement, and changes to the planning and implementation of a service/programme, including its structure and/or administrative processes, to ensure the most vulnerable populations can be reached. Thus, this report looks at inclusive innovative measures in beneficiary identification and registration, payment mechanisms, communication, case management and grievance redressal mechanisms (GRMs).

## Main findings

Section 2 provides an overview of the SP measures implemented in the Global South, including the main instruments used and the population groups targeted, as well as the coverage of those responses and the benefits provided. Across the 961 measures mapped, social assistance (54 per cent) was the most frequent SP component used in the response, followed by labour market and employment protection (35 per cent) and social insurance (11 per cent). Regarding SP support, the three most common types of responses provided across all components were cash transfers, liquidity alleviation and in-kind transfers. In general, the measures implemented exhibited a marked shift from targeting only the poorest people to providing support for groups that are traditionally neither covered by social assistance programmes nor contribute to social insurance, such as informal workers.

Section 3 looks at fiscal space and coordination as important prerequisites that need to be in place for successful and rapid implementation of SP measures in times of crisis. The measures mapped mostly relied on public sources of financing (69 per

cent), followed by international sources (18 per cent). The use of social security (5 per cent) and private financing (8 per cent) was comparatively low in most regions. Within public sources of financing, many countries established 'extra-budgetary funds' to collect donations from the public and private sectors, as well as the donor community, and to facilitate more expeditious public financial management procedures. Innovative financing practices included those that provided liquidity rapidly (e.g. budget reallocation), combined financing from different sources (e.g. extra-budgetary funds), were proactive in their approach (e.g. contingency funds), or were economically sustainable (e.g. unconventional tax revenues).

In terms of coordination, the pandemic has given rise to 'SP coordination committees' and greater contribution of both the private sector and local actors. Coordination committees facilitated inter- and intra-governmental coordination, as well as multi-sectoral coordination between national and international agencies. In some countries, local actors and private sector representatives were also involved in the development of policy responses. They turned out to be particularly important in identifying beneficiaries and delivering assistance to people that have been traditionally excluded.

Section 4 analyses inclusive innovative measures in terms of beneficiary identification and registration, payment mechanisms and communication. It provides country examples for each innovative practice and lists several important factors that are necessary for better and more inclusive implementation in the future. Digital technologies were implemented in most countries for both registration and payment mechanisms, in some cases complemented by other approaches. Across the Global South, 38 per cent of measures relied on registration through web portals; while 52 per cent and 18 per cent relied on bank transfers and mobile money, respectively, to deliver cash support. Communication case management and GRM processes were adapted and implemented mostly through websites, call centres and local actors.

## Recommendations

The unprecedented socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis have led to a window of opportunity in SP policymaking. The pandemic has shown that redundancies, while sometimes less efficient, (i.e., a multiplicity of registration or payment mechanisms) are necessary to make sure that no one is left

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