

[2021 HLPF on sustainable: Ensuring that no one is left behind](#)

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The global social protection response to the COVID-19 crisis has shed light on the importance of social protection as both **social policy** and **economic policy**. It was important (i) to allow workers and families to comply with containment measures; (ii) to attenuate the impact of the economic downturn on their livelihoods and (iii) to help stabilize economies.

The response had to deal with important gaps in social protection coverage and adequacy, particularly for **workers in the informal sector, but also for those usually left behind in standard social protection schemes such as migrant workers, refugees, homeless, and women, who are disproportionately represented in care work occupations, and whose unpaid care burden increased due to the pandemic**. Countries had to quickly develop and implement innovative means to identify and reach out to these groups with varying degrees of success.

Looking at countries in the Global South, the IPC-IG with the support of UNDP, GIZ and SPACE has mapped more than 900 social protection measures (<https://socialprotection.org/social-protection-responses-covid-19-global-south>). The mapping shows that **low-income countries have adopted relatively fewer measures compared to upper and lower middle-income countries**. They also tended to rely relatively more on **in-kind transfers, public works and on manual registration and payments**, suggesting **limited digital inclusiveness** and requiring at least moderate level of **physical contact** in the middle of the pandemic.

Nevertheless, social protection has gained **significant global importance** in the immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis. Emergency cash transfers were paid, often for the first time, in a speedy manner to the so-called **missing middle and hard to reach vulnerable groups, largely due to the adoption of technological innovations such as digital registration and e-wallets as well as to fast and effective resource mobilization**.

It is important to bear in mind that although **digital registration and payments** have been essential in the response, the role of **local actors, social workers, of more inclusive legislations, and non-digital mechanisms** should not be overlooked in fostering social protection coverage among most vulnerable groups both in normal times and in future crises.

The crisis also showed the **need for more gender-sensitive social protection systems**. Quality care services need to be expanded to facilitate **women's re-entry in the labour market in the post-pandemic**.

The increase in social protection coverage prompted by the response to the COVID-19 crisis was short-lived in most countries in the Global South. Emergency cash support, for instance, lasted **only for 4 months in average**. However, their fast implementation has demonstrated their **feasibility in different contexts, largely driven by the adoption of innovative processes using already existing instruments**. The new databases, payment systems and financing mechanisms used in the response will be key to inform a **long due substantial social protection coverage expansion with a view to accelerating progress towards achieving SDG Target 1.3 by 2030**.