

GEORGIA SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM READINESS ASSESSMENT

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale for the study

The development of this assessment tool within UNICEF is in response to recognition of the importance of strengthening social protection across the humanitarian-development nexus. Shocks and disasters are becoming more frequent and severe, as evidenced by the present COVID-19 pandemic that has resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths across the world and brought the global economy to a standstill. There is a need to change the 'business as usual' approach to conceiving and delivering emergency assistance (as short-term, siloed, standalone responses, through parallel systems), and to build links between emergency assistance, disaster risk management and development programming to more effectively address the drivers of crises, build resilience and respond to the needs of populations in crisis prone areas¹.

In 2016, UNICEF and other actors agreed major collective commitments with the aim of increasing the scale, volume and quality of humanitarian cash transfers (HCT)². Within this context there is growing interest about the potential of leveraging national social protection programmes and their underlying systems to provide support in emergencies, and for ways in which social protection systems can be supported to become more 'shock responsive'.

Social protection is a promising solution to bridge the humanitarian-development divide due to several factors. Social protection helps households to manage risk and can build the resilience of households that are vulnerable to disasters, preventing a fall into poverty and negative impacts for children. There are also commonalities in the way that emergency assistance (in the form of humanitarian cash transfers) and social protection programmes (in the form of cash based social transfers) are designed and implemented. While evidence is still emerging, experiences (of UNICEF and others) in supporting national social transfer systems to respond to emergencies suggest that in the right context this approach has potential to enhance resilience to disasters, improve response times, reduce costs of delivering emergency assistance, reduce duplications and gaps and improve national capacities to manage disasters³.

At the same time, as with any programme approach, there will be challenges to address. For example, social transfer programmes may not effectively include those most vulnerable to disasters. Meanwhile where national systems are inflexible, processes bureaucratic and systems and institutions lacking in capacity, or where there is a lack of political willingness, this can create barriers to effective programming. The enabling factors and potential barriers in national social transfer programmes and their underlying systems must be well understood, to inform the feasibility of using these at times of shock and to effectively prepare for these interventions.

This assessment tool was initially developed for UNICEF ECARO and piloted in five countries in the region⁴. The learning from this has fed into

¹ For example - Grand Bargain commitments 2016, the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants 2016

² These include the Grand Bargain commitments that were made at the World Humanitarian Summit; ECHO's 10 Principles for increasing the adoption of Multi-Purpose Cash (MPC); the recommendations of the High-Level Panel's report on HCT; and the call for action from the Agenda for Humanity.

³ For example, as demonstrated in the evaluations of UNICEF's cash assistance in Nepal and WFP's emergency social safety net in Turkey, and in the review of UNICEF and WFP's programmes in the Philippines.

⁴ Armenia, Tajikistan, Serbia, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

the development of a global tool, to build UNICEF's understanding of the opportunities and challenges to supporting provision of, or delivering, cash transfers through national social protection systems during a crisis. By conducting a readiness assessment, country offices can assess how opportunities and challenges vary between contexts, and ways that national social transfer systems can be leveraged and addressed, as well as identifying where shock responsive social protection is not appropriate.

1.2 Study objectives

The current assessment conducted in Georgia had the following overarching objectives:

- I. Assess the general political, technical, operational and financial feasibility, or "readiness", of Georgia's social protection system to provide cash assistance during emergencies to people affected by shocks and disasters.
- II. Assess the advantages and the potential limitations of the social protection measures envisaged by the Anti-Crisis Plan developed by the Government of Georgia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- III. Assess the capacity of the Georgia Country Office (CO) to provide different types of support to the Government to develop cash-based social policy measures during emergencies.

1.3 Summary methodology

The pilot assessment was led by Dimitri Gugushvili (Consultant), working in close partnership with the Social Policy Team of the CO - Tinatin Baum (Social Policy Specialist) and Nino Davitashvili (Social Policy Officer). Valuable support and advice was provided by Louisa Lippi, UNICEF ECARO Social Policy Specialist. The assessment involved the following steps:

- A desk review of secondary data was completed followed by consultations with the UNICEF focal points to understand the social protection and disaster risk management (DRM) context in Georgia and UNICEF's role and ongoing activities.
- A range of key informant interviews were conducted online with various stakeholders listed in Table 1. The interviews helped to fill gaps in knowledge about specific aspects of the social protection and the DRM systems in the country, as well as to obtain an accurate information regarding the ongoing emergency response activities undertaken by the Government.
- The senior management and the national programme officers were asked to complete a short online survey which was prepared based on the questions regarding the CO capacity in relation to emergency cash transfers listed in section 6 (UNICEF readiness) of the Assessment Tool.
- Data collected in the Assessment Tool was collectively analysed by the Consultant and the Social Policy Team.

Limitations:

The pilot studies are intended to be a relatively light touch exercise. It is usually not feasible to consider all emergency contexts. However, the large scope, the severity and the long duration of the present COVID-19 pandemic, which this study has primarily focused on, provides the strongest test of the Government's capacity to use social protection measures effectively during emergencies. Hence, the conclusions drawn in this study are very likely to be applicable in the case of relatively smaller-scale emergencies that might occur in the coming years.

TABLE 1: List of key informants

| ORGANISATION | NAME | ROLE/FUNCTION |
|---|----------------------|--|
| Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs | Tatia Gvaramadze | Head of Pension and Social Assistance Division |
| Social Services Agency | Dimitri Chkheidze | Deputy Head of IT Department |
| Social Services Agency | Nino Osefashvili | Senior Social Agent |
| World Bank | Madalena Honorati | Social Policy Specialist |
| OCHA | Nino Lortkipanidze | National Disaster Adviser |
| Administration of the Government of Georgia | Giorgi Bobghiashvili | Head of Policy Planning Division |
| Donor Coordination Service | Tatia Rogava | Head |
| National Security Council | Rusudan Kakhishvili | Senior Adviser |

2. Summary of assessment findings

Module 1: Mapping

Contextual:

Georgia is a middle-income country with a population of 3.7 million people⁵. It has a well-functioning social protection system - according to a UNICEF study, 67% of households receive at least one of the main transfers (old-age pension, social package, Targeted Social Assistance)⁶. Total spending on social protection comprises about 7% of GDP⁷. Entitlement to each social transfer is clearly defined in relevant legislation. All social transfers (except the municipal ones) are administered by a single agency –Social Services Agency– which has a well-developed MIS system. There have been no delays in the distribution of social transfers, either before, or during the present COVID-19 crisis.

Governance:

Georgia is a representative parliamentary democracy. The executive power is exercised the Prime-Minister who heads the Government. The nominal Head of the State is the President, though her functions are rather limited. Administratively the country is divided into 69 municipalities within 10 regions (including one autonomous republic). These do not include the parts of the country –Abkhazia Autonomous Republic and Tskhinvali region– which at present are outside the control of the Georgian Government. Despite the important recent reforms aimed at increasing the competencies and the capacities of local authorities, Georgia remains a centralised state, where most of revenue collection and public service delivery occurs at the central level. Accordingly, the main social transfers are provided by the Central Government. Parallel

⁵ Geostat (2020) Population and Demography, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/316/population-and-demography>

⁶ UNICEF (2018) Georgia Welfare Monitoring Survey 2017 Report

⁷ IMF (2020) Georgia: Expenditure by Functions of Government, <https://data.imf.org/regular.aspx?key=61037799>

to these, most municipalities also have complementary social transfers, in-kind benefits and services, but the amount of transfers and the coverage is usually limited. In Corruption Perceptions Index Georgia is in the low-risk category (a score of 5.48)⁸, reflecting the important anti-corruption measures that the country has pursued in the past two decades. UNICEF has a long history of successful cooperation with the Government which continues to the present day.

Disaster risk:

Georgia is a medium disaster risk country. The Georgia EPP outlines the following risks: floods, earthquakes, civil unrest/ethnic conflict and epidemics/pandemics. Of these, the one of greatest interest for this assessment is the present COVID-19 pandemic.

Mapping cash based social transfer programmes:

There are three main types of social transfers in Georgia, each of which have been operational for at least 15 years now. Old-age pension is the most important transfer, covering 770,292 people above the retirement age (60 for women and 65 for men)⁹. The amount of the transfer is 220 GEL a month (69 USD in current exchange rate)¹⁰ which corresponds to about 18% of the average wage (1,200 GEL a month)¹¹. Social package is for the following categories: orphans, disabled persons, victims of political repressions and people who lost family members during armed conflicts. The amount of the transfers varies across different types of beneficiaries, but most receive between 100 and 220 GEL (31 – 69 USD) a month. At present 173,905 people receive this transfers¹². Targeted Social Assistance (TSA) is a proxy means-tested family transfer. It covers 133,725 families with 475,132 people¹³. The amount of the transfer is 30 to 60 GEL (9 – 18 USD) a month per member, depending on the family's welfare score. In addition, families registered in the TSA database get 50 GEL (16 USD) a month per child even if they do not qualify for the family assistance, as long as their welfare score is below a certain threshold. This benefit covers 189,227 families (including those families who also receive the family cash support component)¹⁴. Because of their universal design, old-age pension and social package are not concentrated in specific locations. Since TSA is a transfer aimed at poor households, it is more concentrated in rural areas and regions where poverty rates are higher. There are no specific rules regarding the indexation of any of the transfers, though old-age pension and social package are more frequently increased than TSA. The main, family transfer component of TSA has not been increased since 2015, though the child benefit component was increased from 10 GEL (3 USD) a month in 2015 to 50 GEL (16 USD) a month in 2019. Given that TSA is more focused on poverty than the other two main transfers, is also linked to some in-kind benefits and services in some municipalities (see module 4) and is also being used at present to channel a significant proportion of emergency cash transfers, in the rest of the report we analyze various aspects of this programme in more detail.

⁸ Transparency International (2020) Corruption Perception Index, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi>

⁹ SSA (2020) Statistics, http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=610

¹⁰ To convert the GEL amounts into USD, throughout the report we use the current exchange rate, which is 0.31 USD for 1 GEL.

¹¹ Geostat (2020) Employment and Wages, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/37/employment-and-wages>

¹² SSA (2020) Statistics, http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=610

¹³ SSA (2020) Statistics, http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=610

¹⁴ SSA (2020) Statistics, http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=610

Stakeholder mapping SP and disaster responses:

Georgia has a DRR strategy and an action plan which were prepared in 2017 with the active involvement of numerous international donor organisations, including the UN funds and programmes. However, macroeconomic and social risks are not part of these documents which focus on natural and epidemiological hazards typical for the country. Accordingly, prior to the COVID-19 crisis there have been no discussions of the potential role of emergency social transfers during emergencies. However, shortly after the start of the crisis the Government has announced the development of a set of new emergency transfers (for more details please see the section below). These measures had been agreed with the main donors, including the IMF, the World Bank, the EU delegation and the ADB as these organisations will provide loans for the Government's anti-crisis response.

Knowledge and attitude to SP and SRSP:

Social transfers are an important component of the Government's efforts to mitigate the social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly after detecting the first cases of the virus, the Government provided universal subsidies to almost every Georgian family to cover the costs of specific amounts of electricity, natural gas and water for three months. Further, the Government announced a set of social protection measures as part of its anti-crisis plan. These include: expansion of the TSA programme to cover additional 70,000 families with approximately 190,000 people whose conditions have already been assessed and did not qualify for the assistance before the crisis; increasing the level of child benefit component of TSA for beneficiary families with 3 or more children (approximately 21,000 households with 130,000 people); increasing the level of social package for severely disabled people and disabled children (approximately 40,000 people); introduction of unemployment assistance for people who lose formal sector jobs as a result of the crisis (with a potential to cover up to 350,000 people); and a one-off transfer for self-employed people. The total cost of these measures is estimated to be 618 million GEL (193 million USD)¹⁵.

Coordination:

The development of emergency cash transfers, similar to other anti-crisis measures, is coordinated through the Government's three-level emergency response coordination mechanism. In this structure, the highest level decision-making and coordination unit is the Interagency Coordination Council which is chaired by the Prime-Minister. Other members include the Ministers of Internal Affairs, Defence, Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, health and Social Affairs (MOH), Environmental Protection and Agriculture and the Head of the State Security Service. The Council makes the strategic decisions regarding the emergency response. The next level coordination unit is the Operational Headquarters which is comprised of heads of departments in relevant line ministries, including MOH. The Operational Headquarters develops a tactical plan to achieve the strategic aim set by the Interagency Coordination Council; assists the Prime-Minister and the Council in delivering the highest-level political decisions; establishes and maintains an operational control to coordinate the deployment of the emergency response; and coordinates the activities of Regional Headquarters. The Regional Headquarters are headed by the Regional Governors and comprise of Mayors of municipalities and the heads of local branches of relevant ministries. The Regional Headquarters implement the instructions of the Operational Headquarters.

¹⁵ Anti-Crisis Action Plan of the Government of Georgia

Mapping Financial service providers (FSP's):

To deliver social transfers, Georgia uses its well-developed banking system with an extensive coverage of bank branches and ATMs across the country. The main FSP is Liberty Bank which has been delivering all social transfers provided by the Central Government for more than ten years without any delays. Liberty Bank appears to be well equipped to operate during emergencies as evidenced by the previous crisis in 2008 and its readiness to deliver old-age pensions one month in advance of the regular schedule during the present crisis. In addition to this bank there are 14 other banks operating in Georgia, but it is likely that only the largest ones –TBC Bank and Bank of Georgia– have the capacity to deliver transfers in each municipality of the country.

Personal ID:

In Georgia, the primary forms of ID are the personal ID cards and national passports. In addition, in some cases other forms of official documents that contain persons' unique ID number can also be used (e.g. driver's license). However, to receive social transfers, beneficiaries (or applicants) are required to have the primary forms of ID, and in the case of applying for TSA, a proof of official residence as well. Overall, the vast majority of the population appears to have the primary forms of ID, though some vulnerable groups, such as homeless, extremely poor and Roma people may lack these documents. This, in turn, may serve as a barrier to their access to the TSA programme.

Key conclusions:

Being a middle-income economy with a well-functioning social protection and emergency response mechanisms and benefiting from strong support from key donor organizations like the IMF, the World Bank, the ADB and the EU Delegation, Georgia appears to have the capacity to deal with the adverse social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, at least in the short-term. It is commendable that in a short period of time the Government has designed a comprehensive anti-crisis plan, which, in addition to measures for stimulating the economy, also envisages the allocation of 193 million USD for social transfers. Further, parallel to increasing the level of benefits for specific vulnerable groups (including children) and extending the outreach of its main social assistance programme, the Government is planning to put in place two new temporary measures - unemployment assistance for the laid-off formal workers and the self-employed. However, there are certain limitations and risks with each of these measures (especially with identification of the self-employed) which will need to be addressed if the emergency social transfers are extended beyond the originally planned 6 months. These risks will be discussed in more detail in section 3.

Module 2: Data and evidence

Despite the continuous growth achieved in the past 20 years, poverty remains a major challenge for Georgia. According to official statistics, 20.1% of population lived in absolute poverty in 2018 (measured against the nationally-defined absolute poverty line)^{16,17}. The poverty incidence was much higher among children (25.5%) than among working-age population (19.5%) and elderly people (14.4%)¹⁸. The poverty rate is also higher in rural (23.1%) than in urban areas (18%)¹⁹. The picture is similar in relation to extreme poverty (measured against 1.25 USD a day): According to UNICEF's most recent child poverty report, the risk of extreme poverty is 6.8% for children, 5% for total population and 3.7% for elderly people²⁰. UNICEF child poverty studies also show that certain types of vulnerable families, such as families with no employed members, single-parent families and families with three or more children have a higher risk of poverty than other family types. There is also a significant regional variation, with the poverty rates being the highest in Samegrelo-Zemo-Svaneti and Shida Kartli regions and the lowest in Adjara and Kvemo Kartli regions. However, the overall child poverty is not concentrated either geographically, or within specific vulnerable groups (including those exposed to higher risks of natural disasters).

Refugees and IDPs:

While the number of refugees in the country is small (1,513 persons), Georgia has a large IDP population - 283,271 persons displaced from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions during the 1992-1993 and the 2008 armed conflicts²¹. There are no IDP camps as such, but many IDPs live in buildings that were previously used for public purposes (kindergartens, schools, dormitories). However, with the support of the international donor community, in recent years the Government has invested heavily in providing individual housing to IDPs. According to the Public Defender's report, out of 89,970 IDP households, 39,782 have been provided with individual housing and 50,188 households are on the waiting list²². The regions with the largest IDP population include Tbilisi (110,470 persons), Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti (89,539 persons) and Imereti (27,407 persons)²³. As for the access to public services (e.g. health, education, protection) the IDPs are fully integrated in the mainstream services and accordingly have the same access as the rest of the population.

Sector linkages:

UNICEF has an extensive engagement in health, education, nutrition and child protection fields in Georgia, focusing primarily on providing technical assistance to improve the respective national systems rather than providing services directly to beneficiaries. The present COVID-19 crisis raises additional challenges in each of these fields and some of these can potentially be addressed through "cash plus" approach. In

¹⁶ Geostat (2020) Living Conditions, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/192/living-conditions>

¹⁷ For a comparison, national poverty rates are 23.5% in Armenia, 6% in Azerbaijan, 5.6% in Belarus, 9.6% in Moldova and 1.3% in Ukraine (see <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC>).

¹⁸ Geostat (2020) Living Conditions, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/192/living-conditions>

¹⁹ Geostat (2020) Living Conditions, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/192/living-conditions>

²⁰ UNICEF (2018) Georgia Welfare Monitoring Survey 2017 Report

²¹ MOH (2020) Data on Internally Displaced Population, <https://www.moh.gov.ge/uploads/files/2019/Failebi/27.03.2019-51.pdf>

²² Public Defender of Georgia (2019) Annual Report 2018

²³ MOH (2020) Data on Internally Displaced Population, <https://www.moh.gov.ge/uploads/files/2019/Failebi/27.03.2019-51.pdf>

education, the main new concern is that a significant proportion of Georgian families does not have access to computers and internet, while the education system has shifted to online teaching mode during the lockdown. If the online learning practice becomes more common in the coming months/years, there will be an urgent need to consider the provision of computers for children lacking them, as well as to subsidize a limited amount of internet consumption. In nutrition, there is a risk that reductions in family incomes will force families to cut down on children's food. While cash transfers can mitigate this risk, there is a scope for providing the TSA recipients with extra vouchers (in addition to child benefits) to buy specific types of food (e.g. fortified porridges) for infants. Similarly, provision of vouchers to lactating TSA beneficiary mothers in order to purchase vitamins and other food supplements can also be an effective measure in this respect. Further, there is a need to monitor the changes in the prices of most frequently used medicines, and if major increases are observed, to consider providing vouchers for these medicines to specific vulnerable groups, especially the TSA beneficiaries.

Conclusions:

The incidence of poverty (and especially child poverty) in Georgia is high relative to its level of economic development. Certain groups have a considerably higher risk of poverty compared to the rest of the country, but this is not necessarily linked to vulnerability to various disasters. The current crisis is likely to affect most people, but especially those who before the crisis were slightly above the poverty line and lose formal jobs and livelihoods. The crisis also raises further challenges in relation to other dimensions of child wellbeing, some of which may potentially be addressed through "cash plus" approach. If online teaching mode is used more frequently in future, there is a need for the Government to provide computers and ensure access to internet for children living in families that at present lack these amenities. To minimise the risk that reduced incomes worsen the nutritional status of lactating mothers and infants, the Government needs to consider extra food vouchers for infants in TSA beneficiary families and vouchers for vitamins and other food supplements for their mothers. Similarly, if prices on most frequently used medicines increase significantly in the coming months, there will be a need to consider providing vouchers for these medicines to TSA recipients, and possibly to other vulnerable groups as well.

Module 3: Readiness of policy, legislation and finance

Georgia has a well-developed social protection legislation which clearly defines the purpose of different social transfers, the eligibility criteria, the administrative procedures and the responsibilities of various government agencies in administering these transfers. Compared to the legislative framework, the policy framework is less comprehensive as there is no specific social protection strategy and/or an action plan. Nevertheless, the Basic Data and Directions document (the main strategic document of the Government which is updated annually) identifies main policy changes in social protection for a four-year period. There are no rules for indexation of social transfers, but old-age pension and parts of social package (e.g. transfers for severely disabled people) are usually increased every two years or so.

Similar to social protection, there is a comprehensive legislation regulating emergency preparedness and response. There is also a DRR strategy and an action plan, both developed with an active involvement of the donor community. However, these documents are oriented towards natural hazards. Similarly, the early warning system is centred around natural risks. Responses to the risks related to macroeconomic shocks, civil unrest and national security are part of the National Threat Assessment document which is a classified document. There are

sectoral business continuity plans during emergencies, but these are also classified. Local authorities are required to develop their own contingency plans, but anecdotal evidence suggests that very few of them, if any, do have such plans.

Social protection and emergency legislation do not have specific provisions regarding the scaling up of social transfers in emergencies. However, they also do not constrain the Government's ability to scale up existing transfers or develop new ones, as evidenced by the present crisis. The only potential barrier can be that major changes in social protection budget need to be approved by the Parliament. However, since the Government is formed by a party or a coalition of parties that hold majority in the Parliament, this risk is minimal.

Institutional arrangements/coordination for social protection, emergency preparedness and response:

During non-emergency situations, the main mechanism for coordinating inter-sectoral policies is the weekly Government Meeting. For any major policy initiative to be placed on the meeting agenda, first it has to be shared electronically with all government ministries, and at least eight ministries must support it, including each of the three key ministries (the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Justice). If the Government Meeting approves the initiative, then it is signed by the Prime-Minister who issues respective tasks to the Ministries involved in the implementation of the policy. During emergencies, the emergency response (including emergency social transfers) is coordinated by the three-level system, headed by the Interagency Coordination Council as described in Module 1. MOH is represented in all three levels and has been actively involved in the development of the emergency cash transfers.

Coordination with international donor organisations usually occurs in two main formats - a donor conference, which is held twice a year and bilateral cooperation with embassies/development agencies of main partner countries. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, the Government organised an ad-hoc donor conference at which it presented its needs for assistance. Multiple donors responded to this request in line with their mandate and the Government continues further coordination with them in bilateral format.

Financing disaster response and SP:

During normal times, all central social transfers are funded from the state budget and there are no earmarked social contributions. While social protection spending is not ring-fenced, in the past 18 years there have been no cases of reducing the planned expenditure by lowering the level of social transfers. Social protection typically accounts for about a quarter of central government spending and 7% of GDP²⁴. In 2019, the budget of TSA programme was 113 million USD or approximately 0.6% of GDP²⁵. The government agencies which are involved in emergency response have reserve funds, but these are clearly insufficient for financing a major scaling up of social transfers. Instead, during the present crisis the Government has negotiated loans from its main financial donors - the IMF, the World Bank, the ADB and the EU delegation – to finance its anti-crisis plan. These loans have already been officially confirmed. Importantly, each of these organisations supports the announced emergency social protection measures –as a matter of fact, the expansion of the TSA programme to cover a proportion of families who prior to the crisis did not qualify for assistance was initiated by the World Bank.

²⁴ IMF (2020) Georgia: Expenditure by Functions of Government, <https://data.imf.org/regular.aspx?key=61037799>

²⁵ SSA (2020) Statistical Data, http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=610

Conclusions:

Even though the social protection and the emergency preparedness/response legislation and policy documents do not contain specific clauses regarding emergency social transfers, this did not constrain the Government's ability to develop large-scale social transfers in the present crisis. The main potential barrier might have been the large volume of public finances required to fund these transfers, but following the successful negotiations with major donor organisations, the essential funding to distribute the initiated social transfers during next 6 months appears to be secured.

Module 4: Readiness of programme design**Programme Objectives:**

The aim of the TSA programme is to provide cash assistance to families which are in the greatest need.

Targeting:

The targeting of beneficiaries occurs through proxy means-testing procedure which involves recording various proxies of family welfare – the quality of dwelling, employment status and health conditions of family members, possession of durable items, utility bills, etc. Based on these indicators, a purpose-built software calculates families' welfare score which minimises the risk of subjective treatment of applicants. Vulnerability to various disasters is not included in the proxy means-testing formula, but after a risk materialises and a family's situation deteriorates, its probability of qualifying for assistance increases.

Use of conditions:

The only conditionality attached to the programme is that beneficiaries capable of work must register on the Government's jobseeker website. However, during the present crisis SSA will not be monitoring and enforcing this conditionality.

Transfer value, frequency:

The value of the transfer depends on the welfare score band²⁶. Families with a welfare score below 30,001 points receive the maximum amount - 60 GEL (about 19 USD) per member per month. If the score is between 30,001 and 57,001, families get 50 GEL (15 USD) per member. For the score between 57,001 and 60,001 they get 40 GEL (12 USD) per member; for the score between 60,001 and 65,001 they get 30 GEL per member (10 USD). In addition, every family with a score below 100,001 receives 50 GEL (15 USD) a month for each child under the age of 16. In some municipalities this 50 GEL benefit is split into 20 GEL cash and 30 GEL food voucher. After the temporary extension of the programme during the present crisis, families with a score between 65,001 and 100,001 will receive 70 GEL (22USD) a month for the first member and extra 20 GEL (6 USD) for the second member. If the number of family members is more than two, then each member will get 35 GEL (11 USD) a month. Also, each family with a score below 100,001 that has three children or more will get an extra 100 GEL (31 USD) a month on top of the child benefits they are already receiving.

²⁶ SSA (2020) Social Programmes, http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=34

These welfare score bands do not correspond to specific living standards or income and are therefore arbitrary. The amounts of transfers are too low to have a substantial effect on families' welfare, but according to a UNICEF study, they lift a small number of relatively less-poor beneficiaries above the poverty line²⁷. One major advantage of TSA is that it can be expanded both horizontally and vertically without major changes to the programme design and the Government has taken advantage of this opportunity during the present crisis.

Linkages to services/'cash plus':

The beneficiaries of TSA receive a slightly more comprehensive health insurance package than the rest of population (health insurance is universal in Georgia, but some services require co-payments which are waved off for TSA beneficiaries). In addition, most municipalities also provide additional cash transfers, in-kind benefits (such as free canteens, certain types of medication, student grants, wood for heating, subsidies for utilities) and services (such as extra-curricular activities for children, subsidized transport, services for disabled persons)²⁸. Most municipalities use the TSA score for targeting the beneficiaries. However, categorical targeting is also widely used - the most frequently supported groups are single pensioners, disabled persons, poor families with children and children deprived of parental care. Discretionary targeting based on individual applications is also quite common. It should be noted though that in most municipalities spending on social and health programmes accounts for less than 10% of total budget and many benefits are one-off. The benefits are often poorly designed and in many instances, they simply duplicate the national-level programmes. There are no established information exchange rules between the central and local authorities or between local authorities and there is no integrated MIS or social registry to identify who gets what and what are the overlaps between different programmes in terms of covered beneficiaries.

Module 5: Readiness of programme administration

Administrative processes:

The administrative arrangements of the TSA programme are clearly defined by a ministerial decree and the process is easy to follow.

Registration and enrolment:

To enroll in the programme, applicants must possess an official form of ID (national ID card or national passport) and an official place of residence. Registration and enrolment in the programme includes five steps. The first step involves the applicant families submitting an official request for an assessment to a local branch of SSA. In the second step, SSA is obliged to send a social agent to carry out the assessment within a month. In the third step, the data recorded by the social agent during the visit (which is also confirmed by the applicant's signature) is entered into a purpose-built software which also cross-checks the applicant's records in linked databases (taxpayer's register, public register of private property, etc.). In the fourth step, the software generates the welfare score which determines whether the applicant qualifies for assistance and if so, for how much. In the fifth step, the social agent returns to the applicant household and asks them to sign an agreement to receive social assistance. During the present crisis, this final step has been cancelled and the applicants are enrolled in the programme as soon as their welfare scores are determined. The registration process is rather simple, but there are cases when none of the family members speaks

²⁷ UNICEF (2018) Georgia Welfare Monitoring Survey 2017 Report

²⁸ UNICEF (2017) Description of Social Assistance and Recommendations

Georgian language and therefore cannot answer the social agents' questions. In such cases, the applicants are asked to grant the power of attorney to one of their Georgian-speaking relatives/friends who will answer the social agents' questions and sign the declaration on their behalf. This can delay the process and may even discourage some people who do not speak Georgian from applying for assistance.

Payment delivery:

Similar to other social transfers, TSA is delivered through the banking system. Once the applicant signs the agreement to receive social assistance, SSA forwards the applicant's personal data to Liberty Bank which immediately opens an account (if the applicant does not already have one) and sends the applicant a bank card. In some remote locations Liberty Bank also sends minivans on set dates every month. The beneficiaries can receive their transfers from these minivans using their personal ID cards or passports.

Communication:

Since the programme has already been in place for 15 years, SSA does not carry out systematic information campaigns to increase public awareness about the programme. However, information about the introduction of the child benefit component in 2015 was communicated through mainstream media (TV channels, newspapers, social media). In addition, the eligible households were sent phone messages notifying about the benefit. Similarly, the information about the emergency cash transfers has already been widely disseminated through TV channels, social media and newspapers. In addition, SSA plans to send phone messages to the newly qualified families and also require the social agents to disseminate information.

Complaints, feedback and monitoring:

At the case management level, SSA initiates a second visit to an applicant family for monitoring purposes only if the software-generated welfare score is below 100,000 and the social agent has doubts about the accuracy of the information provided by the family. It should also be noted that if a family scores above 100,000, the social agents do not make an additional visit to inform the family about the outcome of the assessment. Instead, the applicants must inquire about it in the local branch of SSA, or assume that they did not qualify. This may undermine the applicants' trust in the programme.

If they do not agree with the ascribed score, the applicants can contest it by submitting an official form to SSA. In such case, within two weeks they will be visited by a social agent (other than the one who conducted the initial assessment), who will ask them to verify or reject each of the data points recorded during the previous assessment. If the applicant is able to demonstrate that any of the data had been recorded incorrectly, the social agent will fill a new form and ask the applicant to confirm every recording. Next, the data will be re-entered in the software and a new welfare score will be calculated. If this time the score is below the eligibility threshold, the applicant will be granted assistance. However, there are also cases when applicants contest the methodology - in such cases the social agents explain the relative weight of each proxy of household welfare and how this leads to their aggregate welfare score. Families who do not qualify for assistance (i.e. receive a score above 100,000) can only reapply for a new assessment after a year, unless there are any changes in the family composition.

As for the general monitoring and evaluation of the programme outcomes, at present MOH and SSA do not have the analytical capacity to

systematically monitor the key performance indicators of TSA, such as targeting accuracy or effects on poverty incidence and gap. While it is advisable that the donor organisations help the Government counterparts to address this capacity gap over the medium term, in the immediate future UNICEF needs to continue and scale up its engagement in the monitoring and evaluation of the programme effects to ensure that it adequately responds to the needs of the newly vulnerable children and their families.

Institutions – Governments / payment service providers/ linked services/surge capacity:

SSA typically carries out around 5,000-6,000 assessment per week, about half of which are demand-driven and the rest are cross-checks of the existing beneficiaries²⁹. Since the start of the present crisis, a decision has been made to temporarily cancel all cross-checks for several months. In addition to protecting the existing beneficiaries from a possible loss of eligibility, the cancellation of cross-checks enables SSA to spare human resources. Therefore, continuing business as usual does not appear to be a problem. However, if over time the number of new applications increases massively, the programme may experience problems with dealing with the extra burden and at present there are no plans for acquiring additional human resource capacity, for example by hiring and training new social agents or training some other public sector employees as social agents. Further, an increase in the number of maximum cases that a social agent can assess (at present it is set at 170 cases per month) may not be advisable as some social agents, especially those who work in more densely populated areas, are already overburdened and a further increase will most likely negatively affect the quality of assessments they carry out. In this respect, it should also be stressed that social agents' work is a highly demanding one as they are often a subject of distrust and aggression from applicant families, especially the ones who do not qualify for assistance.

Conclusions:

TSA programme has effective administrative procedures in place, which, together with sufficient organizational capacity, enable SSA to timely assess the eligibility of applicants and deliver social transfers to the qualifying families. Anticipating an increase in the number of people that will be applying for social assistance as the crisis effects intensify, the programme administrators have made an important decision to relax some of the administrative procedures and to stop the cross-checks of the existing beneficiaries for at least several months. Given that cross-checks accounted for nearly half of the social agents' total workload, this move will free up a significant portion of the human resource capacity that can be utilised to deal with the new cases. However, there are no additional plans for a rapid recruitment of new social agents or retraining of some other public sector employees in case the extra inflow overwhelms the system. In such case, delays in case management are highly likely.

²⁹ Interview with Dimitri Chkheidze, Deputy Head of IT Department, SSA

Module 6: Readiness of UNICEF CO

Experience of working with national SP / DRM systems :

In the past two decades UNICEF has actively supported the Government in the reform of the social protection system, especially the TSA programme, as the main mechanism for reaching children living in poverty and their families. This support has come in different forms, including the systematic generation of evidence on child poverty through the biennial Welfare Monitoring Survey (a nationally representative survey of Georgian households), developing policy discussion papers and proposals for the introduction of child benefit, provision of technical assistance in the revision of the TSA formula and commissioning a TSA Impact Assessment at the request of the Government. Furthermore, UNICEF is one of the few organisations that has actually delivered an emergency cash transfer in the country. During the 2008 crisis, UNICEF together with WFP and UNHCR designed and delivered cash transfers for the newly displaced population. UNICEF's contribution involved transfers for children to be used for purchasing food (for children under the age of 7) and winter clothes (all children under the age of 18).

In addition to social transfer programmes, UNICEF's contributions have been critical for the development of the social work profession in the country, as well as the deinstitutionalisation of children in state care and the development of alternative forms of care. UNICEF was also actively involved in the preparation of the DRR Strategy and the Action Plan. In addition, as part of DMCT operations, the CO participated in the implementation of minimum and advanced preparedness actions, including contingency planning for national disasters (floods and earthquakes). Within DMCT it also leads Nutrition and WASH Clusters and Child Protection Sub-cluster, co-leads Education Cluster and participates in Gender-Based Violence and Health Clusters. During the present crisis, UNICEF developed a COVID-19 Spread Projection Interactive Tool which is being used by the National Centre for Disease Control (the government agency in charge of the healthcare system's response to the pandemic). UNICEF also provided protective personal equipment to national public healthcare providers.

Coordination and knowledge sharing:

The Social Policy Team members have a substantial knowledge of emergency issues acquired in their previous work assignments within the Government and other UN agencies. The DRM Focal Point used to be a part of the Social Policy Team and consequently has an in-depth knowledge of the Georgian social protection system. The office holds weekly staff meetings attended by the senior management and all national officers. These meetings provide a useful venue for knowledge sharing and discussion of cross-sectoral issues, such as emergency cash transfers.

Leadership on HCT & SP:

The senior management of the CO has an extensive experience of working in various types of emergencies where UNICEF provided direct emergency cash support to the affected population. Accordingly, they are well familiar with and acknowledge the potential of social protection measures in an emergency context. However, a direct provision of an emergency transfer by UNICEF during the present crisis is not being discussed. There are two compelling reasons for this. First, the country has a strong social protection system in place which appears to be capable of dealing with the present crisis, at least in the short term. Second, given the large scope of the present crisis, reaching even only the most vulnerable children with emergency cash transfers would be well beyond the CO's financial capacity.

Expertise to support social transfers in emergencies:

The CO has a solid experience in conducting general and sector-specific needs assessments in emergency contexts, at both senior management and national staff levels. Relevant skills and expertise enables the Social Policy Team to calculate the value of an emergency transfer and to define a targeting strategy. The Health Team also has a valuable experience from the 2008 crisis when they participated in the design of the emergency cash transfer to support the nutritional needs of the newly displaced children under 7. In relation to other tasks essential for the design and delivery of an emergency cash transfer, such as post-distribution monitoring and market monitoring, assessing financial service providers for delivering emergency transfers and safeguarding beneficiary data, the staff experience and relevant skills are more limited.

Conclusions:

UNICEF is one of the very few organisations in Georgia which has an experience of delivering emergency cash transfer in the country. In the context of the present crisis, however, direct provision of an emergency cash transfer does not seem appropriate as the required financial resources would be well beyond the CO's means and the preliminary analysis shows that the Government has the capacity and strong support from its main financial donors to design and deliver several types of emergency social transfers. It should also be taken into account that setting up an emergency cash transfer necessitates performing a number of critical tasks, for some of which the CO lacks the capacity at present. Hence, in the present context a more suitable option is to continue supporting the Government with policy advice with a special focus on monitoring the effects of the newly developed emergency social transfers and proposing options for its future adjustments.

3. Georgian Government's plan for the delivery of emergency social transfers: strengths and weaknesses

3.1 Lens for the analysis

Governments and their partners worldwide have tested various approaches for using social protection as a mechanism during disasters³⁰. Existing social protection programmes and systems can be leveraged in different ways to provide cash assistance to people affected by crises. UNICEF envisage four possible ways in which governments, with (or without) UNICEF's support, can use social protection systems to provide cash assistance to those affected by disaster, presented in Box 1.

³⁰ Documented experiences to date are well captured in Oxford Policy Management (2017), 'Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems Research: Literature review (2nd Edition)', Oxford Policy Management, Oxford, UK.

Box 1: Ways that social protection systems can provide cash assistance in emergencies

- I. Government social protection ministry makes 'design tweaks' to a social transfer programme to ensure it can more effectively meet needs during and following a shock or disaster (UNICEF can have a supporting role).
- II. Government social protection ministry scales up cash assistance they provide in response to a shock by expanding vertically (UNICEF can have a supporting, and a financing, role).
- III. Government social protection ministry scales up cash assistance they provide in response to a shock by expanding horizontally (UNICEF can have a supporting, and a financing, role).
- IV. Government social protection ministry or disaster management ministry or UNICEF/other humanitarian actors make use of, ('piggyback' on) parts of the government's social protection administrative systems, to provide emergency cash assistance in response to a shock.

This is founded on the typology of approaches to 'shock responsive social protection' developed by OPM/DFID (more details are presented in Figure 2 and Box 2). Note that the options presented here are not mutually exclusive and the best potential may well involve implementing a combination of these options. It is also not an exhaustive or prescriptive list of ways that social protection systems can be used, or activities that can take place across the nexus in humanitarian settings.

Figure 1: How existing social protection systems can be used to provide a response to shocks



Vertical expansion: temporarily increasing the benefit value or duration of the benefit provided on an existing social protection programme, for all or some of the existing beneficiaries. This can be done via:

- I. an adjustment of transfer amounts.
- II. the introduction of extraordinary payments or transfers.

Horizontal expansion: temporary inclusion of new, disaster affected, beneficiaries into a social protection programme. This could be done via:

- III. the extension of the programme's geographical coverage to underserved areas.
- IV. an extraordinary enrolment campaign to rapidly enroll those who fit programme criteria and who have been affected.
- V. modification/relaxation of eligibility criteria to allow more people to benefit.

Piggybacking: using a social protection programme's administrative framework or systems to deliver assistance but running the response programme separately. This could be via:

- VI. use of a specific programme's beneficiary list.
- VII. use of data in a national registry or database of households underpinning social protection.
- VIII. use of a particular payment mechanism
- IX. use of social protection staff.

Design Tweaks: adjusting the design of social protection programmes to take into consideration the crises a country typically faces, to ensure they are better able to maintain regular service in a shock and can best meet needs of those affected by shocks. This could be done through:

- X. collection and incorporation of new variables on disaster vulnerability within routine registration (e.g. social registries) and targeting algorithms.
- XI. Adoption of principles of 'disaster and climate smart targeting'
- XII. Modification of payment processes to coincide with peak times of need / avoid times when delivery will be disrupted.
- XIII. Embedding business continuity principles into SOPs.

Source: OPM (2018), UNICEF (2019)³¹

Evidence from other contexts highlights that even where such options are feasible and appropriate, more traditional programming approaches (i.e. standalone humanitarian response) are still needed - in the short term whilst the capacity of national systems is further developed, and beyond, since national social transfer programmes will always have gaps in coverage. In such programmes there may be opportunities to design and implement disaster response in a way that aligns with, strengthens or supports the development of emerging social protection programmes or systems, to facilitate social protection approaches in crises in future.

³¹ Programme Guidance Strengthening Shock Responsive Social Protection Systems, UNICEF 2019

TABLE 2: Social protection approaches during crises: opportunities and challenges

| OPTION | OPPORTUNITIES | CHALLENGES |
|--|--|---|
| Design tweaks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures continuity of routine social protection following a shock – building resilience and a prerequisite for any scaling up of social protection post-disaster. • Improves design to better address vulnerability (both idiosyncratic and due to shocks) (e.g. targeting criteria and method; transfer value; payment frequency/ schedule). • Can focus investment strategy (expansion of coverage; capacities) on areas affected by shocks. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of political will to make changes. • Need to satisfy multiple development agendas. • Adjustment could divert the programme from its core objective. |
| Vertical expansion (by Government or UNICEF) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick access to a pre-defined caseload. • Builds on existing administrative systems. • Clear lines of coordination - operations stay within the parameters of the existing programme | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some but not complete overlap between beneficiaries and those affected by disasters. • Political economy and institutional coordination factors can also present real barriers to effective execution. |
| Horizontal expansion (by Government or UNICEF) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverages existing administrative systems rather than setting up parallel systems. • Reaches a broader spectrum of the disaster affected – fills some of the gaps in vertical expansion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties in rapidly targeting a new caseload – identification and communication • Requires establishing criteria for temporary inclusion. • Could risk reducing the clarity of (and therefore the legitimacy of) the underlying programme. • For the above reasons, poss. lack of political support. |
| Piggybacking (by Government or UNICEF) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverages existing systems to reach caseloads on a temporary basis quickly and efficiently, whilst avoiding the difficulties of horizontal expansion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need strong operating systems for targeting and delivery • Success depends on quality of data in social registry • Political economy factors – for example, will data/social registries be shared? • Requires strong coordination between institutions |

3.2 Analysis of the planned emergency social transfers

As discussed in section 2, the Government of Georgia has announced several types of temporary cash transfers to mitigate the adverse social effects of the COVID-19 crisis. In this subsection we describe each of these transfers, and assess their potential advantages and limitations using the theoretical lens outlined in the previous subsection and taking into account the specificities of the national context, as well as the parameters of the planned transfers.

Increase in the coverage of TSA programme

70,000 families (containing approximately 190,000 persons) who are already registered in the database and have a welfare score between 65,001 and 100,000 (and therefore previously did not qualify for family cash assistance) will automatically be entitled to a transfer during 6 months, without any additional assessment of their welfare. Families who apply for TSA during the crisis period and receive a welfare score in the same band will also be eligible similar to those who have applied before the crisis. However, the newly registered families will only get the benefit for the remaining period (before the benefit is terminated) and not for full 6 months. The level of benefit will be 70 GEL (22 USD) a month for a single-member household, 90 GEL (28 USD) a month for a two-member household, and 35 GEL (11 USD) per member per month if there are three or more members in the household. The estimated budget for this transfer is 45 million GEL (14 million USD). This transfer has two major advantages. First, the target group is poorer than the rest of population. Second, its implementation will not require additional administrative resources. The main limitation concerns the design – the level of the transfer will be higher than for some of the existing beneficiaries, who, according to the TSA formula, are poorer. For example, a single-member family with a score of 63,000 at present receives 30 GEL (9 USD) a month, which is less than half of what a single-member family with a score of 95,000 will receive. Similarly, a two-member family with a score of 95,000 will receive 90 GEL (28 USD) a month, while a two-member family with a score of 59,000 will get only 80 GEL (25 USD) a month. These discrepancies may prompt the existing beneficiaries to question the fairness of the TSA programme.

Extra child benefit for TSA beneficiary families with three or more children

At present, all families registered in the database with a score less than 100,001 receive 50 GEL (15 USD) a month per child. In some municipalities this 50 GEL is split into 20 GEL cash and 30 GEL child food voucher. During the coming 6 months, 21,000 families (containing approximately 130,000 persons) with a score less than 100,001 who have three or more children will get an additional 100 GEL (31 USD) per month irrespective of the number of children they have. The estimated budget of this transfer is 13 million GEL (4 million USD). Given that UNICEF studies identify families with three or more children (especially those with a score less than 100,001) as a group with one of the highest risks of poverty, this transfer is very well targeted. However, it would be preferable to increase the level of transfer in line with the number of children in the family, as well as to cover also those families registered in the TSA database with a score above 100,000. Implementation of this transfer will not require additional administrative resources.

Top-up of social package transfers for persons with severe disability and disabled children

At present, there are approximately 40,000 persons with severe disability and children with disabilities who receive social package in the amount of 220 GEL (68 USD) a month. For the next 6 months they will receive an additional 100 GEL (31 USD) a month³². The estimated budget for this transfer is 25 million GEL (7.8 million USD). The implementation of this top-up of an existing transfer will also not require additional administrative resources. In addition to supporting a group that has higher levels of need than the rest of population, this transfer can also be viewed as a partial compensation for services for disabled that the Government was not able to deliver for several weeks due to the lockdown.

Unemployment assistance for people previously in formal employment

Prior to the crisis, Georgia did not have an unemployment benefit scheme. Anticipating a large increase in redundancies as a result of the crisis, the Government decided to set up a temporary transfer for people who lose formal jobs during the crisis. The beneficiaries will be selected through the national tax register which contains data on all individuals paying the income tax. This transfer will automatically be transferred to the accounts of the newly unemployed from which they were paying the income tax before. The Government estimates that up to 350,000 people may become eligible for this transfer. This seems very high as the total number of people in formal employment is 1,039,600 in Georgia³³. The level of transfer is 200 GEL a month (62 USD) per person and the benefit will operate for 6 months. The estimated budget of the transfer is 460 million GEL (143 million USD). The administration of the transfer is expected to be relatively easy as the data on potential beneficiaries already exists and can be updated on a monthly basis. Further, the benefit can be withdrawn immediately once a beneficiary finds a new formal job and thus re-appears in the tax registry. On the downside, most of the people who were formally employed prior to the crisis are not the most vulnerable and they are also more likely to have assets and savings they can draw on. While providing higher benefits to those who have been contributing to the state budget by paying taxes can be justified by reciprocity principle, in practice it also implies that people with higher needs will receive less support. For example, if there are two people in a family and both lose formal employment, they will receive 2,400 GEL over the course of 6 months, whereas a family of the same size but with none of the members formally employed previously (and therefore much more vulnerable) will only get 540 GEL in 6 months if they qualify for the extended TSA (i.e. receive a welfare score between 65,001 and 100,001).

Assistance for self-employed

In Georgia, self-employment is very widespread, accounting for 45% of total employment and 36% of non-agricultural employment³⁴. The Government decided to provide support to the self-employed (engaged in non-agricultural sectors as farmers will get separate agricultural subsidies based on the hectares of land they own) with a one-off transfer in the amount of 300 GEL (93 USD). The expected number of beneficiaries has not been specified, but the estimated budget of the transfer is 75 million GEL (23 million USD), which will allow to cover 250,000 self-employed. However, the implementation of the transfer is going to be far more difficult than the other transfers, as acknowledged

³² Programme SSA (2020) Statistics, http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=610

³³ Geostat (2020) Employment and Unemployment, <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/38/dasakmeba-da-umushevroba>

³⁴ Geostat (2020) Employment and Unemployment, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/38/employment-and-unemployment>

by the Prime-Minister. The main problem is that the vast majority of the self-employed are not registered in any of the public databases since their employment is informal. To address this problem, the Government has announced that it will accept any proof of income from self-employment (e.g. receipts for provided services or bank statements showing fees for products and services) and letters from registered businesses confirming that the person did some sort of work for them. However, the Government also acknowledges that the most vulnerable self-employed people, such as street vendors, will not be able to provide these documents and hence will not receive the transfer. Another challenge is that to receive the transfer, the self-employed people have to register on the website of MOH, and some of the self-employed, especially the most vulnerable ones, do not have the knowledge of how to use computers. Further, the amount of the one-off transfer is too low to make up for the loss of income for the target group.

Conclusions:

Overall, it is commendable that in response to the crisis the Government has designed and will shortly launch several large-scale transfers. However, as in case of any ad-hoc measures, these transfers have certain limitations. At this stage it is questionable whether any amendments can be made to the emergency transfers during the 6 months they are planned to operate. However, as the effects of the crisis are most likely to be felt over a much longer period, UNICEF needs to take account of these challenges in its systematic advocacy efforts for improving the welfare of children and families living in poverty in Georgia. The first issue concerns the balance between the unemployment assistance for people previously in formal employment and the other transfers. So far, the Government has prioritised the former, as it accounts for 75% of the total budget that is allocated for emergency social transfers. However, most beneficiaries of unemployment assistance are less vulnerable than the beneficiaries of TSA, the disabled people or the self-employed. Therefore, if the emergency transfers are extended after 6 months, it might be advisable to allocate more financial resources towards the transfers which are better targeted at the poor. Second, it is very likely that a large proportion (if not the majority) of the self-employed will not receive any support at all as they will not be able to prove their informal employment. The most optimal way of addressing this problem is to encourage the self-employed people to apply for TSA. However, since they presumably had higher incomes (and by extension, better proxies of welfare) than most TSA beneficiaries prior to the crisis, it is likely that they will not qualify for the assistance, unless relevant amendments are made in the TSA formula ("design tweaks"). Third, if the number of people applying for TSA (the self-employed, as well as other people affected by the crisis) increases significantly, there are possibilities that the administrative capacities of the programme will be strained. In this respect, the Government has made an important decision to temporarily cancel systematic cross-checks which will release a part of SSA's human resources to deal with the increased inflow. However, if over time a larger caseload of applicants and beneficiaries becomes a new normal, there will be a need for considering the recruitment and training of new social agents, as well as other administrative staff for SSA. Fourth, there is a need to adjust the TSA benefit levels so that people with lower welfare scores do not get lower amount of transfers than the newly qualified people with much higher welfare scores.

TABLE 3. Summary of advantages and limitations of planned emergency cash transfers in Georgia

| PROGRAMME | SHORT DESCRIPTION | STRATEGY | ESTIMATED COVERAGE AND BUDGET | ADVANTAGES | LIMITATIONS |
|--|---|----------------------|--|--|---|
| Expansion of TSA | Families who applied for social assistance before the crisis and did not qualify as their welfare score was between 65,001 and 100,000, will automatically be entitled to cash assistance in the amount of 70 GEL for a one-member family, 90 GEL for a two-member family and 35 GEL per member if there are three or more members in the family. The transfer will be provided for 6 months. | Horizontal expansion | 70,000 families with 190,000 individuals, 45 million GEL | Automatic enrolment saves time and human resources of SSA; The target group is poorer than the rest of population | Transfers for some types of families of new beneficiaries are higher than for the existing ones, who, according to the programme are poorer. |
| Child benefit top-up for families with three or more children | Each family with three or more children with a welfare score less than 100,001 will receive 100 GEL a month for 6 months on top of the children benefit they are receiving now. | Vertical expansion | 21,000 families with 130,000 individuals; 13 million GEL | The target group has one of the highest risks of poverty among all socioeconomic groups; administratively, the top-up is easy to implement. | The level of transfer does not increase in line with the number of children; Families with three or more children with a score above 100,000 are also more likely to be poor than an average family |
| Increase of social package for severely disabled persons and disabled children | Persons with severe disabilities and disabled children will receive 100 GEL a month for 6 months on top of the social package transfer they are receiving now | Vertical expansion | 40,000 individuals; 25 million GEL | The target groups have higher risk of poverty than the rest of population; administratively, the top-up is easy to implement. | |
| Unemployment assistance for laid-off formal workers | The persons who lose formal employment will receive 200 GEL a month during 6 months The self-employed people will receive a one-off transfer in the amount of 300 GEL | Piggybacking | Up to 350,000 individuals, 460 million GEL | Tax register data allows for fast and accurate identification of the target group Assistance can be withdrawn if a beneficiary becomes employed again | The target group is not poorer than the rest of population The transfer represents only 18% of average wage |
| Assistance for self-employed people | | Parallel system | 250,000 individuals, 75 million | Self-employed are poorer than the rest of population | The most vulnerable self-employed may not be able to prove their status Unlike other transfers this benefit is one-off and accordingly, the amount is low |

4. Recommended Actions

Based on the assessment of the general context of the country, the pros and the cons of the planned emergency social transfers and the CO's capacity, it is recommended to support the Government in its anti-crisis measures by carrying out a number of concrete tasks in the coming months.

First, similar to other contexts, there is an urgent need to evaluate the immediate social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify the vulnerable groups that are hit the hardest. The National Statistics Office (Geostat) conducts two quarterly surveys that are relevant in this respect – the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS). These surveys can provide some useful evidence, for example regarding the changes in poverty and unemployment incidence by main socio-economic groups. However, these data will need to be complemented by an additional nationally representative survey with a questionnaire tailored to the specificities of the present crisis. Such a survey would also enable to measure the effects of the newly developed emergency social transfers, which, in turn, could help to determine the changes to be made in the programme design. With its solid experience and expertise in designing and commissioning nation-wide surveys in Georgia, UNICEF is probably the best placed donor organization to initiate and commission such a survey. To ensure that the survey results lead to fruitful policy discussions, it is advisable to involve the Government counterparts in every stage of the study, from developing of the questionnaire to producing an analytical report and/or a policy discussion paper.

Second, the analysis has shown that while during large-scale emergencies TSA needs to be complemented by other social transfers to cover a larger proportion of affected population, in the longer term, it is the most effective mechanism for providing systematic assistance to the families affected by emergencies. It is also very likely that after 6 months the beneficiaries of other new social transfers, especially the adversely affected self-employed, will be required to apply for TSA to receive cash assistance. In addition to increasing funding, two preconditions are critical for the TSA programme to effectively address the needs of the newly vulnerable groups. On the one hand, the targeting formula needs to be adjusted to take the account of the welfare conditions of the newly vulnerable groups which are likely to differ from those of the traditional clientele. At present, the World Bank is carrying out an exercise which is expected to guide the revision of the TSA formula. To ensure that the new formula continues to adequately reflect the needs of vulnerable children, the CO needs to follow up on the revision process and ensure that it is part of relevant policy discussions with the World Bank and the Government counterparts. On the other hand, there are important questions about the SSA's capacity to deal with a substantially larger workload without recruiting additional personnel. Hence, it is recommended that the CO proposes the Government counterparts to commission a technical assessment to model the human resource capacity (and accordingly, additional financial resources) SSA will need to continue business-as-usual under different scenarios (e.g. 20 to 50% increase in the number of monthly applications). The results of the assessment, in turn, would be used to develop a plan for SSA to acquire additional capacities.

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