

MONGOLIA

BUILDING SHOCK RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

© UNICEF Mongolia/2018/Pasquall

Key Facts and Data

Table 1. Timeline

First case of COVID-19	Outbreak declaration and measures	Date and type of social protection responses	Days to implement SP since first case of COVID-19
10 March	11 November 2020 Partial lockdown (Ulaanbaatar)	April - December 2020 Vertical expansion	-38

Even before the first registered cases, the Government of Mongolia implemented a robust package of measures to stimulate the economy and provide support to livelihoods amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. It was not until 11 November 2020 the State Emergency Committee and Ministry of Health announced the first verified case of community transmission in Mongolia. A first set of measures operated between April and September 2020 and was implemented through two packages – the first announced at the end of March and the other at the beginning of May. As part of the latter, Government’s response was threefold.

The flagship Child Money Programme (CMP) was vertically expanded (topped up) for nine months (the pre-COVID-19 benefit levels rose from MNT 20,000 to MNT 100,000 per month), reaching 1.2 million children from over 500,000 households. The CMP will be topped up until the end of 2020. In doing so, the Government seems to have learned from the most recent experience in tackling the lasting effects of

Dzud – harsh winters – on children’s human capital development. The approved 2021 national budget proposes to continue the CMP top-up until July 2021 in order to help the families overcome the economic difficulties of COVID-19.

Monthly food stamps were doubled for five months from 1 May to 1 October 2020 for all household members. Thereafter, the adult members of eligible households will receive the doubled benefit, while children will receive the usual amount until the end of the year.

Beneficiaries of social welfare pensions (persons with disabilities without social insurance, senior citizens who are not entitled to pension benefits from social insurance, orphaned or half-orphaned children and single parents) will receive an additional MNT 100,000 for eight months (May to December), totalling their monthly allowance to MNT 288,000. This measure will also continue until July 2021.

Table 2. Evidence-base generated by UNICEF

Evidence, Data and Research	Area of Expertise
Rapid social impact assessment on social and protection services for children and families during school closure due to prevention from COVID-19	Socioeconomic research

Table 3. UNICEF’s programmatic support

Technical support	Coverage Targets	Area of Expertise	Partners
Post-distribution monitoring: Rapid assessment of COVID responsive vertical expansion of CMP and FSP	1.2 million children from over 500,000 households 242,000 people benefit from FSP	Monitoring and Evaluation	Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Asian Development Bank

UNICEF Technical Support

Very early in the COVID-19 outbreak, between March and July, UNICEF supported a ‘rapid social impact assessment on social and protection services for children and families during school closure due to prevention from COVID-19’.

In response to a specific request from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection to assess the role of the increased transfers for CMP and food stamps, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and UNICEF agreed to conduct two complementary studies:

- ADB provided technical support for an [indirect assessment](#) of the theoretical impact of the social protection policies implemented by the Government of Mongolia on poverty and inequality. The simulation used 2018 Household Socio-Economic Survey (HSES) data and assumed that policies were implemented according to design, and a counterfactual was developed of what could happen in the absence of government intervention.
- UNICEF supported a survey of beneficiaries of Government support to understand how well the schemes have been implemented, how benefits were used as well as the satisfaction of beneficiaries.

The two studies are complementary and provide comprehensive insight into the effectiveness of social protection policies implemented by the Government of Mongolia. They also provide guidance for further adjustments to the policies for the transition from crisis to recovery.

Critical Success/Challenging Factors

Prior to the onset of the global pandemic in 2019, UNICEF conducted a feasibility assessment of shock-responsive social protection measures for children. The assessment concluded that the existing governments’ mechanism for child benefit is the most suitable system to reach the children in most effective way during shocks, as 96.6 per cent of all children are registered in the system with operational bank accounts and even the smallest administrative unit has access to commercial banks.

Evidences and lessons from the [UNICEF’s pilot](#) of the shock responsive cash transfers conducted in 2019-2020 winter served as basis for the immediate use by the Government for the COVID response to support the household livelihoods. Thus, around 850 billion MNT (300 million USD approx.) leveraged for the child money top-up in 2020, reaching out more than two-third of the households.

UNICEF continued its policy advocacy to maintain the universality and the size of child benefit in 2021, which contributed in state budget allocation of 576 billion MNT required to maintain the current top-up of the child benefit in the first half of 2021 to help households with children in avoiding negative coping strategies caused by the pandemic.

The ADB assessment of social protection measures concludes that the CMP top-up benefits the most disadvantaged more than any other policy interventions that the Government has undertaken to stimulate the economy, including interventions with comparable costs to CMP.

Some international finance institutions, politicians and well-known economists criticize the universal CMP as a burden on the economy and recommend limiting benefits to the most disadvantaged children. Therefore, the sustainability of CMP is a critical concern of UNICEF.

There is a great interest among development partners to support the Government in strengthening the shock-responsiveness of existing social protection programs.

Way Forward

UNICEF Mongolia's priority is to enhance its efforts towards generation of solid evidence of CMP impact on poverty and inequality, as well other impact of universal CMP on children's well-being and development and policy advocacy. In this regard, UNICEF Mongolia is supporting robust monitoring and evaluation and documentation of the top-ups implemented in 2020 in response to COVID-19, both to contribute to learning and to demonstrate to potential new donors how system-readiness facilitates the provision of additional financial support during a crisis.

UNICEF aims to support the development of a long-term strategy for shock-responsive social protection in Mongolia that centres on affordability, flexibility to respond appropriately to different types of shocks/crises (e.g., with different targeting strategies) and appropriate institutional coordination mechanisms, and which establishes robust and transparent mechanisms for coordination or complementarity with non-governmental actors, including international NGOs, humanitarian agencies/donors, etc.

This work has been possible thanks to all our partners and donors:



unicef 
for every child