

PHILIPPINES

EXPANDING SOCIAL PROTECTION COVERAGE IN TIMES OF COVID-19

© UNICEF Philippines/2019/Formatoverde.pt

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
30 January	25 March – Republic Act 11469	25 March / April, May to Nov Vertical and Horizontal expansion	55

To mitigate the socioeconomic impact of pandemic-related policy measures, the Government passed in 25 March 2020 the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act, No. 11469, which included the provision and implementation of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP), worth PHP 200 billion, through various national line agencies. SAP provides cash transfers to 18 million low-income families nationwide ranging from PHP 5,000 – PHP 8,000 per family based on prevailing regional wages. It also provides wage subsidies to displaced low-wage earners in the formal sector. The

intended beneficiaries of the SAP are poor families with people with disabilities, older people, pregnant mothers, solo parents, displaced informal workers and other vulnerable groups. Qualified beneficiaries, who also include the existing 4Ps households, received the cash transfers for April and May 2020. By the end of May, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) had already provided cash transfers to 17,449,500 families. The government extended the payout up to November for the second tranche.

Table 2. Evidence-base generated by UNICEF

Evidence, Data and Research	Results	Area of Expertise	Partners
Child Poverty Effects and Efficacy of Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 (Ongoing activity)	Analysis of the efficacy of the social protection responses, in particular the SAP program for 18 million households.	Socioeconomic research; Monitoring and Evaluation	Department of Social Welfare and Development
Policy brief: “Making Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) universal and inclusive among children of beneficiary households”	Expansion to cover an additional 1,023,874 children to the current 8.6 million (4.2 million poor households)	Policy dialogue for inclusive social protection	Department of Social Welfare and Development

Table 3. UNICEF’s programmatic support

Technical Support	Coverage Targets	Area of Expertise	Partners
Operationalization of emergency cash transfer (ECT) in BARMM	1,000 poor households with pregnant/lactating mothers and/or children 0–2 years old	Horizontal expansion and delivery of social protection	BARMM – Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD), FAO, WFP
Formulation of Methodology for the Tagging of Government Expenditures on Social Protection (SP) Programs and conduct of Expenditure Analysis of Social Protection in the Philippines		Public Finance Management; Sustainable financing of social protection systems	National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), Department of Budget and Management

UNICEF Technical Support

In implementing the SAP, DSWD aimed to work with development partners on areas such as identifying people who should have been included as beneficiaries but were left out, developing interventions per type of beneficiary, expediting the delivery of the emergency subsidy, and developing a validation system and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including digitization of social protection payments. Noting ongoing interventions from other development partners in social protection and to avoid duplication, UNICEF contributed to the M&E component of the SAP.

To that end, UNICEF commissioned two researches: a rapid assessment of the social and economic impact on households with children of non-pharmaceutical

intervention measures for COVID-19; and an assessment on the child poverty effects and efficacy of social protection responses to COVID-19. The socioeconomic impact assessment captured information on households’ access to social protection interventions at the height of the most restrictive quarantine period. The child poverty effects assessment, on one hand, has two components:

- Ex-ante microsimulations to model the poverty effects of COVID-19 on households and children using worst case and best case scenarios.
- Ex-post assessment of the efficacy of social protection responses intended to mitigate the poverty effects of COVID-19.

As part of the COVID-19 response, together with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and World Food Program (WFP), UNICEF augmented the Government's response by operationalizing an emergency cash transfer to 1,000 poor households with pregnant/lactating mothers and/or children 0–2 years old in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), who had been excluded from both SAP and the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps):

- UNICEF reprogrammed 20 per cent of the SDG Fund (USD 144,600), repurposed for the emergency cash transfer – USD 100,000 for emergency cash transfers; USD 34,600 for information and communications technology and USD 10,000 for M&E.
- Following the SAP delivery strategy, payments were also manually distributed by social workers from the Ministry of Social Services and Development in May, using partner government systems.
- UNICEF used SCOPE, the beneficiary database management platform of the World Food Programme to allow deduplication of beneficiaries, tracking and monitoring. Social workers from the Ministry used this same platform to deliver the first round of SAP payments to beneficiaries of the 4Ps.

UNICEF convened a series of webinars and round-table discussions on the implications of COVID-19 and social protection, and the implementation of SAP. It also convened the Sub-Working Group on Social Protection under the United Nations Thematic Working Group on Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 in the early months.

Critical Success/Challenging Factors

A major challenge in effective implementation of SAP was the absence of an updated and objective poverty registry and there is no national ID. Except for the 4Ps and social pension, DSWD relegated beneficiary targeting to local government units which encountered several issues leading to delays in SAP distribution. The DSWD launched the ReliefAgad, a digital platform for registering beneficiaries for the second tranche of SAP payments. DSWD indicated they are moving ahead with the full digitization of social protection payments in response to COVID-19 to facilitate safe and efficient cash transfers.

The digitization of payments for the second tranche of SAP payments is nonetheless limited only to urban centres and areas where there is Internet connectivity. It excludes the geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas where, arguably, some of the poorest also reside. Manual payments will still be the mode of cash transfers for these areas. DSWD continues to receive complaints of exclusion from SAP payments for other equally affected vulnerable groups.

Initial results of the ECT implementation in BARMM point to higher uptake of essential health services for children 0–2 years old, since pregnant/lactating mothers had to go to village health centres to have their children registered. UNICEF was able to demonstrate a simpler process of targeting: families with 0-2 year old children and excluded from 4Ps and SAP.

Way Forward

In light of financing from other development partners for social protection for COVID-19, UNICEF will continue to work on the regular programme of policy and operational support to the 4Ps – making it nutrition-sensitive, more inclusive (not only on lifting the three child limit but also looking at children with disability issues in the programme), refinement of the 4Ps case management system and case referral pathways. The World Bank and ADB have recently approved combined loans of USD 1 billion to support cash transfers in 4Ps, including digitization of payments as part of their COVID-19 response.

Under the Joint SDG Fund for Social Protection, UNICEF will continue to support laying the foundations for shock responsive social protection in BARMM. The following activities will soon commence:

- A review of the poverty registry and various household lists and assessment forms will soon commence to integrate vulnerability indicators.
- An operations manual and financial guidelines will be developed for the implementation of various small cash transfers schemes in BARMM.
- Depending on funding approvals from other donors there is potential to implement subsequent emergency cash transfers in BARMM for COVID-19.

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



unicef 
for every child