

# TIMOR-LESTE

## ADDING TO THE GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL PROTECTION RESPONSE FOR A 'CASH PLUS' SCHEME

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### 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
21 March	28 March – State of emergency	20 April / August Horizontal expansion	30

As of November, Timor-Leste had recorded just 30 cases of COVID-19 and no community transmission and no deaths. Nevertheless, the economic consequences of the pandemic have been severe and far-reaching. On 2 April, parliament approved USD 250 million withdrawal from the Petroleum Fund for general spending as well as stimulus package for the economy. The package, which included cash transfers to manage economic and financial risks from the COVID-19, was finally approved on 20 April.

As part of the package, the Government enacted the first near-universal cash transfer in the country's young history. At a cost of over USD 60 million, the Uma Kain payment took the form of a one-off cash transfer of USD 200 – equal to USD100 per month for the first two months of the state of emergency in April

and May – to all households with a monthly income of less than USD 500 in all of the 452 villages in the country. The pay-outs finally took place during the month of June (and July in Oecusse). The experience with COVID-19 has significantly increased government buy-in for universal social protection.

A new Economic Recovery Plan was approved by the Council of Ministers on 12 August and its implementation is forthcoming. It includes a wide array of measures to boost the economic recovery of the country in the two years following the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan includes a food basket voucher programme, extraordinary support measures for informal workers, and a full section dedicated to social protection, with the approval of the National Social Protection Strategy at the forefront.

**Table 2. UNICEF's programmatic support**

Technical Support	Coverage targets	Area of Expertise	Population covered	Partners
Guidance on the health and safety aspect of the emergency cash distribution, inclusion of information to families, and provision of personal protective equipment.	318,257 households to be reached through Cash Plus	Cash Plus; Nutrition-sensitive social protection	298,816 households received payouts	WHO, ILO

### UNICEF Technical Support

Funded by the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Funds, the UN country team – including UNICEF – provided technical and financial support for the implementation of the emergency cash transfer scheme. Led by the ILO, the United Nations, along with other development partners, provided technical support to the Government in designing the most effective, efficient and safe implementation plan for the scheme. UNICEF also used its Global Thematic Humanitarian Fund (softly earmarked pooled funds, whose flexibility is key to responding quickly to evolving needs) to support the distribution of information to families along with the cash as well as the provision of personal protective equipment for the implementation team.

UNICEF provided guidance, together with the World Health Organization, on the health and safety aspect of the cash distribution. UNICEF also successfully advocated for the inclusion of information to families, contributing to the implementation of the first cash plus scheme in Timor-Leste:

- UNICEF provided information on infant and young child feeding, handwashing, COVID-19 prevention key messages, and social distancing. More than 300,000 brochures were distributed along with the cash.

- UNICEF conducted extensive end-user monitoring on the cash plus aspect, to better understand families' needs and preferences on receiving information.
- UNICEF and the Timor-Leste Commission for the Rights of the Child conducted an online survey for adolescents and youth on their COVID-19 experience. Respondents indicated that in their family, the cash was mostly spent on food, which confirms findings from other research. Half of them felt they had an influence on how the cash was used.
- UNICEF provided personal protective equipment (masks and hand sanitizer) for the post-complaint mechanism payments.

### Critical Success/Challenging Factors

When advocating for a cash plus scheme, UNICEF originally envisioned the provision of a service, i.e., distributing tapes to measure mid-upper arm circumference for malnutrition screening. However this initial idea was not possible, due to logistic constraints to print the accompanying screening instructions as there was limited capacity for printing large numbers in-country and borders were closed.

UNICEF's relationship with the Ministry of Health was key to the cash plus aspect being accepted. It was critical to advocate through different stakeholders.

The use of flexible funding (such as thematic funding or regular resources) was and is key, as it enables UNICEF to respond to unexpected, last-minute Government requests and to pursue opportunities as they arise.

## Way Forward

The COVID-19 cash transfer has helped build the case in Timor-Leste for both universal social protection and for cash plus interventions. UNICEF will continue to look for opportunities to keep this interest alive and push these further, as the Government may expand its cash transfer scheme to vulnerable families so that it covers younger children. The Government is generally expected to give a greater focus to social protection once it adopts the National Social Protection Strategy.

The COVID-19 cash transfer has given the opportunity to UNICEF to demonstrate its support to the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion, for instance with

express procurement of personal protective equipment for front-line personnel making the post-complaint mechanism payments to beneficiaries. UNICEF will also continue to work closely with other UN agencies, particularly the ILO, to identify opportunities for both advocacy and direct support.

The COVID-19 cash transfer, and in particular the difficulty that the Government has had with establishing the list of cash transfer beneficiaries, has helped build momentum for the unique identifier initiative, supported by UNICEF and UNDP. The Government is exploring how to provide citizens with a unique identifier, which should, in turn, facilitate planning and reduce fraud, particularly for social benefits. UNICEF will continue to be fully engaged in supporting this initiative, including through fundraising and facilitating a societal debate on the benefits and needed safeguards to make it a success.