

NEWSLETTER #2

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SOCIAL PROTECTION RESPONSES TO COVID-19

As of April 23, 2020, a total of 151 countries have planned, introduced or adapted 684 social protection measures in response to COVID-19.

Belarus has a rather generous social protection system. Families with children are eligible for governmental benefits that include 11 benefits divided into three main groups: maternity benefits, family benefits, and temporary sick-leave benefits paid to parents taking care of a sick child.

While 3.6% of households were poor on average, among households with children the share was 7.3%, in case of households with two and more children – 12.2%. According to the World Bank recent estimates, the economy of Belarus is expected to contract by 4% in 2020 as the COVID-19 global economic slowdown reduces demand for Belarus's exports of commodities and investment goods to the European Union, Russia, and other countries. It remains the lowest GDP growth forecast in the ECA region. Unstable economic prospects may compromise expenditure in social protection, education and health.

According to MICS6 data, 63.3% of children live in households that received social transfers or benefits in the last 3 months. In the poorest two quantiles of households 69% of children received social transfers or benefits in the last 3 months.

As of April 27, 2020, additional direct social support measures for families with children had been introduced in Belarus because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Decree 143 allows paying temporary incapacity benefits to persons, who take care of kids 10 years old and below, who go to kindergartens or schools, if the kid is a first-tier or second-tier contact of a coronavirus patient. The Decree also contains several measures to support national economy in the area of taxation, control and oversight of operation of commercial entities, labour relations and social security.

The government had previously taken several measures to response to COVID-19: additional payments to doctors, the possibility of delivering food and medicine to senior citizens, state regulation of prices for medical masks and antiseptics, the possibility of receiving a pension and payment of communal services at home.

It is also planned to introduce the following measures:

- Supplements to the minimum wage for parents in part-time employment
- Raising to minimum subsistence budget unemployment benefits
- Simplified access and extension of monthly social benefits within targeted social assistance (TSA)
- Public utilities benefits

Recent study, employs the Commitment to Equity for Children approach, evaluated that introduction of categorical benefits to multiple child families and single parent families and the expansion of TSA availability to households with children will cost around 0.27% of GDP and allow decreasing overall poverty by 2.8 p.p.

 UNICEF TOGETHER WITH THE WORLD BANK
 LAUNCHED ONLINE SURVEY ON THE IMPACT OF
 COVID-19 ON FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

UNICEF together with the World Bank launched online survey on the impact of COVID-19 on families with children, which will help to obtain real-time data in the following areas:

- the effect of isolation on the emotional status of the family members;
- the need for and the difficulties of transition to emergency remote (distance) learning;
- child safety on the Internet;
- attitude to sport and lifestyle;
- health care needs. Knowledge, attitudes and practices of COVID-19 prevention measures;
- personal problems associated with the crisis.

An online survey will include six waves and use a panel survey method. UNICEF will publicly provide weekly reports with key findings.

To mitigate longer-term socio-economic impact the findings will be used to guide programmatic response and inform assessment of COVID socio-economic impact and policy simulations to be done with the World Bank.

Sources: "Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A Real-Time Review of Country Measures" (Living paper, version 6), "Fighting COVID-19" (World Bank, 2020), "Commitment To Equity For Children: Redistributive Effects And Efficiency Of Social Assistance To Households With Children In Belarus" (Bornukova K., Cuesta J., Shymanovich G., UNICEF Belarus, 2020).