

# Kuwait: Design, implementation and child-sensitivity of social protection responses to COVID-19<sup>1</sup>

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**This One Pager is part of a series** based on the report ‘Social protection responses to COVID-19 in MENA: Design, implementation and child-sensitivity’, developed in partnership by the IPC-IG and UNICEF MENARO (Bilo, Dytz, and Sato 2022). The study reviewed the design and implementation features of the social assistance measures implemented in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region up to the end of March 2021, and the extent to which they took children’s needs and vulnerabilities into account.

COVID-19 and the significant drop in oil prices in 2020 have severely affected Kuwait’s economy, with its gross domestic product (GDP) contracting by as much as 13.4 per cent in the second quarter of 2020 (Bilo, Dytz, and Sato 2022). Although data on poverty in Kuwait are scarce, the aforementioned economic indicators indicate that living conditions for Kuwaiti families and children have deteriorated. *Bidoon* residents<sup>2</sup> are particularly affected, as they face severe restrictions in accessing documentation, employment, health care, education and state benefits enjoyed by Kuwaiti citizens. Migrant workers are also among the most vulnerable groups, representing two thirds of Kuwait’s population (Human Rights Watch 2021).

Up to the end of March 2021, the IPC-IG mapping of social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South<sup>3</sup> identified nine government-provided responses in Kuwait to contain the socio-economic effects of the pandemic: five labour market, three social assistance and one social insurance interventions.

One of the social assistance responses consisted of a vertical expansion of the benefits provided by the Zakat Fund. The existing beneficiaries of the monthly cash assistance programme received a top-up in the first phase, and the beneficiaries of the Zakat Fund’s quarterly cash assistance received a top-up in the second and third phases. To receive the aid, authorities called on families that did not have accounts with local banks to open one and then register through the Zakat House website. Payments for the first three phases were provided at the Zakat House offices, while payments for the last phase were made directly to bank accounts, since the country was in full lockdown. The programme benefited a total of 22,882 households.

In addition, the Ministry of Social Affairs, in partnership with charitable organisations, provided *ad hoc* emergency cash and in-kind assistance to migrant workers in the private sector, as well as vulnerable families (including stateless individuals) and those in quarantine. Finally, elderly people and persons with disabilities living in care homes and the workers who cared for them received food support for 3 months.

In the assessment, social assistance interventions (cash, in-kind and school feeding programmes) were analysed taking into account six child-sensitive features: responses targeting children; programmes that increase the benefit level according to the number of children in the household; and programmes providing linkages to nutrition, education, health/water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and child protection services. Considering this scope, only the financial aid to Zakat Fund beneficiaries presented child-sensitive features, as it explicitly targeted orphans.

Based on the analysis of the social assistance responses to COVID-19, some of the key lessons learned for Kuwait in terms of shock-responsive and child-sensitive social protection are the following.

- Social assistance responses that target children or contain child-sensitive features, such as linkages to child protection services, need to be expanded further.
- Increase efforts to improve data availability, to make it easier to assess the efficacy of Kuwaiti social protection programmes and their child-sensitivity.
- Ensure the *Bidoon*’s right to civil documentation, and allow *Bidoon* children to enrol in government schools, to safeguard their right to education.
- Social protection is a human right to which all people must have access, regardless of their nationality. Efforts to include non-nationals in the national social protection system should, therefore, be enhanced.

## References:

Alshammiry, A. 2021. “COVID-19 and the Bidoon in Kuwait.” *The Statelessness & Citizenship Review* 3(1): 123–130. <<https://statelessnessandcitizenshipreview.com/index.php/journal/article/view/301/155>>. Accessed 14 July 2022.

Bilo, C., J.P. Dytz, and L. Sato. 2022. “Social protection responses to COVID-19 in MENA: Design, implementation and child-sensitivity”. *Research Report*, No. 76. Brasília and Amman: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth and United Nations Children’s Fund Middle East and North Africa Regional Office.

Human Rights Watch. 2021. “Kuwait.” *World Report 2021*. New York: Human Rights Watch. <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/kuwait>>. Accessed 14 July 2022.

## Notes:

1. For the full list of references and a description of all social protection measures mapped, see the full study.
2. The *Bidoon* are indigenous to the Arabian Peninsula but were made stateless after the formation of the Kuwaiti State in the 1960s (Alshammiry 2021).
3. See: <<https://socialprotection.org/social-protection-responses-covid-19-global-south>>.