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for Economic and Commercial Cooperation
of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC)

Proceedings of the 19th Meeting of the

COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group

"Effective Social Assistance Provision and Socioeconomic Empowerment in the light of COVID-19 Pandemic"

COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE

November 2022

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 19TH MEETING OF THE

COMCEC POVERTY ALLEVIATION WORKING GROUP

**"Effective Social Assistance Provision and
Socioeconomic Empowerment in the light of COVID-19 Pandemic"**

(October 6-7, 2022; Virtual Meeting)

COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE

November 2022

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The 19th Meeting of the COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group was held on 6-7 October 2022, in a virtual-only format, with the theme of "Effective Social Assistance Provision and Socioeconomic Empowerment in the light of COVID-19 Pandemic".

The representatives of 15 Member States, which have notified their focal points for the Poverty Alleviation Working Group, attended the Meeting. The representatives of the OIC General Secretariat, COMSTECH, SESRIC, IsDB, ICCIA, UNDP Türkiye Office and UNICEF Türkiye Office also attended the Meeting.

1ST DAY: OCTOBER 6TH, 2022

The first day of the Meeting began with the opening speech of Mr. Selçuk Koç, Deputy Director General of the COMCEC. After his speech Mr. Koç gave the floor to Ms. Filiz Kayacı Boz, Deputy Director General at Ministry of Family and Social Services of Türkiye, as the Chairperson of the Meeting.

In the beginning, Ms. Boz summarized the Program of the Meeting and gave the floor to Dr. Ulaş Karakoç to make his presentation on the overview and the theoretical parts of the research report prepared specifically for the meeting. Following the introductory presentation of Dr. Karakoç on the report, case country analysis and the Guide on integrated monitoring and information systems were presented by Dr. Güneş Aşık. Afterwards, Mr. Mustafa Ali Yurdupak from UNDP Türkiye Office and Mr. Emre Üçkardeşler from UNICEF Türkiye Office presented their experiences in the social assistance and socioeconomic empowerment.

1. Social Assistance Provision and Socioeconomic Empowerment during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the OIC Member Countries

The first presentation was made by the Consultant Dr. Ulaş Karakoç on the overall situation of social assistance applications in the world and in the OIC member countries. He firstly explained the methodology of the study. The study is based on a novel dataset, constructed through desk-research, on the state of the integration of the social assistance programs and the use of the information systems there in the OIC countries. Secondly, four case studies on Türkiye, Tunisia, Indonesia and Sudan, carried out via in-depth interviews and field visits, provided more detailed insights on the social assistance systems in those countries.

Dr. Karakoç defined the two most common types of the data registers, the social registries and integrated beneficiary systems, used in the social assistance field. He underlined the importance of social registries in the outreach, registration and assessment systems, as they could allow to uniquely identify all beneficiaries, thereby expanding scope of outreach and assessment efficiency. Secondly, he stressed that the integrated beneficiary systems should increasingly be used in the enrolment and provision stages. He argued that even the most advanced social assistance systems face challenges in effectively managing the delivery systems, as they lack

dynamic inclusion, grievances and feedback systems. Remarkably, the COVID-19 pandemic pushed policymakers to use information systems progressively.

Dr. Karakoç then presented an analysis of the social assistance dataset on OIC countries. He argued that about half of OIC countries set the social assistance integration as a policy priority, and a similar number of them have currently some form of information system. While only 4 countries introduced integrated systems, it increased up to 10 in 2021, showing a linear increasing adoption. The ways the challenges towards integration are perceived also matters. Finally, using a set of indicators, OIC countries are divided into four categories: Very-high, high, low and very-low level of integration.

As a practical guide consisting of concrete recommendations, Karakoç suggested 3 different pathways for OIC countries. The first pathway is designed for the countries which have multiple programs without level of interoperability. It is targeted towards improving the existing social programs, by improving the digital and information systems in individual programs and thereby exploring interoperability between programs. Second one, designed for those with multiple connected programs, aims to create fully integrated registry and single data platform with the help of social registries. Third pathway is suggested for the countries with integrated systems to address key bottlenecks in outreach, inclusion and management.

2. The Role of Integrated Monitoring and Information Systems in Effective Delivery of Social Assistances: Selected Case Countries (Tunisia, Türkiye, Sudan and Indonesia)

Consultant Dr. Aşık started by explaining that four case studies were selected based on geographical coverage, the level of integration of the social assistance systems, Covid-19 response and income levels. According to this classification, Turkey has an advanced level integration in social assistance delivery, Tunisia and Indonesia have high levels of integration but not fully integrated and Sudan has low level of integration in social assistance delivery.

The first case study presented by Dr. Aşık was Tunisia. Tunisia has a trademark program called the Amen Social which aims to provide means for decent living conditions for the poor, including a steady income. This program was launched in 2019 and was instrumental during the Covid-19 pandemic to alleviate the effects on poverty. Dr. Aşık mentioned that Tunisia's social assistance delivery system is based on an MIS and partly integrated, although there is a strong political will to move to a fully integrated system. He highlighted that the social data base system is integrated with the payroll and health system database but not with others such as the data base of Ministry of education, Ministry of Finance and database of real estate registry. In the last part of the Tunisia section, Dr. Aşık stressed that challenges. One of the key challenges that Tunisian authorities have been facing is that each sector has its own ID numbers and Tunisia has not yet moved into an identification number where each citizen has a unique ID number. Another challenge is the high rates of informality, currently around 47 percent of the employment is off the records. The government aims to move into a fully integrated system by 2024.

The second case study presented by Dr. Aşık was Indonesia. The poverty levels increased substantially. The poverty headcount increased from 23 million in 1996 to about 50 million in 1998 before declining to 38 million in 1999. Dr. Aşık reported that in order to alleviate poverty,

the government Indonesia launched a series of reforms and social assistance programs including cash transfers, subsidies and low interest credit for small enterprises between 2000 and 2004. Social protection spending was only 0.73 percent of the GDP in 2017. She explained that Indonesia's Unified Database (UDB-*DTKS)* was established in 2011 and it is a partly integrated beneficiary registry and monitoring system. She explained that The UDB was managed by the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction (TNP2K), under the office of the Vice President between 2012-2015. In 2016, the UDB was transitioned to PUSDATIN, a Data Centre within the Ministry of Social Affairs. UDB was based on the updated Data Collection for Social Protection Programs of the National Statistics Agency in 2011 (PPLS 2011) and was built on the 2010 census. She noted that transfer of data between government institutions in Indonesia is done manually. Data in the UDB are only issued to government agencies (central and local) that organize social assistance programs. National Statistics Agency is the responsible agency for providing data on individual and household wealth through censuses, national surveys, and potential village surveys. In contrast, sub-national governments are responsible for updating quarterly. She argued that one of the biggest challenges that Indonesia has been facing with respect to the unified system is the data updating, especially for programs that target categories or people with 'volatile' status. Dr. Aşık concluded that as in the case of Tunisia, the government of Indonesia plans to move into a fully integrated system in the coming years.

The next case country presented by Dr. Aşık was Sudan. She mentioned about the National Development Strategy (NDS). NDS is the first national planning document following the South Sudan Development Plan, which expired in 2016. The guiding principles of NDS are (i) peace, security, and the rule of law, (ii) democracy and good governance, (iii) socio-economic development, and (iv) international compacts and partnerships. She expressed that the Sudanese government created a social services cluster comprising of education, health, and social & humanitarian affairs sectors to create and the Ministry of Labor and Social Development is the leading institution responsible for social protection policies.

She underlined that most programs in Sudan are demand-driven, where a detailed project proposal is submitted at the beginning of each program phase. She stressed that data is collected through implementation reports, field visits, and relevant reports. The beneficiaries are selected through a household survey. Dr. Aşık mentioned the main demand-driven programs are; Shamel and Zakat. Shamel includes livelihood projects such as skills training, irrigation projects and school meals. She noted that while Sudanese social assistance program is not integrated, certain social assistance types are built on a monitoring and information system (MIS). The cash transfer program in Sudan and National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) rely on an MIS.

She added that Sudan faces disproportionately more challenges associated with catastrophes such as floods, droughts, conflicts, displacement, and inflation hence it needs even stronger social assistance delivery methods. She pointed that the refugee problems complicate the efforts to alleviate poverty in Sudan. Despite the limited resources, Sudan managed to build the basics of an integrated system, such as ID numbers and MIS in monitoring and managing social assistance delivery.

The last case study presented by Dr. Aşık was Türkiye. She explained that Türkiye is among the pioneering countries in transforming its social assistance system from a paper-based into an integrated system. She stressed that Türkiye's Integrated Social Assistance System (ISAS) is based on the Social Assistance Information System, SAIS, a software program developed by the Directorate General of Social Assistance, DGSA in 2009 which enabled the collection of supporting documentation for social assistance applications. ISAS was developed in cooperation with the Turkish Scientific and Technological Research Institution. Under this initiative, first all population registries were digitalized and individuals' public records started being tracked through a single national identity number starting from 2002 under the Mernis project. Dr. Aşık mentioned that another key step was the launch of the e-government gate in in 2008 which centralized the institutions' public records where all applications can be made electronically under one under one platform. Between the year 2009 and 2015, ISAS was gradually improved through modular upgrades. Dr. Aşık also explained the efficiency gains, achieved thanks to ISAS. She emphasized, previously, 17 different documents needed for a citizen's social assistance application, and it took on average 15 days for the social workers collect the appropriate paper documents.

Finally, Dr. Aşık explained the key success factors for ISAS in Türkiye. First key factors were the initial investments into digitalization and centralization of population registries through the Mernis and E-Government Gates. The second success factor was the strong political will and committment; ISAS was endorsed and launched by the Undersecretary of Prime Ministry himself. This facilitated the coordination among public institutions. Third, the system was built by the experts and engineers that worked in the same institution, hence social assistance experts were able to convey the needs to software engineers, and test whether the system functioned properly.

Question(s) and Comment(s)

Question: Which case study is the most useful for Benin to benefit from?

Dr. Aşık responded by saying that the answer depends on how integrated the system is in Benin. Tunisia and Indonesia are very good examples for countries with very limited integration and their experience can be more relevant. But Türkiye had already a well-functioning e-government system in place, so Türkiye's experience may not be too relevant for member countries which have just started improving their social assistance systems.

Question: How do the Tunisian programs deal with outreach, especially reaching out to the vulnerable groups?

In response, Dr. Karakoç said that in Tunisia the outreach is basically on-demand, and the organizations are not able to detect the potential vulnerabilities yet. The question relates to the area of dynamic inclusion and risk warning. Tunisia does not currently have a working dynamic data-driven inclusion system at the point. They, though, have plans to introduce such tools. That, however, requires linking income/employment data with social ministry data.

3. Experiences/Perspectives of the Member States and International Institutions

3.1. UNDP Türkiye Office

Mr. Mustafa Ali Yurdupak, from UNDP Türkiye Office, made a presentation on the efforts of UNDP to contribute to sustainable development through cooperation on many action areas including inclusive and sustainable growth, inclusive and democratic governance, climate change, and environment.

He expressed that UNDP establishes partnerships with government, local governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector to make progress in the key areas of cooperation according to the country's context and national development priorities. He also stated that UNICEF Türkiye has 4 portfolios, 4 clusters and more than 40 projects implemented in several cities of Türkiye.

After touching upon the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the framework of all the cooperation efforts of the UNDP, Mr. Yurdupak elaborated on the UNDP Strategic Plan for 2022-2026.

He also informed the participants about main social development projects of UNDP Türkiye to contribute to gender equality and women empowerment, youth employment and refugee support programs.

Mr. Yurdupak lastly resumed the COVID-19 projects of the UNDP Türkiye, namely Rapid Response Facility (RRF) and Rapid Finance Facility (RFF). Through RRF UNDP provided laboratory equipment for vaccine research center and developed a prototype for a home-based care decision support system using forecasting, optimization, and artificial intelligence. Regarding the RFF, he stated that the focused area of project is digitalization of SMEs and thus an SME Digitalization Platform addressing digital disruption and innovation in SMEs, and piloted gender-sensitive incentive support schemes have been developed.

3.2. UNICEF Türkiye Office

Mr. Emre Üçkardeşler, Chief of Social Policy at UNICEF Türkiye Office, made a presentation on child-sensitive social protection and poverty alleviation. He firstly touched upon the global situation of children in terms of poverty and inequality, then he explained how UNICEF approaches the issue and its principles and key elements, thirdly he elaborated on UNICEF's key action areas for child-sensitive and integrated protections systems and alleviating child poverty, and he lastly gave some action examples on the topic.

Regarding the global outlook of child poverty Mr. Üçkardeşler expressed that due to the increase in urban areas, conflict and humanitarian settings, families working in informal sector there is an unprecedented increase in child poverty. He stated that nearly 350 million children in the world are living in slums and informal settlements. He also stressed that some groups such as children with disabilities, refugees, girls and women are much more vulnerable at especially times of crisis like the pandemic.

Mr. Üçkardeşler also gave some important numbers regarding the child poverty and social protection coverage. He indicated that 1 in 6 children lives in extreme poverty and only 35% of children worldwide have social protection coverage. He added that the coverage is lowest in countries where child poverty is the highest.

Expressing the OECD estimates indicating $4.2 billion additional gap as a result of pandemic, and, on average, countries spend 1.1% of their GDP on child benefits, Mr. Üçkardeşler stressed that more and better financing is needed to ensure coverage, access and quality. He also underlined that if social protection financing gaps continues, poverty alleviation cannot be achieved. He added that eliminating child poverty requires a multi sector approach and changes at macro and national level.

Mr. Üçkardeşler lastly informed the participants about how UNICEF integrates into the efforts to alleviate child poverty through action areas including measurement and evaluation, policy and strategy development, cash transfer programs, social insurance, integrated service delivery, and infrastructure. He also gave some action examples of UNICEF on conditional cash transfers for education for forced migrants in Türkiye.

4. COMCEC Financial Support Instruments

Mr. Hasan Yenigül, Program Coordinator at the COMCEC Coordination Office, made a presentation on COMCEC Financial Support Instruments, namely COMCEC Project Funding, COMCEC Covid Response Program and COMCEC Al-Quds Program.

Mr. Yenigül informed the participants about the essentials and details of the COMCEC Project Funding. In his presentation, Mr. YENİGÜL gave the main elements of COMCEC Project Funding, namely its objectives, sectoral areas, priorities, actors, project types etc.

Mr. Yenigül continued his presentation by highlighting the timeline and budget limits for the project submission. He stressed the importance of finding a project idea and informed the participants on how they can find project topics. He also explained the main project types along with the criteria for being an applicant for a project.

Lastly, he informed the participants about the Project Preparation and Submission Guidelines as well as Project Management Information System.

2ND DAY: OCTOBER 7TH, 2022

1. Main Challenges and Success Factors concerning More Effective Social Assistance Provision and Socioeconomic Empowerment in the OIC Member Countries

The second session was held on the main challenges and success factors for effective social aid distribution among the OIC member countries, on 7 November 2022. Dr. Aşık started her presentation by explaining that there was a clear pattern in social assistance delivery across the member countries where the majority of member countries relied on conditional cash transfers and the social assistance programs were not adequately diverse. Dr. Aşık explained that 48 member countries had a cash transfer program whereas only 21 OIC countries had paid leave or unemployment support programs, 19 had health insurance support, 14 had disability support and only 17 countries had wage subsidies or labor force training programs. Dr Aşık then provided statistics on the impact of COVID-19 on poverty. Dr. Aşık mentioned that according to the World Bank statistics, globally, three to four years of progress toward ending extreme poverty are estimated to have been lost and about 97 million more people living on less than $1.90 a day because of the pandemic. The global poverty rate increased from 7.8 to 9.1 percent. Dr Aşık mentioned that according to ILO estimates, an additional US$77.9 billion would have been needed in 2020 to close the social protection financing gap in low-income countries, corresponding to 15.9 percent of these countries' GDP. The gap is much larger when including lower-middle-income und upper-middle-income countries.

Dr. Aşık then presented the result of their research on the level of integration in social assistance across member countries. The research conducted by the team shows that some member countries, such as Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, and Qatar, have very high integration and interoperability of social assistance delivery. Countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Albania, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Tunisia also have high levels of interoperability but are not fully integrated. Uganda, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Somalia, Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, and Mali have moderate to low degree of integration. Dr. Aşık explained that in 24 countries integration is a policy priority and 22 countries have some degree of a Management Information System in place in social assistance delivery. The research also reveals that 43 percent of the member countries listed the lack of technical infrastructure and know how as the major challenge in moving to fully integrated systems.

Dr. Aşık finally explained the common success factors based on the research findings. There are three key factors. The first one is the political ownership in improving the efficiency of social assistance. Political determination at higher rankings facilitates coordination across different institutions which in turn fosters technical and institutional capacity to share information. Hence, political leadership ensures faster transition into more efficient systems. The second important factor is the existence of social registries and unique national citizenship Ids in place. These building blocks facilitates digitalization and matching of citizens across different databases. In addition, platforms such as e-government services can help moving into integrated systems to a great extent. The third factor is international support for technical

assistance and financing, which is crucial for poorer countries. Integrated systems can be very costly especially if the basic blocks are missing. Many OIC countries face resource constraints and aid for capacity building can facilitate the improvement of social assistance delivery.

Question(s) and Comment(s)

Question: How can the member countries improve technical capacity without relying on non-OIC countries?

This was noted as a recommendation by Dr. Aşık. One of the participants, Ms. Saida Huseynova asked whether integrated systems meant high coverage. Dr. Aşık replied that integrated systems facilitate reaching out to potential beneficiaries and hence lead to an increase in coverage, but in practice, those two are not necessarily true, depending on the design and diversity of social assistance programs.

Question: Can you a bit elaborate on intelligent warning systems to identify the needy?

Dr. Aşık replied that risk maps can be prepared based on the information provided by the integrated systems. She also added that certain artificial intelligence algorithms can be helpful to map out the risks in light of climate change and draughts.

Question: Is it possible to merge all data sources by different institutions in a unified system?

Dr. Aşık replied that depending on the design, it is possible to merge the beneficiary databases of different institutions using a unique national ID numbers or look-up sectoral tables.

2. Policy Debate Session: Policy Recommendations for the Exchange of Views Session of the 38th COMCEC Ministerial Meeting

Under this agenda item, the participants deliberated on the policy options for improving the social assistance systems through integrated monitoring and information systems in the OIC Member Countries. As the Chairperson, Ms. Filiz Kayacı Boz moderated the session. At the outset, Mr. Mehmet Akif Alanbay, Senior Expert at the COMCEC Coordination Office, presented the Room Document including specific draft policy recommendations on the topic which was circulated to the participants before the Meeting. As agreed by the participants, the policy recommendations (Annex IV) will be submitted to the 38th Ministerial Session of the COMCEC as an output of the Meeting to be considered by the Ministers of the Member Countries during the Exchange of Views Session.

3. Closing Remarks

The Meeting ended with closing remarks of Ms. Filiz Kayacı Boz, Chairperson of the Meeting from Ministry of Family and Social Services of the Republic of Türkiye and Mr. Can AYGÜL, Head of Department at the COMCEC Coordination Office. In her closing remarks, Ms. Boz conveyed her appreciations to all the presenters and participants for the fruitful deliberations made during the Meeting. Afterwards, Mr. AYGÜL expressed his thanks and appreciation to all participants for their contributions to the discussions throughout the Meeting. The Meeting ended with vote of thanks.

COMCEC

AGENDA

OF THE 19TH MEETING OF THE COMCEC

POVERTY ALLEVIATION WORKING GROUP

(October 6-7, 2022; Virtual Meeting)

"EFFECTIVE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROVISION AND

SOCIOECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC"

(2nd Session – Final Draft of Research Report and Policy Recommendations)

1ST DAY: OCTOBER 6TH, 2022

Opening Remarks

1. Social Assistance Provision and Socioeconomic Empowerment during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the OIC Member Countries

2. The Role of Integrated Monitoring and Information Systems in Effective Delivery of Social Assistances: Selected Case Countries

3. Experiences/Perspectives of the Member States, International Institutions/NGOs

4. COMCEC Financial Support Instruments

2ND DAY: OCTOBER 7TH, 2022

Preparatory Session for the Exchange of Views Session of the 38th COMCEC Ministerial Meeting

1. Main Challenges and Success Factors concerning More Effective Social Assistance Provision and Socioeconomic Empowerment in the OIC Member Countries

2. Policy Debate Session: Policy Recommendations for the Exchange of Views Session of the 38th COMCEC Ministerial Meeting

Closing Remarks

PROGRAMME

19TH MEETING OF THE COMCEC POVERTY ALLEVIATION WORKING GROUP
(October 6-7, 2022; Virtual Meeting)

"Effective Social Assistance Provision and
Socioeconomic Empowerment in the light of COVID-19 Pandemic"

(2nd Session - Final Draft of Research Report and Policy Recommendations)

1ST DAY: OCTOBER 6TH, 2022

13.15 - 13.30 **Joining the Online Meeting**

(The link for the participation will be conveyed in advance of the Meeting)

13.30 - 13.40 **Opening**

13.40 - 14.00 **Social Assistance Provision and Socioeconomic Empowerment during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the OIC Member Countries**

- *Presentation : Dr. Ulaş KARAKOÇ*

  Consultant

14.00 - 14.10 *Questions and Answers (Q & A)*

14.10 - 14.40 **The Role of Integrated Monitoring and Information Systems in Effective Delivery of Social Assistances: Selected Case Countries**

- *Presentation : Dr. Ulaş KARAKOÇ*

  Consultant

14.40 - 14.50 *Q & A*

14.50 - 15.50 **Experiences/Perspectives of the Member States and International Institutions**

- *Presentations by Member Countries*

- *Presentation : Mr. Mustafa Ali YURDUPAK*
  UNDP

- *Presentation : Mr. Emre ÜÇKARDEŞLER*
  UNICEF

15.50 - 16.00 *Q & A*

16.00 - 16.20   **COMCEC Financial Support Instruments**

  - *Presentation: Mr. Hasan YENİGÜL*

   COMCEC Coordination Office

16.20 - 16.30   *Q & A*

16.30 - 16.35   **Closing Remarks**

2ND DAY: OCTOBER 7TH, 2022

Preparatory Session for the Exchange of Views Session of the 38th COMCEC Ministerial Meeting

13.45 - 14.00   **Joining the Online Meeting**

(The link for the participation will be conveyed in advance of the Meeting)

14.00 - 14.30   **Main Challenges and Success Factors concerning More Effective Social Assistance Provision and Socioeconomic Empowerment in the OIC Member Countries**

  - *Presentation : Dr. Güneş AŞIK*

   Consultant

Q & A

14.30 - 16.00   **Moderated Policy Debate Session: Policy Recommendations for the Exchange of Views Session of the 38th COMCEC Ministerial Meeting**

   Moderator : Ms. Filiz KAYACI BOZ

   Deputy Director General in the Ministry of Family and Social Services of Türkiye

16.00 - 16.10   **Closing Remarks**

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

19TH MEETING OF THE POVERTY ALLEVIATION WORKING GROUP
(OCTOBER 6-7TH, 2022, Online)

A. MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE OIC

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Head of Economic cooperation, Director General of Regional and Provincial Cooperation, Ministry of Economy.

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Expert, Ministry of Health of Türkiye

-Mr. KİBAR SEYHUN SARI

Expert, Ministry of Family and Social Services

-Mr. AHMET DEMİRTAŞ

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Director, COMCEC Coordination Office

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Director, COMCEC Coordination Office

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-Mr. EMRE ÜÇKARDEŞLER

Chief of Social Policy

**THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
19TH MEETING OF THE COMCEC POVERTY ALLEVIATION
WORKING GROUP**

The 37th COMCEC Session agreed on "Effective Social Assistance Provision and Socioeconomic Empowerment in light of COVID-19 Pandemic in the OIC Member States" as the theme for the Exchange of Views Session at the 38th Session of the COMCEC and requested COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group (PAWG) to come up with concrete policy recommendations on this topic and report them to the 38th COMCEC Ministerial Session. Along with the issues related to social assistance delivery during COVID-19 Pandemic, the PAWG also considered the challenges and possible policy options related to moving to integrated monitoring and information systems in social assistance delivery. In this framework, the Working Group has come up with the following challenges and problems as well as recommendations for facilitating adoption of integrated systems for the OIC Member Countries for their submission to the 38th COMCEC Ministerial Session.

CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS FOR SOCIAL ASSISTANCE DELIVERY DURING COVID-19

- The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic erased several years of efforts in poverty alleviation. The economic contraction has been relatively slower in the OIC Member Countries; however, the impact on poverty has been drastic.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant increase in poverty and in the number of individuals facing hunger in the OIC Member Countries.

- The policy response in terms of economic support and debt relief have been relatively slower among the OIC Member Countries than in the rest of the world.

- There is a negative relationship between the coverage of social assistance and adequacy of social assistance among the OIC Member Countries.

- As the number of beneficiaries increases, total transfer amount received by all beneficiaries as a share of total welfare decreases, causing resource constraints in the OIC Member Countries.

- Social assistance protection tools are not sufficiently diverse among the OIC Member Countries. While social insurance and labor market support programs are frequently rely upon by many governments, such tools are less common across the OIC Member Countries.

- Social assistance programs were not adequately supported with labor market policies, such as wage subsidies, training and subsidized work time in more than half of OIC Member Countries during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Such labor market policies increase the effectiveness of social assistance by containing unemployment and protecting job matches between the workers and employees.

CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS WITH RESPECT TO ADOPTION OF INTEGRATED SOCIAL ASSISTANCE SYSTEMS

- With climate change and global warming at alarming levels, natural disasters at a higher frequency and catastrophe levels are expected worldwide.

- Within countries, the poor and fragile sections of the population are typically those who are more exposed to the negative effects of the shocks. Thus, governments need flexible and fast social assistance delivery systems to respond to sudden shocks and protect the most fragile segments of the society.

- While there is a clear trend among the governments around the world to move to integrated systems, adoption of such systems vary greatly across the OIC Member Countries.

- Integrated monitoring and information systems in social assistance are most common across the OIC Member Countries in the MENA Region and Asia Region and least common across members in the Africa region.

- While most OIC members exhibit strong political commitment for adopting fully integrated monitoring and information systems in social assistance delivery, few member countries have effective systems that feature dynamic inclusion of beneficiaries and a single data platform.

- Lack of social registries and existence of unique national identity numbers significantly reduce the speed at which countries can build the basic blocks of integrated systems in social assistance delivery.

- Individual data privacy laws, which are crucial requirements of well-functioning integrated systems, are still at infancy stage in some member countries.

- Lack of technical infrastructure and know-how is the main challenge against building integrated systems.

- Targeting errors, economic uncertainty and coordination problems across government institutions and difficulty of reaching out to minority groups are other important challenges faced by member countries in building effective social assistance programs.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the challenges and problems discussed above, a set of general policy recommendations are as follows:

a. General Recommendations

- Launching staff exchange and training programs between member countries with different levels of integration in social assistance systems. Staff exchange and training programs can facilitate coordination across members and allow learning from each

other's experience. These programs should be designed at technical levels and policy levels.

- Setting the integrated social protection as the main policy priority.

- Determining the detailed structure of existing social assistance by identifying which organization has what datasets, how they use them, to what purpose, as well as data sharing tools between different programs.

- Identifying the financial, human, and organizational resources currently devoted to the social assistance programs and possible expansion into an integrated framework.

- Investing in data infrastructure, technical skills and human resources to enable better targeting, delivery, and provision of services and cash payments.

- Identifying the population groups in need of social assistance that the existing programs fail to reach.

- Promoting a better coordination between different organizations and institutions responsible for running social assistance programs in a collaborative governance structure at both local and national level.

- Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each existing program at the stages of outreach, assessment, provision and management.

- Determining the sources of the shortcomings of each program in ensuring dynamic inclusion of the groups insufficiently covered by the existing structures such as rural poor, women, informal workers etc.

- Identifying all the available datasets that should be connected with social programs such as civil registries, tax records, address registers, birth certificates and income status.

b. **Recommendations for the countries with low level of interoperability and multiple programs**

- Improving the delivery of the existing programs by introducing digital data interface, digital payment systems with better client interfaces.

- Expanding the scope of interoperability between existing programs through data sharing, multiple checks and dynamic data adjustment in a single beneficiary registry or developing binary interoperable data platforms.

- Addressing the insufficient outreach towards the groups that the existing programs fail to cover by complementing on-demand system with administer-driven tools and by tailoring specific outreach strategies for each group, which has special circumstances.

- Developing a single registry system that keep track of "who gets what, when and how".

- Designing a common grievances system that allows adaptive social protection and dynamic feedback provided by clients.

- Developing a single payment gateway that keeps data on all transactions that is accessible by all organizations.

- Exploring the methods to connect the social protection databases with other institutional databases that can lead to a further integration into a more holistic structure.

c. Recommendations for countries with high level of interoperability but without a fully integrated beneficiary system

- Developing the existing interconnected data platforms into a single beneficiary system by identifying the most crucial obstacles (such as, institutional barriers, insufficient data sharing and lack of technical infrastructure).

- Designing methods to provide all existing and potential beneficiaries with unique IDs, which are typically obtained from social registries, in order to make outreach and assessment of needs more efficient and effective.

- Ensuring that there is a single payment gateway, a working client interface, grievances platform, and data analytics platform with access to all databases of social assistance programs.

- Creating tools to fully exploit the existing databases (paper or digital) which can be turned into an effective social registry.

- Designing small-scale pilot implementation of fully integrated system, validating the results and expanding to national level.

d. Recommendations for countries with an integrated beneficiaries system

- Developing methods to improve the outreach of the social programs by designing specific programs for each social group and expanding the horizon of dynamic inclusion.

- Developing additional data platforms to increase effectiveness, accuracy and validity of the existing social assistance data.

- Providing a fully collaborative environment among all institutions and organizations in the sphere of social assistance.

- Developing sophisticated digital monitoring systems, intelligent early warning tools to better identify the people who need social assistance.