

GOLD VI

**Case-Based Contribution
to Chapter 5: Caring**
*GOLD VI Report on Pathways
to urban and territorial equality*

**Reinventing and expanding social
assistance to vulnerable groups in
the wake of the COVID-19 crisis**

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Reinventing and expanding social assistance to vulnerable groups in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis

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CITIES/COUNTRIES IT COVERS

Mexico City (Mexico), Iztapalapa (Mexico), Montevideo (Uruguay), Sfax (Tunisia), Bogotá (Colombia), Barcelona Provincial Council (Spain), Recoleta (Chile), Renca (Chile), Pichincha (Ecuador), Bangkok (Thailand), Telangana (India), Andhra Pradesh (India), Ontario (Canada), Seoul (Republic of Korea)

CHAPTER

5: Caring

SUMMARY

This contribution explores different forms of social assistance initiatives implemented by local authorities, paying particular emphasis on social safety nets, basic or universal income projects and other types of cash transfers or in-kind support programs. In doing so, it aims at exploring recent evolutions in the ways local governments are framing these issues at a moment of deep transformation in the way income and poverty operate at an urban level. Indeed, this contribution emphasizes how the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a massive transformation over income and socio-economic vulnerability, as much as to the way local governments address these issues. The document equally addresses the middle-term impacts of digital transformation over the urbanization of poverty and several marginalization forms existing in cities worldwide. With this in mind, the contribution highlights the specific place and needs of groups at major risk of vulnerability, such as women, migrants, older people and isolated residents or children. It does so by exploring transformative approaches aimed at addressing poverty at its roots, with a view to tackle sustainably long entrenched forms of inequality.

Introduction

Local governments have always been directly confronted with the issue of urban poverty. **As government administrations, local governments have taken a leading role in adopting more structural and institutional approaches to social assistance, in line with the development of welfare and social states.** In doing so, they adopted the social assistance role which was formerly developed by charity institutions. From solidarity-based approaches, governments re-claimed rights-based approaches embedded in national constitutions and social welfare to develop their policies. Local governments would soon develop different types of policy intervention to bring about this vision. These included cash transfers and in-kind support forms to address immediate needs following a logic of proximity and territorial responsiveness. Civil society, NGOs and grassroots initiatives continued to play, over this time, a fundamental role in complementing the local government social assistance

policies – when not directly replacing completely the role government institutions were supposed to deliver.

Over the last decades, local governments have also looked at recent evolutions in global debates about social assistance with increasing interest. The A/HRC/35/26 Report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty¹ offers a good review of what some of these innovations have been, from universal basic income to social protection floors and other evolutions in the welfare state. Other approaches would complement the point of view of this report to offer a more universal (or at least diverse) vision to the issue at stake here: Caring, Commons, *Buen Vivir*, Community Finance, Human Rights Cities and the Right to the City... In short, all of these approaches “speak to” the reality of local governments and have been increasingly embraced throughout the period referred to with a view to reinforce and reinvent their own social assistance programs. What do they have in common?

Evolution of cash transfers

Direct cash transfers remain one of the most significant tools at local governments’ hands to promote greater equality by providing economic means to residents at risk of vulnerability.

Many of these policies incorporate some kind of conditionality; for example, with regards to supporting children and other populations groups access to education. **Mexico City** (Mexico) has implemented the “*Mi Beca para Empezar*” program (My Start-Up Scholarship) with a view to support universal schooling, addressing especially the situation of kids in vulnerable households.²

The program provides more than 1 million scholarships with a maximum monthly value of \$400.³ Population eligible includes basic education students at the preschool, elementary and high school levels.

Iztapalapa (Mexico) implemented a similar program, even though in this case, the population eligible are women at different stages of life who have not completed their basic education. This is the “*Mujeres Estudiando*” program⁴, which targets all women living in the city wishing to start or finish their studies until high school level. The program does not only include monthly economic support, but also free counseling and workshops supporting women in their academic training.

1. Philip Alston. “Report A/HRC/35/26 of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights”. United Nations. <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/35/26> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

2. Gobierno de la Ciudad de México. “Mi beca para empezar”. Mibecaparaempezar.cdmx.gob.mx. <https://www.mibecaparaempezar.cdmx.gob.mx/> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

3. Becas México. “Mi Beca para empezar”. Becasmexico.org. <https://becasmexico.org/mi-beca-para-empezar/> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

4. Becas México. “Becas Mujeres Estudiando”. Becasmexico.org. <https://becas-mexico.mx/2021/beca-mujeres-estudiando-2021/> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

In 2020, **Montevideo** (Uruguay) also implemented a conditional cash transfer system to support vulnerable households in the situation of residential emergency. The “*Subsidio antidesalojo para pensiones*”⁵ scheme aimed at providing immediate support to families who were unable to pay their rents or housing financial obligations due to a sudden loss of income caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the relevance of these instruments to address the needs of the most fragile populations in particular. The local government of **Sfax** (Tunisia) articulated for example different initiatives at a civil society level, as well as the contribution of international organizations with field presence in the city, to provide cash transfers to migrant residents.⁶ In an interview with Commission of Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of United Cities and Local Governments, Sfax highlighted how this program has had to adapt to various conditions linked to migrants’ vulnerability (fear in the public space, stigma, access difficulties) which have mostly been addressed through policy innovation (assuming an affirmative role, use of digital technologies) and coordination with the work of other stakeholders on the ground (which allowed to enhance its impact capacity).

In the same vein, **Bogotá** (Colombia) offered cash transfers to the most vulnerable as well as to local businesses with a view to reactivate the economic system.⁷ Bogotá established an “*Ingreso Mínimo Garantizado*” (Guaranteed Basic Income) to support 140,620 vulnerable families most affected by the economic crisis, which amounted a total amount of 16,800 million Colombian pesos.⁸ The same city also implemented a “*Renta Básica*” (Basic Rent) system which provided direct support in the form of direct



cash transfers to more than 7,000 households, at least a member of which was diagnosed with COVID-19.⁹ The goal with this was to financially support those families that had to comply with quarantine measures – thus, most of the time, not being able to earn an income for themselves.

The **Barcelona Provincial Council** (Spain) provided a new instrument for financial aid for food and basic necessities by municipal social services of local bodies to vulnerable people without resources. In the same vein, the Council has implemented a “*No municipality left behind*” program which includes a fifteen million euro budget for the year 2020 aimed at municipalities and decentralized municipal entities in the province to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and recover from its adverse effects, so that local financial solvency is ensured.

Bogotá’s *Manzanas del Cuidado* (Caring Blocks)
Source: Secretaría de Inclusión Social de la Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá D.C.

5. Intendencia de Montevideo “Plan de subsidio antidesalojo para pensiones”. Montevideo.gub.uy. <https://montevideo.gub.uy/noticias/vivienda/plan-de-subsidio-antidesalojo-para-pensiones> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

6. UCLG-CSIPDHR. “Challenges and responses to COVID-19: A local perspective from cities of Sfax and Douala”. Uclg-cisdp.org <https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-local-perspective-cities-sfax-and-douala> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

7. UCLG. “Carolina Durán, Secretary of Economic Development Bogotá Municipality, Colombia”. YouTube.org. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4CHezvFiyE> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

8. Alcaldía de Bogotá. “Bogotá girará más de \$16.800 millones a hogares más pobres”. Bogota.gov.co. <https://bogota.gov.co/mi-ciudad/hacienda/ingreso-minimo-garantizado-16000-millones-para-hogares-mas-pobres> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

9. Alcaldía de Bogotá. “Estrategia DAR ha brindado ayudas monetarias a 7.415 hogares con COVID en Bogotá”. Bogota.gov.co. <https://bogota.gov.co/mi-ciudad/hacienda/ayuda-monetaria-quienes-son-positivos-para-covid-19-en-bogota> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

Other forms of social assistance and support in kind

The COVID-19 crisis also triggered a large development of social assistance programs in the form of in-kind support, which means, direct support in the form of food, clothes and other fundamental needs.

Mexico City (Mexico) offers a good example of this trend already in the previous stages of the pandemic. The Social Development Secretariat of the same city has developed over time a “*Red de Servicios*” (Network of Services) as a way to develop policies that bring about the Mexico City Constitution’s emphasis on the attention of priority groups.¹⁰ Services offered include a large network of community eatery or canteen, where every resident can access food as a guaranteed right.¹¹ The network of “*Comedores Públicos*” (Public Canteens) is extended across the city (thus, making a key emphasis on decentralizing municipal services and public attention) and has adapted to the limitations posed by the pandemic.

In Chile, the municipality of **Recoleta** supported the grassroots initiatives to provide food assistance to every person in need known as “*Ollas Solidarias*” (Community Pots). This is indeed a long tradition of solidarity dating back to the previous century and the period of crisis and military rule which deeply affected the living conditions of the urban poor. **Renca**, also in Chile, supported a similar scheme of support, even though the forms of support in kind provided by the municipality is much more extensive.¹² In this case, the type of support offered by Renca municipality comprises funerary services, food baskets, milk, construction materials, beds and blankets, diapers for children and adults... among many others.

Many initiatives also incorporated a clear support to local economic development, and sought to create alternative forms of economic and social sustainability through the adoption of proximity-based patterns of consumption and redistribution. The government of **Pichincha** (Ecuador) implemented for example its own online shop,¹³ where vulnerable families can now purchase affordable food by local agriculture producers. The government subsidized these products. Throughout 2020, Pichincha also distributed more than 16,000 food baskets among local residents at major risk of vulnerability¹⁴ (of a total population of 3,228,2333 inhabitants), following a similar emphasis to that implemented by Bogotá through its cash transfer system: supporting vulnerable families at a time when their livelihoods were most affected by the crisis and quarantine measures.

Other forms of in-kind support are particularly prevalent in the field of housing upgrading and community-led housing. Other case-based contributions, especially in the GOLD VI Report’s Chapter 4 on *Commoning*, already explore this issue. The example of the **Thailand Homeless Network** is very relevant for this case specifically.¹⁵ Indeed, the network gathers local government and grassroots initiatives offering vital support to people who are homeless, including different forms of in-kind support. The network empowered homeless people to develop and plan their own secure shelter strategies, including the building of a pioneer shelter offering housing solutions to all residents.¹⁶

10. Secretaría de Inclusión y Bienestar Social de la Ciudad de México. “Red de servicios”. Sibiso.cdmx.gob.mx. <https://www.sibiso.cdmx.gob.mx/red-de-servicios> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

11. Secretaría de Inclusión y Bienestar Social de la Ciudad de México. “Comidas completas gratuitas”. Sibiso.cdmx.gob.mx. <https://sibiso.cdmx.gob.mx/comidas-completas-gratuitas> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

12. Municipio de Renca. “Atención Social, Ayudas Sociales en especies o servicios”. Renca.cl. <https://www.renca.cl/atencion-social-ayudas-sociales-en-especies-o-servicios/> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

13. Tienda Pichincha. [Tiendapichincha.com](https://tiendapichincha.com/) [Accessed May 31, 2021].

14. UCLG-CSIPDHR. “Challenges and responses to COVID-19: Interview to Paola Pabón, President of the Province of Pichincha (Ecuador)” - [Uclg-cisdp.org](https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-interview-paola-pab%C3%B3n-president-province). <https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-interview-paola-pab%C3%B3n-president-province> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

15. Community Architects Network. <http://communityarchitectsnetwork.info/actions-de.php?id=27&ic=1&is=2> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

16. CODI. “Networks of homeless people in three cities plan, develop and manage their own secure shelter strategies”. En.codi.or.th. <https://en.codi.or.th/baan-mankong-housing/homeless-housing/> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

Transformative approaches

Some recent evolutions have brought the types of local government interventions described above to embrace new narratives or ways to operate that should be addressed at this point.

The issue of income and cash transfer, for instance, has seen an important evolution from the point of view of universality and redistribution. Several local and regional governments in India, for example, made daring essays around the idea of unconditional cash transfers and basic rent forms, most of the times operating after an “insurance” logic. The regional government of **Telangana** proposed for example a large-scale budget aimed at supporting local farmers with a basic income.¹⁷ This provides support in front of market uncertainties and adverse market conditions. Cash transfers are in this case conditional to the scale of crops assigned to local farmers. In line with promoting rural development, the budget also covers specific support lines on social security pensions to the aged and widows. This intervention is similar to those implemented in other regional contexts of India – one of the most significant being the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which was implemented by various regional governments such as that of **Andhra Pradesh**.¹⁸

In Canada, the regional government of **Ontario** implemented a Basic Income Pilot Project already in 2016 “to test a growing view at home and abroad that basic income could provide a new approach to reducing poverty in a sustainable way”.¹⁹ The program ensures a minimum income level regardless of employment status to a group of around 4,000 people. Pilot locations where the project is being run include:



Seoul, Republic of Korea
Source: UCLG CSIPDHR

Hamilton, Brantford, Brant County, Thunder Bay and other municipalities in the area as well as Lindsay. The project is carrying out a monitoring study in parallel to address its outcomes.

Care approaches and people working in care, especially women, are also at the center of an important transformation which is re-defining social assistance and the role of people bringing this service about in cities from bottom to top.

In order to support working women and women in the domestic context involved in care tasks, **Iztapalapa** (Mexico) created a municipal program for care which includes direct cash transfers and other forms of support.²⁰ Eligible residents for this program include caregivers for people with disabilities and older people in a situation of dependency. The program targets an initial group of 2,000 residents, mainly women, and provides a monthly support of \$1,000 Mexican peso as well as access to courses, workshops, psychological therapy and other training activities.²¹

17. PTI. Telangana proposes Rs 5L insurance cover, Rs 12,000 crore support scheme for farmers. *Economic Times*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/finance/telangana-proposes-rs-5l-insurance-cover-rs-12000-crore-support-scheme-for-farmers/articleshow/63319240.cms> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

18. Inclusive Cities Observatory. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. uclg-cisdp.org/en/observatory/mahatma-gandhi-national-rural-employment-guarantee-act [Accessed May 31, 2021].

19. Ontario. “Ontario Basic Income Pilot”. [Ontario.ca. https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-basic-income-pilot](https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-basic-income-pilot) [Accessed May 31, 2021].

20. Alcaldía de Iztapalapa. “Programa: Sistema Público de Cuidados”. [YouTube.com. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hv5z3PsYf8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hv5z3PsYf8) [Accessed May 31, 2021].

21. Apoyoseconomicos.org. Apoyo Económico a cuidadores en Iztapalapa 2021. <https://apoyoseconomicos.org/programa-cuidadores-en-iztapalapa-2021/> [Accessed May 31, 2021].



The local government of **Bogotá** (Colombia) implemented an innovative policy inspired by the same caring approach, which is the “*Manzanas del Cuidado*” initiative (Caring Blocks).²² This measure has allowed the development of new social services and other opportunities integrated in the built environment of specific blocks of the city. In these caring places, women living in a very deprived area of the city are allowed to be relieved from their daily caring tasks, offering their kids the chance to spend a good and stimulating time in care of local government professionals.

The **Barcelona Provincial Council** (Spain) also implemented a Local Telecare service²³ which guarantees security and gives peace of mind and support to people who may be in a situation of risk due to factors of age, fragility, loneliness or dependency and, in addition, to detect emergency situations and respond immediately to them. This service relies heavily on coordination with other tiers of local government.

In line with its local human rights system premises,²⁴ the metropolitan government of **Seoul** (Republic of Korea) established a taskforce offering comprehensive support for single-person households facing different barriers.²⁵ This taskforce seeks to address particularly a growing demographic challenge for the country capital, which is that of single-person households (many of which are composed of older people). This measure will seek better articulation between different municipal services working on this issue, focusing on five major concerns: safety, disease, poverty, loneliness and housing.

Seoul, Republic of Korea
Source: UCLG CSIPDHR

22. Secretaría de Integración Social de la Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá. “Grato impacto de las manzanas del cuidado”. Integracionsocial.gov.co. <https://www.integracionsocial.gov.co/index.php/noticias/116-otros/4338-grato-impacto-de-las-manzanas-del-cuidado> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

23. Diputació de Barcelona. “Servicio Local de Teleasistencia”. <https://www.diba.cat/es/web/teleasistencia/servei-local-de-teleasistencia> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

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25. Seoul Metropolitan Government. “Mayor Oh Se-hoon’s First Pledge to Establish a Task Force for Comprehensive Support for Single-Person Households.” English.seoul.go.kr. <http://english.seoul.go.kr/mayor-oh-se-hoons-first-pledge-to-establish-a-task-force-for-comprehensive-support-for-single-person-households/> [Accessed May 31, 2021].

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CARING

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In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 5 on “Caring”, which focuses on the multiple actions that promote the care of diverse groups within society through safety nets and solidarity bonds, and the ways in which local and regional governments can promote caring practices that support structurally discriminated and/or vulnerable groups, as well as those that have historically “taken care” of others.

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