

## **Ehsaas Emergency Cash Program contributes largely for welfare of vulnerable segments**

ISLAMABAD, Nov 11 (APP): The globally acclaimed Ehsaas Emergency Cash Program emerged as a most extensive social protection intervention in the history of Pakistan which has empowered the weakest segments of society in the unusual circumstances of COVID-19 lockdown.

The initiative was launched by the Prime Minister, Imran Khan on April 1, 2020 to provide one-time emergency cash of Rs. 12,000 to the piece rate and daily wage workers, realizing the economic hardship faced by the vulnerable groups due to the Coronavirus lockdown in the country.

The large-budget initiative has so far disbursed an amount of Rs. 180 billion among 15 million families representing half of the country's population while the payment process was still continued for those who remained unable to collect their amount due to faulty bio-metric issues and death of beneficiaries.

The micro analysis of the country's labor work force revealed that there were 24 million breadwinners in the country who either work as daily wage workers, at piece rate enumeration or self employed in the country's large informal economy. When this figure is multiplied with the family size, the country has 160 million of such individuals which is two third of the total population.

The Ehsaas Emergency Cash program, conceptualized by the Prime Minister Imran Khan and supported by the federal cabinet, was launched to mitigate the socio-economic damage from the lockdown and focused on utilizing all the options for providing cash assistance to the poorest people who lost their jobs due to closure of businesses amid lockdown.

The daily wagers and labourers whose livelihoods were affected badly during the lockdown were asked to send SMS on 8171 through wide advertisement after which 139 million SMS were received. The details of the applicants were scrutinized through data analytics and different parameters to select the most eligible beneficiaries in a transparent manner.

The payment process was started through the designated banks and retailers outlets with ensuring compliance of COVID Standard Operating procedures while many challenges were faced like cyber attacks, biometric failures, unregistered deaths, closure of banks and relevant institutions etc.

According to a study conducted by UNICEF, UN and IPC-IG to assess social protection response in Asia focusing on an extensive mapping and overview of how social protection measures were deployed by the countries in Asia and the Pacific region in the response to the COVID-19 crisis, Pakistan covered highest number of responses to social protection in Asia through Ehsaas Emergency Cash.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation, Dr. Sania Nishtar who is heading Ehsaas Emergency Cash Program is committed to ensure transparency in all the schemes being implemented under the umbrella of Ehsaas.

Sughran Bibi, a widow of Mohammad Sharif, resident of Chak 40-GB Satyana, who visited BISP office, Satyana Road for receiving financial assistance told APP that she was looking after seven daughters and two sons with disabilities.

She expressed her satisfaction over the cash support and praised the Prime Minister Imran Khan for considering the miserable condition of the poor people who suffered the most during the lockdown.

She told that she received the cash amount after biometric verification process without any delay and the staff at the payment center was very supportive.

Another beneficiary, Yaqoob Khan who is a resident of Nishter Colony, Lahore termed the facilities at Ehsaas Kafalat Center in Nishter Town as remarkable. He said that special arrangements including clean drinking water, sitting, waiting room and shelters besides security were ensured to facilitate the people visiting the centers.

The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) pertaining to Covid-19 were strictly implemented by the district administration to contain spread of virus, he said and added that SMS alert system to inform the applicant about his eligibility and payment collection was an effective step to avoid inconvenience for the people.

Akram Shah, a driver of a cab hailing service in federal capital said, he was unable to earn during the lockdown period as the number of customers drastically decreased. It happened for the first time when he was left with no money to pay rent of his house, what to talk of the other expenses.

“While waiting for the customers in a corner of a road, I received a message from Ehsaas program about payment collection which was not less than a miracle for me. Some people question the worth of Rs. 12,000 in the period of inflation but to me it was a blessing”, he said.

Haji Mushtaq, a beneficiary from Lahore appreciated the efforts of the present government for taking care of the poor and vulnerable sections of society in the difficult circumstances.

He said that he was provided with financial assistance of Rs 12,000 during Covid 19 pandemic when he was struck hard owing to the lockdown and lost his daily wage work. However the cash amount under Ehsaas proved as a blessing for my family in hour of need.

Sharing his experience at Ehsaas Kafalat Center in Cant area, he said that he witnessed the efficient service delivery by the well-trained and cooperative staff of the district government at the payment collection center. “Such initiatives should be continued to help poor overcome their financial difficulties on regular basis,” he added.

The Executive member, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Babar Chaudhry was of the view that the Ehsaas program launched by Prime Minister Imran Khan led government is a great initiative to provide relief to those living below the poverty line.

He said the program has provided temporary relief to the poverty-stricken daily wagers and piece-rate workers through providing them financial assistance in the lockdown situation amid Coronavirus which has enabled them to meet their basic necessities. Emphasizing the need of launching more such programs, he said “we should support the Prime Minister in his pro-poor initiatives”.

According to the provincial breakdown of Ehsaas Emergency Cash Program disbursed and withdrawal amount till Nov 06, an amount of Rs. 92459.628 million has been disbursed to the bank in Punjab while 79999.338 million has been withdrawn.

A total amount of Rs.60532.548 million has been disbursed to the bank in Sindh out of which Rs. 55305.1245 million has been withdrawn; Rs. 34914.384 million disbursed to bank in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa out of which Rs.30390.04325 million withdrawn and Rs. 9593.364 million disbursed to bank in Azad Jammu and Kashmir out of which Rs. 2826.825 withdrawn.

An amount of Rs. 952.488 million has been disbursed to bank in Islamabad out of which Rs. 833.8525 million withdrawn and Rs. 1494.396 million disbursed to bank in Gilgit-Baltistan and Rs. 1346.74975 million withdrawn.

According to the `Provincial Breakdown of Ehsaas Emergency Cash Program Beneficiaries` till November 06, around 7704969 beneficiaries enrolled in the program in Punjab out of which 6617079 beneficiaries withdrawn the amount, 5044379 beneficiaries enrolled in Sindh and 4589662 beneficiaries withdrawn the amount and 2909532 beneficiaries enrolled from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa out of which 2506424 beneficiaries withdrawn the amount.

Around 799447 enrolled from Balochistan out of which 701419 beneficiaries withdrawn the cash amount, 272608 enrolled from Azad Jammu and Kashmir out of which 231757 beneficiaries withdrawn the amount, 124533 beneficiaries enrolled from Gilgit-Baltistan among which 110472 received their amount and 79374 beneficiaries enrolled from Islamabad out of which 69081 withdrawn the amount.

The ongoing programs under the umbrella of Ehsaas also included Ehsaas Undergraduate Scholarship, Ehsaas Langar Scheme, Ehsaas Kafalat, Ehsaas Interest Free Loans, Ehsaas Amdan, Waseela-i-Taleem initiative and Ehsaas Nashonuma and billions of rupees have been disbursed under these initiatives to benefit millions of people.

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