Understanding cross country practices for policy evaluation

Comments by Patricia Moreno, Senior advisor to the Director for Monitoring and Policy Evaluation, Department of National Planning Colombia

The pandemic not only has affected the execution of evaluations, but also has created the need to speed up the process of the evaluations to provide evidence to policy makers in a timely manner.

Colombia is currently performing rapid evaluations of the VAT Compensation program and of the Ingreso Solidario (Solidarity Income) program, which were implement during the pandemic to relief the situation of the most vulnerable people. These are the main characteristics of each program:

- VAT Compensation program: this program was projected to reach 300,000 households in 2020 and was supposed to start in May, but as a consequence of the pandemic the number of beneficiaries was broaden to one million households and the first payment was moved forward to April 1.
- Solidarity Income program: consists of a cash transfer delivered to around three million households who previously were not benefiting by any government social program, but who had been affected by the pandemic.

Key aspects we considered to be able to provide evidence to policy makers in a timely manner:

- Making arrangements with organizations that have experience performing impact evaluations and have the capacity to conduct rapid telephone surveys. The National Planning Department of Colombia made an agreement with Innovations for Poverty Action, which is carrying out the VAT compensation evaluation and with the Interamerican Development Bank, which is conducting the Solidarity Income evaluation.
- Usage of the available existing evidence. Evidence gap maps and Systematic reviews are good examples of tools that can provide information in a timely manner.
- The information gathered through these surveys will not only allow us to measure the effects of the social programs implemented, but also will give us valuable insights regarding household’s behavioral changes derived of COVID 19, which is also relevant for policy makers during and after the pandemic.

Fieldwork considerations during the pandemic:

One of the main obstacles for policy evaluators under this pandemic scenario is the process of gathering primary information. COVID 19 has forced us to move towards virtual or remote mechanisms for collecting information, facing all the challenges and constraints that this situation involves.

This transition towards virtuality and remote mechanisms involves making some adjustments to face the new challenges. The main adjustments could be summarized in:

- Reducing the length of some instruments
- Verifying connectivity
• Generating strategies to guarantee an adequate response rate and to assure the quality of the information gathered.