



1. Project Data

Project ID P149242	Project Name Emergency Nat'l Poverty Targeting Proj	
Country Lebanon	Practice Area(Lead) Social Protection & Jobs	
L/C/TF Number(s) TF-17200,TF-A2803	Closing Date (Original) 31-Dec-2018	Total Project Cost (USD) 15,051,645.22
Bank Approval Date 06-Jun-2014	Closing Date (Actual) 31-Mar-2021	
	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	18,200,000.00	18,200,000.00
Revised Commitment	15,051,645.22	15,051,645.22
Actual	15,051,645.22	15,051,645.22

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The objectives of the project were to expand the coverage and enhance the social assistance package of the National Poverty Targeting Program to Lebanese affected by the Syrian crisis and all Lebanese households under the Extreme Poverty Line (Trust Fund for Lebanon Grant Agreement No. TF017200, p. 5, with the International Development Association acting as Administrator).

On June 30, 2016, an additional grant financing introduced another objective to assess the effectiveness of the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP) graduation pilot. In a fourth project restructuring



on December 4, 2020, an outcome-level target was reduced, four months before the closing date, at which time most disbursements had already occurred. This ICR Review did not apply a split rating because it was clear at the outset that achievement of objectives was the same under both original and revised objectives, and a split rating was moot.

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

Yes

Did the Board approve the revised objectives/key associated outcome targets?

Yes

Date of Board Approval

30-Jun-2016

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

No

d. Components

I. Administration of NPTP (Appraisal: US\$11.18 million total cost, of which US\$3.89 million to be financed by the Trust Fund for Lebanon (TFL), administered by the International Development Association; Actual TFL: US\$3.97 million). This component aimed at ensuring effective and efficient NPTP administration and operations through its structures in the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (PCM) in order to expand coverage and enhance social assistance to extremely poor Lebanese households and those affected by the Syrian crisis. It would finance technical assistance to: (a) support the program management team; upgrade the NPTP Management Information System; monitor and evaluate the program and its processes; refine the grievance and redress mechanism (GRM); provide maintenance to information technology and other equipment; train staff and social workers in implementation of the NPTP, including the provision of technical assistance to the NPTP Project Unit in managing, assessing, and monitoring the implementation of the e-card food voucher program; and provide allowances for transportation and training for NPTP social workers; (b) recertify applicants, including by refining application forms and Proxy Means Test questionnaire, and recertifying existing beneficiaries and new applicants; (c) carry out an outreach campaign to enroll new beneficiaries, particularly in poorer and remote areas; and (d) provide training to beneficiaries on the use of food vouchers.

II. Provision of Social Assistance (US\$202.2 million, of which US\$3.76 million from TFL; Actual TFL: US\$10.21 million). The component would introduce the provision of basic food assistance using an electronic debit card system (financed by TFL). It would provide an existing package of assistance in health and education, largely consisting of coverage in public and private hospitals through a waiver of copayments for hospitalization, and school fee waivers for registration and free books for students in primary and secondary public schools (financed by the government of Lebanon).

The e-card food voucher program, which was already being implemented in Lebanon by the World Food Programme (WFP) for refugees, aimed to fulfill a minimum caloric intake estimated at approximately US\$30/month/person via a prepaid electronic voucher (e-card). NPTP would use the same system as that



deployed by WFP. Using the targeting criteria of NPTP, each eligible household would be provided with an e-card with a monthly value of US\$30/person. Purchase of alcohol and tobacco was not permitted. Contracts would be signed between WFP and merchants meeting required standards. WFP would maintain responsibility for shop selection/de-selection, use of commercial bank monitoring, site visits, household visits, and hotlines.

III. Fiduciary Operations Team (Appraisal: US\$0.55 million from TFL; Actual: the component was merged with Component I of NPTP Administration). The Fiduciary Operations Team, working closely with the teams in MOSA and PCM, would be responsible for two key activities: (i) managing procurement processes for all contracts such as goods, consulting services, and operating costs; and (ii) handling financial management, including payments for all contracts, financial reporting, and ensuring external audits were undertaken in compliance with guidelines. The fiduciary team would include a procurement specialist, financial management specialist, procurement assistant, and internal auditor.

Revised Components: The first restructuring/additional financing of June 30, 2016, introduced the following revisions:

- **it merged Component III (Fiduciary Operations) with Component I (NPTP Administration).**
- in lieu of the original third component that was merged with NPTP Administration, the restructuring **added a "new" third Component on NPTP Graduation Pilot (Additional Financing: US\$2.5 million; Actual: US\$0.2 million).** In line with the additional objective that was introduced by additional grant financing (see details below), the component aimed at piloting a graduation program for beneficiaries to improve self-employment opportunities.

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates

Cost and financing: At appraisal, the total cost was estimated at US\$213.9 million, of which a grant of US\$8.2 million would be financed by the World Bank through the Trust Fund for Lebanon Grant or TFL (noted above in Section 2d); US\$3 million from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR); and US\$84.9 million from the government of Lebanon for a project implementation period of three years. A financing gap of US\$117.8 million for financing e-card food vouchers remained, and the project was expected to serve as a platform that would attract donor assistance (PAD, p. 11).

An Additional Grant Financing of US\$10 million was provided on June 30, 2016, by the Lebanon Syria Crisis Trust Fund administered by the World Bank. This increased the grant financing administered by the Bank to a total of US\$18.2 million, for which the actual cost was US\$14.18 million. An amount of US\$0.81 million in undisbursed funds from the original grant was cancelled (ICR, p. 47). The Borrower contribution during the life of the project was LBP 46.1 trillion, estimated at US\$30.2 million (US\$14.9 million for health, and US\$15.3 million in education subsidies).



The ICR (p. 15) noted that this was the first time an exceptional IDA grant was provided to a Middle-Income Country, as the government of Lebanon was reluctant to take a loan to deal with the impact of the refugee crises on local citizens.

Additional parallel assistance mobilized during the project period: According to the ICR (p. 26), the e-card food voucher program attracted about US\$68 million in donor financing, including a total contribution of US\$8.1 million from UNHCR; US\$34.6 million from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development Cooperation; US\$25.2 million from the humanitarian MADAD Fund; and US\$ 25,437 from unspecified others. In addition, UNICEF targeted 75,000 vulnerable Lebanese children with a one-time ATM cash card valued at US\$40 per child; and World Vision targeted 170 NPTP households in Central Bekaa and provided them US\$175 per household per month for five months (ICR, p. 25).

Dates: The project was approved on June 6, 2014 and became effective on August 18, 2014. A Mid-Term Review was carried out on February 11, 2016. After four extensions (see details below), the project closed on March 31, 2021. The project was thus extended for a total of three years and three months (or 39 months) from its original closing date of December 31, 2017.

Restructurings, including extensions of the closing date:

1. The first restructuring that was associated with the additional financing of US\$10 million on June 30, 2016, scaled up activities; added another objective “to assess the effectiveness of National Poverty Targeting Program graduation pilot” (ICR, p. 8) with a related component titled as NPTP Graduation Pilot; merged Components I and III; and revised the results framework to add three new outcome indicators reflecting the new graduation objective. The project closing date was extended by 12 months, from December 31, 2017 to December 31, 2018, to accommodate the additional activities.
2. A second restructuring on December 10, 2018 extended the closing date from December 31, 2018 to December 31, 2019. The extension was requested because of substantial delays in NPTP recertification, staffing gaps, and disruptions due to national elections with no government in place for five months.
3. A third restructuring on December 27, 2019 extended the closing date by another 12 months, from December 31, 2019 to December 31, 2020. The 2019 nationwide mass demonstrations and political unrest led to the Prime Minister announcing his resignation but remaining as a caretaker until a new government was formed. Political uncertainties that stalled critical project-related decisions, combined with lengthy internal procurement processes, necessitated this extension, according to the ICR.
4. A fourth restructuring on December 4, 2020, was triggered by continued project inertia due to political instability, severe and financial economic crisis, COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, and a massive explosion at Beirut port on August 4, 2020. Delays and time constraints meant that the graduation pilot could not be launched and implemented by the project closing date of December 31, 2020. Hence, the graduation objective was dropped. Also, the end target of the PDO level indicator “Direct project beneficiaries” was reduced from 350,000 to 240,000 beneficiaries (ICR, p. 10), four months before the closing date and when most disbursements have already taken place, therefore, a split rating was rendered inconsequential.
5. Three weeks after the fourth restructuring, a fifth restructuring, on December 25, 2020, extended the closing date by three months, from December 31, 2020 to March 31, 2021, to complete several activities, including an external business process audit for NPTP and verification of benefit applicants.



3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

The objectives were relevant to Lebanon's pressing needs in social protection and increasing fragility. Unlike other refugee situations, displaced Syrians were not housed in camps, but in Lebanese host communities that were already disadvantaged prior to the influx, and that were more likely to be poor and struggling to access essential services and opportunities in a fragile environment. The project aimed to mitigate the immediate and potentially long-lasting impact of the crisis by supporting vulnerable poor households.

At closing, the project remained closely aligned with the Country Partnership Framework (CPF FY2017-FY2022), specifically with CPF Objective 2e to strengthen the safety net for the poorest Lebanese. Enhanced targeting of NPTP benefits to the extreme poor provided the basis for some of the CPF indicators, such as the number of extreme poor Lebanese receiving e-card food vouchers, and households receiving education and health benefits.

In addition, the objectives continue to be aligned with the World Bank's Social Protection and Labor Strategy 2012-2022 that aims to improve resilience, equity, and opportunity for people in low- and middle-income countries, and to promote the development of integrated and efficient social service delivery systems for addressing poverty, inequality, and other social risks. Project objectives remained consistent with the World Bank's Regional Strategy for the MENA Region, which aims to contribute to building peace and stability. The objectives are explicitly linked to the Regional Strategy's pillar on Resilience and Refugees. They are also in line with the World Bank twin goals that guide its work for ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity.

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Expand the coverage of the social assistance package of the National Poverty Targeting Program to Lebanese affected by the Syrian crisis and all Lebanese households under the Extreme Poverty Line

Rationale



Theory of change

The theory of change held that improved staff capacities through training, knowledge about NPTP benefits through outreach and a communication campaign, recertification of NPTP applicants, upgraded information systems and services, and enhanced monitoring of NPTP services would plausibly result in expanded program coverage, reflected by increased beneficiaries.

Intermediate results

Household awareness of NPTP increased from a baseline of 40 percent in 2013 to 60 percent in 2021, short of the target of 90 percent.

According to the ICR (p. 32), the uptake locations for GRM were limited in terms of accessibility and number. Recording of complaints and/or requests was poor or lacking. There was no mechanism for automated response and unclear follow-up and accountability lines. GRM had process weaknesses, including in staffing structure for monitoring and handling complaints and queries.

Outcomes

The number of direct project beneficiaries increased from a baseline of 195,000 in December 2013 to 260,966 beneficiaries in December 2020, short of the target of 350,000 beneficiaries (Results Framework, p. 40). The percentage of female beneficiaries was 51.30 percent, essentially remaining on track compared to both baseline and target of 52 percent.

NPTP beneficiaries from extremely poor households as a share of total NPTP beneficiaries receded from a baseline of 57 percent in December 2013 to 43 percent in December 2020, short of the target (also set at 57 percent).

In view of the above results, this objective was only partly achieved.

Rating

Modest

OBJECTIVE 2

Objective

Enhance the social assistance package of the NPTP to Lebanese affected by the Syrian crisis and all Lebanese households under the extreme poverty line

Rationale



Theory of change

Interlinked with the theory of change described under Objective 1, it was reasonably expected that the distribution of e-cards for food vouchers and training of beneficiaries on their use; provision of health subsidies that promoted beneficiaries' access to hospital services; and waiving registration fees for students in public primary and secondary schools with provision of free books would plausibly lead to an enhanced social assistance package, reflected by enhanced beneficiary utilization of benefits related to food assistance, hospitalization, and education. In the long run, this would plausibly contribute to improved health and education outcomes, and food security for the beneficiaries.

Intermediate results

The number of NPTP applicants increased from a baseline of 480,000 persons in 2013 to 629,542 in 2021, short of the target of 800,000 applicants.

Targeted households reporting an increase in the Food Consumption Score reached 52.1 percent in 2021, exceeding the target of 25 percent.

The proportion of assisted people who were informed about the e-card food program (i.e., eligibility, benefits, and where to complain) reached 100 percent, attaining the target.

Education benefits amounted to US\$140 per year per household with two students, and hospitalization benefits were US\$110 per year per patient.

Outcomes

Outcomes related to the intended enhancement of the NPTP social assistance package were assessed in terms of benefit aspects concerning food, hospitalization, and education. Positive results were reported only in food assistance. It would be reasonable to conclude that attribution in results measurement is shared with respective donor partners and the government of Lebanon, while also noting that the project created the platform to attract additional resources, and that platform enabled or facilitated the channeling and utilization of mobilized funds, in pursuit of achieving development objectives.

Food assistance: Beneficiaries of safety net programs involving e-card food vouchers increased from a baseline of zero in December 2013 to 105,538 beneficiaries in December 2020, exceeding the original target of 5,222 beneficiaries and the revised target of 52,715 beneficiaries.

In terms of health and education benefits, the ICR provided qualitative information about related benefits that were delivered by the government of Lebanon, but without disaggregated quantitative data other than reporting that the take-up rates by NPTP beneficiaries for both services were low (ICR, p. 21). The reasons cited by the fieldwork coordinators and the private firm that conducted the evaluation were as follows:

Hospitalization benefits: According to the ICR (p. 21), several issues were observed, including low number of contracted hospitals; limited hospitalization options for NPTP beneficiaries; low beneficiary satisfaction;



hospital admission at the discretion of doctors and frequent admission denial; out-of-pocket costs for treatment in hospitals, as hospitals often claimed that the program did not cover the beneficiary's specific medical condition; significant number of beneficiaries in need of a specialist's consultation (rather than hospitalization) not covered under the program; and significant delays by NPTP in reimbursing hospitals for their services, resulting in reluctance of hospitals to admit NPTP beneficiaries.

Education benefits: According to the ICR (p. 22), the opportunity cost of registering students to receive the education subsidy was higher than the subsidy provided by the program, and there was insufficient incentive for extremely poor families to enroll their children in schools, as many NPTP households relied on their children's income to survive.

Therefore, the objective was only partly achieved.

Rating
Modest

OBJECTIVE 3

Objective

Assess the effectiveness of the National Poverty Targeting Program graduation pilot

Rationale

Theory of change

As understood from the information provided by the ICR, the theory of change was based on the premise that improving self-employment and employability would minimize beneficiaries' long-term dependence on the safety net program by elevating them from extreme poverty (ICR, p. 15). The theory of change held that support to beneficiaries for strengthening their technical skills, running a business, and financial literacy; for coaching and life-skills training; and for jump-starting economic activities would increase employment opportunities, measured by self-employment or employment percentages, increased income of targeted households, and improved poverty level for targeted households.

The pilot essentially reflected a "jobs for the poor program" to help selected beneficiaries to cope with labor market impacts of the Syrian crisis that particularly affected low-skilled individuals from poor households. The design was based on the graduation model of the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor/Ford Foundation, that was mostly used in rural areas. The pilot aimed at providing self-employment opportunities to male and female members of targeted NPTP households living in the North and Bekaa regions, with an intervention sample selected from 5,000 new extremely poor households. The pilot was planned in both rural and urban areas to inform a potential national scale-up after its evaluation. A rapid market analysis was conducted to assess local market needs and opportunities.

In terms of preparation at the time of the additional financing in 2016, overall readiness for the graduation pilot was in an advanced stage. Key preparatory arrangements were completed, including the following: a contract was signed between PCM and WFP; the pilot concept was developed, and its process and geographic areas



were defined; pilot beneficiaries were profiled and identified; over 100 social workers were selected and trained; and an M&E plan was prepared. The procurement process for engaging a service delivery firm was finalized; savings and financial literacy activities were identified; and a baseline survey for the impact evaluation was completed (ICR. p. 19).

Outputs and Outcomes

There were no outputs, as related activities were not implemented. Several reasons were reported by the ICR (pp. 9-10, and p. 19): initially, there were substantial delays to the recertification process that was needed to identify graduation beneficiaries; there were staff changes at the Project Management Unit and a long replacement process for the Program Manager; and there were political factors, including national elections and absence of an appointed government for several months. All of these factors contributed to stalling of program-related decisions and delayed the launch of planned activities. In 2019 and 2020, there was additional political instability, social unrest, further exacerbation of the economic and financial crisis, and the Beirut port explosion. The combination of these factors hampered MOSA’s ability to make decisions and to initiate the planned activities.

In view of non-implementation of related activities, no progress was made or measured. The objective was dropped on December 4, 2020, four months before the project closing date of March 31, 2021.

Rating
Negligible

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale

The two objectives to expand the coverage and enhance the social assistance package of NPTP to Lebanese affected by the Syrian crisis and all Lebanese households under the Extreme Poverty Line were partly achieved. The third objective to assess the effectiveness of NPTP graduation pilot was barely achieved. The aggregation of achievements under the three objectives is consistent with a modest efficacy rating. Nevertheless, according to the ICR (p. 18), the project made important contributions toward enabling a modern social safety net program in Lebanon with strengthened institutional capacities, updated Proxy Means Testing, and an upgraded information system with a database, all constituting a national social safety net program to build upon.

Overall Efficacy Rating

Primary Reason



Modest

Low achievement

5. Efficiency

The PAD's economic and financial analysis (pp. 51-59) provided general arguments about the rationale for public involvement. At the project level, the analysis argued that the basket of benefits was expected to have economic impacts on both household and aggregate levels. At the household level, NPTP was expected to increase disposable income and consumption of extremely poor households and possibly contribute to improved education and health outcomes. At the aggregate level, NPTP was expected to reduce the level of extreme poverty and inequality in the country, and possibly increase aggregate utilization of health, education, and e-card food services with corresponding externalities these changes imply. The analysis estimated that, by 2016/2017, 100 percent of extremely poor households would be covered with NPTP benefits, with the assumption that all NPTP beneficiaries were extremely poor with no errors of inclusion, that the number of extreme poor would remain constant, and that a faultless outreach would be achieved by 2016/2017. The realism of these assumptions is questionable.

The ICR (p. 22) assessed efficiency across three dimensions: project administration cost, cost efficiency, and project innovations. The ICR noted that, in 2017, the administrative costs of NPTP exceeded international benchmarks and were becoming a burden. This was largely due to the number of contracted social workers far exceeding the needs of the program, and because salaries as a percentage of total NPTP costs reached 78 percent, compared to 15 percent without social workers. Also, not all social workers were performing their tasks or working the required number of hours. To address these concerns, MOSA undertook a process of rating the social workers and reduced their number from 649 to 350 workers.

The ICR reported that cost efficiency was significantly reduced due to delays related to the flow of funds between ministries, delayed recertification and identification of graduation pilot beneficiaries, and delayed recruitment of key consultants and firms. The ICR stated that extensions of the project closing date from the second restructuring of 2018 onwards were inefficient, as most of the progress was realized by mid-2018. The Project Management Unit, the Fiduciary Operations Team, and the Bank expended substantial technical assistance and administrative time on preparatory activities and inordinate extensions for the graduation pilot with no outcome achieved. Periodic adaptation of the program organizational structure, clarifying roles and responsibilities of MOSA staff to accommodate the scale-up of the food voucher program, took a long time to settle, delaying recruitment and overall implementation. The ICR noted that cancelling the graduation pilot and reallocating its funds at an earlier date would have been a more efficient course of action.

Several other factors adversely impacted implementation and significantly reduced project efficiency. The economic and financial crisis substantially hindered governance and implementation (ICR, p. 29). Political instability through much of the life of the project created uncertainty over the longevity of governments and inertia in taking decisive actions. The 2020 port of Beirut explosion shocked the entire nation, and exacerbated social and political unrest (ICR, p. 29). Internal and lengthy processes of PCM and the Ministry of Finance created repeated bottlenecks to the flow of funds. Agreements with the WFP for the original project and the additional financing took considerable time to finalize. The re-allocation of social workers to conduct a census of Syrian refugees in the second half of 2016 delayed both provision of benefits to NPTP beneficiaries and selection of participants for the graduation pilot. Fraudulent behavior by a portion of social workers was detected during the identification of beneficiaries in 2016-2017 and had a detrimental effect on the recertification process, program effectiveness, and its reputation (ICR, p. 30).



Efficiency Rating

Modest

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

Relevance of objectives is rated high, as objectives responded to pressing country needs and remained closely aligned with the Country Partnership Framework (CPF FY2017-FY2022) at project closing. Efficacy is rated modest as development objectives were partly achieved. Efficiency is rated modest because adverse aspects of implementation significantly reduced efficiency. The overall outcome is rated moderately unsatisfactory, indicative of significant shortcomings in the operation's achievement of its objectives, and in its efficiency.

a. Outcome Rating

Moderately Unsatisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The main risks to development outcomes are related to continued economic and political instability. However, the ICR indicated that financial sustainability of NPTP in the near term appears to be ensured, as the US\$246 million Emergency Crisis and COVID-19 Response Social Safety Net Project (ESSN, P173367), approved in January 2021, is currently providing cash transfers and access to social services to extremely poor and vulnerable Lebanese populations affected by the economic crisis and COVID-19 pandemic. This follow-on operation built on activities that were undertaken by the project. Specifically, Component 1 (US\$204 million) would incrementally scale-up e-card food voucher beneficiary households utilizing PMT and NPTP database; Component 2 (US\$23 million) would provide a top-up education support to students aged between 13-18 years to remain in public schools; Component 3 (US\$10 million) would continue strengthening MOSA's capacities and systems to define and develop basic and specialized social services to beneficiary groups (i.e. women at risk, elderly, persons with disabilities, and children at risk or in need of early childhood development); and Component 4 (US\$9 million) would enhance program delivery, including a national social registry building on NPTP data, and establish a GRM at MOSA. In addition, substantial



institutional strengthening generated by the project at MOSA, PCM, and NPTP to provide critical support to poor and vulnerable households may contribute to alleviating the risk to development outcome.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

According to the ICR, the project capitalized on existing arrangements of NPTP under MOSA and the e-card food voucher program by the WFP to shape its design (ICR, p. 35). It also built on lessons learned from previous NPTP experience and from operations supported by the Bank and WFP worldwide. Lessons included the importance of outreach and awareness; selection of targeting methodology such as proxy means testing that was demonstrated to be suitable in countries with high informality and unreliability of income information; and use of electronic pre-paid vouchers for food distribution rather than paper vouchers, as electronic vouchers save time and costs for both beneficiaries and WFP and allow for better monitoring of spending patterns and detection of fraud (PAD, p. 12).

Implementation was to be coordinated by MOSA and its NPTP Project Unit. According to the PAD, the project would also include a Central Management Unit headed by a director, to be housed at PCM (PAD, p. 33). In addition, a Fiduciary Operations Team was to be housed at PCM and would report to the secretary general of PCM. According to the ICR (pp. 38-39), these arrangements were complex, and subsequently affected coordination and ownership, as critical responsibilities rested with different government institutions. The ICR noted that simpler lines of responsibility and accountability would likely have expedited procurement and implementation. The risk of an implementation slow-down or gridlock in the event of diverging visions among different government institutions was well identified during preparation (PAD, p. 47), but "risk management" was limited to the reflection of corresponding roles and responsibilities in the Operations Manual. The description of roles is normally included in an Operations Manual as a standard practice, irrespective of project risks. M&E implementation arrangements were adequate, but M&E design had moderate shortcomings (noted in Section 9a).

In terms of financial management capacity, the fiduciary team was managing the Second Emergency Social Protection Project with satisfactory performance, and the overall financial management risk was assessed as moderate (PAD, p. 18). WFP was to coordinate with the commercial Bank and Master Card in applying monitoring tools and was to train NPTP staff on monitoring aspects, including household visits.

Quality-at-Entry Rating
Moderately Satisfactory

b. Quality of supervision



According to the ICR (p. 35), the Bank Team was proactive, closely monitored project activities, identified issues, and worked with MOSA, PCM, and WFP to find solutions to arising implementation challenges. The ICR also reported that implementation support focused on maximizing development impact, resulting in continuous adjustments, including a first restructuring associated with the approval of additional financing for program scale-up and four more project restructurings. Guidance was provided for procurement, staff recruitment at the Project Management Unit, streamlining of social workers, management of fraudulent behavior, and enhancement of the GRM mechanism. The Team supported knowledge exchanges/transfers in the form of study tours, virtual sessions on specific topics, and training courses to strengthen capacities. The Bank Team provided regular support to various aspects of the project, including overall fiduciary aspects, procurement of specialized consultancies, impact evaluation, and analysis of poverty data. The Bank Team was based in the field and conducted weekly follow-up on project progress. Biannual supervision missions resulted in regular Implementation Status and Results Reports that were candid and detailed, outlining priority issues with actionable recommendations.

Nevertheless, the project was left heavily encumbered by an objective whose activities never materialized. The ICR (p. 38) reported that the Bank waited too long for related activities to pick up and that it should have restructured the project earlier and reallocated funds to other priority areas.

Quality of Supervision Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

Objectives were clearly defined and reflected by measurable indicators. Baselines were available, but targets for beneficiaries and applicants were overly ambitious and set without prior analysis of demand and accessibility of NPTP services, according to the ICR (p. 32). The Results Framework did not include disaggregated information on health and education beneficiaries, although the PAD (p. 14) stated that the project would specifically monitor the number of direct project beneficiaries of education, health, and e-card food vouchers. The theory of change had a lapse in the presentation of intended outcomes for the enhancement of social assistance. Utilization was presented as an intermediate result, and the PDO outcome was presented as improved health and education outcomes, and food security. Measuring improved health and education outcomes was beyond the purview of the project. The ICR (p. 32) noted that the M&E plan identified the resources available at MOSA for M&E activities, M&E roles and responsibilities for the different components, sources of information for each indicator, methods and tools for data collection, and the intended use of information.

The computerized information system that was developed under the first phase of NPTP was expected to be a central part of M&E. It included a module to register applicant households, eligibility assessment, utilization of benefits, and registration of complaints and grievances. For food vouchers, the project would use WFP established systems for the e-card food vouchers program in collaboration with the Banque



Libano-Francaise for monitoring transactions. The design included M&E training and capacity building for relevant staff. The design incorporated a technical audit of NPTP and monthly Post Distribution Monitoring of the food voucher program.

b. M&E Implementation

Data on beneficiary households' food consumption, dietary diversity, and coping strategies were collected through monthly post-distribution monitoring in collaboration with WFP. M&E activities were further enhanced to accommodate monitoring of the graduation pilot, with an assessment of beneficiary profiles completed in mid-2020. A technical audit for NPTP was completed, and NPTP operations and the food voucher program were reportedly closely monitored by the Project Management Unit and WFP.

c. M&E Utilization

M&E findings were used for regular project monitoring. They were used in decision-making for project extensions and project adjustments. Monitoring of NPTP administrative costs helped to rationalize the number of social workers. Monitoring of NPTP applications as well as education and health benefits provided an early indication of low take-up rates. In mid-2017, it was noted that the distribution of households in the sample database did not correspond to the geographical distribution of the poor and extremely poor in the Household Budget Survey of 2011/12, indicating that some regions of the country were under-covered, namely Mount Lebanon, Beirut, and South Lebanon, in contrast with North Lebanon and Bekaa that were over-covered. According to the ICR (p. 33), the findings of the technical audit are currently informing the follow-on operation (ESSN) on improving NPTP effectiveness and efficiency, including real-time transfer of beneficiary data; timeframes for accepting, transferring, and assessing applications; increasing orientation on the food assistance program, e-card utilization, and beneficiary rights; and redesigning education services to ensure that subsidies are meaningful and that services are accessible to NPTP beneficiaries.

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial

10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

The project was classified under Environmental Category C. Environmental and social assessments were undertaken both at appraisal and at the time of additional financing (ICR, p. 33). According to the Integrated Safeguards Data Sheet at appraisal, there were no social or environmental safeguards impacts anticipated under the project.



b. Fiduciary Compliance

Financial Management. The flow of funds was channeled through the Ministry of Finance to a Designated Account for PCM. Direct payments for the e-card food voucher program were made by the World Bank to WFP. The project experienced delays in financial management activities, mostly caused by lengthy internal procedures at PCM. According to the ICR (p. 34), this raised the need for more clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the Fiduciary Operations Team in relation to MOSA and to the Central Management Unit at PCM. Nevertheless, quarterly interim financial reports were submitted on time and were of acceptable quality and content. No weaknesses of significance were observed in internal controls. All annual audited financial statements had an unqualified audit opinion (ICR, p. 34). The World Bank received annual progress reports, quarterly Interim Financial Reports, and annual external audit reports in a timely manner.

The PCM signed service agreements with WFP for the implementation of the e-card food voucher program, and, as WFP was signatory to the World Bank-UN FPA23 of February 2009 and of the WB-UN Financial Management Framework Agreement of April 2006, activities assigned to WFP were not subject to the Bank's standard financial management and audit requirements.

Procurement. World Bank procurement guidelines were applied. The contract with WFP was significantly delayed and signed on June 5, 2015. Until mid-2019, post procurement reviews found procurement processes to be generally satisfactory, except for the failure to publish contracting awards. This issue was resolved in 2016 following use of the Bank's procurement tracking system (STEP), as publications were generated systematically. Key procurement delays related to the graduation pilot were encountered, and substantial efforts were extended to revise procurement processes to expedite its activities. But as noted in Section 5, there was no progress made, essentially because of political uncertainties, severe economic crisis, and disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

Attracting funding from donors was reported by the ICR as an unintended impact (pp. 25-26). However, resource mobilization was intended, and the project was to serve as a platform for donor assistance (see Section 2e; PAD, p. 11; ICR, p. 4 and p. 18). Donor contributions were previously noted under project costs in Section 2e.

d. Other

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11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
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Outcome	Unsatisfactory	Moderately Unsatisfactory	There is no disagreement, as both the ICR (p. 24) and this ICR Review rated the outcome as moderately unsatisfactory (the ICR rating was incorrectly recorded in the system).
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderate shortcomings were observed, including complexity of implementation arrangements and lines of responsibility resting with different institutions, blurring accountability. M&E at entry also had shortcomings in design and target setting. During implementation, the project was left heavily encumbered by an objective whose associated activities were never launched. The ICR reported that an early decisive action by the Bank was warranted, and that the project should have been restructured with funds reallocated to other priority areas.
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Substantial	
Quality of ICR	---	Substantial	

12. Lessons

The ICR (pp. 37-39) offered several lessons and recommendations, including the following lessons, partially re-stated by IEG:

When a development project uses national institutions for its implementation in FCV settings, the project can concurrently contribute to the preservation of those institutions and to the enhancement of their capacities. The project maintained and strengthened the capacities of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, and the administration of the National Poverty Targeting Program to provide critical support to poor and vulnerable households during a highly fragile and volatile period. The project also strengthened the building blocks of a national social safety net system and contributed to helping Lebanon to weather the compounding effects of successive crises, that it continues to face.

Collaborating with international organizations with comparative advantages and leveraging their capacities and expertise can expedite project activities and lead to more significant impact. The project benefited from its partnership with the World Food Programme, its experience,



delivery mechanisms, and M&E systems, resulting in effective implementation of the electronic food voucher program.

Project coordination, ownership, and implementation can be negatively affected by complex implementation arrangements. The implementation structure encompassing the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, and the Fiduciary Operations Team was complex and negatively impacted implementation. Critical responsibilities rested with different government institutions, and necessitated clarification of responsibilities and coordination of activities throughout the cycle of implementation and project restructurings. Simpler lines of responsibility and accountability would likely have expedited procurement activities and overall implementation, particularly for the graduation activities.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR was results-oriented and aligned with development objectives. It provided a candid critique of the project and its performance. The ICR appropriately linked the narrative with the evidence and efficacy ratings. The ICR provided sufficient evidence underpinning its conclusions. Its reporting on fiduciary aspects was meticulous. The report was internally consistent. It offered specific lessons and recommendations that were derived from project experience and should be useful to similar future operations. The ICR followed guidelines, except in three areas: (i) the ICR addressed the objective pertaining to the piloting of NPTP graduation as a component rather than a self-standing objective, as laid out by the 2016 Grant Agreement; (ii) the split rating, although inconsequential in this case, would have been expected to consider the entire project lifetime in assessing achievements against original and revised targets rather than before and after restructuring phases; and (iii) the ICR main text was not concise, reaching 39 pages.

a. Quality of ICR Rating

Substantial

