

Government of Pakistan
Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division
Press Release

Dr. Sania briefs diplomats on Ehsaas Emergency Cash: Pakistan's social protection response to COVID-19

July 2, 2020 -Islamabad: Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a virtual briefing on the country's social protection response to COVID-19, Ehsaas Emergency Cash program that brought together heads of diplomatic missions, Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Country Representatives and Charge de Affairs from over 60 countries. Dean of Diplomatic Corps, H.E. Atadjan Movlamov was also present. The meeting primarily aimed to reflect on real-time lessons of Ehsaas Emergency Cash program with the international world and learn from their social protection experiences.

Briefing foreign diplomats, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation, Dr. Sania Nishtar who heads Ehsaas program highlighted various dimensions of the USD 1.16 billion program particularly the scale and design, speed of deployment and real time lessons along with transparency measures safeguarded by the government to reach out to multimillions of daily wage earners and labourers. Addressing the meeting, Dr. Nishtar stated, "Ehsaas Emergency Cash is the most extensive and transparent social protection operation ever undertaken in the history of Pakistan. In just 11 weeks, Ehsaas has supported 12.30 million families amid these unprecedented times. With around 24 million of the population subsisting from self-employment in the informal economy, daily and piece rate wages, the COVID-19 response had necessitated an immediate strategy to protect those living in extreme poverty. The program's overall success is driven by its comprehensive approach to implementation based on leveraging existing Ehsaas systems and strengthening social safety nets, which helped to ensure that vulnerable households were provided with immediate cash support as one time assistance for four months."

Elaborating the methodology of the program, Dr. Nishtar continued, "To deliver Ehsaas Emergency Cash to the disadvantaged, digital capabilities developed over the past year as part of Ehsaas strategy were adopted by the government. Requests were sought through an SMS short code service; data analytics enabled eligibility ascertainment, using unique national identification numbers and drawing on the National Socioeconomic Registry and wealth proxies (travel, taxes, billing, assets ownership data and government employment status), and payments were biometrically verified."

Diplomats widely lauded the Ehsaas Emergency Cash program that it took lead in radically expanding social safety nets to help mitigate the effects of the COVID-19. They appreciated the real time lessons and transparency measures hardwired in the roll out of program especially the Ehsaas information portal that provide real time details about the number of beneficiaries

served for each of categories with provincial, district and area wise breakdowns. They were of the view that experiences of Pakistan under this emergency cash program provide a great insight to other countries. They offered broader collaboration to the government of Pakistan to further expand this program.

In his remarks, Dean of Diplomatic Corps H.E. Atadjan Movlamov thanked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Dr. Nishtar for organizing an online engaging interaction on Ehsaas Emergency Cash with diplomatic community. He appreciated steps taken by the government to provide cash assistance to the vulnerable segments of the society that were affected the most by COVID-19 pandemic.

Closing the briefing, Foreign Secretary, Sohail Mehmood acknowledged the success of Pakistan's social protection program, Ehsaas Emergency Cash that has reached out to millions of deserving families amid COVID-19 outbreak under the leadership of Dr. Nishtar. Further, the Foreign Secretary thanked all the distinguished guests from international community for joining the meeting and exchanging the best international experiences. He said that another interaction will be planned very soon to share the final report of Ehsaas Emergency Cash.