

ACTRAV's support for trade unions in the Caribbean: Promoting decent work and social protection to address economic, demographic and ecological transformations

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**Introducing the ILO approach to family-
friendly social protection**

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What is social protection and why is it so important?

What is social protection?

Social protection/security systems provide comprehensive and adequate protection throughout the life course

They usually include the following branches:

- Health protection and access to health care
- Sickness benefits
- Unemployment protection
- Old age pensions
- Work/employment injury benefits
- Child and family benefits
- Maternity benefits
- Disability benefits
- Survivors' pensions

Protection can be provided through

- Contributory schemes, such as social insurance
- Non-contributory (tax-financed) schemes and programmes, such as social assistance, categorical or universal benefits

Financing: Social insurance contributions and general taxation, in some cases, also external support

Positive economic impacts of investments in social protection

**Micro level:
individuals and
households**

- building, protecting and enhancing human capabilities
- enhancing productivity and employability
- empowering poor individuals to invest or to adopt higher return strategies

**Meso level:
local economy**

- enhancing community assets and infrastructure
- positive spillovers from beneficiaries to non-beneficiaries

**Macro level:
overall economy**

- stabilizing aggregate demand
- facilitating structural change
- rendering growth-enhancing reforms more politically feasible
- Enhancing social cohesion

Underinvestment in social protection constitutes not only a social challenge, but also an economic challenge

The most relevant ILO social security standards for building and maintaining universal and sustainable social protection systems

❑ Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)

Sets minimum standards for the nine branches of social security:

- ▶ Minimum percentage of personal coverage;
- ▶ Minimum level of benefits
- ▶ Maximum qualifying period for the entitlement to benefits;
- ▶ Minimum duration of benefits

Sets basic social security principles, e.g:

- ▶ General responsibility of the state, collective financing and social solidarity, tripartite administration of social security schemes, guarantee of defined benefits, right to appeal in case of refusal of benefits or complaint as to the quality or quantity of benefits

❑ Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)

Complements the existing ILO standards, and

Guides member States in building comprehensive social security systems, through

- ▶ Establishing and maintaining national social protection floors as a fundamental element of national social security systems,
- ▶ Implementing their floors within strategies for the extension of social security that progressively ensure higher levels of social security to as many people as possible, guided by ILO social security standards





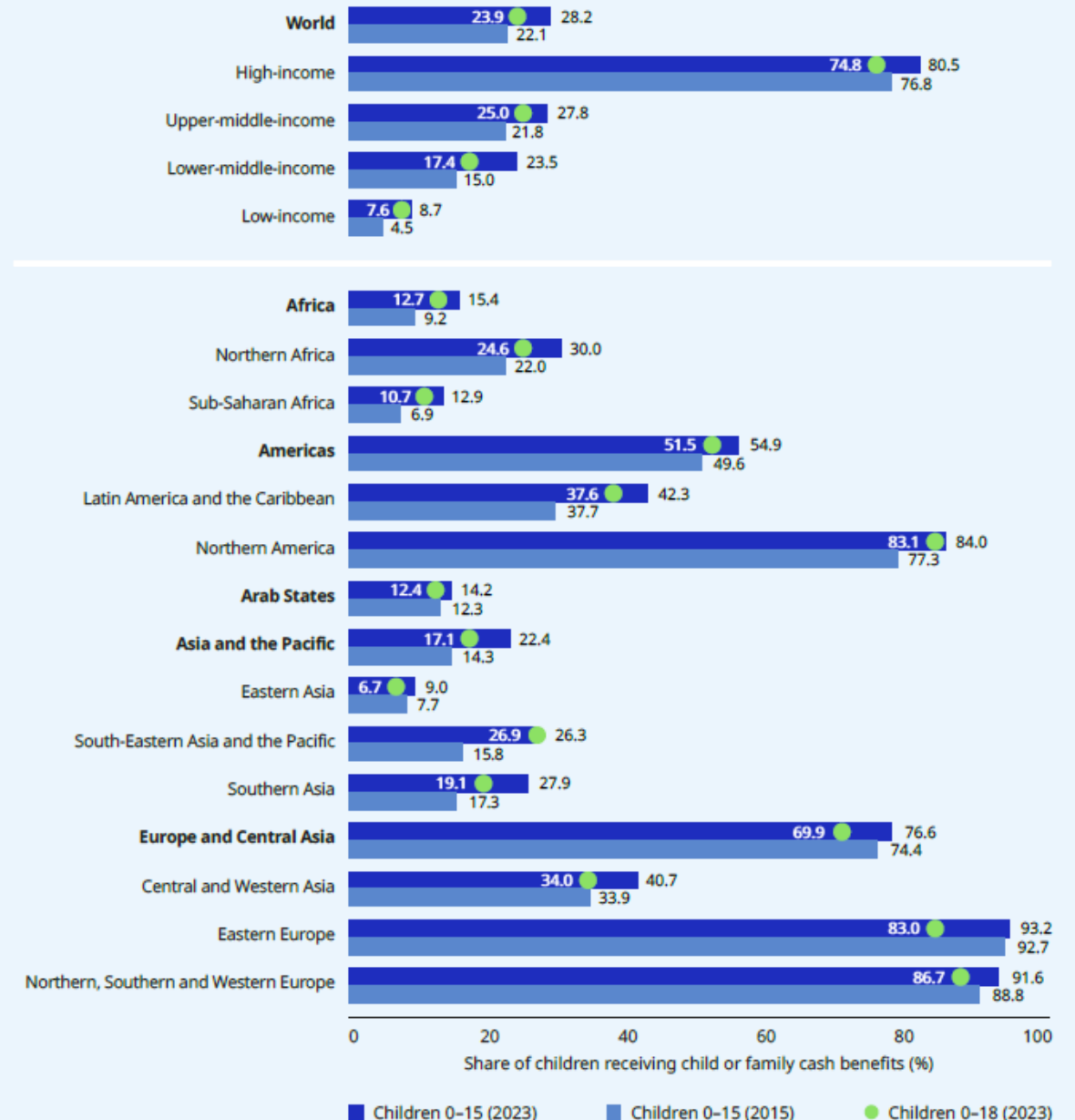
Main requirements: ILO social security standards on family/child benefits

	Convention No. 102: Minimum standards	Recommendation No. 202: Basic protection
What should be covered?	Responsibility for child maintenance.	At least basic income security for children.
Who should be protected?	At least: ► 50% of all employees; <i>or</i> ► categories of economically active population (forming not less than 20% of all residents); <i>or</i> ► all residents with means under prescribed threshold.	All children.
What should the benefit be?	Periodic payments; or provision for food, clothing, housing, holidays or domestic help; or combination of both. <i>Total value of benefits calculated at a global level:</i> ► at least 3% of reference wage multiplied by number of children of covered people; or ► at least 1.5% of reference wage multiplied by number of children of all residents.	Benefits in cash or in kind at a level that ensures at least basic income security for children, providing access to nutrition, education, care and other necessary goods and services.
What should the benefit duration be?	At least from birth to 15 years of age or school-leaving age.	For the duration of childhood.
What conditions can be prescribed for entitlement to a benefit?	► Three months' contributions or employment (for contributory or employment-based schemes); ► One year's residence (for non-contributory schemes).	Should be defined at national level and prescribed by law, applying the principles of non-discrimination, responsiveness to special needs and social inclusion, and ensuring the rights and dignity of children.

Social protection for children remains limited, yet is critical in the face of the climate emergency

- ▶ Social protection systems are an essential for realizing children's rights.
- ▶ **Most children still have no effective coverage** — only 28.2 per cent of children aged 0 to 15 globally are covered by child or family benefits.
- ▶ **Staggering regional differences in effective coverage:** 76.6 percent in Europe and Central Asia, and 15.4 per cent in Africa
- ▶ **Children are twice as likely to live in poverty as adults.** 333 million children still live in extreme poverty.
- ▶ The unfolding climate crisis further exacerbates the poverty risk for children. **Child poverty is both a driver of vulnerability and a result of overall climate risk.**
- ▶ **Social protection policies are powerful tools in alleviating poverty for children and their families.**
- ▶ Strengthening households' resilience and copying strategies in response to climate shocks requires **investing in robust systems and enhancing their shock responsiveness.**

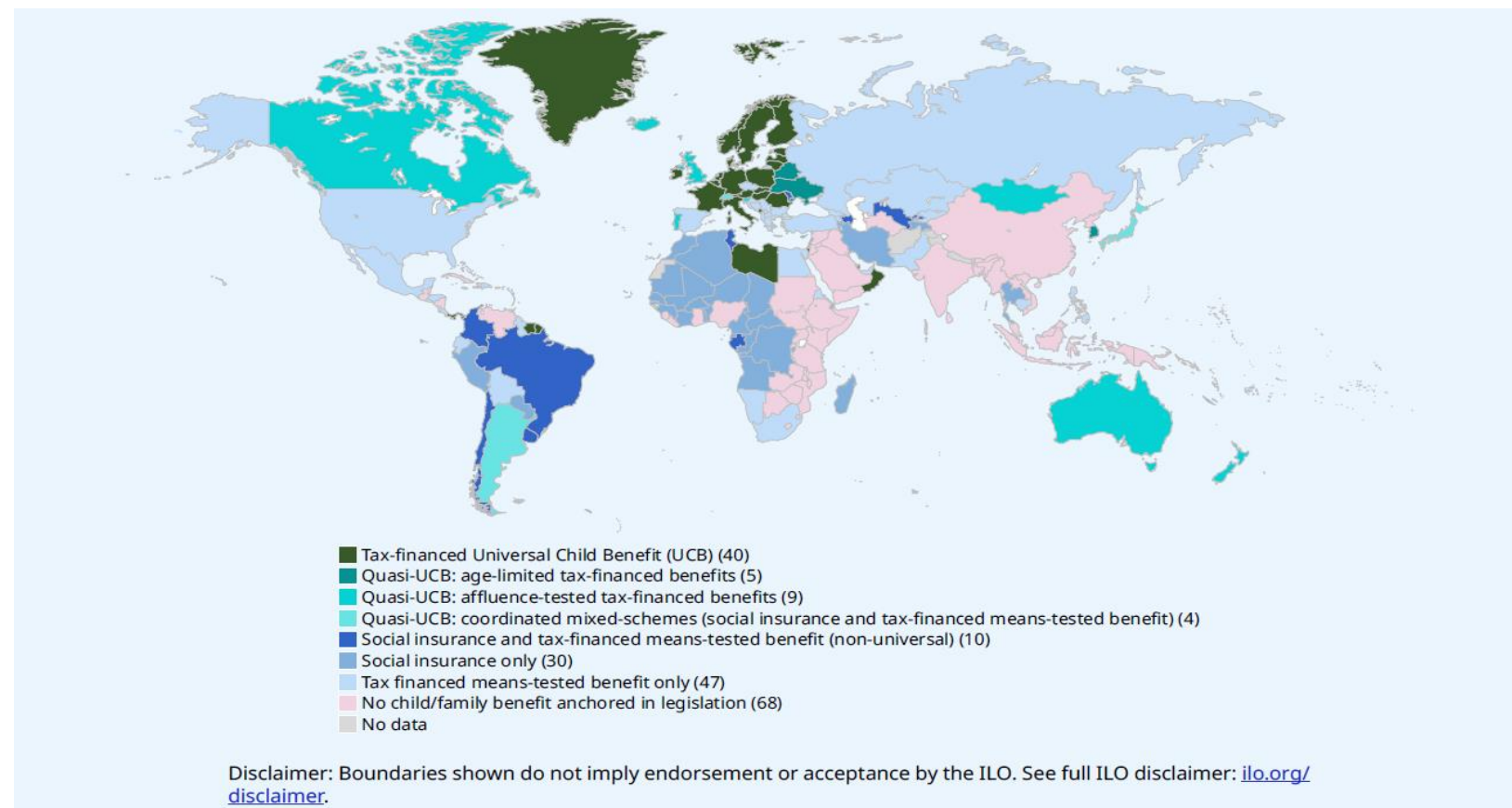
SDG indicator 1.3.1 on effective coverage for children and families: Share of children receiving child or family cash benefits, aged 0 to 15 (2015 and 2023) and aged 0 to 18 (2023), by region, subregion and income level (percentage)



Towards universal social protection for children

- ▶ **Positive recent developments** include the adoption of universal or quasi-universal child benefits (UCBs/qUCBs)
- ▶ Average national GDP expenditure on social protection for children is too low = **only 0.7 per cent of GDP** (excluding social health protection)
- ▶ Much also needs to be done to **enhance the gender-responsiveness** of social protection for children.
- ▶ Social protection for children is more crucial than ever in response to the climate crisis and the need for a just transition.

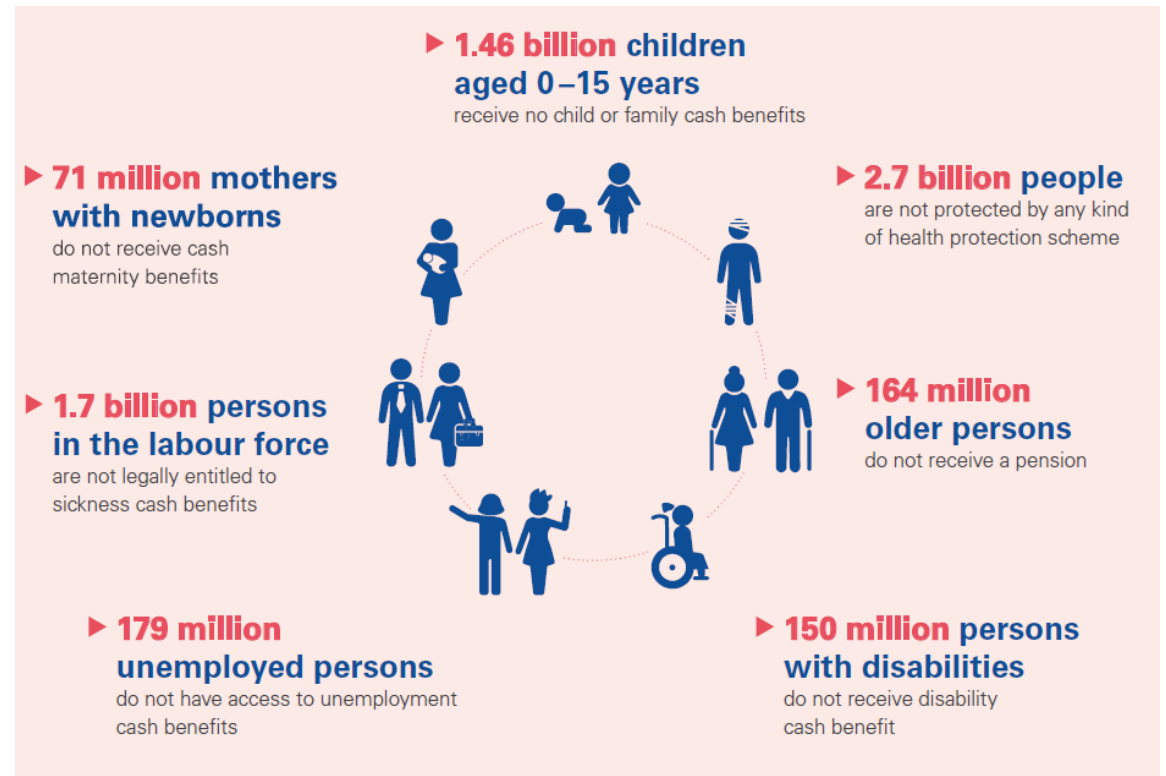
Social protection for children and families (cash benefits) anchored in law, by type of scheme, 2024 or latest available year



Ensuring comprehensive lifecycle protection and closing decent work deficits

- ▶ **The well-being of children cannot be dissociated from that of their parents, caregivers and families**
 - ▶ A gap anywhere across the life-cycle is to the **detriment of children**
 - ▶ Ensuring that parents and caregivers enjoy **adequate social protection** is indispensable.
 - ▶ Addressing decent work deficits is essential, including working poverty
- ▶ Extending social protection coverage to **2 billion workers in the informal economy** is key to reduce decent work deficits and facilitate transitions to the formal economy
- ▶ Building **rights-based universal social protection systems**
 - ▶ Nationally-defined **social protection floor** that guarantees at least a basic level of social security (income security and access to health care)
 - ▶ **Higher levels of protection** through contributory mechanisms that allow for risk-sharing and solidarity (especially social insurance)
 - ▶ **Sustainable and equitable financing** through taxes and contributions (solidarity!)

Figure 3. The numbers at a glance: The absence of social protection for different population groups and of comprehensiveness for selected benefits

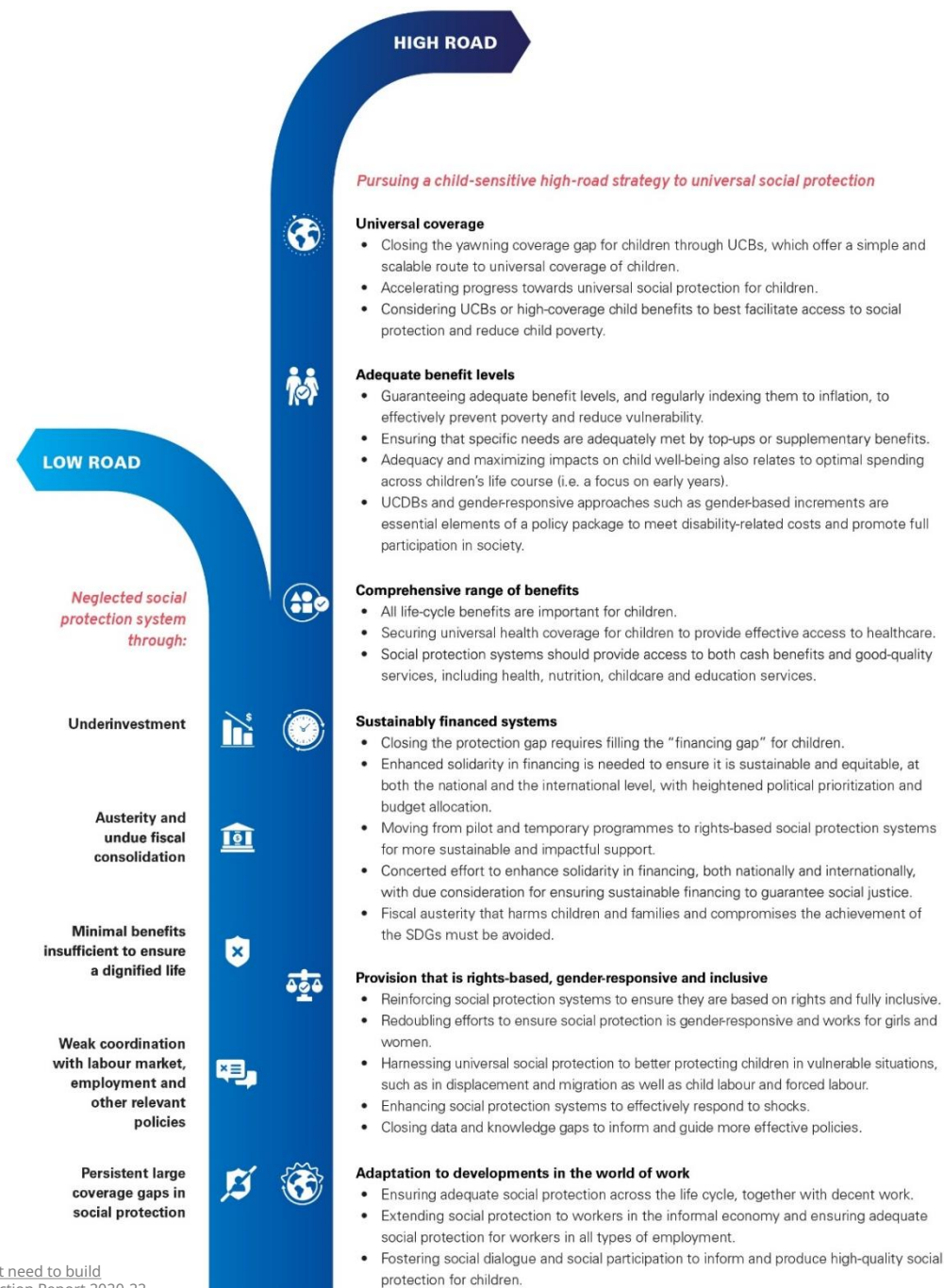


Source: ILO and UNICEF (2023) [More than a billion reasons: the urgent need to build universal social protection for children](#); ILO (2021), [World Social Protection Report 2020-22](#).

6 action points for taking the high road to ensure universal social protection for children

- ▶ Accelerate progress towards **universal coverage for all children** as a critical step towards improving their well-being (such as universal child benefits)
- ▶ Guarantee **adequate benefit levels and quality services** to generate meaningful change in children's lives.
- ▶ Provide a **comprehensive range of benefits** that supports children and families through a life-cycle approach, including income security and access to health care, nutrition, childcare and education.
- ▶ Ensure **sustainably financed social protection systems** to fill the financing gap, ensuring solidarity in financing through taxes and social insurance contributions, avoiding fiscal austerity that harms children.
- ▶ Build **social protection systems, including floors, that are rights-based, gender-responsive and inclusive** and that can effectively respond to multiple shocks and crises
- ▶ Ensure that **social protection systems are adapted to developments in the world of work – Decent work** for parents and other caregivers is essential for preventing poverty and vulnerability, reducing inequalities and for fostering well-being, dignity, social inclusion and a strong social contract.

Source: ILO and UNICEF (2023) [More than a billion reasons: the urgent need to build universal social protection for children](#); ILO (2021), [World Social Protection Report 2020-22](#).



► How can trade unions support Universal Social Protection

1. Advocacy and Policy Influence

- Lobbying governments to establish or expand universal child and family benefit schemes (cash transfers, child allowances, parental leave).
- Participating in social dialogue with governments and employers to ensure that such benefits are part of national social protection floors.
- Campaigning for adequate public financing and progressive taxation to sustainably fund benefits.

2. Strengthening the evidence base

- Data and evidence are critical tools for trade unions to make their case to governments on social protection issues. Strong evidence is one of the most important building blocks for the success of social protection awareness creation and advocacy.
- Understanding a government's policy decision-making process is also critical for knowing when advocacy can be most effective.

3. Collective Bargaining

- Negotiating employer-provided family benefits where statutory schemes are weak or absent (e.g., childcare allowances, extended parental leave, flexible working hours).
- Ensuring that workplace agreements include non-discrimination clauses to protect workers with family responsibilities



4. Through building alliances

- Having a unified and informed position to advocate for and shape social protection policies

5. Monitoring and Accountability

- Monitoring the implementation of laws and benefits to ensure workers actually receive what they are entitled to.
- Reporting gaps, exclusions, or delays in benefit payments to authorities.
- Providing union legal services to support workers in claiming benefits.

6. Promoting Equity and Inclusion

- Advocating for universal and non-discriminatory coverage (including informal economy workers, migrant workers, and women).
- Ensuring that benefits are gender-sensitive, supporting both mothers and fathers, and reducing unpaid care burdens.

7. International Solidarity

- Engaging with the ILO, ITUC, and regional trade union bodies to push for the global recognition of child and family benefits as a core part of social protection.
- Exchanging strategies across countries where unions successfully campaigned for such benefits.

In short: Trade unions can support the establishment of child and family benefits by advocating at the national level, bargaining at the workplace, raising awareness among workers, and ensuring accountability. Their collective voice is crucial in making sure these benefits are seen as rights, not privileges.

Country Examples

1. **South Africa:** Trade unions, together with civil society, played a strong role in advocating for the Child Support Grant (CSG), which is now one of the largest social protection programmes in Africa. Unions highlighted how poverty affected workers' families and mobilized around the principle of a Social Protection Floor. The CSG currently reaches over 13 million children and is credited with reducing child poverty and improving nutrition.
2. **Uruguay:** Trade unions, through tripartite social dialogue, supported reforms that established Asignaciones Familiares (family allowances) and expanded coverage to informal workers. They also pushed for paid parental leave and childcare services as part of collective bargaining agreements. Uruguay's strong social dialogue system made unions key players in embedding family benefits within the broader social protection framework.
3. **Brazil:** Trade unions were active in shaping the design and expansion of Bolsa Família, a conditional cash transfer programme. Unions also linked family benefits to broader struggles for workers' rights, minimum wages, and access to public services. Their advocacy helped ensure that Bolsa Família became a nationwide programme reaching millions of children.
4. **Ghana:** While Ghana does not yet have a universal child benefit, trade unions (especially the TUC Ghana) have been campaigning for social protection expansion, including child benefits and maternity protection. They are using the ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No. 202) to push the government to establish guarantees for families with children.

Lessons from these Examples:

Social dialogue matters →

Unions need a seat at the policy table.

Link to poverty reduction →

Framing benefits as essential for workers' families and society helps build broad support.

Use collective bargaining →

Where national schemes are absent, unions can negotiate employer-funded family benefits.

International norms help → ILO conventions and recommendations give unions leverage in negotiations.

In short:

These examples show that trade unions can be catalysts: they don't just defend workers' wages, but also shape national social protection systems that lift entire families out of poverty.

Thank you for listening!

Read more:

