

► The extension of social protection coverage in Africa

Key considerations for ILO Member States

Social protection is a human right and a social and economic necessity. It is a key factor in reducing poverty, exclusion, and inequality while enhancing political stability and social cohesion. Social protection is a powerful tool for prevention of and recovery from economic crises, natural disasters and conflicts.

Social protection in Africa

African countries have shown very strong political will at the highest levels to develop policies aimed at building sustainable development and combating poverty through social protection:

- [The Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want](#) Outlines an African Union (AU) strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of Africa within 50 years.
- [The Abidjan Declaration-Advancing Social Justice: Shaping the future of work in Africa](#) Adopted by ILO Constituents during the 14th African Regional Meeting in December 2019, it calls for progressively extending sustainable social protection coverage on the continent.

Challenges of extending social protection

The COVID-19 crisis struck at a time of growing concern regarding the fragility of social protection systems in Africa, where effective coverage is estimated to be as low as 17 per cent of the total population. The pandemic exposed the glaring gaps in coverage, particularly for workers in the informal and rural economies.

The root causes of social protection coverage deficits in Africa include:

- [Need for a rights-based approach](#): Most African countries have enshrined the right to social security in their constitutions, but many of the existing social protection programmes are not embedded in law.
- [Underfunding of social protection systems](#): Africa is the region where the public expenditures in the area of social protection are the lowest, according to ILO estimates.
- [Inequities affecting workers in the informal economy, migrants, refugees and other minority groups](#): informal work accounts for over 80 per cent of total employment in some African countries, hence the urgent need to extend social protection to informal workers.

Africa Regional Social Protection Strategy, 2021-2025

Towards 40 % – a social protection coverage acceleration framework to achieve the SDGs



- ▶ **Weak governance and administration systems:** continued improvement in governance and in the administration of schemes and programmes could lead to expanded and more sustainable coverage.
- ▶ **Absence of policy and institutional coordination:** Social protection systems are highly fragmented and there is no cross-sectoral policy coherence, particularly between the social, employment and economic sectors.
- ▶ **Lack of social protection in rural areas and fragile zones:** Social protection coverage is extremely limited in rural Africa, where the majority of workers are employed in agriculture and are thus often excluded from social security laws.

The Strategy

The ILO Regional Office for Africa has developed a regional strategy to support AU Member States in raising their social protection coverage from 17 per cent to at least 40 per cent by 2025.

This regional strategy also responds to the United Nations Secretary General's recent call for a *Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection*, led by the ILO, to create a new era of universal social protection, green and job-rich growth.

An enabling environment for social protection

The expansion of social protection coverage with a view to universal protection in Africa will require structural transformation, including through:

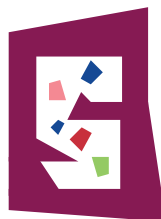
- ▶ A systemic approach to social protection;
- ▶ Good governance;
- ▶ Social dialogue;
- ▶ Investment in data collection and analysis with a view to the development of empirically sound policies;
- ▶ Monitoring and evaluation of the system with a view to future reforms.

As the ILO moves into the second phase of the Global Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection Floors for All, more African countries will be included with the goal of expanding social protection coverage to at least 40 per cent of the population.

Coordinated initiatives based on existing agreements and frameworks, as well as the present strategy, are essential for African countries in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals and achieving the ambitious and important target of extending adequate social protection to all.

Strategic action areas

The strategy presents recommendations across three strategic areas in which action is necessary for tangible change:



Action area 1: enhance coverage and adequacy through stronger social protection strategies, legal frameworks and programmes and by scaling up existing and new initiatives;



Action area 2: close financing gaps by ensuring adequate and sustainable financing.



Action Area 3: develop strategic partnerships

Member States and Social Protection

The strategy is based on a coherent and adaptable approach that supports the development of national Social Protection Floors in African countries.

The State is primarily responsible for establishing the legal and administrative architecture and sustainable financing of social security, it also being the final guarantor of its good operation;

African countries need to prioritize social protection and pursue ambitious projects and programmes with sufficient scale to bring about effective change.

Member States are encouraged to engage with social partners and promote effective social dialogue to achieve the most appropriate national policies and time frames for the progressive implementation of effective social protection floors.