



Inter-Agency Task Team

Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions

Thematic Working Group:

Financing Social Protection

Participating Agencies:

ILO

UNDP

UNICEF

Background

The early 21st century is marked by the culmination of multiple crises, underlining the urgency of placing social protection systems and the creation of decent jobs as a top priority of the development agenda to facilitate just and inclusive transitions. In the past two decades, the world has seen a renewed surge in violent conflicts. The war in Ukraine is the most recent, resulting in a devastating humanitarian crisis, causing large losses of life and livelihoods, forcing 5.7 million people to flee, and displacing 8 million within the country, with broader ramifications on global food and energy markets and the global financial system, which are triggering a cost-of-living crisis. These recent disruptions have come on the heels of a global pandemic that had a devastating social and economic impact and led to disruptions in global supply chains; the global financial and economic crisis of 2008 with its lingering socioeconomic effects; an increase in extreme weather phenomena; the growing threat of disease outbreaks and loss of biodiversity as flagrant manifestations of climate change and anthropogenic interference with the natural environment; in addition to structural megatrends like the demographic transition, the care crisis and the fourth industrial revolution with its dramatic impacts on the world of work.

As a result, poverty, inequality, and hunger are on the rise again. Global hunger and food insecurity had been on the rise even before COVID-19 and the Ukraine war. According to World Bank data, between 75 million and 95 million additional people could be living in extreme poverty in 2022 compared to pre-COVID-19 projections, due to the protracted effects of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and rising

inflation. Moreover, more than 100 million additional children will be falling into poverty, including children that had never experienced poverty and exclusion before. Over the past two decades, the gap between the average incomes of the top 10 per cent and the bottom 50 per cent of individuals within countries has almost doubled, from 8.5 times to 15 times. The uneven recovery from COVID-19 reinforces these inequalities further: the World Bank estimates that in 2021 the top 20 per cent of the global income distribution had recovered about half of the income losses they experienced during the first year of the pandemic, while the bottom 40 per cent of the income distribution had not started to recover their income losses yet.

Moreover, an increasing share of the wealth is held in the private sector (in high-income countries, the totality of wealth is in private hands), with governments becoming significantly poorer, compromising their ability to tackle inequalities in the future (World Inequality Report 2022). At the same time, even before the pandemic, low-income countries were spending more on debt servicing and repayments than on social protection, health, and education combined. The recent rise in interest rates raises debt servicing costs for governments, businesses, and households, and risks triggering capital outflows from developing countries, compromising their recovery and medium-term growth prospects.

Overall, social protection enables people to invest in and accumulate assets (human, productive, financial), diversify their livelihood sources, move between occupations with a range of positive economic and productive impacts, generating income and economic multipliers and spillovers, which can contribute greatly to long-run, inclusive growth. In addition, in these times of crises and transformations, social protection systems are widely recognized as playing a crucial role, not only to help people manage their life-cycle risks, improve health outcomes and to prevent and reduce poverty but also to act as automatic stabilizers in response to covariate shocks. To perform this function, it is important that countries put in place robust systems of social protection that provide adequate, comprehensive, gender-responsive, and sustainable protection for all members of society when they need such protection. Where these systems do not exist prior to the onset of a crisis and the population relies on humanitarian assistance as their only support, it is important that such interventions are designed with a view to their possible transition towards standing social protection systems offering longer-term protection. Where these systems do exist, they need to be constantly adjusted to the new realities of the above-mentioned underlying demographic, environmental, or socio-economic and structural developments that result in less linear and more interrupted work biographies, where people move between education, training, employment, self-employment, entrepreneurship, leisure, care, etc.

Social protection not only strengthens resilience and helps mitigate the adverse impacts of crises, including climate shocks but can also facilitate the transition to more environmentally friendly modes of production and consumption, for example by facilitating the phasing out of polluting technologies or the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices that put less pressure on the natural resource base on which their livelihoods depend.

Meeting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 1.3 and achieving universal social protection requires substantial additional investments in social protection benefits and their delivery. Recent estimates suggest that developing countries need to invest an additional US \$1.2 trillion per annum to close the financing gap, which is 3.8 per cent of their GDP, while low-income countries would need to invest an additional US \$77.9 billion per annum, equivalent to 15.9 per cent of their GDP ([ILO 2020](#)). Adequate investment in public social protection systems, working synergistically with investments in public health, education, and care services, requires fiscal space and an enabling macroeconomic environment, as acknowledged also in the International Monetary Fund's efforts to encourage countries to establish social spending floors. In line with human rights and international social security standards, the mobilization of additional domestic resources, combining taxes and social security contributions, needs to be based on the principle of solidarity and ensure progressivity. It is encouraging that in the context of Financing for Development greater efforts have been made to combat tax evasion and illicit financial flows and to ensure that multinational companies pay their fair share in financing public goods by reducing profit-shifting. Where needed, domestic resource mobilization efforts will have to be complemented with international financing while fully respecting country ownership in determining the pathway to reach universal social protection.

Progress in implementing integrated policy solutions backed by adequate financing can only be achieved where there is a political commitment from decision-makers and where social partners, producer organizations, and civil society groups are actively involved in the design and implementation of social

protection systems that are responsive to people's needs. Only such a participatory approach will be able to build trust, renew the social contract and hold public institutions to account. Adopting a rights-based approach in the effort of system building is therefore not only a moral obligation under human rights treaties but also a key element to ensuring the social, political, environmental, and economic sustainability and resilience of systems. Realizing the human right to social security and delivering on the 2030 Agenda's promise of leaving no one behind requires particular attention to covering hard-to-reach groups. Women/girls and people with disability in all their diversity cut across all marginalized groups and are at particular risk of facing intersectional vulnerabilities, such as the risk of discrimination, exclusion, violence, and harassment. For women, the massively unequal distribution of unpaid care work is one root cause of their marginalization. Agricultural workers, migrants, and displaced populations are also often excluded from national social protection systems while also being most in need. Crises and emergencies increase needs and vulnerabilities at times when government resources are stretched thin, giving an important role to risk financing. Given the pervasiveness of life-cycle risks and the diversity of needs across population groups, and the intertwined nature of social and economic development, to create synergies social protection policies must be coherent with economic, employment, environmental, health, care, food systems, and migration policies as well as other social policies.

Outcomes

Overall outcomes:

The Global Accelerator supports countries to build universal social protection systems, including social protection floors, offering everyone adequate protection against the full range of life-cycle risks, preventing poverty, and promoting equality and appropriate conditions for a full and productive life. This would be the outcome of context-specific combinations of contributory and non-contributory schemes, as well as protection and promotion policies, coordinated with economic, employment, environmental, health, care, food systems, and migration policies, to contribute to human, social, and economic development, and foster pathways to the formalization of the economy.

Necessary intermediate steps to achieve the overall outcomes:

A robust legal framework

National social protection systems should be anchored in robust legal frameworks in line with international labour standards and human rights instruments, aim at universality, offer comprehensive guarantees to everyone throughout their life-cycle, and provide effective complaints and appeals mechanisms. These systems must be gender-responsive and adopt policies that are supportive of decent work, aim to correct gender inequalities in the labour market, redistribute unpaid care work between the state, families, ethnicities, and genders, and address other unacknowledged gendered vulnerabilities, such as violence and harassment (UN Women 2021). With due attention to equality of treatment, they should cover nationals and migrants alike, including workers in the informal economy, and work towards the inclusion of people with disabilities and indigenous populations, thus guaranteeing the right to social protection for all.

Sustainable financing strategies

To offer reliable protection against social risks, vulnerability, and poverty, these systems must be based on sustainable financing strategies. Significantly more investment is needed in social protection, including dedicating sufficient proceeds of economic growth to this. At the country level, to align policy priorities and financing strategies, a whole-of-government approach is needed which can foster closer alignment between ministries of finance, planning, line ministries, and social security institutions, with the involvement of all other important stakeholders.

Social protection expenditure reviews and Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs) are useful tools to assess current social spending and identify financing gaps and options to increase fiscal space ([Joint UN Paper](#)). They should reflect progressive taxation aimed at reducing income and wealth inequalities, well-established measures to curb tax evasion and illicit financial flows, and new fiscal initiatives to deal with the changing nature of the global economy and with climate change, which would include the adoption of green taxes and the reduction of subsidies on fossil fuels, as well as taxes on

financial transactions, and price and tax measures as part of comprehensive strategies of prevention and control of the consumption of tobacco and alcohol for instance. To enhance global policy coordination and national implementation, it is important to have buy-in from international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the regional development banks, in recognition of the multipliers of investing in social protection.

Sound governance and delivery structures

Sound social protection policies require strong, accountable, and transparent public institutions, permeable to the participation of social partners, civil society organizations, and local communities, offering quality services as well as complaints and appeal mechanisms. Social protection policies should be integrated with employment promotion activities, such as public employment services, active labour market policies, and public employment programmes, including environmental programmes. New digital solutions are now applied to administrative registries, payment systems, and several government services, allowing for or building towards full interoperability between different systems and enhanced user-friendliness for those who have access to digital applications. This is essential to target governments' limited human resources to those most affected by the digital divide, facilitating the coverage of the hardest-to-reach ([UNDP 2021](#)). Delivery systems should harness the benefits of digitalization while also managing related risks and providing non-digital solutions as needed in recognition of the fact that the digitalization of processes for claiming social protection benefits can exacerbate the digital divide and may lead to more, not less, uncertainty for vulnerable groups.

Social protection policies, schemes, and programmes also benefit from regular monitoring and evaluation processes, to facilitate their constant improvement and provide early warning systems in the face of crises. In the context of such evaluations the availability of disaggregated data is crucial to enable effective measurement of the impact of social protection policies, schemes, and programmes on preventing and reducing poverty, reducing multiple and intersecting inequalities, including by gender, urban/rural residence, and other relevant markers, supporting decent work, as well as the achievement of key SDGs.

Principles of country-level action

The success of the Global Accelerator will be determined by action at the country level. Drawing from inter-agency discussions, publications, and experience working together at country and sub-national levels, some key principles for country-level work include:

A human rights-based approach. The vision underpinning the work of United Nations agencies is anchored in the right to social protection for all, as set out in various human rights standards. These create a range of responsibilities for social protection schemes, including equality and non-discrimination and a level playing field for the most vulnerable; and progressive realization and the obligation of state parties to progressively ensure the right to social protection for all individuals, along the life-cycle, including minimum levels of essential benefits using the maximum available resources.

Universal social protection that leaves no one behind. The United Nations supports a vision of social protection for all, with adequate, comprehensive, and sustainable coverage across the life-cycle. Social vulnerabilities marked by characteristics and identities such as age, gender, residence, ethnicity, disability, and citizenship status can fundamentally shape an individual's exposure to risk. It is essential therefore that social protection instruments explicitly promote social, labour market, and economic inclusion and equity by ensuring that all groups are systematically included and covered while also making sure that programme design and implementation are sensitive to the vulnerabilities of excluded groups. It also involves supporting countries to identify and expand schemes, policies, and financing options most conducive to achieving universality, while also recognizing countries' different capacities, contexts, and challenges. Crucially, it also means the right to social protection for people everywhere, including in fragile and humanitarian situations and contexts of forced displacement.

A focus on social protection systems. Expanding coverage of schemes is essential to expand the reach of social protection. However, expansion should be part of a systems-based approach to social protection, in line with SDG target 1.3 which calls for implementing social protection systems and measures for all. Critical building blocks for a systems approach to social protection can help ensure

social protection coverage is adequate and comprehensive across the life-cycle as well as coverage that is predictable and sustainable over time. Such a systems approach includes a system grounded in a clear policy and regulatory framework and informed by robust evidence; a programmatic approach that translates policy and strategic commitments into actions and concrete programmes; and a strong coordination structure that ensures different ministries and sectors but also that the national/sub-national levels work effectively together towards common goals. Coordination with employment and economic policies is particularly important so that social protection systems also support increased economic activity and labour market participation, including through formalizing informal employment and economic units, which can in turn increase the tax base to finance social protection.

Country ownership and participation. Social protection is ultimately the responsibility of the state and a pillar of the social contract. As such, nationally owned and led social protection systems, including the development of national financing strategies, should be at the heart of accelerating access to social protection, anchored in a related national legal framework. Strong legal anchoring ensures national coherence and coordination and clear accountability for results, including by putting in place structures for social dialogue and participation of major groups, including civil society organizations, to ensure systems are designed in response to population needs, thereby strengthening the social contract between governments and the population.

UN Coherence and coordination. At the heart of the global accelerator is the role of the United Nations in delivering as one, capitalizing on our comparative advantages, improving coherence and efficiency, and ensuring accountability and transparency in our work, particularly at the local level. At the country level, this may include promoting social protection as a core pillar of Common Country Analyses, UN Development Assistance Frameworks and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks; conducting coordinated in-country analysis and activities; supporting governments in the creation and facilitation of inter-agency working groups; supporting the ratification and application of international social security standards and human rights instruments; facilitating the creation of institutionalized national structures for coordination between sectoral ministries, social security institutions, and agencies, as well as the creation of relevant structures at sub-national levels; supporting the implementation of e-governance strategies, providing technical advisory services for the design and implementation of national social protection strategies and policies, social protection delivery systems and related sustainable financing, including through supporting INFFs, and the promotion of better ESG reporting standards for private sector actors.

Strengthened shock responsiveness of social protection systems. The risks posed by climate change, political instability, natural disasters, epidemics, and compounding health and economic shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic have underlined that social protection systems need to be ready to anticipate and respond to large-scale shocks. Robust social protection contributes to enhancing the risk management capacity of individuals, households, and families. However, to maximize their role, social protection systems require specific adaptation to strengthen resilience and be shock-responsive, including in policy, strategy, legislation, coordination, and financing; programmes and their design features; risk financing and insurance; and administration and delivery systems. Also, experience has shown that universal social protection systems act as automatic stabilizers where these are in place before the onset of crises, including through anticipatory action so that countries with such systems are affected less and recover more quickly from the consequences of shocks.

Supporting documents/publications

General social protection:

- Paper on UN collaboration on social protection (forthcoming)
- ILO – [World Social Protection Report 2020-22](#)
- ISPA – [Interagency Social Protection Assessments](#)
- UNICEF – [Global Social Protection Programme Framework](#)

- UNICEF – [Activities, Tools and Resources to Support Implementation of 10 Action Areas in Social Protection](#)
- WFP – [Social Protection for Zero Hunger](#)

Social security standards / legal framework:

- ILO – [Toolkit on Social Security Standards](#)
- UNDP – [The State of Social Assistance in Africa](#)

Extension / informal economy:

- ILO – [Extending Social Security to Workers in the Informal Economy](#)
- ILO – [Extending Social Protection to Migrant Workers, Refugees and their Families](#)
- OECD – [The Future of Social Protection : What Works for Non-Standard Workers?](#)
- UNDP – [Informality and Social Protection in African Countries : A Forward-Looking Assessment](#)

Thematic Working Group:

- ILO & UN Women – [Fiscal Space for Social Protection: A Handbook for Assessing Financing Options](#)
- OECD – [Can Social Protection Be an Engine for Inclusive Growth?](#)
- UNFPA – [National Transfer Accounts Programme](#)
- UNICEF – Public Finance Toolkit: A Resource Guide for Selecting, Adapting and Applying Public Financial Analysis Tools

Gender and disability:

- Joint Guidance – Disability-Inclusive Social Protection Systems (forthcoming)
- Joint Statement – Towards Inclusive Social Protection Systems Supporting the Full and Effective Participation of Persons with Disabilities
- UNICEF & UN Women – [Mainstreaming Gender into Social Protection Policies and Programmes](#)
- UNICEF, ODI & FCDO – [Social Protection and Gender Equality Outcomes Across the Life-Cycle](#)

Adaptive social protection/ shock-responsiveness:

- UNDP – [Next Practices : Innovation in the COVID-19 Social Protection Responses and Beyond](#)
- UNDP – [Diverse Ways to Build Social Protection? Lessons from the Breadth of Emergency Social Policy Responses around the World](#)
- UNDP – [Addressing the COVID-19 Economic Crisis in Asia through Social Protection](#)
- UNDP – [Social Protection Systems and the Response to COVID-19 in the Arab Region](#)
- UNICEF – [Programme Guidance: Strengthening Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems](#)
- WFP – Social Protection and Climate Change
- WFP – Lessons on Better Connecting Humanitarian Assistance and Social Protection