

# **SOCIAL PROGRESS**



**SOCIAL PROTECTION**

**1. Understanding Social Protection Systems: securing rights and promoting solidarity**

# INTRODUCTION

**The world's 1.8 billion young people (15-25) make up the largest generation of youth in history. In generational terms, a 2018 report by Bloomberg estimated that Gen Z (born from 2001) will comprise 32% of the global population of 7.7 billion in 2019, slightly more than millennials (born in 1980), who will account for a 32% share. In total, children, adolescents and young adults account for almost 64% of the world's population<sup>1</sup>. Nine out of ten millennials live in the developing world and by 2020 millennials are expected to make up 35% of the global workforce<sup>2</sup>.**

According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA)<sup>3</sup>, countries with the greatest demographic opportunity for development are those entering a period in which the working-age population has good health, quality education, decent employment and a lower proportion of young dependents. However, the developmental opportunity and health and education outcomes for this generation will not be achievable in the absence of social protection for young people. The vast majority of young people in developing countries have no social protection coverage at all<sup>4</sup>, compounded by an environment where dramatic changes in the nature of work are driving youth insecurity and exclusion.

Social protection is a key component of social policy and is “concerned with preventing, managing and overcoming situations that adversely affect people’s wellbeing. It helps individuals maintain their living standard when confronted by contingencies such as illness, maternity, disability or old age; market risks, such as unemployment; as well as economic crises or natural disasters.”<sup>5</sup> Social protection is not charity or compassion but a human right that incorporates central rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, participation, transparency and accountability in its design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The growing youth population presents a challenge for policy makers who have failed to design policies and programmes and allocate resources to ensure that young people can enjoy all their human rights guaranteed in international human rights agreements, particularly their economic, social and cultural rights. Continued failure to address the youth gap in social protection has and will lead to political, social and economic instability as evidenced by the large youth migrant crisis, political disaffection, and social unrest.

## Social protection in perspective

Social protection has received focused attention in international development over the past 15 years and is now incorporated into the Sustainable Development Goals. However, social protection has long been codified in international human rights frameworks. Article 25 (i) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

*“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of [themselves] and of [their] family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond [their] control.”*

1. Bloomberg Online. 20.08.2018 Gen Z is about to outnumber millennials within a year by Lee J Miller and Wei Lu <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-20/gen-z-to-outnumber-millennials-within-a-year-demographic-trends>
2. Financial Times Millennial Series (online) June 2018 The Millennial Moment In Charts by Cale Tilford <https://www.ft.com/content/f81ac17a-68ae-11e8-b6eb-4acfcfb08c11>
3. UNFPA. Demographic Dividend. <https://www.unfpa.org/demographic-dividend> (03/12/2018)
4. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2018) Promoting Inclusion through Social Protection Report on the World Social Situation 2018. New York. United Nations  
UNRISD 2010 Combatting Poverty and Inequality



These rights have been elaborated in various international human rights instruments, notably the International Covenant for Economic Social and Cultural Rights as well as a number of International Labour Organisation Conventions and Recommendations.

The ILO's social protection floor recommendation (2012), adopted by governments, employers and workers, provides guidance on how countries – no matter their level of development – can establish the minimum standard of social security standards in line with national priorities, resources and circumstances. At the most basic level, these should provide all inhabitants of a territory with access to:

- Essential health care, including maternity care
- Basic income security for children (e.g. family allowances)
- Basic income security for persons in active age who are unable to work (e.g. social protection benefits for persons with disabilities, unemployed, maternity)
- Basic income security for older persons (e.g. pensions)

## BOX 1: Forms of Social Protection

Social protection comes primarily in three forms: social insurance, social security and social assistance. For the purposes of this study we draw from the Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) Typology of Social Protection Programmes<sup>6</sup> below:

**Social Security** – Commonly used to refer to government programmes designed to provide for the basic economic security and welfare of individuals and their dependents. The two most common social security programmes are old age pensions (often together with disability and survivors' insurance) and health insurance. The term "social security" is most often used interchangeably with "social insurance". It is also used more broadly to refer to "social assistance" as well as "social insurance".

**Social Insurance** – The term refers to compulsory public insurance programmes that protect against various common economic risks: notably, loss of income due to illness, maternity, disability, unemployment, and old age.

**Social Assistance** – The term refers to public programmes that cover cases of need that are not covered by social insurance, usually targeted to the poor and disadvantaged and often, therefore, subject to a uniform means test.

**Social Safety Nets** – This term is used in two ways: more broadly, to describe a collection of services provided by the state which prevent individuals from falling into poverty below a certain level; and more narrowly for short-term relief measures such as food kitchens or public works to help tide individuals or groups through a difficult period.

**Social Protection** – This term is the broadest of all and refers to social insurance, social assistance, and various other public schemes and is used most commonly in discussions of social policy in countries where social insurance/social security covers only a small portion of the population and other schemes are necessary.

These programmes are often designed to be either:

### 1. Contributory or Non-Contributory

Contributory programmes are mostly financed through earnings-related contributions from employers and/or employees. Eligibility for benefits under contributory programs is usually limited to those who have made a minimum number of contributions.

6. See WIEGO (2018) Typology of Social Protection Programmes, <http://www.wiego.org/informal-economy/typology-social-protection-programmes> (03/12/2018)



Non-contributory programmes, which include social assistance and social safety nets (also referred to as welfare, benefits, or cash transfers) are means-tested and targeted at the lowest income households in exceptional need. They are usually in the form of resource transfers (cash, food, school fees) to poor vulnerable individuals or households. This is financed by government and/or, in the case of some developing countries, by development aid. Recipients of non-contributory programmes are often required to prove eligibility through means testing and conditions for support may include school attendance or health check-ups.

**2. Compulsory vs. Voluntary** – This term refers to whether individuals are legally required to subscribe or can do so voluntarily. Public works programmes or employment guarantee schemes are examples of voluntary programmes. It is possible to have a mixed scheme, where members are required to contribute a set minimum but can voluntarily pay over and above this amount, for example, funeral assistance schemes established by communities.

**3. Universal vs. Targeted** – In principle, universal programmes are offered to all citizens or to all persons belonging to a particular group (usually an age cohort). Targeted programmes are aimed at specific groups, usually poor or otherwise disadvantaged. Three main targeting methods are used: group targeting (e.g. to specified groups such as pregnant mothers), means testing (e.g. based on income or assets), and self-selection. In some developing countries, a system of community identification of poor households is used. Also, some countries use geographical targeting, based on poverty levels in different areas.

Self-selection involves imposing disincentives to participants to enter into programmes, either because the benefits are too low or because there is some social stigma associated with them (e.g., food-for-work programs and public works because normally only those truly in need accept to work in them).

Source: WIEGO (2018) Typology of Social Protection Programmes, <http://www.wiego.org/informal-economy/typology-social-protection-programmes> (03/12/2018)<sup>7</sup>

## Why states must invest in social protection for young people

Social Protection is both a human rights and a development issue. From a development perspective, investment in social protection:

- builds human capital and increases labour participation
- mitigates shocks and minimizes losses in production
- drives demand and economic activity
- fosters social cohesion
- reduces inequality
- promotes economic development.<sup>8</sup>

Governments have fallen short on their commitments to younger generations who are experiencing worsening employment conditions, reduced access to opportunities and failing public services<sup>9</sup>.

7. WIEGO (2018) Typology of Social Protection Programmes, <http://www.wiego.org/informal-economy/typology-social-protection-programmes> (03/12/2018)

8. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). (2018) "Why we need social protection". Bangkok. United Nations

9. ILO Press Release 8 May 2018 More than 68% of the employed population in Asia Pacific is in the Informal Sector [https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS\\_627585/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_627585/lang--en/index.htm)



Two fundamental human rights principles<sup>10</sup> are those of “progressive realisation” and “non-retrogression”. This means that each successive generation should enjoy better economic and social rights than the previous ones as states move towards the full realisation of their human rights commitments. The principle of “non-retrogression” means that states may not deprive citizens of those social, economic and cultural rights that they already enjoy unless there are strong justifications.”<sup>11</sup> These principles have been found to have been violated in the context of austerity programmes where social programmes have either been frozen and cut.<sup>12</sup>

As more young people enter the labour market to seek employment the rate of unemployment is projected to rise. This projection, coupled with alarming figures on youth unemployment, underemployment, in vulnerable employment or working poor show the urgency of accelerating social protection provision for young people.

## **Policy reform can enable youth friendly social protection**

Several countries have put in place national legislations that specifically acknowledge the right of informal workers, and often specifically women, to social protection through better integration of informal workers’ rights in national legislations.

Further, ILO reviews of fiscal space have found that governments have themselves been innovative in creating fiscal space to finance social protection floors.

### **BOX 2: Approaches adopted to provide informal workers with better social and labour protection**

The following examples, though not specifically targeted at youth, provide social protections or employment guarantees that benefit young people who form the majority of informal sector workers.

**INDIA** -- The Unorganised Workers’ Social Security Act 2008 provides for the establishment of social security schemes (e.g. provident funds, employment injury benefit, funeral assistance and old-age homes) for unorganised workers. Its broad definition of ‘unorganised worker’ includes home-based workers, wage workers and self-employed workers in the unorganised sector, which ensures broad coverage of the informal economy<sup>13</sup>.

**THAILAND** – provides guaranteed healthcare for all. The programme covers everyone working in the informal economy (62.3% of the population). The remaining workers are covered by their employers in either the public or private sector<sup>14</sup>.

**CHILE** -- provides access to health insurance by adapting the contribution plans to seasonal work patterns. Workers on temporary or fixed-term contracts have access to full health insurance coverage for 12 months but contribute only during the three months they are temporarily employed<sup>15</sup>.

10. In 1948, most of the world’s countries affirmed the right to social security in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and again in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and again in the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. The human rights declaration calls for “a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of their family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond their control”.
11. OHCHR Fact Sheet No 33. Frequently Asked Questions on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet33en.pdf> also see
12. UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Foreign Debt 2018 Guiding Principles on Human Rights Impact Assessment of Economic Reforms. [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/LocalGovt/20190218\\_Expert\\_Foreign\\_Debt2.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/LocalGovt/20190218_Expert_Foreign_Debt2.pdf)
13. Ulrichs, M. (2016) Informality, women and social protection: identifying barriers to provide effective coverage. IDS Working paper 435 (April 2016). London. International Development Institute
14. Sakunphanit, T. and Suwanrada, W. (2011) The Universal Coverage Scheme. in Successful Social Protection Floor Experiences: Sharing Innovative Experience. 386 – 400. Geneva. International Labour Organization.
15. Ulrichs, M. (2016) Informality, women and social protection: identifying barriers to provide effective coverage. IDS Working paper 435 (April 2016). London. International Development Institute



**SOUTH AFRICA** -- Domestic workers' organisations have lobbied successfully for protection during maternity. They are now entitled to at least four months of maternity leave paid by the Unemployment Insurance Fund, a compulsory social security system. The fund includes unemployment benefits as well as benefits in case of illness or death. The employer must pay unemployment contributions and lack of compliance is punishable<sup>16</sup>.

**INDIA** -- Although not specifically targeted at youth, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act provides at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. From its inception in 2006, the program had reached over 50 million households at a cost of about 1.2% of GDP by 2013<sup>17</sup>. It has been specifically designed to be friendly to women workers, providing for decent work and equal pay for equal work<sup>18</sup>.

## Conventions, recommendations & initiatives protecting young people's social protection rights

A number of conventions, recommendations and initiatives are in place to protect young people's rights. States must be pushed to respect the agreements that they ratified, and need to be more widely known.

**ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)** defines national social protection floors as “nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees which secure protection aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion”<sup>19</sup>.

**Sustainable Development Goal 8, “Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all”** States are called on to make efforts to reduce youth unemployment and increase the participation of young people in education and training<sup>20</sup>.

**Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth strategy**<sup>21</sup> identifies improved productivity, earnings, working conditions, and the rights of young people, emphasising those who work but cannot escape poverty and including the estimated 48 million<sup>22</sup> young workers (15-17) in hazardous jobs. The Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth is the first-ever, comprehensive United Nations system-wide effort for the promotion of youth employment worldwide.

**Promoting pro-employment growth and decent work for young people – the 2012 International Labour Conference (ILC) “The youth employment crisis: A call for action”**, stresses the importance of promoting pro-employment growth and decent work for young people by adopting a multi-pronged, rights-based approach to youth employment. It also states that international labour standards play an important role in protecting the rights of young workers<sup>23</sup>.

16. Ibid

17. Antonopoulos. R. (2013) Expanding Social Protection in Developing Countries: A Gender Perspective. Levy Economics Institute of Bard College. Working Paper No. 757

18. Ibid

19. ILO. (2017) Guide to international labour standards and rights at work concerning young people. International Labour Office, International Labour Standards Department, Employment Policy Department. Geneva. ILO

20. Ibid

21. The UN Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth - aims to foster system-wide cooperation, strengthen policy coherence and coordination, mobilize and engage external partners, and enhance linkages between the normative and operational aspects of United Nations efforts for improved programming and delivery. The Task Team is chaired by the ILO and it is composed of a multi-agency membership

22. ILO. (2013) Marking progress against child labour: Global estimates and trends 2000-2012; and 2011: Children in hazardous work: What we know, what we need to do. Geneva. ILO

Ibid



**The ILO's Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment Convention, 1988 (No. 168)**, calls for the adoption of “special provisions for new applicants for employment”, including young persons who have completed their vocational training, studies, or compulsory military service, and offers protection not only to workers who have lost their jobs, but also to those who are not or never have been employed, as is often the case with young people<sup>24</sup>.

**Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2014 (No. 204)**, aims to (a) facilitate the transition of workers and economic units from the informal to the formal economy, while respecting the workers' fundamental rights and ensuring opportunities for income security, livelihoods and entrepreneurship; (b) promote the creation, preservation and sustainability of enterprises and decent jobs in the formal economy and the coherence of macroeconomic, employment, social protection and other social policies; and (c) prevent the informalization of formal economy jobs<sup>25</sup>.

## Conclusion

Social protection is intended to enable young people to expand their choices and enjoy their right to self-determination. The existing frameworks for social protection need to be radically changed if they are to meet the needs of young people—an increasingly heterogeneous group. The development of international guidelines and recommendations in the context of the ILO and the SDGs provide guidelines for national social protection floors, and provide a basis for designing programmes tailored for young people.

24. Ibid  
25. Ibid



This is an excerpt from ActionAid International's draft report ***Youth, Gender and Social Protection: Rebuilding Systems for the 21st Century (2018)***

Authored by Nancy Kachingwe and Kudzai Makombe

Commissioned by  
ActionAid International - Youth Working Group

Design and layout by: The Media Chilli  
Artwork by: Donovan Ward