



**2. Whose rights are they anyway?
Closing social protection gaps
for women and young people**

INTRODUCTION

Globally, only 29% of people have access to comprehensive social security. The majority of the 71%, or remaining 5.2 billion people are either not protected or only partially protected¹. Youth make up a large proportion of those who do not have some form of social protection. They fall between the cracks of social protection policies, often overlooked by policy makers whose priorities lean more towards early child development and adult outcomes. Where they do address young people, the focus tends to be on practical needs rather than its transformative potential, for example changing unjust power relations that result from gender, racial, class ethnic, caste, disability and other forms of discrimination.²

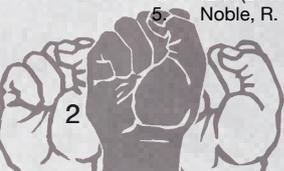
Traditionally, social protection has been attached to formal employment. However, the adoption of neoliberal policies by most governments around the world over the last four decades has eroded formal, secure employment with social protection benefits and other collective rights and brought in an era of informal and informalized work that relieves the employer of the obligation to provide social protection benefits. The majority of youth, particularly in the developing world, are engaged in the informal sector—an employment sector the International Labour Organisation (ILO)³ defines as encompassing jobs that generally lack basic social or legal protections or employment benefits, whether they are in the formal sector, informal sector or households.

The situation is more precarious for young women. According to the ILO, the 2017 global labour force participation rate (i.e. the working-age population that engages actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for work) for young men stood at 54% compared to 37% for young women – a 17% gap⁴. This includes employment in both the formal and informal sectors.

Jobs created under the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank's structural adjustment programme, global value chains in agriculture and textile export processing zones, tourism, and hospitality, for example, have played an important part in increasing young women's participation in the labour force. However, they have failed to dismantle gender stereotypes with women's employment mirroring undervalued domestic reproductive roles and receiving pay that is far less than their male counterparts. To keep costs down, employers prefer flexible contracts which offer no job security, social security benefits, maternity, or parental leave. Women in this labour market then and now find themselves in double jeopardy. They are faced with greatly reduced public services like health, while available paid employment opportunities offer little pay and/or no security with bad working conditions also exposing them to violence at the workplace. ActionAid⁵ notes that women living in poverty are especially prone to exploitation, making them even more vulnerable to violence, rendering them more vulnerable to economic exploitation – and so on, in a vicious cycle.

Young women's concentration in the largely unrecognised, undervalued, often exploitative, and unregulated paid and unpaid care work sector, with little or no social protection, further marginalises them. Social protections that are available to young women are often on the basis of their roles as caregivers and not in their own right as individuals.

1. Isabel Ortiz. (2019) World Social Protection Report 2017/19: Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Geneva, ILO
2. UNRISD 2016. Policy Innovations for Transformative Change-UNRISD Flagship Report 2016
3. ILO. (2013) DECENT WORK INDICATORS guidelines for producers and users of statistical and legal framework indicators. ILO Manual. second version. Geneva. International Labour Office
4. ILO. (2017) Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017 | Paths to a better working future. Geneva. International Labour Office
5. Noble, R. (2017) Double jeopardy violence against women and economic inequality. London. ActionAid



Vulnerability in the absence of social protection

Identifying where the cushion of social protection for youth will come from in the absence of forms of social protection directly targeted at them is critical considering the lack of decent employment prospects, a growing youth labour force and ever-shrinking labour rights and protections. In addition, the continued dominance of a neoliberal ideology, which prioritises profit-making at the lowest cost and cuts in public social spending further limit the availability of social protection for young people.

Since the opening up of markets through trade liberalisation and deregulation, the world has witnessed both jobless growth and wage stagnation; the new wealth created through productivity and economic growth has not resulted in higher wages. According to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) wage inequality is increasing, with the highest-wage earners enjoying a wage rise multiple times faster than the average.⁶ In almost all G20 countries, the labour share of national income since the 1990s has been in decline, with this trend noted since the 1970s in the case of advanced G20 countries.⁷

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.

Youth (un)employment types & trends impact on social protection prospects

BOX 1: Youth labour trends

Informal employment

- Globally, more than three-quarters (77%) of working youth are in informal jobs.
- In emerging and developing countries, 17% of young workers live on income below the extreme poverty threshold of US\$1.90 a day, partly because they often start their working lives in the informal economy.
- Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest youth working poverty rate, with nearly 67% of young workers living in poverty in 2017.

Own-account vulnerable employment

- 82% of women in 2017 were in vulnerable forms of employment compared to 72% of men.
- The number of people in vulnerable employment in sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to have increased by over 8 million, reaching 279 million in 2018.

Migrant workers

- The bulk of international migrant flows consist of young people – around 70% are under 30.

Source: ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017 | Paths to a better working future. ILO. Geneva: 2017⁸

The ILO⁹ reports that the global youth unemployment rate reached 13% in 2017, or 71 million young unemployed. This figure was at its highest at 77 million in 2009 in the wake of the 2007-2009 global recession. Between now and 2030, the global youth labour force will expand by 26 million. 77% of these young people will be in the developing countries of Africa and Asia and the Pacific. Further, 40% of economically active young people are either unemployed, or working but living in poverty¹⁰.

These figures show how failure to provide social protection today will perpetuate dire intergenerational poverty.

6. ITUC 2017. Global Poll https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/global_poll_en_print.pdf

7. ILO, IMF, World Bank, OECD 2015. Income Inequality and Labour Income Share in G20 Countries: Trends, Impacts and Causes. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_398074.pdf

8. Ibid

9. ILO. (2017) Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017 | Paths to a better working future. Geneva. ILO

10. ILO. (2018) World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2018. Geneva. ILO



Even for young people in formal employment, there is no guarantee of social security given the threat of precariousness offered by new formal employment terms in the services sectors – the very sectors the ILO¹¹ identifies as the prominent growth sectors for youth employment. The ILO¹² notes that these jobs can be linked to worsening of overall conditions often characterized by higher incidence of unconventional work patterns, higher work intensity, excessive working hours and limited or no access to social protection.

Amongst agricultural workers, less than 20% have access to basic social protection¹³. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)¹⁴, those living in economically stagnant rural areas in developing countries have limited opportunity for entrepreneurship and poorly remunerated and quality employment prospects. The absence of state social policies that protect against food insecurity and provide health and other social services, shelter, water, land and assets have left everyone vulnerable.

Most social insurance programmes available to young people require contributory payments. However, they tend to benefit less than adults because their age and high participation rates in informal employment means they have shorter formal work histories than older workers, and so would have paid less into contributory schemes such as unemployment and health insurance. Only 20 out of 201 countries provide unemployment benefits for first-time job seekers¹⁵. The ILO notes that in sub-Saharan Africa, where young populations are largest, most of the existing contributory social protection schemes only cover workers in the public sector and the formal private sectors. These represent less than 15% of the population¹⁶.

Cash transfers often exclude young people, either because of their age (benefits are typically cut off after age 18) or because they no longer live with their parents¹⁷.

Informal employment is also at odds with the concept of decent work. It is characterized by labour exploitation, unsafe working conditions, lack of social safety nets or social protection, and lack of legal protection for young people's collective rights at work, including freedom of association and collective bargaining.

BOX 2: 10 Decent Work Deficits

The 10 decent work deficits cover the four strategic pillars of the Decent Work Agenda, namely: 1) full and productive employment 2) rights at work, 3) social protection and 4) the promotion of social dialogue, also called collective bargaining, with gender equality cutting across these four pillars.

The 10 Deficits that define indecent work are:

1. Lack of employment opportunities
2. Inadequate earnings and unproductive work
3. Indecent hours
4. Inability to combine work, family and personal life
5. Engaged in work that should be abolished
6. Lack of stability and security of work
7. Unequal opportunity and treatment in employment
8. Unsafe work environment, including gender based violence at work
9. Lack of social safety nets
10. Lack of voice through workers' representation

Source: Decent Work and Quality in Work Statistical Indicators ILO ¹⁸

11. Ibid

12. ILO. (2017) Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017 | Paths to a better working future. Geneva. ILO

13. Deotti, L. and Estruch, E. (2016) Addressing rural youth migration at its root causes: A conceptual framework. Rome. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

14. FAO. (2014) Youth and agriculture: Key challenges and concrete solutions. Rome. FAO

15. Ibid

16. ILO 2017. Global Social Protection Report 2017-2019

17. UNDESA. (2018) "Promoting the Inclusion of young people through social protection" Social Development Brief #5 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2018/04/RWSS-Policy-Brief-5.4.pdf>

18. ILO. (2013) DECENT WORK INDICATORS guidelines for producers and users of statistical and legal framework indicators. ILO Manual. second version. Geneva. International Labour Office



Young women in paid and unpaid care and domestic work - a massive economic subsidy

The paid care sector¹⁹ accounts for some 381 million workers, or 12% of total global employment, most of whom are women. Paid care is mostly unregulated and insecure work which places the women workers in a poor negotiating position²⁰. Yet as the demand for childcare and care for the elderly grows, so does the paid care economy.

The ILO²¹ estimates there are at least 67 million domestic workers over the age of 15 worldwide, 80% of whom are women and 50 million in the informal sector. About 17% of domestic workers are migrant workers. It is a growing income source for women, employing about 14% and 11% of women in Latin America and Asia respectively²².

Global care chains employing mostly young migrant women from the Global South are a direct result of structural adjustment programmes and drastic spending cuts for public services. As public provisioning of care is withdrawn by the state, women are forced to pay for care services in order to enter or stay in the labour market. Care work is therefore displaced onto poorer and poorer women, from the global north to the global south, and from urban to crises-ridden rural areas. Since it is largely migrant women from the global south who step in to fill the care gap left by the state, global care chains are inherently racialised and gendered, characterised by exploitative and precarious conditions.

More than half of all domestic workers have no statutory limitation of their weekly working hours, more than 40% are not entitled to a minimum wage, and more than a third have no right to take maternity leave²³.

Young migrant and undocumented women workers are especially vulnerable. Across Asia and the Pacific, young women make up the bulk of domestic migrant workers, frequently working very long hours and receiving low wages. They are more likely to face physical and sexual harassment, violence and abuse²⁴.

Unpaid care and domestic work, which includes women in agriculture as contributing family workers, has traditionally been given no economic value and little recognition, although studies have shown that it accounts for an estimated 10% - 39% of global GDP²⁵. Women engaged in food production, either as own-account or unpaid family workers, comprise 50% of the female labour force in sub-Saharan Africa and in South and Southeast Asia. Their lack of land ownership, water rights, productive assets, access to credit, information, technology, and decision-making rights on how the productive assets are used in the family unit further compromises them.

Research has shown that women carry a much higher work burden than men and their combined work – paid and unpaid. This is an additional tax, particularly on women with low incomes and lacking social protection. In 2015, ActionAid calculated that women globally are missing out on \$17 trillion a year through their lower pay and participation in the workforce²⁶.

We need to keep a critical eye on the biggest employers of women such as employers in the paid and unpaid care work – and the global value chain sectors. We need to ensure that care tasks and social protection measures are redistributed between the government, market, society and men and women and are in line with the ILO's Decent Work Agenda.

19. Based on the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) Revision 4, care sectors are: 85 – Education; 86 – Human health activities; 87 – Residential care activities; and 88 – Social work activities without accommodation. Domestic workers are identified by the ISIC code 97

20. ILO. (2018) Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work. Geneva. International Labour Office

21. ILO Global Action Programme on Migrant Domestic Workers. International Labour Office: Geneva 2018. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/domestic-workers/lang--en/index.htm> (accessed 30/11/2018)

22. Ibid

23. ILO. (2013) Domestic workers across the world: global and regional statistics and the extent of legal protection. Geneva. International Labour Office

24. Migration and Youth: Challenges and Opportunities. Global Migration Group. UNICEF. 2014 http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/system/files/4_Chapter_1.pdf

25. Ibid

26. ActionAid (2015) Close the Gap! The cost of inequality in women's work, London: ActionAid, https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/womens_rights_on-line_version_2.1.pdf



Further guidance can be drawn from Sustainable Development Goal 5 - “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, which, in target 5.4 calls for recognition and value of unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies.

Lack of social protection driving youth disaffection

There is growing recognition of the importance of social protection not only as an economic safety net but a means towards social justice, equity and empowerment. Poverty leads to social exclusion. It not only affects a person’s material wellbeing, but also participation in social, political and economic life through which individuals would otherwise be able to influence and change policies that affect their lives.

For youth in particular, social exclusion has long lasting effects, coming at a time when they are transitioning into adulthood. The Strategy for the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth notes:

“[...] for most young people, the transition to adulthood coincides with the transition into the world of work. The costs of joblessness or poor quality jobs for individuals and societies include reduced self-esteem, discouragement and diminished levels of health and well-being, which may persist for many years in adulthood. In some cases, democracy itself and its underpinning political processes can be exposed to social unrest. There are significant economic and societal pay-offs if these situations are remedied”²⁷.

Evidence of youth exclusion has been witnessed in recent years in the high levels of youth migration, indebtedness, political disaffection, student protests and the erosion of resilience in the face of shocks, such as incapacity to meet health costs. In the news headlines, the focus has been on international migration, but internal migration from rural to urban areas is more common.

Social protection provides the social capital through which individuals have the capacity to form social networks by contributing to the wellbeing of the household and community. In the process it raises a young person’s status and ability to participate in social and cultural activities, in mainstream society, access related resources and opportunities, and engagement in active citizenship by questioning and contributing to policy processes. Social protection is key to improving trust between individuals and the state.

Mind the gap: lost social protections for young informal and vulnerable workers

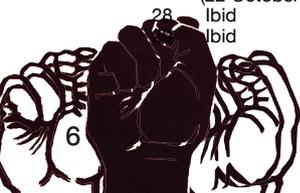
Social protection covers all measures that provide benefits, whether in cash or service, to secure protection. Given the conditions under which young women and men in informal sector workers are engaged, there is a huge gap in terms of the social protections they would otherwise be entitled to under regulated formal labour employment. These include:

Maternity leave - Convention No. 183 provides for a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave to women to whom the instrument applies (Recommendation No. 191 extends this to 18 weeks)²⁸.

Termination of employment benefits – Under the Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158), and its corresponding Recommendation No. 166, employment should not be terminated unless there is a valid reason for such termination connected with the worker’s capacity or conduct or the business’ operational requirements. Invalid reasons include those based on union membership or participation in union activities, filing of a complaint against an employer, race, colour, sex, marital status, family responsibilities, pregnancy, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, temporary absence due to illness, or absence from work during maternity leave²⁹.

27. UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination Secretariat (UNSCCEB). (2016) The Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth: The strategy document (22 October 2015). Geneva. UNSCEB

28. Ibid
Ibid



Equal opportunity and treatment - The Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) seeks to eliminate any discrimination in respect thereof “...race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation”³⁰.

Equal remuneration of men and women for work of equal value - Convention No. 100 (Equal remuneration Convention, 1951)³¹.

Income replacement in case of employment injury – covered under the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and the Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 (No. 121)³².

Sickness benefits are included in Income Security Recommendation, 1944 (No. 67), and the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), Part III, and the Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Convention, 1969 (No. 130), which provide for periodic payments³³.

Social dialogue –The ILO³⁴ defines social dialogue as “all types of negotiation, consultation and exchange of information between representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest.

Conclusions

Achieving universal social protection floors is a basic minimum to ensure social justice. But even that requires action on multiple fronts, not only economic policy, but also the elimination of social discrimination and exclusion against disadvantaged groups, such as racial and indigenous minorities, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, LGBTQIA+ and non-binary people. Understanding social protection as a transformative economic and political project to realise the right to self-determination is key to its success. It cannot be emphasised enough that social protection and social security are rights, not charity or handouts. They are universal, indivisible, interrelated and inalienable according to international law.

30. Ibid
31. Ibid
32. Ibid
33. Ibid
34. Ibid



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

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