



Global Coalition for **SOCIAL PROTECTION FLOORS**

Side event on Safeguarding Social Protection Expenditure: actionable recommendations for FfD4

Wednesday February 12, 2025

Good afternoon, my name is Lena Simet. I work as a senior researcher and advocate with Human Rights Watch (HRW), but today I'm speaking on behalf of the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF), a network of over 130 NGOs and labor organizations worldwide, of which HRW is a member.

We see the process leading up to the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) as a crucial opportunity to establish a fairer and more just global financing framework—one that can help address deep-seated, structural, and intersectional inequalities that have constrained countries' ability to realize the right to social security.

We welcome the inclusion of social protection in the zero draft of the FfD4 outcome document, an important step forward from the elements paper. However, we believe the FfD4 process can be further strengthened in at least four ways:

1. Reaffirm Commitment to Universality and Human Rights Law

While social protection is included in the zero draft, the language is weak and vague, failing to fully reflect the human rights obligations underpinning social security.

As affirmed in Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “everyone has the right to social security.” Additionally, in the Addis Agenda and in SDG Target 1.3., Member States *committed* to “social protection systems and measures FOR ALL, including floors.” FfD4 should uphold these commitments. However, the draft only “encourages” countries to do so, which weakens this obligation. Failing to reaffirm universal social security, including social protection floors, would amount to backtracking on existing commitments.

We emphasize this because, in many countries where our members are active, we frequently encounter fragmented, narrowly targeted safety nets that apply a charity-based approach rather than universal systems grounded in the right to social security, where everyone is included throughout their lives. This becomes especially problematic when governments swiftly phase out fuel or other subsidies without first scaling up investments

in renewable energy and establishing universal social security systems to help shield people from potential cost-of-living increases.

2. Specify that International Financial Institutions have Rights Obligations

The zero draft mentions the IMF and multilateral development banks (MDBs) in relation to social protection financing. We remind Member States that these institutions, as specialized agencies under the UN framework, are bound by international human rights law—not just in stable times, but also during crises.

Our coalition members have documented how austerity policies, including IFI-imposed conditionalities, have led to social security cuts or prioritized narrowly targeted, time-bound schemes over comprehensive, rights-aligned systems. Sri Lanka, Argentina, and South Africa are just a few recent examples.

3. Future of Work and Social Security

The zero draft acknowledges the potential opportunities of digital technology and AI but fails to recognize that they can also deepen inequalities, spur job displacement, and further concentrate wealth.

To mitigate these risks, FfD4 should include preventative measures such as unemployment protections for all workers who lose work, and the taxation of AI-driven profits to redistribute benefits back to society. It should also ensure that tech companies contribute to social security systems, especially as some may take advantage of unregulated and precarious labor arrangements.

4. Moving from Agreement to Action – Raising Ambition

Finally, we call for FfD4 to deliver concrete action, not just agreement on paper.

As civil society, we urge countries to go beyond the 2-percentage point (ppt) target, which should be seen as the absolute minimum. At this rate, a country with 18% social security coverage would take over 40 years to achieve near universality – an unacceptably slow timeline.

Moreover, the financing challenge is not primarily a technical challenge, but a political one.

Social security is not a cost to be kept small– it is an investment with proven long-term economic and social benefits. Every dollar invested in social security strengthens social contracts, builds public trust, and improves tax compliance, ultimately boosting domestic resource mobilization.

Many countries in the Global South have already shown universal approaches are feasible. Take Nepal and Mauritius – which introduced universal old age pensions decades ago

when they were still classified as low-income countries. They later expanded disability benefits and child grants, largely financed through domestic revenues.

However, we recognize that achieving universal social security is far more difficult for countries burdened by unsustainable debt servicing, illicit financial flows, and a global tax system that disadvantages them.

This is why reforming the global financial architecture is critical, and we applaud the historic progress promised by international cooperation moving towards a UN tax convention.

As we move forward in the FfD4 process, we urge a strong, unwavering commitment to universal, rights-aligned social security and social protection floors.

Thank you.