



ACHIEVING GLOBAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

Key messages and recommended policies to achieve Universal Social Protection and its financing

Contribution of the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) to the outcome document of the Second World Summit for Social Development (Doha, 4-6 November 2025)

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. All governments - insofar as they have not already done so – are to commit to develop national implementation and financing plans for universal social protection floors by the end of 2028, to prepare for the launch of a new era of social protection after the conclusion of the 2030 sustainable development agenda.
- B. National resources and domestic revenues will in most cases be sufficient to ensure the needed expansion of social protection. Where resources are insufficient, the international community and the international financial institutions are strongly recommended to establish programmes and policies to meet the needs of grants and loans to support governments financially and technically to implement or expand universal social protection systems.
- C. National plans and the achievement of their implementation should be reviewed every five years on the basis of a surveillance and monitoring mechanism established for that purpose, housed in a UN Programme or Specialized Agency, with international financing that can be tied as an overhead to international financing for the implementation of universal social protection systems.

Introduction

In contribution to the outcome document of the forthcoming Second World Summit for Social Development (hereinafter the Summit) the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) is hereby advancing key messages and recommending policies to establish social protection systems and social protection floors for achieving social justice through universal social protection. The GCSPF proposals are predicated on a range of existing national and international policies available to implement and finance universal social protection systems and floors, and include proposed means to implement the recommended policies and to ensure sustainable financing.

We live in an unjust and insecure world, in which poverty remains widespread, inequality is increasing, human rights' defenders are under attack, and the gap between rich and poor continues to widen as the rich become richer. This is not the world of global social justice envisioned by those who gathered in Copenhagen in 1995, where governments pledged to put people first, combat injustice and inequalities, and make the world safer for all, at all ages, across all continents.

In 2025, the Summit presents an unique opportunity to make a critical assessment of the successes and failures since 1995, and to design a new global agenda and roadmap of renewed commitments to achieve social, economic and environmental justice. It is the first opportunity to redefine that path since the visionary 2030 agenda and its 17 SDGs were adopted in 2015.

The Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) reasons that the single greatest contribution to the renewed commitment of the multilateral system and all its stakeholders to people-centred social development grounded in human rights and social justice is a universal implementation plan for social protection systems, and social protection floors, upon which comprehensive universal national systems can be built. This requires robust political will and verifiable action from Member States in all regions.

The NGO Committee for Social Development has included in its advocacy document to the Summit's coordinators the rationale for and the means of implementation of universal social protection systems and floors.

This GCSPF statement underscores the relevance of social protection to the Copenhagen Declaration adopted in 1995, explaining the role that social protection has since played in the multilateral agenda, and recommends an implementation plan and the means to financing implementation.

Our six key messages and recommended policies to the Summit outcome document address: (i) multi-dimensional poverty; (ii) social protection systems and floors; (iii) universal access to essential health care; (iv) accessing social protection and services; (v) gender equality and care work; and (vi) international legal instruments.

Social protection in the multilateral global agenda

Thirty years ago, in March 1995, governments and civil society were motivated to gather in Copenhagen at the World Summit for Social Development to focus on addressing and rectifying the challenge of social and economic inequalities in a world that was pursuing economic growth and prosperity.

The ten Commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 established an international framework for advancing sustainable social development for all people of all ages. They prioritized global cooperation, solidarity amongst and between people and countries as well as policies based on human rights to eradicate poverty, promote full employment, and foster social integration. Key principles include achieving gender equality, ensuring universal access to education and healthcare, the pursuit of wellbeing for all across the life course, and preserving cultural heritage. The commitments emphasize accelerated development in Africa and the least developed countries, integrating social goals into economic policies, and mobilizing resources. They call for strengthened partnerships through multilateral institutions to create inclusive, equitable, and sustainable progress worldwide.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the current multilateral agenda negotiated in 2013-2014 and launched in 2015 for achievement by 2030 - once again defined the basic goals of development, equality and justice, but this time with a renewed emphasis on human rights, measurement and government accountability.

One notable new tool in the field of Social Development was the [International Labour Organization - ILO Recommendation 202](#) adopted in 2012 for National Floors of Social Protection. Social Protection was accorded high priority and was made one of the first three targets of SDG1 to End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Yet today, at the closing of the first quarter of the 21st century, over half the global population lacks social protection, one-fifth of our world population lives in multi-dimensional poverty; and one-tenth are still hungry. Although the income gap between rich and poor countries has narrowed on average, many low-income nations have not benefited from this progress, and income gaps within countries have grown as the wealthy enjoy economic benefits whereas the conditions of the poor have generally stagnated or worsened. The impacts of environmental change on social and economic conditions are becoming increasingly severe, disproportionately affecting populations in already vulnerable conditions, impacting especially on already marginalized groups, and countries in the Global South. Simultaneously, a growing portion of the global population across all age groups is enduring the devastating consequences of conflicts and wars, many of which are fought for profit and rest on the exploitation of the poor and the sacrifice of their lives.

Four billion people have no social protection coverage. This astonishing figure means that they lack critical means of escaping poverty, or of avoiding falling into poverty, and do not enjoy food security for their families and themselves, nor have access to essential health and other services. Without effective social protection, inequalities within societies and between countries are increased and increasing. Women and girls, children, persons with disabilities, the unemployed and older persons are disproportionately disadvantaged.

Yet it is critical to recognize that social protection is fundamental to a range of strategies for economic prosperity, environmental safeguards for our planet, and global political security. There is no time to waste to put in place universal social protection floors.

On the positive side, the 2030 SDG agenda and the New International Consensus outlined in the Pact for the Future ([UNGA Resolution A/RES/79/1](#) of September 2024) are powerful, negotiated multilateral agreements to reduce social, economic and environmental injustices. The Pact for the Future revealed many multilateral solutions available to reduce social, economic, environmental and political injustices. Also, the ILO initiative for the [Global Coalition for Social Justice](#) focuses on reducing inequality, promoting employment, social protection and social dialogue - in the context of a human rights economy. In addition, the [Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions](#), launched in September 2021 by the UN Secretary-General, is designed to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), supporting decent job creation in the green, digital and care economies, and promoting the extension of social protection.

Key messages and recommended policies

In drafting the outcome document for the Summit, Members States are asked to take note of – and integrate - the following messages and recommendations.

2.1 ERADICATING MULTI-DIMENSIONAL POVERTY

Poverty is not just about lack of income; it is multidimensional, involving material, social, and institutional deprivation, exacerbated by systemic discrimination and exclusion. Accordingly, policies to address poverty must take a broad approach, based on in-depth and context-specific knowledge of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and discrimination, and designed with the participation of those directly affected, so that their voices are heard. Ensuring the active involvement of people living in poverty in the design, implementation, and evaluation of anti-poverty policies is key to their effectiveness. Special attention must be given to those population groups at greatest risk of experiencing situations of vulnerability, including refugees, persons with disabilities, older persons, ethnic minorities, and women, especially when they belong to marginalized communities. Furthermore, discrimination on grounds of age, sex, gender, functional ability, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, legal status, sexual orientation or any other grounds can intersect; intersecting discrimination compounds disadvantage and accumulates over the life course.

2.2 IMPLEMENTING UNIVERSAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS AND FLOORS

Universal social protection systems and floors must be embedded in national legislation, budgets and programmes with long-term budget provision to provide for sustainability and reach, and to support their resilience and expansion in the event of climate and conflict-related shocks that affect people and their communities, from the cradle to the grave. The legislation of social protection systems and floors is essential for long-term financial sustainability, and institutional stability; established as a national institution, social protection must be protected from the vicissitudes of partisan politics.

To guarantee broad societal support and ownership of social protection systems and to contribute as much as possible to stronger social cohesion, it is important that social protection systems are developed, implemented and monitored with the active involvement of social partners and relevant civil society actors, as well as those directly affected.

Furthermore, social protection systems must be founded on universal inclusion, ensuring accessibility for all, across the life course, and in all the systems' dimensions - from the design to the implementation. This requires an in-depth understanding of the specific needs, risks and circumstances of different population groups, especially of persons more likely to encounter barriers based, for example, on gender, age and disability, of the drivers of inequalities and discrimination, while putting users at the centre of the design and conceiving implementation on the basis of a rights-based and people-centred approach. Accessibility must be designed to ensure the most vulnerable and marginalized are not left behind.

2.3 GUARANTEEING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL HEALTH CARE

As stipulated in [ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 \(No. 202\)](#) and in SDG3, providing access to basic health care is the responsibility of the State. “Access to a nationally defined set of goods and services, constituting essential health care, including maternity care, that meets the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality” is the first of the four guarantees of National Floors of Social Protection outlined in [Recommendation 202](#).

In countries that have pursued universal access, health care delivery based on quasi-public social insurance systems have contributed to a good status of health, judging by morbidity and mortality indicators (which more generally applies to European and other nations, in particular the post-World War II welfare states).

However, countries with weak health care delivery systems and which are also often dependent on external aid show deplorable health status levels and poor measures of wellbeing. They may show segmentation of access to care and in care itself. A local health centre might ensure postpartum and new-born care, even childhood vaccinations, but balk at pregnancy or delivery complications, a broken leg, a traumatic injury, or treatment for a noncommunicable disease, requiring a means of referral to a next level of care or continuous care, that may or may not be in place (which applies to a number of least developed countries in Asia, Africa and the Americas).

Lacking comprehensive and holistic health systems that are people-centred, Member States may be subject to donor objectives of measuring impact based on short-term visible intervention effectiveness rather than successful health outcomes in the longer-term. Such micro-goals lack scope, with health reduced to the success of multiple micro-interventions. Furthermore, if each micro-intervention is sponsored by a different donor, demonstrating success becomes a competition to the detriment of improvements in health infrastructure and building stronger health systems, which require longer-term targeting, sustained and sustainable investments.

Yet other countries show coexisting high-quality private care and lower quality public care. Two-tier systems arose as the profitability of medical interventions visibly interested the financial world. The for-profit yet health-dedicated medical and pharmaceutical industries have been overtaken in sectoral investments by financial funds in search of higher profitability.

The stake of profitability in delivering health is considerable. At present, annual global health expenditure exceeds ten trillion US dollars. There is forceful pecuniary motivation to privatize health as widely and deeply as possible.

Universal access to health care means going against the grain and overcoming these obstacles. Progress in this respect requires changes that ensure that everyone, everywhere, is able to access the health and care services that they need regardless of their circumstances and identity factors, and without facing financial hardship. [Health is a human right](#) and must therefore be redefined comprehensively, rather than as a haphazard assembly of elements. The objectives of reducing morbidity and mortality must apply to the entire population and employ interventions on all disease causes, with special attention to social and economic determinants, neither relying on interventions selected to bring rapid and measurable results, nor emanating from donor priorities, nor again meeting only the priorities of privileged strata.

Importantly, it calls for greater public and national investment to build health systems that achieve the essential goal of truly equitable and universal access.

Social protection mechanisms in the domain of health must promote health equity and be inclusive, age and gender-sensitive, as well as adequately funded. Marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities and older persons, often face limited access to healthcare despite requiring more support, including assistive technologies and long-term care. They experience poorer health outcomes, reduced functioning, and shorter life expectancy due to systemic inequities and structural barriers, such as inaccessible information, complex application processes, and restrictive eligibility criteria. Women with disabilities and caregivers, which include older women, face additional challenges in accessing health care, further increasing their vulnerability.

Progress towards universal access to essential health care requires multisectoral collaboration and a calendar of incremental steps to expand coverage to achieve universality. Progress requires stronger multilateral collaboration and solidarity through both [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) and UN Programmes and Specialized Agencies that address health and international financial institutions - the development banks and the Bretton Woods institutions. It requires greater flexibility from international financial institutions regarding national budgets to enable spending on health and social protection. This means tolerating deficits, allowing modification of budget allocations and treating loans and grants in general budgets.

2.4 ACCESSING SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SERVICES – DIGITALIZATION AND LEGAL IDENTITY

At least a billion people around the globe face challenges in proving who they are. According to [United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund \(UNICEF\)](#), hundreds of millions of children have no legal identity, lacking birth registration and the birth certificate they need to assert a legal identity. Millions of older persons and persons with disability lack identity documents. The lack of legal identity, limited access to technology and the internet, inaccessibility of forms and websites, and illiteracy—often coupled with unfamiliarity with administrative procedures—hinder many vulnerable groups from accessing social protection benefits and other public services where they do exist.

Changes in legislation on legal identity and its application at national and local level are needed to ensure a legal identity for everyone. This means free birth registration, simplified procedures to obtain legal identity for adults and children, as well as mobile administrative services for areas that are currently underserved. Additionally, disability cards that provide access to benefits compensating for disabilities and/or need for care are essential, in addition to the appropriate systems to support their implementation. The opportunity of national data collection exercises, such as decennial censuses, and intercensal surveys, should be used to establish and ensure universal registration of household members. Data must be disaggregated according to characteristics such as gender, age, disability and location, to ensure that members of specific groups are effectively included and their access to social protection benefits is ensured. Governments should also be assisted to provide and maintain civil registration systems.

Whereas digital technologies have strong potential to enhance access to social protection, delivery models that increasingly rely on the availability of digital technologies and digital skills carry the risk of excluding some population groups and exacerbating inequalities, if existing gaps in relation to access to technologies and digital skills are ignored and remain unaddressed. Beyond registration issues, the disbursement of benefits digitally is becoming widespread. Recent research suggests that this can increase exclusions, for example among older women, perpetuating discrimination and inequalities. Greater efforts are required to ensure that digital gaps are effectively addressed in the delivery of social protection, and that digital technologies support equality, inclusion, and the realisation of rights. In this respect, the GCSPF stresses the following points:

- Any registry designed for the attribution of rights to social services and benefits should be a dedicated registry, designed for the purpose and fit for that purpose;
- The right to privacy and to confidentiality must be built into each registry that is utilized to grant access to social benefits and services of all kinds. Registration for the purpose of legal identity granting access to social services should not be accessible for any other purpose, especially purposes of selection or exclusion of individuals from access to such services. There should be firewalls between the registry and other sources of individual information, to protect rights-bearers from cross-classification with other data sets because of the link to individual identity;
- Affordable access to internet and digital support should be provided to everyone, particularly in rural areas. Websites and interfaces should be easy to use;
- When persons are not able to digitally access public services, the right to a physical human reception should be ensured so that human contact is always present in administrative processes;
- Digital registration should apply to the entire resident population of any State, to ensure that access to benefits is not limited for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers on the basis of their documentary status; and
- Rights-holders in respect of public services should meaningfully participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of digital policies.

2.5 GENDER EQUALITY AND CARE WORK

Thirty years after both the Copenhagen plan for action and the Beijing Platform for Action, women's disproportionate share of unpaid care work and responsibilities continues to prevent them from fully engaging in public life and in income-generating activities. Care responsibilities often remain a key obstacle to women's labour force participation, most often depriving them of the social protection benefits linked to formal employment. When women do work outside the home, they are frequently paid less than men, and experience discrimination, in particular in hiring, promotions and access to decision-making positions. Discrimination and inequality experienced by women throughout their life course across multiple domains accumulate in old age – manifest in gender gaps in pension coverage and income inadequacy - making women less likely to enjoy income security and economic independence in old age than men. Many older women are in poverty, globally.

Unpaid care work is a major cause of social and economic injustice and hardship for women across the life course, all the more so when maternity, race, migratory status, age, disability and other intersecting grounds of discrimination come into play. Women who raise children alone and widows are also particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion.

Unpaid care work must be shared equitably, first between men and women, but also across society; every stakeholder, including government and the private sector, must assure their share of responsibility and costs. Public provisioning of care should have a sustainable and reliable source to reduce potential inequities in the availability of care services. Public policies should frame care as a social and collective responsibility rather than an individual problem; these policies should also treat unpaid caregivers and those they care for as rights holders. Ensuring universal social protection by creating social protection floors and universal quality public services would be an important step towards this objective, contributing to the broader care systems of a society. It would also support recognition of the contribution to the economy of unpaid and underpaid care work done by women, as well as the critical value of care.

At the Summit, Governments must re-commit to their 1995 commitments, renewed in SDG5.4 of the 2030 global development agenda: *“Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate”*.

Appropriate macroeconomic policies are vital in addressing socio-economic disparities in accessing care services and to provide the adequate fiscal space needed. Moreover, the cross-cutting nature of care must be recognized in cross-sectoral policy approaches. States must ensure care systems are adequately funded and sufficiently staffed. They must mobilize the necessary resources both domestically and through international assistance and cooperation, ensuring that expenditure and public policy comply with human rights standards, taking account the long-standing demands of unpaid care workers, their right to self-care, and evolving standards of care.

2.6 RATIFICATION OF EXISTING AND ADOPTION OF NEW INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

The ILO, the UN and regional institutions have adopted international legal instruments that have important implications for social protection. Notable instruments of the United Nations are the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW, 1979\)](#), [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC, 1989\)](#), and the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD, 2006\)](#). Moreover, there is a body of relevant ILO Conventions and Recommendations, including the [Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 \(No. 202\)](#) and, importantly, the [ILO Social Security \(Minimum Standards\) Convention, 1952 \(No. 102\)](#) that is currently the object of an active ratification campaign.

Regional instruments are also essential tools, including the [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Citizens to Social Protection and Social Security \(2022\)](#), recently adopted by the African Union. Ratification by all eligible Member States is being urged and should proceed apace.

New instruments will be important tools of the multilateral system to ensure the establishment and expansion of floors of social protection. An ILO Convention for Social Protection would give new impetus to ratchet the agenda for social protection into international public law. A UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons would also greatly expand protection to one of the most unprotected groups globally.

Ensuring domestic and international financing

Both national and international financial resources for social protection will need to be expanded. When allocating resources, countries must ensure an appropriate investment in the development and expansion of social protection systems. It is critical that social protection systems are designed to be universal at the outset, i.e. designed to reach all residents in the country who require social protection benefits in order to comply with the universal right to social security. Furthermore, the benefits must be organized and financed to assure effective protection is guaranteed.

In this context, it is essential to improve domestic fiscal revenues, through taxation and fiscal planning, both for countries seeking to establish or increase coverage of social protection, and countries assisting through international financial institutions, multilateral or bilateral aid. Presently, trillions of dollars evade fiscal responsibility annually. The proposal for a UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, as put forward by the Africa Group, should therefore be pursued with great urgency in everyone's interest. Such collaboration could lead to the establishment of an equitable and effective international tax system that would greatly improve the domestic resource mobilization of countries. In this regard, also, the OECD's Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting of 2016 and Global Minimum Effective Corporate Tax Rate of 15% of 2021 can be noted.

A strong, global response from the international community to shortages in domestic resources in the face of extreme poverty and inequality is urgently needed to ensure that the right to social security can be realized worldwide. The international community can support low-income countries in their efforts to establish effective social protection systems in a sustainable manner and in efforts to increase coverage and benefits. A globally harmonized and well-coordinated approach that observes the rules of 'country ownership' and complies with human rights standards can provide the pathway forward. The UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions is a model for partnership structures between participating countries and the active involvement of civil society and trade unions. In any case, to ensure participation of all countries in the global effort to broaden social protection will require an effective international financing mechanism, such as a significantly strengthened UN Global Accelerator, and the proposed solidarity-based Global Fund for Social Protection.

There are various specific policies that countries and the international community can pursue:

- Strengthening domestic resource mobilization for the financing of universal quality public services through (i) re-allocating public expenditures; (ii) universal

progressive taxation that does not enable tax avoidance or evasion by the rich; (iii) addressing illicit financial flows and tax abuses and (iv) adopting a more accommodative macroeconomic framework;

- Strengthening the Global Accelerator – with the full participation of trade unions and civil society;
- Establishing a solidarity-based Global Fund for Social Protection;
- Supporting the process toward a UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation;
- Modifying structures of the international multilateral system, as specified in the Pact for the Future, to reduce the underrepresentation of developing countries in international economic decision-making institutions, notably the Bretton Woods institutions such as the World Bank Group and the IMF. At present, the imbalanced representation limits the ability of a number of countries to influence policies that affect the financing of their economic and social development;
- Supporting international aid, including for technical advice on the development, expansion and improvement of social protection systems and floors; and
- Supporting a Marshall plan for low-income countries, to provide long-term debt solutions and promote their economic and social development. This could be financed for example by the use of special drawing rights and other international financial aid, and in the longer run through the establishment of a new international tax system.

In the case of loans for social protection, the International Financial Institutions and Bretton Woods Institutions (IBRD and IMF) and regional development banks must demonstrate flexibility in respect of national budgets to enable adequate spending on health and social protection, such as by tolerating deficits, allowing modification of budget allocations, and by treating loans and grants in general budgets to be allocated according to national priorities.

Commitment to implementation

The extension and implementation of universal social protection systems and floors is already a commitment agreed by all countries, following human rights law, in compliance with other international instruments, and in accordance with the negotiated multilateral development agenda.

Yet their commitments have not been achieved, and the deficit in their achievement is measurably large. It has taken a generation to reach the Second World Summit for Social Development since the first Summit and the Copenhagen Declaration of 1995.

In line with existing agreements, the outcome document will need to give a renewed and increased importance to social protection to achieve the desired impact on regional and global organizations responsible for social protection.

The substantive value, future and longstanding impact of the Second World Summit for Social Development will depend on the commitment by Member States to implement and finance the policies agreed in the outcome document.

Political will must be broadly harvested at the Summit to ensure re-commitment to social protection goals already agreed, and to achieve adoption of a robust agreement to move forward on social protection.

The Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) reasons that the single greatest contribution to social development globally at this point is the establishment, implementation and expansion of social protection that is best achievable in each Member State. This will require action by Member States and multilateral actors as follows:

- A. All governments - insofar as they have not already done so – are to commit to develop national implementation and financing plans for universal social protection floors in collaboration with the social partners, civil society and other stakeholders, structured with a calendar of milestones to achieve; and
All governments are to agree to elaborate these plans by the end of 2028, to prepare for the launch of a new era of social protection after the conclusion of the 2030 sustainable development agenda.
- B. National resources and domestic revenues will in most cases be sufficient to ensure the needed expansion of social protection. Various options are available to increase domestic resource mobilization and to reallocate government expenditure. Domestic resource mobilization and fiscal space can be greatly improved through taxation and greater tax collaboration between countries, and establishment of an equitable and effective international tax system.
Where national resources and domestic revenues are not sufficient to meet national social protection objectives, the international community can and should agree to support governments financially and technically to implement these plans in the least developing countries for whom domestic resources are insufficient and technical expertise is lacking;
The international financial institutions are strongly recommended to establish programmes and policies to meet the needs of grants and loans for the purpose of implementing and expanding social protection systems as outlined by the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF), designed to be universal and not limited to the protection of only the poorest population groups, however defined and targeted;
- C. National plans and the achievement of their implementation should be reviewed every five years – in collaboration with social partners, civil society and other stakeholders;
A surveillance and monitoring mechanism should be established for that purpose, housed in a UN Programme or Specialized Agency, and funded for that purpose with international financing which can be tied as an overhead to international financing for the implementation of universal social protection systems.

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