

## **Team Europe Event: Building Synergies for Social Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Friday 20 March, the stately Egmont Palace in the heart of Brussels, is the setting for a high-level conference on the need for synergies to build strong social protection systems in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Belgian government (DGD) and the European Commission (DG International Partnerships) are at the origin of this initiative. With representatives of member states (both of the European and the African Union), of UN agencies (ILO, World Food Programme, World Health Organization, etc.) and of civil society, there is a colourful collection of experts around the table. They seize this opportunity to put and keep social protection high on the political agenda. Not unimportant in these times, where so much attention is paid to economic investments and investments in security.

Fortunately, other voices can be heard here. "Social protection is an investment, not a cost," says Heidi Rombouts (general director, DGD) in her opening speech. And this is also confirmed by Valérie Schmitt (Deputy Director of the Department of Social Protection, ILO). There should therefore be no reason to consider social investment less important than economic investment. Moreover, there is a real "return on investment" if a society opts for a fully-fledged social protection policy: improved health, less inequality, more social cohesion, but also more economic growth!

Koen Detavernier (policy officer at WSM and speaking on behalf of civil society) brought two key messages to the table. First: if the EU wants to do things differently than other global players it should involve civil society. "By talking to trade unions, social health insurance organisations and other social movements and by involving them in the design of programmes, you ensure that the policy effectively responds to people's needs. You also get more ownership from the population."

Second: don't be shy to actively promote the core pillars of the European social model, including solid and universal social protection systems. If Europe doesn't actively promote redistribution, social dialogue and decent working conditions, who will?

From unions and civil society perspective, having flanking projects to improve decent work and social protection in line with Global Gateway investments is a good thing as such. Several projects already underway prove it's possible. It's a good way to implement the so called 360° approach. But it's the bare minimum. Hence, our call for sufficient clearly identifiable thematic budgets for social development and social protection in the next Multiannual Financial framework of the EU.

*By Koen Detavernier, Policy Officer at [We Social Movements \(WSM\)](#).*

*High-level event **Building Synergies to Maximise the Potential of Social Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa in a Changing World**, held on **20 March 2026** in Brussels, Belgium, at the Egmont Palace.*

*The event was co-organised by Team Belgium and the European Commission (DG INTPA), as co-leads of the Team Europe Initiative on Social Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa.*

*For additional information on this event, you can also visit [“Social protection key to inclusive transitions in Africa,”](#) [“Team Europe convenes high-level event to boost social protection in Sub-Saharan Africa”](#), [“Team Europe convenes high-level event to boost social protection in Sub-Saharan Africa.”](#)*