

Concept note

Working Group on Social Protection and Climate Change

26/08/2021

1. Introduction¹: Why focus on social protection and climate change?

Social protection² aims to provide coverage against essential risks over the course of a person's life³. It is a fundamental human right and its implementation worldwide is a major social achievement of the twentieth century – yet at the beginning of the twenty-first century, almost half of the world's population, including the most vulnerable, still lack basic coverage.

At the same time, the global risk posed by climate change is apparent to states and individuals alike and threatens to disrupt human society and the environment and further exacerbate social injustices. The universalization of social protection and the fight against climate change share the common and urgent goal of protecting people and the planet.

Climate change is considered an "*existential threat to humanity*"⁴.

The risks associated with a person's life cycle, as typically covered by social protection (sickness, unemployment, income security for the disabled or elderly, etc.), will mostly increase with the rising global temperatures, a dramatic prospect for the most vulnerable people. Moreover, the observed and projected impacts of climate change on society, the economy, human and animal health, and ecosystems will be most profound in countries with weak social protection capacities, setting the stage for a vicious cycle of increased vulnerability to climate risks and weakened systems for addressing them.

¹ This section draws on:

Aleksandrova, M. (2021). [The Untapped Potential of Global Climate Funds for Investing in Social Protection](#). Briefing paper. German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE). Bonn.

Aleksandrova, M. (2019). [Principles and considerations for mainstreaming climate change risk into national social protection frameworks in developing countries](#). Climate and Development, 1-10. doi:10.1080/17565529.2019.1642180.

Györi, M. et al. (2021): [The importance of social protection for climate change mitigation in LMICS](#). Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. Bonn

² Within the context of Inter Agency Social Protection Assessments (ISPA), social protection refers to the set of policies and programs aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion throughout their life cycles, with a particular emphasis towards vulnerable groups. Social protection can be provided in cash or in-kind, through non-contributory schemes, providing universal, categorical, or poverty-targeted benefits such as social assistance, contributory schemes with social insurance being the most common form, and by building human capital, productive assets, and access to jobs. <https://ispatools.org/tools/CODI-What-Matters.pdf>

³ [Convention C102 - Social Security \(Minimum Standards\) Convention, 1952 \(No. 102\) \(ilo.org\)](#), [Recommendation R202 - Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 \(No. 202\) \(ilo.org\)](#)

⁴ United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres during the R20 Austrian World Summit in May 2018

The role of social protection to support climate change adaptation policies, meant to lower the risks posed by the consequences of climate change, is becoming increasingly important for most countries and critical for the world's poorest countries disproportionately affected. Indeed, climate hazards and slow onset environmental changes already undermine efforts to eradicate multidimensional poverty, construct new risk layers in critical social security sectors, and increase the demand for social support. Meanwhile, investments in social protection programmes can create maladaptive outcomes when the long-term impacts of climate change such as sea level rise, water scarcity, and land degradation are not taken into consideration.

The role of social protection is also crucial to enable climate change mitigation policies, aimed at keeping global temperatures close to 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels, as foreseen in the Paris Agreement. Those policies will affect all sectors of activity: sectors gaining jobs will need a workforce with the right skill set, while sectors losing jobs or being phased out will need social protection and active labour market policies to guarantee a just transition, leaving no one behind.

Finally, social protection systems are themselves exposed to climate risks, and need to ensure their own physical, functional and financial continuity and resilience to shocks.

Over time, climate change will continue to alter the settings under which social protection systems function. Addressing this issue therefore implies being able to apprehend the problem in a broad, systemic perspective and in a long-term time scale.

Global, regional and national policy agendas on social protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk reduction and other related policies is fragmented. Social protection systems are often not designed in a way that they can prepare for and respond to climate-related shocks. Currently, social protection objectives are poorly integrated into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which shape countries' climate ambitions along with other strategic documents such as National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and National Just Transition plans (NJTPs).

The financing of social protection systems in a changing climate will be faced with the dual challenge of increasing life-cycle risks, and increasing covariate risks that affect a large number of people simultaneously e.g. in a crisis situation, and will therefore need to find innovative financing solutions to ensure continuity while extending coverage to all. In that sense, the potential of global climate funds to invest in social protection represents an opportunity not yet fully exploited, as evidence of the impact of social protection on climate change outcomes is not strong or visible enough.

The time has come to strengthen the links between social protection and climate change, as many low- and middle-income countries are formulating development and post-pandemic reconstruction plans that include strengthening comprehensive social protection systems, including floors, while at the same time initiating climate change strategies.

The objective convergence between the fight against climate change and the universalization of social protection is a powerful opportunity to reinforce the long-term values of social justice and sustainable development while integrating social protection with climate action.

"Social Protection in a Changing Climate": from experts' meetings to working group

A series of two experts' meetings on "Social Protection in a Changing Climate"⁵ was co-organized in 2020 by the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre with several institutions including the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the British Red Cross, the UK Met Office, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the World Bank, Climate KIC, German Development Institute/ Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), the French Development Agency/Agence Française de Développement (AFD), the BMZ (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The two meetings organised in 2020, one in London and one virtually, provided a one-off, exploratory and informal platform to spark "big ideas for the long term" with regards to social protection in a changing climate.

There was considerable interest expressed by the participants - experts in climate, social protection, risk management, and humanitarian action - to engage further in the process and identify some more in-depth policy and technical elements that might contribute to a long term vision for social protection.

For that reason, the co-organizers of the second expert meeting are exploring options to sustain, expand and institutionalize the initiative under the form of a working group with a broad membership - donors, humanitarian and development agencies, academic institutions, social partners, private sector and national governments – with the purpose of building and operationalizing a coherent, comprehensive and long-term vision of the role of social protection in a changing climate.

2. Vision and objectives of the Working Group on Social Protection and Climate Change

- 1) To develop a coherent, comprehensive and long-term vision of the role of social protection in a changing climate to ensure sustainable, green and resilient development for present and future generations
- 2) To promote the mainstreaming of climate change considerations into social protection policies, programmes, and mechanisms, and building capacity where possible in linking and coordinating social protection systems with national, regional and international climate change agendas and relevant frameworks
- 3) To bring relevant actors together and promote inter-agency coordination in strengthening, sustaining and scaling up inclusive social protection systems for addressing climate vulnerabilities, through the promotion of research, innovative approaches, knowledge sharing and advocacy

⁵ [Blog: Social protection in a changing climate – what are the experts saying?](#)

3. Membership of the Working Group on Social Protection and Climate Change

Any individual, practitioner or expert, any public or private institution directly or indirectly involved in any aspect of social protection, or in matters related to understanding or addressing the causes or effects of climate change, and interested in developing bridges and synergies between the two fields. It is aimed to actively engage institutions and practitioners with expertise on a wide range of topics under climate change and social protection, including (but not restricted to): adaptation and mitigation, labour market interventions and policies, humanitarian action, disaster management, green jobs and transition, migration and conflict.

This includes and is not limited to:

- Governments and relevant public authorities
- Development partners (donors) and related technical cooperation agencies
- Social security organizations, at national, regional and international levels;
- Financial institutions, such as regional or international development banks, specialized Funds such as the Green Climate Fund, or major social/climate insurance funds etc...
- Civil society organizations, including local and international NGOs, representatives of minority groups, indigenous people, persons with disabilities, saving groups, women-led groups, youth-groups, community-based organisations, foundations, as well as social partners e.g. representatives from workers and employers including in the informal economy;
- Relevant actors of the private sector and relevant productive sectors such as fishery, mobility, ITC, coal and fossil fuel extraction, agriculture, ...
- Research and academic institutions, think tanks and collaborative networks,
- Humanitarian actors, especially those delivering cash transfers
- UN agencies

4. Constitution of the Working Group on Social Protection and Climate Change under the twin umbrellas of SPIAC-B and USP 2030

The rationale for the Working Group to be directly associated with these two entities, the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030) and the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), is the very nature of its purpose, which implies both systemic and operational developments, and therefore to be heard at the global and political governance level, by countries and international bodies responsible for taking appropriate decisions, but also and simultaneously at the level of technical agencies to optimize and harmonize the mechanisms that will make them possible.

The USP2030 partnership is for the Working Group the opportunity to reflect and convey evidence-based policy recommendations directly to the highest and most global level of social protection governance with a view to their concrete implementation in countries within a supportive international setting. Furthermore, the Working Group will contribute to the advancement of the actions envisioned by the USP2030 partnership, by better taking into account the risks induced by present and future climate changes in the design and governance of nationally owned, sustainably financed universal social protection throughout the life cycle, based on the principles of participation and social dialogue.

On the other hand, the Social Protection Interagency Cooperation Board represents an opportunity for the Working Group to develop tools and methodological approaches jointly with other

technical agencies, international organizations, and bilateral institutions. These tools will both produce impact in the field and encourage donors and international actors to harmonize their actions, pool their resources and coordinate development cooperation in countries through demand-driven actions.

As it is essential to develop such tools and synergies to enable the effective implementation of social protection policies that take into account climate change risks, and to advocate for linking social protection and climate agendas at every level, participation in both USP2030 and SPIAC-B is seen by the Working Group as equally important and complementary.

5. Advisory group on Social Protection and Climate Change

The advisory group supports the development and organization of the working group, and currently comprises the core members who have constantly been involved, and this includes:

Advisory group members	Contribution to the group
Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre (RCCC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Expertise on Climate Change – Expertise on opportunities for linking Social Protection and Climate Change in the context of humanitarian settings and more generally in policy and programmes – Network with Red Cross National Societies, and other humanitarian agencies – Connection with other implementation partners, donors and academic institutions – Experience in organising virtual and in person events on CC+SP, including interactive games for awareness and advocacy – Experience in knowledge building and sharing (guidelines, ...)
German Development Institute/ Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Expertise on both Social Protection and Climate Change – Generating and sharing knowledge and expertise (through academic articles and policy briefs) – Network with research and academic organizations – Support the organization of events – Support the work of the Advisory Group (coordination, etc.)
Agence Française de Développement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Practical experiences through projects that work on social protection and climate – Network of social protection as well as climate change experts – Connection with developing countries counterparts and other donors Support the organization of events

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support the work of the advisory group
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Network of social protection experts – Connection with partner country governments and other stakeholders – Practical experiences through projects that work on social protection and climate – Technical experience on the link between social protection and climate change, including through publications – Support the organization of events – Support the work of the advisory group
International Labour Organisation (ILO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Technical and Policy expertise on social protection (including in a warmer climate), green jobs and the Just transition – Network of social protection experts and social partners in countries worldwide – The Green Jobs network (ILO specialists focusing on climate change from different angles e.g. refugees/migration, shock responsive, informal economy, private sector, workers’ unions, public works...) – Direct connection to USP2030, SPIAC-B and other platforms on social protection – Capacity to mobilize resources and partnerships for research, training and field projects implementation – Communication and knowledge sharing capacity including online platform (ILO website), organization of webinars and international conferences (capacity but no dedicated resources)

The advisory group will welcome the participation of other volunteer members once the working group is established.

6. Potential Activities

- Developing an international multidisciplinary network of experts, including practitioners, social partners, scientists and policy-makers, involved in or interested in strengthening social protection in the fight against the causes and adverse effects of climate change
- Undertaking active evidence-based advocacy for universal social protection in the fight against the causes and adverse effects of climate change;
- Articulating the many challenges which social protection can possibly address, including flagging key areas to prioritize based on the most likely medium-term climate scenarios
- Promoting research on the impact of social protection measures on climate mitigation and eco-social policies, as well as on climate adaptation policies;
- Promoting innovative evidence-based approaches to problems to be solved by social protection

systems,

- Organizing international and regional meetings, roundtables and discussions on a variety of topics related to social protection in the fight against the causes and adverse effects of climate change;
- Developing and sharing knowledge pieces and expertise, e.g. developing analytical tools and guidelines, policy recommendations, and sharing best practices and case studies; and sharing resources within the group and externally;
- Depending on their technical specificities, communicate these issues to other groups working on particular aspects of social protection and/or climate change, or develop internal workstreams to address them, and integrate the findings into advocacy messages, policy recommendations and technical guidance
- ...