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UN collaboration on social protection:
Reaching consensus on how to accelerate social protection systems-building

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Published by International Labour Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and United Nations Children's Fund

First published 2022

Attribution – ILO, FAO and UNICEF. *UN collaboration on social protection: Reaching consensus on how to accelerate social protection systems-building*. Geneva. doi.org/10.4060/cc0015en.

ISBN: 978-92-2-037131-2 (print); 978-92-2-037132-9 (web PDF) [ILO]

ISBN: 978-92-5-136177-1 [FAO]

Foreword

The global pandemic has delivered to the world another stark reminder of the importance of having comprehensive social protection systems in place to contend with shocks and manage ordinary life-cycle challenges. The crisis threw a spotlight on the precarious plight of the 4.1 billion people who have no social protection at all and highlighted in particular the difficulties of reaching the 2 billion informal economy workers and their families with COVID-19 social protection response measures. It also underscored the important role played in the spread of disease by income insecurity and a lack of financial access to healthcare, and the inequities in infection, morbidity and mortality. We saw that low-income and marginalized people were especially affected, in particular children and women, as well as those facing insecure income as informal workers and in precarious employment. These profound inequities documented during COVID-19 affected health outcomes for infection, COVID-19 complications and mortality, with those worse-off in society affected by a factor of 2 to 4 times more than the better-off.

A clear bright spot, however, has been the crucial role that social protection has played in an unprecedented policy response worldwide. Undoubtedly, without this massive and rapid expansion of social protection through pre-existing provision and the introduction of emergency measures, the human and socio-economic toll of the crisis would have been much, much, greater. This recognition has resulted in a renewed appreciation of universal social protection and the need for sustainable systems; and the indispensability of such systems as a cornerstone of all socially-just, healthy and well-functioning societies has become more self-evident.

Moreover, the pandemic gave a timely jolt to the UN family and development partners alike, an urgent prompt to build further on joint work on strengthening social protection systems, and to redouble our efforts in this regard. In so doing, we can draw on our common human rights framework, and on international social security standards, which provide concrete guidance for the building of universal and robust social protection systems; on a common vision of the importance of universal social protection and health coverage, in enabling people to flourish in life and health; on a common inter-agency statement on the crucial role of social protection for pandemic control; and also on our respective strengths and technical expertise, to maximize the support we can provide to governments to realize their social protection ambitions and ensure that those people who do not currently enjoy effective access to social protection soon will. The recent launch of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions is an expression of this strengthened commitment of a collaborative UN to support countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to be as fully as possible prepared to address the multiple crises and transformations of the twenty-first century. This publication, therefore, appears at an opportune moment: first, it sets out agreed priority policy areas that require dedicated action now; and second, it puts forward several practical recommendations on how UN collaboration in this domain can be further enhanced – quick wins that are practically attainable now.

Therefore, I believe this publication is a timely contribution to our efforts to strengthen UN collaboration, better-position the United Nations Development System (UNDS) on the most strategic development challenges – and opportunities – of our times, and will surely help us deliver on our shared ambition of universal social protection for all.

Robert Andrew Piper
Assistant Secretary-General
for Development Coordination,
Development Coordination Office (DCO)

Contents

▶ Acknowledgements

The drafting of this review publication, convened by FAO, ILO and UNICEF, was led by a core team which included (in alphabetical order) Alejandro Grinspun (FAO); María José Escriche, Ian Orton, Valérie Schmitt and Veronika Wodsak (ILO); and Tomoo Okubo and David Stewart (UNICEF). The report also draws on a joint effort by organizations from across the social protection community (listed below), and the core team wish to thank everyone for their great contributions and collaboration:

- African Development Bank
- African Disability Forum
- African Union
- Asian Development Bank: Anand Kumar, Michiel Van der Auwera
- EU: Dörte Bosse
- FAO: Sara Abdoulayi, Omar Benammour, Gala Dahlet, Gabriel Fernandez, Alejandro Grinspun, Marco Knowles, Marion Ouma, Claudia Patrone, Federico Spano and Qiushi Yue
- FCDO (UK): Clare McCrum and Heather Kindness
- GIZ: Ralf Radermacher, Silas Theile and Maren Suchta-Platzmann
- ILO: Christina Behrendt, Joanna Borges, Christina Dankmeyer, Shana fabienne Hoehler, Aurelie Klein, Jasmina Papa, Ariel Pino, Shahra Razavi, Lou Tessier, and Rubén Vicente Andrés.
- IMF: David Coady
- IOE: Luis Rodrigo Morales
- IrishAid: Aileen O'Donovan
- ITUC: Evelyn Astor
- OECD
- OHCHR
- Oxfam
- Save the Children
- SIDA: Britta Olofsson, Pontus Korsgren
- UK Government
- UNAIDS
- UNCTs from Argentina, Malawi, Mexico, Viet Nam
- UNDCO: Robert Piper
- UNDESA
- UNDP: Luis Dasilva Depaiva, Shivani Nayyar, Mansour Ndiaye, Mizuho Okimoto-Kaewtathip, Renata Nowak-Garmer, Vesna Dzuteska-Bisheva, Devika Iyer, Renata Pardo and Rita Sciarra

- UNDP IPC-IG/IPEA: Fabio Veras
- UNDP IPC-IG/socialprotection.org: Mariana Balboni
- UNECLAC: Simone Cecchini
- UNESCAP: Sayuri Cocco Okada
- UNFPA
- UNHCR
- UNICEF: Tinatin Baum, Alexandre Cote, Pamela Dale, Ruth Graham-Goulder, Nupur Kukrety, Munir Mammadzade, Tomoo Okubo, David Stewart and Natalia Winder-Rossi
- UN Joint SDG Fund: Maya Marquez, Nenad Rava
- UNRCs: Stephen Jackson, Tapan Mishra, Roberto Gabriele Valent and Sara Sekkens
- UNRISD
- UN Women: Silke Staab
- WFP: Sarah Laughton, Christopher Turton
- WHO: Claude Meyer, Nicole Valentine
- WIEGO: Laura Alfers
- World Bank
- WSM: Koen Detavernier, Bart Verstraeten

The research for this publication also draws from extensive interviews conducted with (in alphabetical order): Michelle Bachelet, Omar Benammour, Michael Cichon, David Coady, Luc Cortebeeck, Nuno Meira Simoes Cunha, Alejandro Grinspun, Krzysztof Hagemejer, Elliott Harris, Mansour Ndiaye, Isabel Ortiz, Vinicius Pinheiro, Helmut Schwarzer, Cäcilie Schildberg, David Stewart, Jennifer Topping, Claudia Vinay, Pierre Vincensini, Rubén Vicente Andrés, Natalia Winder-Rossi and Ruslan Yemtsov.

We would also like to express our gratitude to Gillian Somerscales for editing the report.

▶ Abbreviations and acronyms

ABND	assessment-based national dialogue
AI	artificial intelligence
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
ASP	adaptive social protection
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Philippines)
CCA	common country assessment
CODI	Core Diagnostic Instrument
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO(s)	civil society organization(s)
DFAT	The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
EUDs	European Union Delegations
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK)
GBV	gender-based violence
GCSPF	Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors

GDP	gross domestic product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HCP	Happy Child Programme (Brazil)
HQ	headquarters
HRAU	Human Rights Action Unit
IBC	Issue-based Coalition
IDA	International Disability Alliance
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IFI(s)	international financial institution(s)
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ILC	International Labour Conference
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC-IG	International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth
IPEA	Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (Brazil)
ISPA	inter-agency social protection assessment
ISSA	International Social Security Association
ITC-ILO	International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation

JP	**joint programme**
LICs	**low-income countries**
LMICs	**lower-middle-income countries**
LNOB	**leaving no one behind**
M&E	**monitoring and evaluation**
MAF	**Management and Accountability Framework**
MAPS	**Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support**
MDG(s)	**Millennium Development Goal(s)**
MENA	**Middle East and North Africa**
MPTF	**multi-partner trust fund**
MSSI	**Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (Timor-Leste)**
NHIS	**National Health Insurance Scheme (Nigeria)**
NGO(s)	**non-governmental organization(s)**
ODI	**Overseas Development Institute**
OECD	**Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development**
OECS	**Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States**
OHCHR	**Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**
ONORC	**One Nation One Ration Card (India)**
OPD(s)	**organization(s) of persons with disability**
P4H	**Providing for Health**
PBSO	**Peacebuilding Support Office**

PROSPECTS	Partnership for Improving Prospects for Host Communities and Forcibly Displaced Persons
PROSPERA	Australia Indonesian Partnership for Economic Development
PUNO(s)	Participating UN organization(s)
PwD(s)	person(s) with disabilities
RAP	Rapid Assessment Protocol
RASER	Rapid Socio-Economic Response (Iran)
RC	resident coordinator
RCO	resident coordinator office
SDCF(s)	sustainable development cooperation framework(s)
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SEIA(s)	socio-economic impact assessment(s)
SERP(s)	socio-economic response plan(s)
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIDS	small island developing nations
SPCT	social protection cash transfer
SPF	social protection floor
SPF-I	Social Protection Floor Initiative
SPIAC-B	Social Protection Interagency Cooperation Board
SP-IBC	Social Protection Issue-Based Coalition
SPPOT	social protection policy options tool
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights

SRSP	**shock-responsive social protection**
UHC	**universal health coverage**
UHC2030	**universal health coverage 2030**
UMICs	**upper-middle-income countries**
UN	**United Nations**
UNAIDS	**Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS**
UNC	**University of North Carolina**
UNCEB	**United Nations Chief Executives Board**
UNCT(s)	**United Nations country team(s)**
UNDAF(s)	**United Nations Development Assistance Framework(s)**
UNDCO	**United Nations Development Coordination Office**
UNDESA	**United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs**
UNDG	**United Nations Development Group**
UNDOCO	**United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office**
UNDP	**United Nations Development Programme**
UNDRR	**United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction**
UNDS	**United Nations Development System**
UNDSG	**United Nations Deputy Secretary-General**
UNECA	**United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**
UNESCO	**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**
UNFPA	**United Nations Population Fund**

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNPRPD	United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNRC(s)	United Nations resident coordinator(s)
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
UNSCC	United Nations System Staff College
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USP	Universal social protection
USP2030	Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WSM	We Social Movements

Executive summary

The objective of this publication is to work towards a consensus among UN agencies on how best to support countries to achieve progress towards universal social protection in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To this end the publication investigates (1) lessons learnt from past joint UN work on social protection; (2) priority areas for social protection engagement; (3) recommendations for improving UN collaboration; and (4) next steps for the way forward.

Lessons learnt from experiences

Since 2009 and the UN Social Protection Floors Initiative (SPF-I), UN agencies and development partners have increased their collaboration on social protection. Several key lessons have been gleaned from all the experiences and accomplishments of this joint work. Critical ingredients for success revolved around the following themes:

- **The importance of having a joint framework and shared ownership.** Joint work requires a joint framework for engagement that needs to be jointly developed and owned. Given the high degree of "path dependency" in social protection systems-building and the specificity of each country context – regarding both the national circumstances, and the capacities of and dynamic between the different UN agencies – these joint frameworks need to be developed on a case-by-case basis for each country. Nevertheless, all such frameworks should be based on the common foundation of international social security standards and national development planning instruments such as the (UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs).
- **Social protection is beyond the mandate and capacity of any single agency.** Consequently, there is a need for close collaboration, but such engagements take time, and require patience and compromise.
- **Common initiatives, partnerships, development of joint tools, trainings and e-platforms**, such as the Interagency Social Protection Assessment (ISPA) tools, the innovative training Initiative TRANSFORM, socialprotection.org etc., made it easier for UN partners to understand each other better, forge greater alignment and increase sensitization of the respective mandates for each agency.
- **A lack of UN collaboration and divergent views among UN agencies can both reflect and contribute to a lack of coordination within national governments**. Conversely, where development partners' social protection interventions are well coordinated, it is also easier to strengthen the coherence of the national social protection system and policies.
- **Incentives to deliver as "One UN"** are important to overcome competition for funds, increase visibility and achieve results. Joint approaches to social protection (e.g. the Joint SDG Fund) worked best where they could draw on pre-existing collaborations. The recognition of common guiding principles for social protection policy, and the guidance and leadership provided by UN resident coordinators (UNRCs) facilitate inter-agency collaboration, and enable real synergies instead of parallel tracks of activities.

Six key areas to be prioritized in social protection engagement

There is wide agreement across UN agencies and development partners on the areas of work to engage in when supporting countries to accelerate progress towards universal social protection. These can be summarized around six key areas of engagement:

- **Keeping the promise of leaving no one behind (LNOB) and promoting inclusive social protection through a rights-based approach**. There is consensus on the need

to close protection gaps and work towards universal social protection in all dimensions: full population coverage, adequacy of benefits and services, comprehensiveness of risks covered, adequate and sustainable financing, transparency and accountability in the governance, reliability and timeliness in delivery; and ensuring dignity, gender and disability aspects are included to promote rights, avoid stigma and ensure that no-one is left behind throughout the life cycle, including displaced and migrant populations. All this can be achieved only by building strong policy and legal frameworks agreed through national and social dialogue, robust administrative systems and sustainable adequate financing, in order to create and guarantee rights-based social protection entitlements.

- **Supporting the transition from the informal to the formal economy and covering the "missing middle"**. The pandemic increased awareness of the vulnerabilities faced by the 2 billion informal economy workers and their families who lack adequate social protection coverage. These workers are often excluded from both social assistance and social insurance mechanisms. Adapted social protection mechanisms need to be designed and implemented to cater for these workers, their families and their enterprises, while also facilitating their transition to the formal economy.

- **Ensuring adequate and sustainable financing for social protection.** Closing protection gaps to achieve universal social protection depends on securing and sustaining the necessary resources to ensure at least basic social protection for all. Financing gaps for social protection are considerable, estimated on average at 15.9 per cent of GDP for low-income countries (LICs). Countries should not only invest more in their social protection systems but also invest better, by ensuring that social protection systems foster national solidarity through the way they are financed and allocate social protection benefits.

- **Strengthening social protection delivery systems.** Implementation capacities, including transparent and accountable administrative and financial governance as well as complaints and appeals mechanisms, are critical for the realization of the human right to social protection.

- **Adaptive/shock-responsive social protection systems**. The risks posed by climate change, violent conflicts and displacements, pandemics, economic crises and other challenges such as digitalization and related labour market transformations (for example, platform work) and population ageing can undermine the sustainability of social protection systems and their capacity to provide adequate protection to households. These processes threaten to erode years of achievements in poverty reduction to which social protection systems have contributed. Therefore, national social protection systems need to evolve and adapt to provide protection against life-cycle risks in a dynamic environment and an era of transformations.

- **Stronger integration of universal social protection and universal health coverage policies**. Acknowledging interlinkages between population health and social protection systems is necessary to face the challenges of the twenty-first century and offer a coordinated response to achieve the human right to social security. Health systems distribute and redistribute resources forming a key part of the social protection floor, while other dimensions of social protection systems support health system resilience in crises and epidemics by increasing the effectiveness of social and public health measures, as well as providing income support and services with positive impacts across the social determinants of health. Both poorly functioning health systems, resulting in low levels of universal health coverage, and overall poorly functioning social protection, impede improvements to health and health equity, and drive people into poverty. We know that our health is shaped by living conditions within families, homes and neighbourhoods, and that these in turn are shaped by broader policies and systems. We should all have the opportunity to live long, healthy lives, regardless of our income,

education, ethnic or gender background. Possibly as much of 50 per cent of health in society, in particular of equity in life expectancy, is affected by the social determinants of health. The evidence identifies five essential conditions needed to live a long, healthy life: health services; income security through social protection; living conditions (no one should live or work in polluted environments); social and human capital; and employment and working conditions. These are all directly or indirectly linked to social protection.

Recommendations for future UN collaboration on social protection

We are currently witnessing renewed impetus for universal social protection, including through the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions (the Global Accelerator) (UN 2021a).[1] The set of preliminary ideas and suggestions presented in this publication on how to work jointly to systematically enhance UN collaboration on social protection to fulfil the policy priorities identified above could inform the design of the Global Accelerator. Some of the obstacles for effective collaboration are identified and suggestions made for how to overcome these:

- **Drawing on existing structures for collaboration**. Collaboration prompts further collaboration. There are numerous inter-agency collaborations (for example, through the SPF-I, SPIAC-B, TRANSFORM, USP2030, UHC2030 and P4H) that have led to a greater convergence of views (for instance, on universal social protection, and a "systems approach") and a better understanding of commonalities and differences in approaches across agencies, thereby facilitating more collaboration. Clearly, there is scope for further leveraging global agreements and tools to enhance work at the country level by:
  - having a common definition of and language regarding social protection;
  - cultivating greater awareness of the specificities and added value of each agency's social protection mandate, approach and capacity, as well as possible synergies across agencies;
  - recognizing that coordination requires time and resources and appropriate budget allocation;
  - exploring organizing or deepening collaboration along different channels, for example through joint programming, joint resource mobilization, joint analytical work, delivery of common messages and coherent advice, and joint or coordinated complementary operations.
- **Engaging jointly with international financial institutions (IFIs) and European Union delegations (EUDs) to build stronger partnerships**. Multilateral and bilateral development banks, as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and development partners such as the EUDs that provide budget support to countries, are major players in supporting the development of countries' national social protection systems. Concrete avenues through which to pursue joint work with the IFIs and EUDs include:
  - staying true to the human rights framework and social security standards in developing win–win collaborations with IFIs;
  - building a common basis for collaboration with IFIs by increasing understanding among UN agencies of their respective added value in providing technical support to countries on financing social protection and building sustainable social protection systems;
  - tapping into the IMF's interest in social protection's multiplier effects and social and economic stabilizer function as an entry-point for collaboration between the UN and IMF;

[1] The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions supports countries in the design and implementation of integrated policy approaches, through adequate financing strategies based on domestic resource mobilization and complementary international financial support, and facilitated through enhanced multilateral cooperation.

- interacting with the European Union's (EU's) interest in social protection for the implementation of its geographic and thematic multi-annual indicative programmes, and exploring the role the UN could play in providing technical assistance to countries in the context of budget support modalities;
- using the work on the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) to structure a national dialogue on policy priorities, financing needs and ways to create more fiscal space for social protection;
- mobilizing UN agencies to provide input on IMF allocations of, for example, special drawing rights to contribute to higher investments in national social protection systems;
- engaging with the IFIs more thoroughly on social insurance and social health protection investments;
- drawing on IFIs' expertise to complement policy guidance on issues such as curbing illicit financial flows and reforming tax structures.

- **Improving joint resource mobilization and reducing competition**. UN collaboration requires the establishment of stronger incentive structures that reward collaboration and discourage competition, to maximize the impact of UN system work and accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Avenues that have shown promise in this regard include:
  - making use of national development strategies and other agreed planning instruments, such as jointly developed United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (SDCFs), which can be decisive sources for providing guidance and facilitating convergence;
  - performing coordinated social protection sector reviews or systems analyses for planning joint UN work on social protection, which can lay the foundation for joint implementation;
  - harnessing the convening power and ability of UNRCs to manage UN country teams (UNCTs) to maximize each agency's comparative advantage and expertise, to facilitate joint efforts, and thereby to help avoid competition and address unresolved disagreements at UNCT level so that they do not inhibit work at the technical level;
  - creating a culture of UN collaboration in each agency, covering such matters as the allocation of working time, recognizing focal points and essential expertise, and rewarding individual and team efforts;
  - increasing financial incentives for joint UN programming and resource mobilization, using existing social protection sector working groups, which offer institutionalized structures for coordination and collaboration.

- **Improving coherent messaging on social protection across agencies**. Being able to present recommendations and plan implementation together, and to achieve clarity in communication, are critically important in articulating a coherent set of social protection interventions. This increases credibility vis-à-vis national stakeholders and donors; it also increases the effectiveness and efficiency of each activity, if it is well integrated into an agreed, consistent and country-specific UN collaboration approach to social protection. The following elements could help achieve this:
  - Joint analytical work, which provides credibility to UN work and policy advice. UNCTs should continue and strengthen analysis, including through joint assessments of social protection programmes and the overall system, and using the analytical frameworks available (including ISPA tools). Regional groups and Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs) are often important in fostering collaboration and also in disseminating analytical work, common messages and recommendations, catalysing successful approaches and sharing lessons learnt.

- Building on evidence to inform action. For example, a range of joint programmes (JPs) have commissioned impact assessments or sector reviews, but it is unclear how far their findings and recommendations have informed programme implementation. A learning review should consider what factors lead to action.
- Joint training and capacity-strengthening activities, both for national counterparts and for UN staff, can contribute to mutual understanding and improved collaboration. UNCTs should therefore continue their joint capacity-building work, for example, through TRANSFORM, the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITC-ILO), Leadership for UHC and the UN System Staff College (UNSSC).
- Fostering and supporting learning through South–South cooperation and triangular cooperation on social protection, including communities of practice, is an important part of dialogue processes informing policymaking and implementation.
- A common road map based on international agreed conventions and recommendations (such as international social security standards and international conventions), or a guidance note or new international standard, would orientate and shape tailor-made collaborative UN support to countries.
- A recognition that fully resolving tensions over different approaches and definitions may prove difficult, and that some flexibility is needed to facilitate compromise. It may be easier to take national visions as articulated in social protection policies or other development planning documents as a starting point and on that basis reach consensus on a common objective of what we want to achieve together. This common vision will then enable the formulation of joint recommendations – in respect of which, however, there will still be a need for openness and willingness to negotiate positions (while being faithful to our red lines) in the search for innovative ways to address and overcome differences and find common ground.

- **Maximizing impact by leveraging the UNCT/UNRC structure and SDCFs**. Collaboration requires close coordination and vice versa, which can be time-consuming, cumbersome and resource-intensive. By developing and maintaining institutionalized structures for coordination and developing joint approaches, the UNRC can contribute to reducing the opportunity costs of collaboration by the following means:
  - Thinking strategically about how social protection can be positioned prominently in RC engagement with national counterparts. The RC is in a position to raise the profile of social protection and identify the right entry points for interventions at the country level, while connecting agencies to important developments at the global level and ensuring that global approaches – for example, the Global Accelerator, Our Common Agenda, and on social protection floors (SPFs) are integrated into national policy, financing and institutional frameworks.
  - Drawing on key country-level planning instruments, UNDAFs, SDCFs and social protection sector working groups at the country level, or other dialogue mechanisms with governments, can help create a common understanding of the country context, situation and challenges, develop a common vision, assess the comparative advantages of each agency, and provide good starting-points for joint planning and implementation of social protection interventions.
  - Inviting the RC to represent the UN agencies in political processes at key points such as national social protection dialogue events hosted by agencies, or discussions with IFIs and EUDs, is central to creating momentum for change.

Possible way(s) forward

The COVID-19 pandemic has improved the prospect of enhanced UN collaboration by elevating and revalorizing the importance of universal social protection and its intertwined relationship with universal health coverage, prising open a policy window and renewing impetus for the UN to engage jointly in social protection. The Global Accelerator offers a unique opportunity to build a new, strong and coherent UN narrative to organize our efforts to move towards universal social protection as a shared mandate. However, there are some challenges still to be overcome if the UN is genuinely to act in a unified manner on social protection. The key challenge lies in the involvement of many agencies with different mandates competing for governments' attention and for limited national and international resources. Agencies pursue different policies and priorities and have different understandings of what social protection is, and what it can and should do. Nonetheless, there is still considerable room for collaboration and scope for overcoming, if not eliminating, these barriers to enhanced collaboration. Below are some ideas of how the present collaboration gaps can be closed.

1. Enhance efforts to mainstream existing (or devise new) **human rights instruments and related social security standards** adopted by the international community into the work of UN agencies and RCs, since these enshrine internationally agreed principles on how to design and implement social protection systems. This will generate greater coherence across the UN system, based on our common values. It will also ensure that UN advice is aligned with the international standards adopted and ratified by Member States. This mainstreaming effort might necessitate a new international convention or resolution on social protection floors, policies or systems. The recommendations in this publication could act as a catalyst to spur further inter-agency dialogue on the subject over the coming years.

2. **UNRCs, through their important convening and leadership role**, can help forge coherence and a common vision for social protection in the UNCTs that reflects the realities of each particular country, while positioning the UNCT's service offer around support to apply agreed international standards and guiding principles.

3. **Build on existing structures** to develop joint UN approaches, in particular in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At the country level, UNSDCFs, Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPs) missions, sectoral working groups and national development policy planning documents are important elements for building joint UN social protection work based on a common policy vision as well as country ownership and national priorities.

4. **Improve collaboration of the UN with other key actors** in the development arena, such as the IFIs, the EU and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which play an important role in influencing development discourse as well as the level and nature of social protection investments. Continuing to fully involve civil society organizations (CSOs), trade unions and employers' organizations is equally important to ensure an understanding of the social protection needs and priorities of households, children and young people, workers and enterprises, their respective views on the development of the national social protection system, and their commitments to contribute to and comply with social protection obligations.

5. **Ensure close engagement between the United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO), UNSDG entities at global and regional level, and UNRCs and UNCTs at the country level, to enhance collaboration on social protection** and leverage the Joint SDG Fund as one of the existing global structures that facilitates country-level joint programmes in social protection – spearheaded by the RCs, based on UNSDCFs, strategically led by the UN Deputy Secretary-General (UNDSG), and managed by the Operational Steering Committee that currently includes the UNDCO, ILO, UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UN Women.

6. **Developing a set of guidance and operational documents on universal social protection. Given the ubiquity of gender and disability issues across the life cycle, these documents should articulate gender responsiveness and disability inclusion as well as intersecting vulnerabilities**. This set of documents could include, for example, a joint directory of "who is who" in social protection, a guidance document for RCs, a joint evidence repository from all agencies, a set of joint key messages, a joint position on the international financing mechanism for social protection, and joint training and capacity-strengthening strategies. All these documents could then also feed into/be part of the Global Accelerator.

It is hoped that the possible ways forward outlined here will contribute to more effective UN collaboration, based on a consensus around social protection that will ensure that everyone has access to social protection when they need it.

Photo: © Marcel Crozet / ILO

Introduction

The purpose of this publication is threefold. First, it aims to document, summarize and assess the results of UN collaboration on social protection to date. Second, it aims to delineate what should be the future thematic priorities of joint work on social protection. And third, it aims to show how the UN can coordinate and collaborate better in supporting countries to build adequate, sustainable and comprehensive social protection systems for all.

This exercise in identifying how UN collaboration can be enhanced comes at an opportune moment, as the world is being rocked by COVID-19, ongoing conflicts and the ever-growing impacts of climate change. The impacts on human well-being of all these events have been devastating. In the past years, the previously observed progress in reducing poverty has been reversed and life expectancy reduced (University of Oxford 2021). In this context, only 46.9 per cent of the world's population are covered by at least one social protection benefit. This leaves 4 billion people with no coverage at all (ILO 2021b). However, as the crisis has been unprecedented, so has been the response. Social protection has been at the centre of addressing the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic, with nearly every country or territory – even if only temporarily – expanding its social protection programmes. While insufficient to address the scale of the crisis, it is a response the like of which has not been seen before.

> only 46.9% of the world's population are covered by at least one social protection benefit

For the UN system, the crisis has created both an obligation and the possibility to provide coherent and coordinated support to Member States' efforts in strengthening their social protection systems. The foundations upon which this joint response is built are strong: the UN Chief Executives Board (UNCEB) launched the SPF-I in response to the global financial and economic crisis of 2008–09, which in turn led to the creation of an inter-agency coordinating body on social protection, the Social Protection Interagency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), the ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) and the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030) launched in 2016; these initiatives, coupled with emerging evidence on the potential of social protection for acceleration of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and increased government commitments in all regions of the world, accelerated UN country engagement on social protection.

The COVID-19 crisis has offered a unique glimpse of how this capacity and joint work functions under intense stress. This inter-agency publication reviews both the history of collaboration on social protection, and the successes and challenges of the joint UN social protection response to COVID-19. It highlights great progress and coherent responses that would not have been possible a decade ago, from guiding global policy directions to integrated on-the-ground support to governments. But it also provides a clear-sighted view of the challenges that remain and how they can be addressed. The UN system's capacity on social protection covers every level of provision and every region of the world, and all the dimensions of social protection. Learning from the historical UN collaboration on social protection can change the course of the ongoing response, cement a strong recovery and lay the foundations for strengthened social protection systems to address future crises.

Against this backdrop, the UN system has produced this joint report to document, summarize and assess the results of 12 years of joint UN and development partner work on social protection. This includes exploring how the 2009 UN SPF-I led to a comprehensive programme of work at the national, regional and global levels, and how greater attention by UN agencies to social protection grew out of internal dynamics

> The UN system's capacity on social protection covers every level of provision, every region of the world and all the dimensions of social protection

and previous work. That work includes efforts such as the ILO's on social protection floors (SPFs) prior to the joint initiative; the Adjustment with a Human Face and then Recovery with a Human Face programmes of UNICEF, along with work on universal child benefits, and increasingly gender-responsive/transformative, disability-inclusive and shock-responsive social protection systems; the work of the UNDP on human development and inclusive growth; the activity of the WFP, whose work in social protection supports people to meet their food security and nutrition needs, and manage the risks and shocks they face; work by UN Women on gender-responsive social protection as a critical pillar of the Women's Economic Empowerment agenda; the work of the World Health Organization (WHO) on social determinants of health and pandemic preparedness, as well as UN-wide focus on universal health coverage; and the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on social protection in rural areas and its synergies with small-scale producers' adaptation to climate change and economic inclusion, as well as managing climate risks as a means to reduce poverty and hunger, enhance resilience, and contribute to more sustainable agri-food systems.

On the basis of this historical review, the report aims to distil the key lessons learnt from collective work on the SPF-I and give additional impetus to renewed efforts on joint UN work on social protection. In particular, it explores how the UN can move towards a common understanding of social protection, enabling it to coordinate and cooperate more and better in supporting the design and implementation of national public social protection systems, while contributing to a green and inclusive socio-economic recovery from the pandemic and the achievement of the SDGs on social protection by 2030 – and to work beyond that date. These lessons and recommendations are particularly relevant given the current development and implementation of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions (henceforth the "Global Accelerator") (UN 2021a), launched on 28 September 2021 by the UN Secretary-General (UNSG), which will give further impetus to UN collaboration on social protection. As the review period coincides with reform efforts within the UN, it is also an opportune moment to reflect on the new roles and processes at the country level of the UNRCs and UNCTs, and how these UN structures can best be leveraged to enhance UN collaboration on social protection.

Numerous successful examples of enhanced UN collaboration on social protection and important lessons learnt

Our common UN experience is replete with successful examples of fruitful UN collaboration on social protection. This is demonstrated by the following timeline, punctuated by important milestones (see Annex 1 for an extended timeline on inter-agency work on social protection):

- **2009** saw the launch of the UN SPF-I as one of nine UNCEB initiatives to respond to the global financial crisis, along with the issuing of the joint statement on advancing child-sensitive social protection (DfID et al. 2009), and social protection featuring more frequently in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs).
- **2010 and 2011** witnessed the launch of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* (FAO and WHO 2010) and the *Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization* (Social Protection Floor Advisory Group 2011). The former highlighted the linkages between social protection, humanitarian assistance and food security. The latter called for the extension of

social protection to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Rio Declaration on social determinants of health (WHO 2011) underscored the importance of social protection for health.

- **2012** saw the adoption of ILO Recommendation No. 202 concerning national social protection floors (ILO 2012a) and the subsequent formation of SPIAC-B (2013, 2019a) to improve the coordination of technical advisory services provided to development agencies and Member States, as well as the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) to foster national and international mobilization for the realization of SPFs. At country and regional levels, UN agencies started joining forces through joint programming, policy advice and advocacy in the context of UN thematic groups and Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs). The UN's 2012 resolution on global health and foreign policy urged countries to accelerate progress towards universal health coverage (UN 2013).

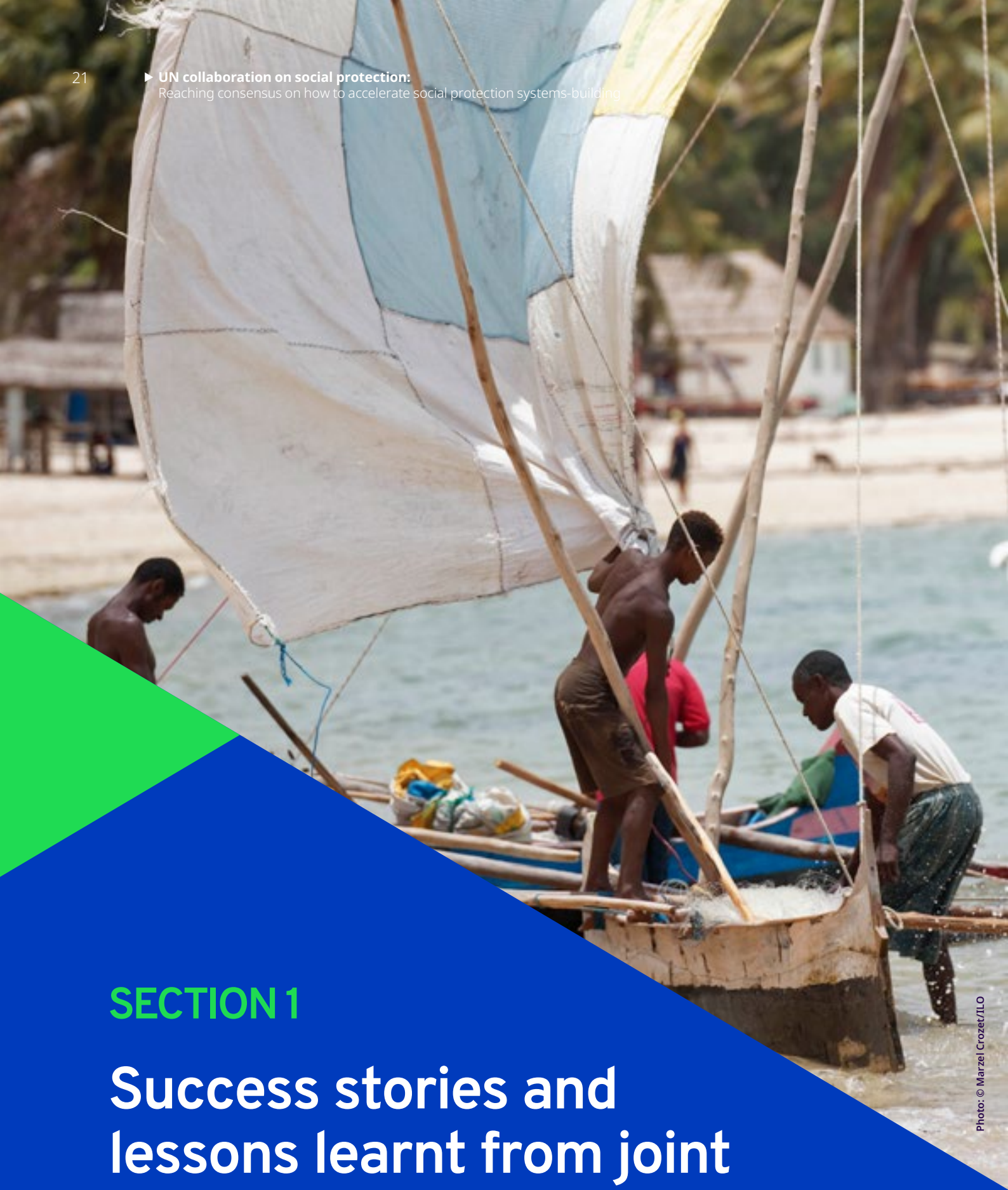
> "What I think is a success was the narrative of the social protection floor that became accepted across the UN system since each agency saw its place with its comparative advantage in that framework.
>
> ▶ **Elliot Harris,** UN Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development and Chief Economist

- In **2014**, the Chair of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the ILO Director-General sent a joint letter to encourage all UNRCs and UNCTs to maintain the momentum behind the establishment of SPFs.
- In **2015**, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development prioritized social protection, including social protection floors, to achieve the SDGs, with social protection featuring prominently in SDG target 1.3 and universal health coverage in SDG target 3.8, supported by several other SDGs (Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10 and 16). This year also saw the launch of the knowledge platform socialprotection.org, and the *State of Food and Agriculture 2015* (FAO 2015), which explored the role of role of social protection and agriculture in breaking the cycle of rural poverty.
- In **2016**, the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030) was launched to support the implementation of social protection systems, including floors. SPIAC-B also presented a joint statement on "Leaving No One Behind: How Linking Social Protection and Humanitarian Action Can Bridge the Development–Humanitarian Divide" (SPIAC-B 2015) at the World Humanitarian Summit. This led to a set of humanitarian commitments expressed as what came to be known as the "Grand Bargain".

USP Banner, © Unsplash/E. Benites

- **2017** saw the International Conference on Social Protection in Contexts of Fragility and Forced Displacement, which explored and contributed to ongoing discussions on the role of social protection in humanitarian and development programming.
- In **2018**, the UN Joint SDG Fund was created to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs through JPs. The Fund's very first call for proposals, launched in 2019, focused on integrated social protection to leave no one behind and resulted in financing for 35 JPs in 39 countries to a total value of US$69 million with an additional US$32 million in co-funding. The same year, SPIAC-B launched the joint statement on the role of social protection in promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls (SPIAC-B 2019b).
- In **2019**, a coalition of agencies launched the Joint Statement: Towards Inclusive Social Protection Systems Supporting Full and Effective Participation of Persons with Disabilities, the ILO, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and UNICEF convened an international conference and produced a report to explore the case for universal child benefits (ODI and UNICEF 2020), USP2030 organized a high-level conference leading to the adoption of a declaration on universal health coverage by the UN General Assembly in September, and the ILO celebrated its 100th anniversary with a Global Social Protection Week: Achieving SDG 1.3 and universal social protection in the context of the Future of Work.
- **2020** saw social protection featured in the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, and the strengthening of countries' health systems and cash transfer programmes through the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund (UN 2020a).
- In **2021**, the UNSG's report *Our Common Agenda* (UN 2021b) called for the establishment of universal SPFs, including universal health coverage, and for increased investment in social protection systems. To achieve this, the UNSG launched the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection (UN 2021a) in September. The UNDP, together with other UN agencies, supported the development of COVID-19 socio-economic impact assessments in 97 countries, and UN socio-economic response plans, which encompass social protection, in 139 countries. Finally, the 2021 Food Systems Summit recognized the role of social protection in transforming food systems. That same year, the International Labour Conference (ILC) conducted the 2nd Recurrent Discussion on Social Security and adopted a resolution that (1) defines the concept of universal social protection, helping to guide future work on social protection (ILO 2021b), (2) stresses the importance of building robust and sustainable social protection systems, and (3) strongly emphasizes the importance of multilateral cooperation to support and complement national efforts.

Our Common Agenda Report, © 2021 United Nations



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SECTION 1

Success stories and lessons learnt from joint work on social protection

▶ A common denominator: The rights-based approach to social protection

The vision underpinning the work of UN agencies is anchored in the right to social protection for all, as set out in Articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and Article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). The right to social protection is also enshrined in many other important human rights conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in its Articles 26 and 27. The international social security standards adopted within the ILO represent the backbone of the normative architecture substantiating the human right to social security by setting out how states should assume their overall and primary responsibility for building, maintaining and expanding rights-based social protection systems.

Recent decades have seen the acceleration of work on social protection across UN organizations, including joint initiatives, driven by the commitments made under the MDGs and subsequently the 2030 Agenda's SDGs, and by substantive evidence on the effectiveness of social protection in addressing poverty, vulnerability and inequality, and contributing to inclusive and sustainable economic transformation.

This section presents an overview of joint work,[2] and identifies successes, failures and lessons learnt at the country, regional and global levels. It describes joint work carried out and approaches adopted in more detail, drawing lessons on what worked and what did not, and why, in different contexts, and drawing on a Social Protection Floor Actors' Survey that was conducted in 2020 (see box 1 and Annex 2).

▶ Box 1. The social protection floor approach brings about clarity and meaningful change at the country level

As part of the research for this publication, the ILO conducted a survey at the end of 2020 with approximately 150 individuals from UN agencies and development partners. The results of this survey were conclusive in indicating that the concept of an SPF has been positive in several ways (see Annex 2):

- ▶ 84 per cent of respondents agreed that the SPF concept helped with the extension of social protection to populations that previously had no protection;
- ▶ 87 per cent agreed that overall the SPF concept makes a positive contribution to the human rights and development agenda;
- ▶ 76 per cent agreed that the SPF concept has helped clarify the general understanding of social protection.

These results indicate that the concept of the SPF anchors an area of policy activity in which UN agencies can collaborate and achieve meaningful impact at the country level.

Source: ILO2021c.

[2] We understand "joint work" as work undertaken by two or more UN agencies, or work that was open to participation by all interested UN agencies and development partners.

▶ Success stories and lessons learnt from joint work on social protection

Enhanced cooperation across UN agencies at the global level

At the global level, initiatives launched following the SPF-I, notably SPIAC-B and USP2030, have greatly improved collaboration and coherence across the social protection sector. Various workstreams and working groups have been established to facilitate in-depth technical exchanges on various social protection topics including gender equality, digital social protection, inter-agency social protection assessment (ISPA) tools, financing, climate change, humanitarian (cash) transfers and food systems. Different partners and UN agencies contribute to these groups to different degrees, based on their comparative advantage, capacity and interest.

At the global level, these institutionalized exchanges of information and joint technical work have led to intensified collaboration, with a mutually improved understanding of the different agencies' perspectives, institutional constraints, common ground, concrete opportunities for collaboration and complementarities. One such successful collaboration was witnessed in the development of the shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) module in the TRANSFORM training materials for governments in Africa. Such collaboration among agencies has been translated into fruitful joint work at regional and country levels over the past decade. Nevertheless, certain differences in approaches and perspectives, as well as challenges to seamless coordination and collaboration, persist; these are discussed later in this report.

Vegetable market during COVID-19 crisis, Antananarivo, Madagascar. © E. Raboanaly/ILO

Regional initiatives

Regional UN entities and commissions have an important role to play in catalysing and supporting country work for strengthening national social protection systems (see box 2). For instance, UNDG Asia–Pacific pioneered collaborative UN work on SPFs by establishing a regional thematic group on social protection. Participating UN agencies and UNRCs have been keen to share the collective experiences of the UN in building SPFs throughout the region. Different practices were studied and analysed, and in 2014 were compiled into the first regional social protection issues brief (Schmitt, Paienjton and De 2014).

Further, the UNDG Asia–Pacific Technical Working Group on Social Protection has developed a toolkit on coordinating the design and implementation of SPFs (ILO and UNDG 2016a). The toolkit builds on initiatives both in the region and in other parts of the world. It provides entry-points for UNCTs and other stakeholders seeking to support governments in better coordinating social protection initiatives, with the objective of being effective and efficient in delivering the right service to the right person at the right time. It is the result of interactive work that was possible only because of the different types of expertise and experience available among the various UN agencies, demonstrating again the added value of UN joint work in the area of social protection. Parallel joint initiatives have also sought to strengthen the ability of the ASEAN regional body to lead ongoing capacity building of Member States, particularly around SRSP (Beazley et al. 2019).

In the context of the UN reform, the Asia–Pacific Thematic Group turned into the IBC on Empowerment and Inclusion, which was later closed down, to be replaced by a new one on Inclusive Economic Growth and COVID-19 with social protection as a key area of its work, further developing synergies among different UN entities' related areas of activity, and serving as a platform to amplify their voice.[3] In 2020, an Asia–Pacific Action Plan on Strengthening Regional Cooperation on Social Protection was adopted, and this became a key regional framework for the IBC. During 2020, the IBC focused on scaling up social protection to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable groups. The regional synthesis report *Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific: The Story so Far and Future Considerations* (UNESCAP and ILO 2020), launched in August 2020, provides an initial analysis of measures implemented by countries across the region to reduce the effects of COVID-19, including the impacts on vulnerable populations. Through 2021, the focus has been on enhancing regional cooperation on social protection, and on expanding social health protection to achieve universal coverage. Indeed, the IBC organized a high-level regional conference on social health protection, which launched the ILO regional report *Extending Social Health Protection: Accelerating Progress towards Universal Health Coverage in Asia and the Pacific* (ILO 2021d) and the UNFPA Analyses of National Transfer Accounts (UNFPA 2021).

Several other regional groups have been established under the auspices of the UNDG to facilitate information and knowledge-sharing, to increase coordination among UN agencies active on social protection in the respective regions and to develop joint policy guidance for UNCTs, among other initiatives. Regional issue briefs have been prepared, notably in Eastern and Southern Africa (ILO and UNDG 2016b), the Arab States, and Europe and Central Asia (UNDG 2018). Furthermore, in the context of COVID-19, joint mapping of social protection responses has been conducted – for example, by the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)/Arab States Social Protection Issue-Based Coalition (SP-IBC).[4] The mapping has been used to inform regional and global discussions regarding social protection responses

[3] The IBC is currently chaired by ILO and UNICEF, with participation from the FAO, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNDP, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), UNESCO, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the WFP.

[4] This is co-chaired by the ILO and UNICEF, with the participation of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), FAO, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office (UNDOCO), UNDP, UNHCR, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), UN Women, WFP and WHO, in collaboration with the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) (see UN 2020c).

to COVID-19.[5] A similar publication was produced by the IBC for Europe and Central Asia, coordinated by the ILO, UNICEF and WHO (ECA R-UNDG 2020). Furthermore, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has since 2011 been mapping on a regular basis non-contributory social protection programmes in the region, in collaboration with the IPC-IG.

▶ Box 2. Role of regional convenorship in fostering universal social protection

UN regional commissions and other subregional organizations have unique intergovernmental convenorship that can foster stronger collaboration, standard-setting and knowledge exchange on social protection. For both ESCAP and ECLAC, the social protection floor and Universal Social Protection Partnership have provided a common framework and principles through which to engage governments and partners.

These framework and principles have served as a blueprint for Asia–Pacific countries, through the convenorship of ESCAP together with the ILO and other stakeholders, to develop an Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection (ESCAP 2021), endorsed by ESCAP Member States in October 2020. The Action Plan serves as a shared vision, strategy and platform to promote partnership, peer learning and technical capacity-building on social protection that aligns with, and promotes, established common system approaches. Moving forward, further engagement of UN partners and regional stakeholders will be instrumental in leveraging this Action Plan and strengthening the building of a regional consensus on constructing universal social protection systems. To this end, ESCAP is collaborating closely with the ILO and UNDP to conduct a rapid baseline survey that will provide an overview of progress and challenges in achieving the regional vision of inclusive and comprehensive social protection systems for all as expressed in the Action Plan.

The Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, a subsidiary body of ECLAC which brings together social development ministers and high-level officials, approved at its third session, in October 2019 in Mexico City, the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development. This technical and political instrument, which seeks to support the implementation of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the region, promotes universal, comprehensive and sustainable social protection systems to end poverty and significantly reduce inequalities. Furthermore, this forum among social development ministries was rapidly activated for the exchange of experiences and demands for technical cooperation once the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Agreement on the lines of action to strengthen social protection systems in the context of the Regional Agenda allowed for debate and consensus around the role of a universal approach to social protection as a response to the current crisis.

Sources: ECLAC; ESCAP.

[5] In addition, the IBC in the MENA region has supported the development of a regional review of COVID-19 social protection responses before supporting the development of a regional ministerial forum and declaration on social protection to respond to the pandemic. See Issue-based Coalition on Social Protection in the Arab Region/MENA

UN country work and country teams

Working as a unified UN has long been a mantra of a sometimes disparate UN system. Consequently, there is a need to better understand the factors driving the success or failure of collaboration. This requires a consideration of the role of UNCT sector groups on social protection – or similar groups working on poverty and vulnerability – as well as other UN structures and mechanisms relevant to social protection, such as UNDAFs, UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) missions, Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs) and inter-agency working groups. UNRCs can play an important role in raising the profile of social protection, harnessing the comparative strengths of the various agencies and supporting a whole-of-government approach.

Based on the framework provided by the UN SPF-I, and calls for greater UN collaboration on social protection,[6] participating UN agencies have drawn on the SPF concept for universal social protection, the SDGs on social protection and UN JPs to guide their support for countries in building and extending their national social protection systems. At different stages of policy development, system design, and scheme implementation and administration, combining the expertise and resources of various UN agencies, has led to demonstrable successes in expanding social protection.

The example of the JP in Cambodia illustrates both the benefits and challenges of increased UN collaboration on social protection (see box 3).

▶ Box 3. Supporting and contributing to the nationwide rollout of the comprehensive National Social Protection Policy Framework in Cambodia

The JP in Cambodia, funded by the Joint SDG Fund, is led by the ILO in collaboration with UNICEF and the WHO. Its focal point is the General Secretariat of the National Social Protection Council, which coordinates the work with the ministries and other institutions that implement social protection. The JP supports and contributes to the nationwide rollout of the comprehensive National Social Protection Policy Framework. The goal of the framework and this JP has been to lead to more people being covered by a more effective, efficient, accountable, equitable, sustainable, and child- and gender-sensitive social protection system. In addition to increased coverage, the JP aims to increase cross-governmental collaboration on social protection, improve analysis of who is left behind, and increase fiscal space for social protection. The JP's activities are complemented by the EU programme on improving the synergies between social protection and public finance management. This activity is conducted in collaboration with development partners such as the World Bank, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), DFAT and USAID.

The JP has made a significant impact in terms of coverage extension through the technical assistance it has provided. For instance:

- Approximately 1.5 million people will be covered by the new pension schemes and will enjoy better service delivery through digitalized services such as online registration, e-payments, and more efficient monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

▶ Continues...

[6] Such as the letter to UNRCs by UNDG Chair and UNDP Executive Secretary Helen Clark and ILO Director-General Guy Ryder in March 2014.

- The roll-out of the family package of integrated social assistance programmes will include a new cash transfer programme that will benefit 200,000 pregnant women and children aged 0–2; around 8,000 provincial district and commune-level officers will be trained to ensure its proper and efficient delivery through a digitalized system focusing on enrolment, payments, and M&E.
- It also contributed towards a temporary (June 2020 to September 2022) pandemic intervention: the COVID-19 Cash Transfer Programme, which provided a direct cash transfer to at least 560,000 households with IDPoor cards, covering approximately 2.4 million people.

Furthermore, several key lessons have been learnt from this JP. It created the impetus and the opportunity for the different PUNOs to come together to work jointly on addressing the cross-cutting issues of social protection that requires inputs and participation across the government. This is both an opportunity and a risk. It allows the different participating UN organizations (PUNOs) to strategize together and to ensure that their individual work plans are supporting the common agenda. It is, however also a risk, as the ownership of the common agenda is not held exclusively by the individual UN agency nor the UN as a whole, but also with the respective government stakeholders. Any assumption that this common agenda of the UN agencies and the PUNOs is shared with the government stakeholders is misplaced, and the need for higher-level advocacy to ensure that the national partners are also aligned cannot be underestimated. Retrospectively, should the opportunity arise to redesign the JP, more emphasis should be given to the advocacy effort directed to the highest level of the government, which can be led by the resident coordinator office (RCO).

A related challenge is that the JP and the UN are seen as a single entity by the national partners. Thus challenges and difficulties faced by one PUNO will have negative impacts on the perception and work of other PUNOs. In fact, the operation of each PUNO is outside the control of others, and the options for interventions to support the operations of another PUNO facing challenges and difficulty are limited. Hence, while outcomes and responsibilities are joint through the JP, none of the PUNOs has a sufficient sphere of influence individually to achieve these joint outcomes.

Sources: ECLAC; ESCAP.

Concerted efforts at country level take a variety of forms, depending on the demands of the specific intervention and country context, the proclivity of the various actors involved to work together, and the receptiveness of UNRCs to social protection. They include:

1. Promoting social protection as a core pillar of UNDAFs and UNSDCFs, as well as coordinating engagement with national social protection systems for emergency operations through humanitarian response plans.

2. Supporting governments in the creation and facilitation of inter-agency working groups on social protection in which different government departments, social partners, civil society organizations (CSOs), donors and other stakeholders can participate to share information, forge coherent common positions, and increase coordination and collaboration.

3. Conducting joint in-country activities such as joint assessments of social protection situations, national dialogues on policy priorities and financing frameworks, workshops, training and other activities. In 26 countries, participating agencies used the assessment-based national dialogue/ social protection policy options tool (ABND/ SPPOT) methodology to carry out UN joint assessments of social protection systems and support the development of national social protection strategies. They also promoted a systems approach to social protection, reducing fragmentation and enhancing proper coordination between institutions and policy coherence. UN agencies also worked together in countries including Mozambique and Cambodia on monitoring

national investments in social protection and advocating for the creation of additional fiscal space for social protection.

4. Creating pooled or collective financing arrangements, including joint resource mobilization, financial management and reporting mechanisms. UN JPs are such a modality and JPs on social protection have been developed in some countries. The first call for proposals of the UN Joint SDG Fund focused on social protection, resulting in a rapid growth of JPs with 35 programmes approved and implemented in the period 2019–22. Most JPs focus on the extension of social protection to priority groups or in specific branches of social security (for examples of the impact of JPs, see Annex 3). Many of them combine this overall objective with support for the development of a system of social protection that is coherent, well-coordinated, and based on a sound legal framework and integrated management information systems. Some JPs focus more specifically on financing social protection, supporting the provision of care for children and older persons, and creating linkages with social services or other policies to facilitate the transition to the formal economy.

▶ Box 4. The Joint Programme in Argentina: Introducing an early childhood and comprehensive care system

In Argentina, work under the UN Joint SDG Fund portfolio in 2020–22 includes the development of an early childhood and comprehensive care system, led by UNICEF and carried out in coordination with ECLAC, ILO, UNDP and the RCO. The aim is to strengthen early childhood policy and to incorporate a gender perspective. The emphasis is placed on girls and boys from the lowest income deciles and their families, particularly those experiencing multiple factors of exclusion and discrimination (such as children living in rural areas or indigenous communities, and children with disabilities).

The joint activities have focused on supporting the National Early Childhood Strategy and the policy response to the impact of COVID-19 on the care system for early childhood; the development of innovative instruments for a comprehensive care strategy; the formulation of a strategy aimed at estimating the demand for early childhood care services and improving the working conditions in the care sector; and follow-up and M&E using big data and other analytical tools.

The JP has strengthened institutional structures and positively influenced the planning and implementation of public policies aimed at early childhood, applying an intersectoral and evidence-based approach and a gender perspective. The estimated number of individuals reached through the JP's efforts in 2020–21 have been significant, with approximately 856,000 children aged 0–6 being covered in the provinces, and 2,936 workers in early childhood educational and care services receiving training.

The positive achievements of the JP have been evident at both the national and provincial levels. In particular, the JP has contributed to the creation and consolidation of four provincial boards for early childhood and provided technical support in the development and implementation of early childhood strategies in four provinces (Entre Ríos, Mendoza, Salta and Córdoba) and 18 municipalities. The provincial boards are an important space for interinstitutional articulation based on a comprehensive approach to public policies for early childhood within the framework of social protection.

▶ Continues...

Other significant contributions have been the support to the implementation of the Federal Care Map (UNICEF 2021a), a tool that facilitates access to timely online information about early childhood care services; the definition of a system of indicators on early childhood, which will support the national government in decision-making; and the implementation of an online training system for parenting with the participation of communities, families, care institutions, municipalities and national universities.

The lessons learnt from this joint effort are pertinent to other similar initiatives and include the need to:

- **consolidate intersectoral institutional structures** to promote a comprehensive approach to early childhood and the care system (for example, through the provision of technical support at the provincial and municipal level for the planning, implementation and monitoring of early childhood strategies);
- **strengthen innovative processes** for early childhood policy through the creation of the Federal Care Map, with a unified registration and information system on the care services available in the country, allowing for further replication in new contexts;
- **ensure synergies** with the strategic cooperation framework of the UN system by incorporating into the programme design the principles and priorities already established in the Marco Estratégico de Cooperación de las Naciones Unidas Para el Desarrollo Sostenible de Argentina (MECNUD) and other strategic documents, thereby contributing to the coherence of UN activities;
- **promote the complementarity** of technical knowledge between agencies to optimize the quality of the results, avoid duplication of efforts, and provide an articulated and comprehensive response to government counterparts;
- **streamline the generation of timely and solid evidence** as input for early childhood public policies that facilitate decision-making, which is especially helpful in guiding the response to COVID-19;
- **facilitate exchange and learning** through competence strengthening, training courses and the generation of joint workspaces across different provinces; and
- **expand the scope of action** through public communication campaigns aimed at raising awareness of rights-based and equitable child-raising practices.

UN collaboration has allowed many UN agencies to strengthen their social protection portfolios in several countries; to work not only with their traditional counterparts in government but with other ministries, such as those of planning, labour, health, education, social welfare, finance, agriculture and local development; and to involve social partners and CSOs in national dialogue processes on social protection and on the formulation of UNDAFs and UNSDCF. UN collaboration on social protection has contributed to raising the profile of social protection in many countries and gaining prominence for social protection frameworks in relation to the targets of the SDGs; it has also contributed to increasing understanding of how social protection contributes to the objectives of other UN agencies. While some agencies had already developed frameworks and strategies to work on social protection (such as UNICEF, which launched its first framework in 2012 and a revised one in 2019), many others have developed their own social protection strategies (FAO in 2017 and WFP in 2021, among others). However, working as one is not without its challenges, as box 5 on Ecuador illustrates.

▶ Box 5. The inter-agency group on social protection in Ecuador: Successes and challenges

In Ecuador, the inter-agency group on social protection has the main role in coordinating and articulating the UN response to national constituents' requests for support on social protection. The inter-agency group has played a substantial role in positioning social protection as a key policy area for recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, and one of critical importance for accelerating progress towards achievement of the SDGs. The advocacy work of the group achieved the inclusion of three important principles in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF):

- the need to implement social protection floors as a strategy to achieve universal coverage;
- the importance of working on strengthening institutional and social actors' capacities to develop adequate governance of the system, and on improving the coordination and linkages between contributory and non-contributory schemes;
- the need to gather evidence on the economic returns from social protection, and to enhance coherence between social protection and active labour market policies, including childcare for workers in the informal economy.

There are two main lessons to be taken away from this collaboration that are indicative of the wider challenges for the UN of working together. First, UN agencies do not always share the same definition of social protection, and tend to adapt the concept to their respective mandates. This reduces the UN's capacity to minimize confusion and jointly push for the development of social protection among national counterparts, and to position social protection as a socio-economic stabilizer key to accelerating recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. Second, the role of the leading agency of the group could be enhanced with backing from the resident coordinator's (RC's) office.

Joint analytical work and assessment methodologies and tools

A key area of work for the UN system at the country level is the carrying out of **research and analysis**, and the compilation of data across countries to create a strong evidence base that can inform countries in their political decision-making (see boxes 6, 7, 8 and 9). Joint analysis is a valuable asset of the UN system that increases constituents' trust in the system and its overall credibility. Joint analytical work by a group of UN agencies has also turned out to be much richer than that carried out by single agencies. Such analysis is useful both to guide governments in decisions on reform, and also to guide UN agencies themselves in their technical advisory and training activities. The resulting evidence base further helps agencies to forge common ground for the policy recommendations they provide to countries. Recent examples of such analytical work include joint analysis by the ILO and UNICEF of social protection for children (ILO and UNICEF 2019), and by FAO and the ILO of the extension of social protection to rural populations (ILO and FAO 2021). Collaboration on data collection and statistics can also avoid duplication of effort and contribute to joint analysis, for example in the context of monitoring progress towards the SDGs or assessing adherence to gender mainstreaming, including in crisis response and recovery. To assess the extent to which social protection responses to COVID-19 integrated a gender perspective, for example, the UNDP and UN Women joined forces to analyse over 3,000 measures across 226 countries and territories as part of the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker. The analysis found that only 13 per cent of measures targeted women's economic security and just 7 per cent addressed rising unpaid care demands, but also identified a range of good practices that were used in policy advocacy.

▶ Box 6. An example of joint research: The Transfer Project

The Transfer Project is a multi-country cash transfer research initiative, driven by a network including national governments, FAO, UNICEF, the University of North Carolina (UNC) and local research partners. The breadth of the partnership was one of the key factors underlying the success of the project. The collaboration with national governments and research institutes was important to ensure that the process was nationally led, that the research was relevant to each country's policy priorities, and that the findings contributed to decision-making processes. FAO, UNC and UNICEF worked in partnership to support the project with research expertise in mixed-method evaluation across diverse topics, ranging from adolescent and child well-being to agricultural production and multiplier effects. Country-level engagements by FAO and UNICEF were also important in forging key links to national social protection policy dialogues and providing technical assistance to governments.

A number of impact evaluations and research studies on cash transfers have been conducted under the project, with measurements of a wide range of outcomes covering aspects of people's lives beyond the typical economic focus, including mental health, physical violence and child labour. The rigorous evidence generated through the initiative has been used to inform the development of cash transfers and social protection policies/programmes via dialogue and learning as well as for making an economic case for investing in social protection.

Sources: Davis et al. 2016; Tirivayi, Waidler and Otchere 2021; The Transfer Project.

▶ Box 7. Joint analytical work on social assistance in Africa

The UNDP partnered with the African Union, the ILO, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and UNICEF to develop a publication, The State of Social Assistance in Africa Report (UNDP 2019), with an accompanying data platform. Drawing on over 100 social assistance programmes, a dataset compiled specifically for this project, and a review of regional and national policy documents and laws, the report maps and analyses the trends in social assistance as a tool to address poverty and vulnerability in Africa across its three foundational dimensions – legal frameworks, financing and institutions. The report contains a section of country profiles which presents key information and data on contemporary social assistance in all 55 African countries. The publication has become an important reference source for policymakers and practitioners seeking information about existing good practices and models, and wishing to engage in South–South collaboration. It also serves as a research and advocacy tool. The collaboration between several entities on the report has deepened existing partnerships and opened up policy and programmatic space at the regional and country levels.

Sources: UNDP **2019.**

▶ Box 8. Joining forces to build social protection systems that work towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PwDs)

In recognition of the specific risks and vulnerabilities faced by PwDs and their families, and of the potential of social protection systems to effectively protect them from livelihood shocks, reduce and prevent poverty, and enable them to participate fully in society, a joint statement, "Towards Inclusive Social Protection Systems Supporting the Full and Effective Participation of Persons With Disabilities", was issued in 2019 by UN agencies, development partners and a civil society alliance/coalition (ILO and IDA 2019). Building on the joint statement, the joint ILO–UNICEF–United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD)–IDA project deepened collaboration on disability and social protection. Building on the paradigm shift introduced by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the joint statement and the ensuing project systematically gathered evidence, good practices, tools and guidelines on how to build disability-inclusive social protection systems that empower PwDs throughout, from design to implementation, covering the following topics:

- **data** for disability-inclusive social protection;
- considering disability-related **extra costs** in social protection;
- social protection and **employment** of PwDs;
- social **health** protection and PwDs;
- **designing** cash transfers for inclusion of PwDs;
- disability-inclusive social protection **delivery** mechanisms;
- disability **assessment**, determination and identification;
- social protection and **community support services**;
- meaningful **participation** of PwDs in social protection reforms;
- **financing** inclusive social protection for PwDs;
- focus on **social insurance** and contributory schemes;
- social protection and **children** with disabilities;
- social protection and **women** with disabilities;
- social protection and **older people** with disabilities;
- social protection and disability in **humanitarian interventions**.

In addition to the strong focus on generating a solid evidence base on the key issues of disability-inclusive social protection, the other two pillars of the project were:

(a) engaging organizations of persons with disability (OPDs) in all steps of the project; and

(b) strengthening the capacities of OPDs, government officials, social partners, development partners and UN agencies in designing and implementing disability-inclusive social protection systems. The project was run in collaboration with Bonn University and trained four cohorts of students.

Joint engagement in a cross-cutting issue such as disability on which all UN agencies have an obligation to deliver, financing from the UNPRPD, and the great willingness and commitment of the individuals involved to collaborate for an important cause all facilitated productive cooperation between the participating agencies.

Leather worker with a mobility impairment preparing her meal, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. © Fiorente A./ILO

Joint analytical work has also been of key importance in the wake of COVID-19. In countries where the Joint SDG Fund's social protection portfolio accelerated catalytic joint initiatives, socio-economic impact assessments (SEIAs) informed the repurposing of these funds to enable timely responses and the pursuit of additional joint funding opportunities (see Annex 1, box 22). In **Palestine**, the assessment carried out using the ISPA Food Security and Nutrition tool has led to the development of a National Investment Plan for Food Security and Nutrition that promotes universal access to social protection. The work was supported by FAO, with the contribution of SDG1 and SDG2 working groups where all UN agencies are represented. In Uzbekistan, following a common analysis of the status quo using the Core Diagnostic Instrument (CODI) assessment (see box 9), agencies felt the need to conclude the joint analysis with an agreed set of joint recommendations and found compromise wording for them. In **Indonesia**, joint work by four UN agencies – UNICEF, the UNDP, UN Women and the WFP – through the UN COVID-19 multi-partner trust fund (MPTF) enabled the UN to play a role in strengthening the country's social protection response to COVID-19. The JP conducted two nationwide surveys on the socio-economic and gendered impacts of the pandemic to shed light on the impacts of COVID-19 on the well-being of Indonesian households and identify the urgency of social assistance. The main survey was implemented through face-to-face interviews while the follow-up employed an interactive voice response survey. Devoting particular attention to social protection, JP activities included filling the gaps resulting from the absence of an updated unified database for social protection, improving linkages with the civil registration database, and enhancing monitoring and assessment processes. Furthermore, the inter-agency collaboration created an opportunity to combine resources, expertise and partner networks, as demonstrated by the survey on the impact of COVID-19 responses delivered to households in Indonesia. Funding was provided through collaboration among UNDP, UNICEF and PROSPERA (DFAT). Thanks to the joint resources, the programme managed to conduct the first national-level survey involving respondents across the country, and produced an analysis on the impact of the pandemic and subsequent social assistance provided by the Government to households. In the **Lao People's Democratic Republic**, the ILO, UNICEF, the WHO and the World Bank joined forces to support the design and costing of the national health insurance benefits package in 2019–20 as part of a broader support to the universalization of the scheme.

Inter-agency tools and frameworks such as the **ISPA tools** or the **2016 UNDG Social Protection Coordination Toolkit** provide a useful common starting-point for joint analysis or joint action. The first such tool was the **ABND/SPPOT** framework, which follows a participatory process to identify priority policy options for the successful and coordinated development of nationally defined SPFs. Guided by Recommendation No. 202, the ABND/SPPOT tool analyses the extent to which a population is already covered by SPF guarantees and how those guarantees can be extended to all members of society. Policy gaps and implementation issues in the social protection system are identified, and recommendations for new or expanded social protection provisions are developed to guarantee an SPF for all residents, including children. The ILO Rapid Assessment Protocol (ILO/RAP) cost-estimation tool is used to estimate the cost and affordability of implementing the recommendations in each country. Policy recommendations must be affordable, while providing flexibility for schemes to be scaled up as more fiscal space becomes available.

The participatory approach adopted throughout the ABND/SPPOT exercise raises awareness among line ministries, employers' and workers' representatives, CSOs and UN agencies about the SPF concept, its relevance for every country and the importance to the effective development of social protection of taking a coordinated and holistic approach. The methodology for conducting ABND exercises built on the *Manual and Strategic Framework for Joint UN Country Operations* (ILO and WHO with collaborating agencies and development partners 2009), and was developed jointly by UN agencies and development partners under the leadership of the ILO. The ABND was first applied in East and South-East Asia and the Pacific, and supported the development of national social protection strategies in a total of 26 countries (see Annex 4). In Myanmar the ABND process led in 2014–15 by ILO, UNICEF, the WFP and the World Bank was the main input to the formulation of the national social protection strategy which allowed for the creation of a social pension and a maternity and newborn cash transfer. Subsequently, the tool was integrated into the ISPA suite of tools, and the SPPOT was piloted in its draft version in Togo in 2018 and in Senegal in 2019–20. In Togo, the findings presented in the SPPOT report helped to prepare the ground for the universal health insurance law passed in 2021; in Senegal, the analysis informed the reform efforts under way to improve the access of PwDs to equal opportunity care.

The CODI is another tool developed as part of the ISPA toolkit, with the objective of analysing the overall performance of social protection systems (see box 9).

▶ Box 9. Inter-agency Social Protection Assessment (ISPA) tools: Useful resources for UN joint analytical work

Following the launch of the SPIAC-B, the elaboration of a set of ISPA tools to analyse the performance of national social protection systems was established as the first workstream of the initiative. The tools offer a coherent framework for analysis and represent a consensus of leading experts across agencies working on social protection as to what is important when investigating social protection systems, programmes or delivery mechanisms.

The following tools have been finalized and are available:

- ▶ CODI, to analyse overall system performance;
- ▶ social protection identification tool;
- ▶ social protection payment mechanisms tool;
- ▶ food security and nutrition tool;
- ▶ social protection public works programmes tool.

▶ Continues...

The following tools are under development:

- ▶ social protection financing tool;
- ▶ SPPOT;
- ▶ social information systems tool;
- ▶ cash transfer tool.

To date, 48 ISPA tool applications have been carried out, mostly in Africa (22) and Latin America (11), but also in Asia (7), the Middle East and North Africa (6), and Eastern Europe (2).

These tools are "agency neutral" - not associated with any one agency - and therefore provide an easy entry-point for joint UN analytical work and joint research as the first step to formulating joint policy recommendations. An interesting dynamic has been observed on several occasions, whereby agencies initially derived diverging policy advice from the joint analysis but subsequently were able to generate consensus on recommendations in the spirit of the collaboration that had been established in the course of the joint research.

For example, in Uzbekistan, CODI was implemented by the ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank to inform the fast-moving reform programme aimed at maintaining a high economic growth rate, increasing competitiveness and promoting international economic integration. By undertaking an inventory of Uzbekistan's main social protection programmes as well as an analysis of their appropriateness, effectiveness, responsiveness, cost-efficiency, and fiscal and financial sustainability, the initiative identified the main strengths and weaknesses of the system, and offered a set of conclusions and recommendations on strengthening the social protection system in Uzbekistan.

Joint capacity-building initiatives

Like joint analytical work and assessments of social protection systems, joint training activities have proven to be of great value for strengthening UN collaboration at the country level, increasing outreach and improving the quality of the policy advice provided to national counterparts, maximizing synergies, and at the same time strengthening mutual understanding and learning across UN agencies. While many joint training exercises at the country level are organized on an ad hoc basis in response to specific requests, there are also more institutionalized joint approaches to capacity-building.

TRANSFORM is an innovative learning initiative launched jointly by UN agencies working on social protection and other development partners to build capacity, raise awareness and facilitate the implementation of national SPFs in Africa.[7] TRANSFORM promotes critical thinking and builds capacity at national and subnational levels to improve the design, effectiveness and efficiency of social protection systems. The key to TRANSFORM is the creation of a body of skilled social protection leaders in Africa to support transformational change using state-of-the-art knowledge presented through internationally informed and locally relevant materials. By January 2021, 56 social protection experts from 29 African countries had been trained to become TRANSFORM master trainers, including a new cohort of 12 French- and Arabic-speakers. Since 2016, TRANSFORM has been implemented in 12

[7] Developed at the request of the African Union, TRANSFORM is a partnership between the European Commission Directorate-General for International Partnerships, FAO, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Government of Finland, ILO, IPC-IG, the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITC-ILO), Irish Aid, the Southern African Social Protection Experts Network, UNDP, UNICEF, the United Nations University–Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology and WFP.

TRANSFORM training in Sudan, June 2021. ©/ILO

African countries, including in an online format (see below), reaching over 1,600 practitioners.[8] In Malawi, for example, joint funding and implementation of TRANSFORM for government representatives at national and district level was led by GIZ, ILO and UNICEF. Starting with national-level applications of TRANSFORM, the partnership delivered in-depth courses in several of the curriculum's themes, such as selection and identification, and management and information systems; later, it further tailored the content of the package to better suit needs at district level and went on to implement training at district level.

With the support of socialprotection.org, the TRANSFORM initiative was able to offer an online version of the curriculum, and thereby reach an even wider circle of participants. The online course has already been offered seven times in the full format and once in a blended format (online and face-to-face). Furthermore, in February 2021, using UNICEF's programme guidance on SRSP systems as a basis, the platform developed and piloted the TRANSFORM Shock-Responsive Social Protection e-course, with support from the ILO, UNICEF and the WFP.

Further examples are the courses developed by the **United Nations System Staff College** (UNSSC). Created with support from UN agencies working on social protection, these online courses equip participants with a solid understanding of social protection and its relevance for sustainable development. The first course was held in July 2018 with a focus on social protection as an accelerator for achieving the SDGs. It provided expert training to 46 participants from 33 countries across a wide range of international agencies. In 2021, the UNSSC, again with inputs from UN agencies, developed a comprehensive social protection course for UN staff, national counterparts, CSOs and development partners.

> Joint training activities have proven to be of great value for strengthening UN collaboration at the country level

[8] See TRANSFORM.

Similarly, the Social Security Academy and other courses offered by the ITC-ILO in Turin invite contributions and self-funded participants from across relevant UN agencies and development partners, as well as being open to participants from all institutions, national counterparts and partners. Another example is the e-learning component of socialprotection.org; there are also examples of collaborative e-courses involving the FAO, GIZ, ILO, IPC-IG, UNDP and UNICEF.

Diversity of contexts

Efforts of UN agencies to strengthen collaboration and support countries in building their social protection systems take place in all regions of the world and in diverse country contexts, including in small islands and fragile countries. There is no "one-size-fits-all" delivery model; each country and each context requires a tailor-made and adapted response to apply the principles laid down in international standards to the specific situation. UN agencies – even when engaged in emergency cash transfer programmes – strive to influence the design and feasibility of sustainable social protection systems in the direction of a rights-based and universal approach.

Small island developing nations (SIDS) face common challenges that limit their capacities to achieve universal, adequate, sustainable and responsive social protection. They face increasing social protection demands created by external shocks and serious environmental threats. Despite these considerable needs, the risk of overlap with UN interventions is high because national capacities to absorb technical cooperation are sometimes limited. Common development cooperation frameworks, such as the United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the English and Dutch-Speaking Caribbean 2022–2026 (United Nations Caribbean 2021), as well as inter-agency coordination and cooperation within UNCTs, can support delivering as a coordinated UN. This has been the approach adopted by the Joint SDG Fund in its support for the joint programme in the Eastern Caribbean (Joint SDG Fund 2022). Moreover, funding for integrated social protection was provided by the Joint SDG Fund for another six SIDS in 2020 and for eight SIDS in 2022.

In fragile contexts, UN agencies are often involved in strengthening the policies, programmes and governance of social protection systems to enable them to respond to shocks and crises. This includes emergency cash transfer programmes that have an immediate impact on hundreds of thousands of people (for an example, see box 10). UN agencies try to link humanitarian action to long-term development by ensuring that the programmes are embedded in national institutions, strategies and legal frameworks, and by strengthening national capacities in areas such as policy design, programme administration, and M&E. UN agencies also strive to ensure that the programmes can be progressively financed from domestic resources.

▶ Box 10. Joint work in Yemen through the Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project

In Yemen, the partnership between the UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank through the US$500 million Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project has been supporting a large-scale unconditional cash transfer programme implemented by UNICEF, alongside the UNDP's work in providing cash-for-work and wage employment projects, support for small businesses and repairs to socio-economic infrastructure. The Yemen unconditional cash transfer programme aims to ensure that access to social transfers for the poorest and most vulnerable population groups is maintained within a conflict context. Despite the significant security challenges, this programme has reached all of Yemen's 333 districts and has ensured that cash payments are made to even those members of the population who are internally displaced. This has resulted in 1.45 million households (9 million individuals) being supported through unconditional cash transfers, with women comprising 45 per cent of direct recipients. The country's social

▶ Continues...

protection system has been strengthened by improvements to the delivery process of cash transfers, such as the involvement of banks as payment service providers and the introduction of digital payments in some locations, regular monitoring, and the establishment of a grievance redress mechanism. The programme is currently in the process of being transformed into a local entity, the Social Fund for Development, with the aim of handing over the programme to the national Social Welfare Fund – the flagship national social protection programme.

In terms of lessons learned, the partnership between the UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank has proven to be an effective way of leveraging the complementarities between the agencies to support populations affected by conflict. The UNDP and UNICEF have provided the instruments that enable the World Bank to engage in Yemen despite its inability to work through the Government during the conflict. The UN agencies also have a strong country presence, access to all parts of the country, a high risk tolerance, and an ability to coordinate the numerous humanitarian and political actors on the ground. The World Bank's engagement in Yemen has created an effective platform for donor coordination and mobilization of the resources needed for economic activities, which are particularly critical in a crisis context.

Source: Al-Ahmadi and de Silva 2018; UNICEF 2021b.

Social protection for refugees and host communities

In contexts where displacement is becoming protracted, responses are increasingly focused on durable solutions to support more dignified, inclusive and comprehensive programmes for refugees and the communities that host them. In such contexts, self-reliance and empowerment need to be facilitated, and social cohesion needs to be strengthened. To this end, the Partnership for Improving Prospects for Host Communities and Forcibly Displaced Persons (PROSPECTS) has been launched with the support of the Government of the Netherlands, bringing together the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the ILO, UNHCR, UNICEF, the UN Refugee Agency and the World Bank to implement this transformative approach. Moreover, PROSPECTS also interacts with FAO at the country level, especially in Kenya, where the SDG fund project and PROSPECTS are being implemented jointly. A growing collaboration exists between PROSPECTS and FAO in Lebanon and Sudan too.

Under the umbrella of PROSPECTS, the ILO and partner governments are looking to work through both humanitarian and development processes using social protection systems, and particularly social health protection schemes, to provide predictable and sustainable support for displaced populations and host communities beyond the short-term aim of providing international humanitarian assistance. The integration of refugees into national social protection programmes can provide sustainable and cost-effective ways of moving on from humanitarian assistance, particularly in situations of protracted displacements. The ILO and UNHCR have developed a joint *Handbook on Social Health Protection for Refugees: Approaches, Lessons Learned and Practical Tools to Assess Coverage Options* (ILO and UNHCR 2020). The purpose of this handbook is to guide UNHCR public health and programme staff and ILO staff working on social protection at country level on the considerations and practical steps required to assess options for the inclusion of refugees in national social health protection schemes.

Establishing sustainable social protection systems in countries of origin can further facilitate refugees' voluntary return and re-integration. Strengthening social protection systems generally benefits both refugees and host communities. Solid social security systems act as strong economic and social stabilizers in the region and at the country level.

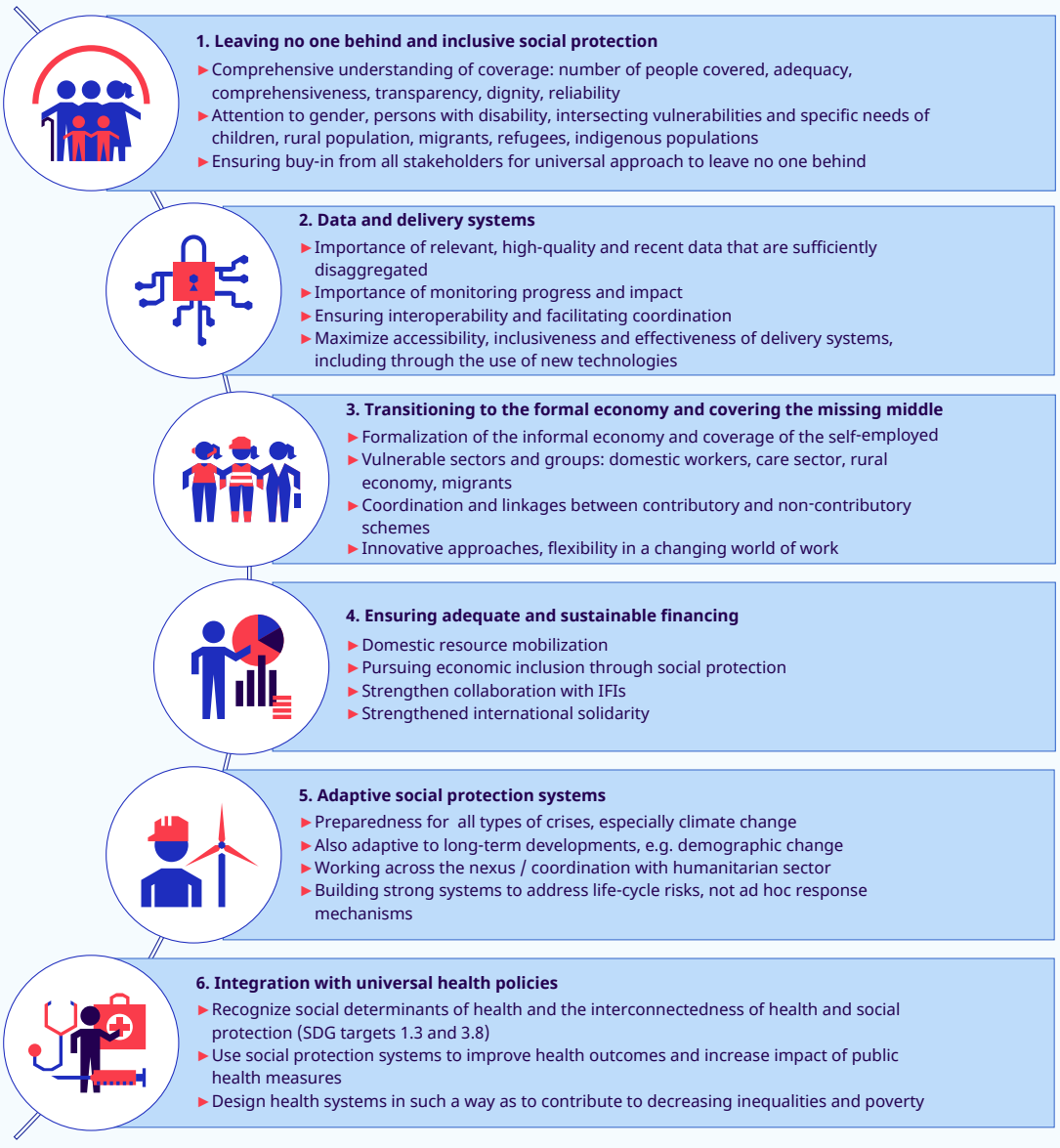
Photo: © Marcel Crozet/ILO

SECTION 2

Priorities for joint work on social protection – the "what?"

Building on the preceding section's examination of success stories, challenges experienced and lessons learnt from joint work on social protection to date, this section considers where the focus should lie in collaborative work on social protection, both over the medium term (the next ten years) and in the longer term, beyond the SDGs. It draws on a 2020–21 SPF actor survey (see Annex 2), extensive interviews conducted with and inputs from UN and development partner colleagues, and a virtual workshop organized in July 2021 attended by 150 participants from across the UN system, CSOs and development partners. Through these consultative activities, six priority policy areas were identified, and there was broad consensus that these require concerted joint work on social protection (see figure 1). The identification of these six key areas, which are discussed below in further detail, is intended to strengthen the existing areas of convergence on social protection among UN agencies and, perhaps more importantly, go some way to reducing some of the counterproductive differences that exist (see box 11).

▶ Figure 1: Key areas for social protection engagement



▶ Box 11. Social protection issues open to debate

There is extensive convergence among UN agencies, IFIs and development partners regarding a commitment to rights-based universal social protection: a consensus that all members of society should be able to access the support they need across the life cycle, and that this requires a systems approach. However, there are areas in which debates may arise on how to achieve these common goals, for example:

- the definition and the scope of social protection, in particular as regards social services and active labour market or economic inclusion programmes;
- whether the role of social protection is primarily to guarantee access to healthcare and ensure income security for maintaining a decent standard of living, or to promote livelihoods, productivity and labour market participation;
- how to sequence the progressive extension of social protection and if certain vulnerable groups should be prioritized;
- the degree of targeting or conditionality applied to the provision of social protection;
- with what other social, economic and employment policies should social protection cohere;
- the role of social insurance in the realization of universal social protection (USP);
- the potential and pitfalls of decoupling of social protection from employment;
- what role there might be for universal basic income as a viable policy to achieve universal social protection;
- the respective roles of the state and the private sector in realizing the right to social protection;
- the relative importance of addressing idiosyncratic and covariate risks;
- the priority given not only to reducing but to preventing poverty.

It would be unrealistic to expect that consensus can always be reached on these matters. However, airing and acknowledging differences in approach might sensitize UN staff better to different views and possibly signpost possible ways out of deadlock where it arises. There may not be a single "correct" answer on any of these topics, given the diversity of country contexts; this also points to the importance of dialogue, joint analysis and JPs within each country context to help build broader consensus among relevant agencies.

There is consensus across the UN system on the imperative of LNOB (areas 1 and 3 in figure 1), of building robust, sustainable and adaptive social protection systems (areas 2, 4 and 5), and of ensuring integration between universal social protection (USP) and universal health coverage (UHC) (area 6). There is also agreement on the importance of paying attention to cross-cutting themes, in particular gender, disability, environmental considerations, ensuring a participatory approach and coordination. Also, as social protection systems cut across different policy areas (access to healthcare, unemployment protection), institutions (ministries of health, labour, social welfare, agriculture, education, finance) and all administrative layers, strong structures for both horizontal and vertical coordination are important. The vision for a coherent social protection system in which all parts are well coordinated across different sectors and administrative levels, and the division of the roles and responsibilities among actors involved in planning and implementing social protection schemes and programmes, is best elaborated

in the form of a national social protection policy or strategy. However, UN advice to countries on how to improve the coherence and coordination of their social protection system requires a coordinated UN approach/joint framework for social protection work at country level to start with.

Keeping the promise of LNOB and inclusive social protection

Despite some progress in recent years in extending social protection, significant challenges persist in making the human right to social security a reality for all. Large gaps remain in the coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy of social protection systems. As of 2020, only 46.9 per cent of the global population were effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit (excluding healthcare and sickness cash benefits), while the remaining 53.1 per cent – as many as 4.1 billion people – were left wholly unprotected. These gaps are particularly pronounced in certain regions, with coverage rates dropping below the global average in Asia and the Pacific (44.1 per cent), the Arab States (40.0 per cent) and Africa (17.4 per cent) (ILO 2021b). Where

> The needs of refugees are often different from those of other vulnerable groups and need special attention

sex-disaggregated data are available, they show significant gender gaps in both coverage and adequacy. The gaps are particularly wide among the most vulnerable groups, calling for stronger attention to and investment in building social protection systems that respond to the needs of vulnerable groups and to the gender-specific and disability-specific needs of these vulnerable groups. Box 12 illustrates how gender was successfully integrated into social protection programmes under the Joint SDG Fund. The needs of refugees are often different from those of other vulnerable groups and need special attention. If these coverage gaps are not closed by 2030, the global community will have failed to deliver on the promise to ensure that no one is left behind and that everyone can access social protection when they need it.

Road to KAOMA, Zambia, 2015. © Marcel Crozet/ILO

▶ Box 12. Integrating gender into joint social protection programmes: Lessons from the UN Joint SDG Fund JPs and beyond

The need to mainstream gender into social protection systems, policies and programmes has been widely recognized. Indeed, in 2019, SPIAC-B issued a joint statement calling for greater action to strengthen social protection systems and use them to promote gender equality and empower women and girls. To support this critically important change in the social protection sector, the Joint SDG Fund made the integration of a gender perspective a mandatory criterion to be considered during the selection process of first-generation JPs, using an upgraded gender marker to encourage applicants to mainstream gender across the programming cycle. While a comprehensive review of implementation and results cannot be conducted until the JPs are finalized, an initial screening highlights at least **three innovative ways** in which the gender mainstreaming mandate has been taken forward, from which we can learn for future programmes.

1.Closing gender gaps in coverage and adequacy

Across regions, several JPs have worked on closing gender gaps in social protection coverage and adequacy, often with a focus on women in vulnerable and highly femininized sectors and occupations. This is a critical area for gender, often overlooked in favour of smaller design or implementation tweaks. In **Mexico** and **Thailand**, the JPs included the provision of technical assistance to governments to improve coverage for domestic workers. In **Bangladesh**, the entire JP focused on expanding social protection coverage among tea-garden workers, the majority of whom are women, and strengthened their capacity to influence national social protection policies and hold employers and the Government accountable for responding to their rights and needs. In **South Africa**, one of the JP components focused on extending social insurance schemes to women in the informal sector, particularly in rural areas, through fiscal space analysis and support for budgetary processes. In **Viet Nam**, the JP has been designed to take a holistic approach to scaling up gender-responsive social protection, including coverage and adequacy for children and pregnant women, and social pensions, from which women are disproportionately excluded.

2. Integrating care into social protection systems

This is an innovative emerging area of work spearheaded by several JPs in the Latin American and Caribbean region. In **Mexico**, the JP has supported the Government in the formulation of a national care strategy as a key pillar of its social protection system; the process of passing the necessary legislation is now under way. In **Ecuador**, the JP has introduced into the care system at local level a component targeted at supporting equal employment opportunities among young women and men in the informal economy. In **Brazil**, the JP has focused on strengthening the Government's Happy Child Programme (HCP), which complemented the recently discontinued Bolsa Família cash transfer scheme through a system of home visits aimed at helping vulnerable families to nurture the cognitive, emotional and social development of their children. Through a dedicated survey, the JP identified significant gaps in knowledge and awareness about gender issues among HCP programme staff, and developed three training modules (on pregnancy, violence against women and co-responsibility for care) that will be available to more than 18,500 workers from the HCP. (For a detailed example of similar work in **Argentina**, see box 4.)

3. Addressing violence against women

In **Madagascar**, the JP provided survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) with psycho-social, legal and/or medical support, and strengthened the capacity of CSOs, including local community

▶ Continues...

leaders, to deliver key messages on both social protection and GBV. In **Turkmenistan**, the JP is piloting a community-based model of social workers who will be engaged in identification, assessment and case management of potentially eligible women, as well as specialized social services designed to meet specific needs and help people to live independent lives in their communities – including women facing GBV. In **Georgia**, the JP focused on strengthening the social protection system alongside the capacity of the Government and non-governmental organization (NGO) sector in order to address more effectively GBV, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and inclusion of PwDs. The National Referral Mechanism on Domestic Violence/Violence Against Women was updated to reflect the needs of PwDs. In addition, a network of over 30 organizations working on the rights of women with disabilities was established, and capacity-building efforts focused on areas including gender equality and knowledge about SRHR and GBV, as well as grant proposal writing, project management and reporting.

Source: UNICEF; UN Women.

Universal social protection is a cornerstone of a human-centred vision for the future, offering the prospect of realizing the human right to social security for all, contributing to the prevention and eradication of poverty, reducing multiple and intersecting inequalities, enhancing human capabilities and productivity, fostering solidarity and fairness, reinvigorating the social contract, and more. Prioritizing investments in social protection systems, especially in nationally defined SPFs, is also central to delivering on the promise of the 2030 Agenda – in particular, to attaining SDG targets 1.3 and 3.8 – to leave no one behind.

The normative framework embodied in international human rights instruments and social security standards for building universal social protection systems comprises an essential foundation and reference guide for realizing the fundamental right to social security through a rights-based approach. This normative framework includes in particular the ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation No. 202.

Among all development partners, there is a broad consensus that USP should be achieved and that this means working on all of its dimensions and ensuring commitment to it on the part of all stakeholders. There is also a growing recognition that access to healthcare and other care services – including childcare and long-term care services – are an integral part of social protection systems and critical to the LNOB principle, as these mechanisms also contribute to the workforce participation of family members with care responsibilities and an equal sharing of care work between women and men (see boxes 4 and 12) (UNICEF, ILO and WIEGO 2021). Implementing USP means taking a rights-based approach, covering all members of society while paying due attention to the specific needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. USP also means strengthening the gender responsiveness of social protection systems and working towards the inclusion of PwDs throughout the life cycle, paying due attention to intersecting vulnerabilities. USP means more than universal population coverage; it also requires adequate levels of benefit and comprehensiveness of risks covered. Achieving USP requires ensuring the transparency, reliability and sustainability of administrative and delivery systems and of the entitlements provided, as well as the dignity of rights-holders. Coordination with other policy areas – in particular with healthcare services, education, agricultural, economic, environmental and employment policies – through integrated policy responses is also crucial. All of this needs to be guided by social dialogue and to take cognizance of the views of persons of concern. Only if all these conditions are met can we be sure that everyone in need of social protection will be able to access it without facing hardship, stigma or discrimination. At the same time, while catering for the particular needs of specific groups, be they PwDs or persons from indigenous communities, it is important to avoid fragmentation of the system. The extent to which systems should cover specific

groups with tailored and specific programmes, or to which group-specific design features can be built into mainstream schemes and programmes, needs to be carefully monitored.

Many countries will not be able to achieve USP in the short run, but they can embark on the journey towards it, progressively building adequate, comprehensive and sustainable social protection systems for all. This requires both a vision and the setting of priorities to design the path to its realization. South Africa offers an instructive example, having gradually extended its Child Support Grant to a growing number of children by extending the eligible age range, even if it is still not fully universal. However, UN collaboration work on universal social protection at the country level sometimes takes the form of simply superimposing all the separate UN mandates (such as food, nutrition, children, the elderly, informal economy workers, co-variate risks), rather than bringing them together to identify joint priorities. This may overload the capacity of often nascent social protection systems. Having said this, there are examples where these challenges have been overcome. The example of the Consortium on Social Protection for Food Systems Transformation is an instructive example. It simultaneously aims at promoting the role of social protection in reducing hunger and malnutrition and promoting decent work through access to social insurance for workers in the agri-food system, and enhancing sustainable economic inclusion. Taking a food-systems approach helped frame an integrated approach for social protection.

Nonetheless, bringing all the perspectives and mandates of different UN agencies to the table should not be done in such a way as to pull government stakeholders in different directions while they juggle limited budgets. While it is important to consider all options, there needs to be an inclusive exercise on prioritization, followed by the provision to key government stakeholders of coherent support on the basis of these agreed priorities, which may mean building consensus on which line of work is pursued first.

The promise not to leave anyone behind is at the heart of the UN agenda; therefore UN agencies must, through their joint efforts, assist countries to ensure this promise is turned into reality. Social protection systems play a crucial role in doing this. In addition to the tools and frameworks guiding the extension of social protection (see the section below on extending social protection to the informal economy), there is also the UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams on Leaving No One Behind to support UN collaboartion in this respect.

Extending social protection to those in the informal economy and their families, covering the missing middle and supporting their transition from the informal to the formal economy

Today, over 4 billion people are excluded from social protection, and most of them rely on the informal economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the vulnerabilities faced by the 2 billion workers in the informal economy and their families, as well as the glaring gaps in social protection coverage and adequacy.

The extension of social protection to workers in the informal economy can take a variety of forms, and often relies on a combination of social insurance and tax financing. The extension of social insurance can contribute to alleviating pressure on the State's coffers and make the extension of social protection more feasible, not least in contexts where the tax base and the progressiveness of taxation are limited. Combined with other policies, the extension of contributory schemes can also support the process of formalizing the economy.

> The extension of social insurance can contribute to alleviating pressure on the State's coffers and make the extension of social protection more feasible

Street vendor in Tirana, Albania, 2014. © Marcel Crozet/ILO

In view of the salience of this topic, there is a need to strengthen the capacities of UNRCs and UN agency colleagues in this area, for instance through wider dissemination and application of the ILO resource package on "Extending Social Security to Workers in the Informal Economy" and the joint FAO–ILO report *Extending Social Protection to Rural Populations*. Perspectives for a joint FAO and ILO approach (2021), which outlines the specific profiles, risks and vulnerabilities of rural populations, and explores options to extend social protection coverage to them. The guidance provided by ILO Recommendation No. 202 and the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), provide particularly useful guidance in this regard.

Within the Global UNDP–ILO Framework for Action of 2020, the ILO and UNDP deepened their collaboration in supporting African countries in their efforts to recover from COVID-19 through a new generation of programmes for the extension of social protection to informal economy workers and for the socio-economic empowerment of vulnerable workers. The UNDP report, in collaboration with the ILO, *Informality and Social Protection in African Countries: A Forward-looking Assessment of Contributory Schemes* (UNDP 2021) provides an overview of extension practices in Africa through seven country case studies, illustrating the range of emergent design practices. The ILO and UNDP are developing a Global Initiative on Pathways to the Formal Economy under their joint Framework for Action, and also co-lead the thematic working group on "informality" of the Global Accelerator, supporting the development of a common roadmap for joint UN action in this area.

UN agencies should first and foremost foster a better understanding of the characteristics of those in the informal economy, for example, through surveys, such as those carried out by ILO and FAO agricultural surveys and censuses, farmer registries, or rural poverty profiling and analysis (FAO 2021). Identifying and understanding the barriers to access social protection is important for developing suitable solutions: in some cases, workers and enterprises are excluded by design (if, for instance, the legal framework does not include them) and in others, they are covered by law but not in practice, owing to administrative barriers and/or a lack of compliance and/or of contributory capacity. Solutions for removing these barriers include extending the coverage of

the law (for example, including micro-enterprises and self-employed workers); developing sectoral approaches, for example focusing on rural and farm workers (see box 13), care workers – including domestic, childcare or long-term care workers (see boxes 4 and 12), or (as in India) construction workers, with contributions calculated as a proportion of the construction cost rather than of the payroll; promoting the gender responsiveness of social protection schemes, for instance by taking into account the significant extent and unequal distribution of unpaid care work, especially for women; including PwDs, those from ethnic minorities and migrants; addressing gender-specific contingencies such as maternity, reproductive and maternal health, as well as violence and harassment; and using new technologies, such as India's One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) for accessing food rations from anywhere, which is providing to be beneficial for migrant workers, in response to the issue of worker mobility. Also, the governance of social security institutions could be improved by promoting the representation and participation of organizations of categories of workers or sectors hitherto excluded, including informal workers and women's rights groups. This would enable the legal, administrative and practical barriers that prevent the extension of coverage to be addressed, increasing not only the system's responsiveness to the needs of excluded and vulnerable groups, but also trust in the system, thereby increasing the likelihood of affiliation.

▶ Box 13. The challenge of covering rural and farm workers

Today, rural populations represent around half of the world's population. In rural areas, the prevalence of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition is generally disproportionate. For instance, poverty is three times higher in rural areas and three quarters of the chronically food insecure are concentrated in rural settings (World Bank, 2018). Those populations work predominantly in the agriculture sector (including agri-food value chains), in which working conditions are often difficult and hazardous, with high rates of fatalities, injuries and work-related ill-health, and where livelihoods are more vulnerable to climatic and socio-economic shocks. In this sector, poverty is also largely concentrated within the categories of small-scale producers and agricultural wage workers, characterized by pervasive informality, seasonal and irregular income, and child labour. Agricultural subsectors such as cropping, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and forestry all have their specific idiosyncrasies regarding the types of risks they experience, including seasonality of incomes, while rural women, who make up a high proportion of workers in the agriculture sector, are particularly vulnerable, undermining their ability to access social protection while at the same time exacerbating their coverage needs.

However, access to adequate social protection in rural areas is limited. Very often, agricultural workers or producers who are not poor are part of the so-called "missing" or "invisible middle", unprotected and therefore vulnerable to the devastating impact of any kind of shocks. Social protection has long been recognized as an essential tool for a sustainable rural and agri-food systems transformation that induces rural poverty reduction, zero hunger, resilience and environmental sustainability, especially in marginalized areas with limited access to employment opportunities, affecting more prominently youth, women, migrants, PwDs and indigenous peoples. COVID-19 has recently shown that the importance of social protection for protecting lives and livelihoods is more critical than ever, as confirmed by the surge of government pandemic response measures. Despite recent efforts, overcoming barriers to guarantee access to social protection in rural areas remains essential, while the exposure of rural populations to the various types of risks associated with different agricultural subsectors

▶ Continues...

calls for adapted and risk-informed schemes and benefits. Moreover, several potential barriers affect rural populations' access to social protection: these include legal barriers, financial barriers, and administrative and institutional barriers. Additionally, the remoteness of places of work and residence generally hinders access to a wide range of services, including schools, health centres, and vocational and training services.

To overcome those barriers, a joint ILO and FAO approach has been developed focusing on extending, in a complementary way, social insurance and non-contributory benefits. To succeed, the extension of social protection to rural populations should be embedded in a comprehensive and coherent policy and legal framework, specifying eligibility conditions, targeting criteria and the type, level and periodicity of benefits, ensuring transparency and accountability, providing a sustainable and equitable financing of these schemes and promoting shock responsiveness. In addition, reforms to facilitate administrative procedures, including in case of co-variate shocks, and facilitate access to social services should be promoted; this can be done through the promotion of digital solutions, from one-stop shops to mobile social security offices. Funding the extension is also important and can be done by mobilizing public funds and contingency funds, and by implementing innovative solutions to collect potential contributions from agricultural workers, according to their socio-economic characteristics and the seasonality of their incomes. Furthermore, extending coverage to rural and farm workers cannot be achieved without making rural populations aware of their rights, building trust in the system through the involvement of trade unions, farmers' organizations, agricultural cooperatives, and community-based organizations, and setting up mechanisms for ensuring compliance and establishing incentives for enrolment.

FAO and ILO work with governments and actors at the country level to extend coverage to rural and farm workers in a range of countries such as Kenya, Lebanon, Mongolia and Sudan. An extension of social protection to rural areas should aim at promoting an inclusive and sustainable rural transformation. To that end, a coherence between the extension of social protection and agriculture, livestock, fisheries and forestry policies is generally promoted by FAO through its various diagnostic tools and framework for analysis and action.

Finally, extending coverage to rural areas in fragile contexts adds an additional level of complexity. Such contexts require close collaboration between the humanitarian response and provision of non-contributory benefits, to operationalize the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

Source: ILO and FAO 2021.

UN agencies could explore together how to design and implement integrated approaches to support formalization and economic inclusion jointly through measures such as social protection, skills development, public employment and childcare services, support for micro-enterprises and tax incentives. This work could be carried out in those sectors of the economy where certain agencies have a comparative advantage (for example, FAO and the ILO in the agri-food value chains; the ILO and UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, UN Women and the WHO in the care sector). Without additional efforts to formalize the economy, it will be difficult to finance the SDGs. Building a proper data infrastructure and improving tax policies can contribute substantially to enabling the extension of social protection to those in the informal economy. UN agencies could also join efforts in developing projects of "digital transformation", which can facilitate these processes.

Ensuring adequate and sustainable financing for social protection

Closing gaps in the coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy of social protection systems to achieve universal social protection and universal health coverage depends on securing and sustaining the necessary investment. Currently, there is a huge shortfall in the spending required to close gaps to ensure at least minimum provision of healthcare and income security for all; and this financing gap, which was already significant prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, has increased by approximately 30 per cent since the onset of the crisis. To guarantee at least a basic level of social security through a nationally defined social protection floor, lower-middle-income countries (LMICs) would need to invest an additional US$362.9 billion and upper-middle-income countries (UMICs) a further US$750.8 billion per year, equivalent to 5.1 and 3.1 per cent of GDP respectively for the two groups, while LICs would need to invest an additional US$77.9 billion, equivalent to 15.9 per cent of their GDP (ILO 2020).

Aside from the challenge of mobilizing the actual resources required to close the financing gap, there is an additional challenge in the "disconnect" that often exists between policymaking ambitions and the financing required to realize them. In many cases, national social protection strategies have lofty goals but lack the commensurate financing. This disconnect can be particularly strong for tax-based social protection mechanisms that are developed and administered under the responsibility of ministries of health, social affairs or labour that do not control the financing priorities of the Government. This problem can be less pronounced in contributory social insurance schemes, where governing boards control both the finance and the policy, so that there is less risk of disconnect owing to a more coherent structure.

There is significant convergence across the international community on many aspects of the financing agenda. It is agreed among UN and development partners that national social protection systems must ultimately be financed by domestic resources to ensure sustainability and national ownership. The human rights-based "maximum available resources" framework obliges UN agencies to support governments in progressively realizing their commitments to social protection according to human rights norms through various means, including extending contributory social security to uncovered groups,

Hands of women in the garment industry, Bangladesh, 2013. © Marcel Crozet/ILO

improving compliance and fighting tax evasion, reallocating government budgets, creating new earmarked taxes and curbing illicit financial flows.

Ensuring that policy ambitions are matched by financing priorities requires three big pushes to be made. First, *more investment* in social protection is needed to close the financing gap (Bierbaum and Schmitt 2022a, 2022b). These resources should come primarily from innovative and diversified sources of domestic financing; they need to be gradually increased in line with the economic and fiscal capacities of the country and based on national priorities. Second, given that LICs face funding challenges that far outstrip their domestic funding capacity, the UN, together with IFIs, governments, the EU and other relevant stakeholders, *should align and increase synergies with a view to extending the fiscal space* for social protection, and should explore ways (for example, through intensified cooperation on tax matters or debt restructuring) to create an environment that facilitates domestic resource mobilization. This may require strengthening government and UN staff capacities to engage with IFIs as well as making the case for increased international solidarity. Third, for countries with limited fiscal capacities to invest in social protection or facing increased needs due to crises, national resources need to be complemented by *international financial resources in combination with adequate and longer-term technical assistance,* to support domestic resource mobilization for sustainable financing of social protection.

All these ideas for unified UN action on financing and the common call to action are currently found in the UNSG's brief, I*nvesting in Jobs and Social Protection for Poverty Eradication and a Sustainable Recovery* (UN 2021a), and are being implemented through the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions based on a common road map under development. Moreover, the three lines of action outlined above accord with the principles on the financing of SPFs contained in the ILO's Recommendation No. 202, such as the need to ensure sound financial management, solidarity in financing, diversity of financing mechanisms, and financial, fiscal and economic sustainability.[9]

At the country level, UN agencies can help governments align their policy and financing objectives. There is a need for a whole-of-government approach that achieves alignment and coherence between ministries, with a particular focus on closer collaboration with ministries of finance and planning, and the strong involvement of workers and employers' representatives, who are both beneficiaries of and contributors to social security. INFFs can play an important role in such an approach, as supported through the Joint SDG Fund in 25 countries that use INFFs to put the focus on social protection financing.

> At the country level, UN agencies can help governments align their policy and financing objectives

UN agencies can also support countries technically in increasing domestic resources for social protection and in aligning policy and financing priorities. Agencies can work together on carrying out *social budget and social protection expenditure reviews* to assess current social spending, pinpoint financing gaps and identify financing options. This work could use existing tools and methodologies, such as the ILO's Social Budgeting and Social Protection Expenditure Review methodologies, the ILO and UN Women's Fiscal Space Handbook and the UNICEF Public Finance for Children Toolkit. This work could be incorporated into INFF discussions. UN agencies should also make sure that suggested reforms are feasible financially, and advise on how to increase fiscal space (for example, by curbing illicit financial flows or reforming tax structures). The role and mandate of the IMF is key here, and there needs to be coordination and joint work between UN agencies and the IMF. This requires inter-agency collaboration, as some individual agencies may lack the necessary skills and experience to support the implementation of some of these recommendations. In this regard, the experience

[9] See R202 - Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).

in Mozambique is instructive. Since 2015 the ILO and UNICEF have been recurrently engaged by the IMF during consultations for its Article IV missions regarding social protection.[10] Key to this engagement has been the ILO's involvement in the Budget Advisory Group – comprising mainly cooperation partners, the IMF and World Bank – with the ministry of finance. This long-term and fruitful collaboration resulted in Mozambique being identified as one of four pilot countries to further strengthen ILO–IMF collaboration in 2021–22.

For resource-constrained countries or those having to contend with crises, natural disasters or climate change, UN agencies can play a role to ensure that additional financial allocations contribute to national policy priorities, for instance by providing evidence regarding the needs and expected impacts of additional funding for different social protection measures as well as by developing the monitoring framework that is needed to define and implement, for example, budget support. In this context, increased dialogue with IFIs, bilateral aid partners, development banks and the EU is also required, as discussed in detail in the next section.

Social protection information and delivery systems

Data and delivery systems, as well as complaints and appeals mechanisms, are necessary for the realization of the human right to social protection. Even where strong legal frameworks and sufficient financing exist, if delivery systems are absent or weak, individuals will be unable to access their entitlements. Yet many countries lack strong delivery systems that reach everyone nationwide throughout the delivery chain, from outreach and registration to payment/delivery and on to complaints and appeals mechanisms. Improved delivery capacities and data systems can also help to better enforce compliance with social security obligations (such as registration of enterprises and workers, and payment of social security contributions).

Where the benefit delivery is not in cash but in form of access to services (healthcare, long-term care, disability care or support services, childcare), there are many additional elements that can explain or challenge the delivery, such as availability and distribution of qualified staff, adequate equipment and infrastructure and so on. Moreover, the performance of the delivery system also relies on interoperability between different systems (such as the health information system and social protection information system) as well as complaints and appeals mechanisms, social workers for case management and referrals and so on. However, data systems are one necessary building block in all delivery systems that currently receive a lot of attention and where several UN agencies are active. The following section will therefore focus primarily on data systems.

Countries' delivery capacities, including their ability to collect, store, analyse and use social protection data, need to be strengthened. To this end, UN agencies should join forces, coordinating their different entry-points with different ministries and social protection schemes to support collection and maintenance of data in government systems, emphasizing the importance of ensuring that data are digitalized, and that systems are interoperable and are furnished with adequate protection for the privacy and security of individuals. Supporting countries in building well-performing and interoperable data systems improves delivery performance as well as the transparency and accountable management of social protection.

Relevant, up-to-date, high-quality data are the cornerstone of effective and credible policy-making. A sufficient level of data disaggregation for SDG indicator 1.3, notably by age, sex (see UN Women 2021, p. 34), residence, employment and disability status, and the collection of essential coverage data on additional benefits such as sickness and long-term care benefits, are preconditions for addressing the diversity of social protection needs in a satisfactory manner and supporting policymaking. The World Social Protection Database, operated by the ILO, collects,

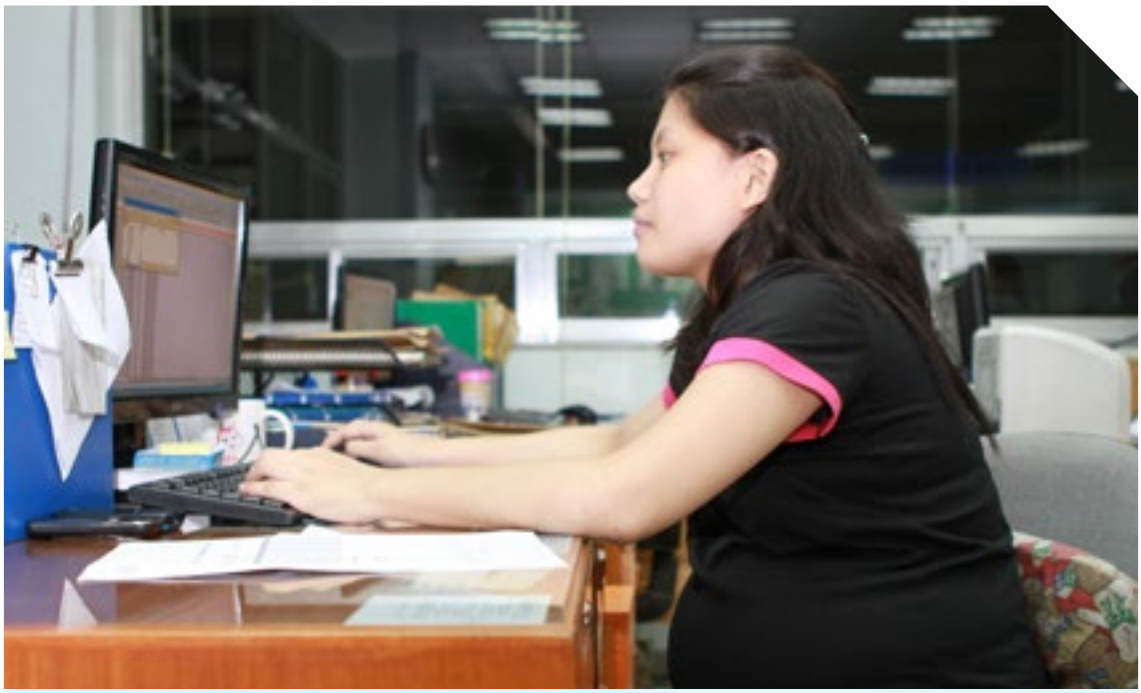
[10] Under Article IV of the IMF's Articles of Agreement, the IMF holds bilateral discussions with members, usually every year. A staff team visits the country, collects economic and financial information, and discusses with officials the country's economic developments and policies. On return to HQ, the staff prepare a report, which forms the basis for discussion by the Executive Board.

Relevant, up-to-date, high-quality data are the cornerstone of effective and credible policymaking

consolidates and updates data on social security coverage and expenditure around the world, and is used to report on SDG indicator 1.3.1 as well as to provide additional data on social health protection. Other rich sources of data and administration information for social insurance include the Country Profiles of the International Social Security Association (ISSA), the ISSA–US Social Security Administration's *Social Security Programs throughout the World*, the WHO Universal Health Coverage Data Portal, and e-government and other public databases. Providing all UN agencies with training on the Social Security Inquiry – the questionnaire used for collecting data to monitor progress on SDG target 1.3 – will ensure the application of a consistent standard for social protection data collection.

M&E systems provide not only information on the progressive achievement of the SDGs, but also programmatic feedback that allows scheme administrators or governments to adjust social protection programmes to better respond to the needs of target groups and their contributory capacity. They also furnish information on the administrative capacities of institutions to ensure the reliable delivery of the entitlements they provide. Ensuring that feedback can inform possible adjustments to programmes presupposes high-quality data and proper data disaggregation. There is a pressing need to close gaps in both. A UN Women review of national social protection strategies across 50 LMICs in various regions found that only one third of strategies contained gender-specific indicators in their M&E frameworks or pledged to establish M&E systems informed by gender data (Camilletti et al. 2021).

Digital technologies and infrastructure can play an important role in the collection, storage, analysis and exchange of data, for example to facilitate better access to social protection through transparent information-sharing; to reduce errors and fraud; to establish user-friendly and reliable registration mechanisms, payment of



Garment workers and maternity protection, Philippines, 2011. © E. Tuyay/ILO

social security contributions and delivery; and to contribute to improving complaints and appeals mechanisms. In Viet Nam, the JP run by the ILO, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF has accelerated mobile payments for cash transfers. Besides accelerating e-payment, it has also helped with the e-reporting of the Government's social protection support. This has laid the foundation for digitalizing the regular social assistance services and building an integrated social protection database (Hu Minh 2020). In Lebanon, digital technologies will help farmer registries expand social protection to agricultural workers. In Cambodia, the ILO, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the WHO, along with other agencies, are all contributing to the modernization of the National Social Security Fund.

Although social protection programmes worldwide are quite similar, the sector suffers from the lack of globally harmonized standards and terminologies, and "best practices/ blueprints" when implementing digital technologies in support of these programmes. Digital systems within countries are often incompatible, and solutions to the same problems are reinvented time and again for each country.

An initiative was founded under the umbrella of USP2030 as a joint effort by the partnership's members, governments, development partners, CSOs and the private sector with the aim of creating integrated and interoperable social protection information systems. The aim of this Convergence Initiative is to provide more guidance and ensure efficiency, better access, inclusion and transparency in the development of digital tools for social protection systems through convergence – that is, common standards, interoperable information systems and shared guidelines for digital technologies and services in the social protection sector.

There are a number of frameworks and tools available to help improve data and delivery systems. These include the ISPA tools on identification, payments and soon on information systems; openIMIS, an open source management information system for social protection benefits and social health protection; and the Quantitative Platform on Social Security (QPSS), which is designed to provide online statistical, financial and actuarial tools to support good financial management of social protection systems. Based on administrative data of social protection systems, the Social Security Inquiry is used to collect and consolidate administrative information on social protection coverage and expenditure that feeds the World Social Protection Database and its country dashboards. It complements the ASPIRE, based on household surveys. Awareness of these tools and databases will contribute to avoiding duplication in developing tools on administrative and financing governance of social security and in data collection efforts across UN agencies.

There are several other critical considerations to be borne in mind when planning joint UN work on digital solutions for social protection. One is ensuring interoperability within social protection, with service providers of health and social care and between other government e-services; another is the fact that building systems and strengthening them takes a lot of time, requiring the ability to engage with national partners on a long-term basis. There is also a need to work with ministries across a range of sectors (such as health, labour, social welfare, education, digitalization, interior and agriculture), since social security schemes and programmes may fall under a range of different ministries. In these contexts, it is important to build a coherent approach to digital solutions for social protection across UN agencies, so as to create a convergence of the support provided and the development of interoperable digital solutions across ministries and social security institutions. As elaborated in section 3 below, both residential and non-residential agencies should be involved in this work, as some agencies provide their support from their regional or global offices and regular on-site missions. Moreover, the role of the private sector in the digital transformation of the sector needs to be carefully considered.

At the same time, countries should be fully aware of the costs, the digital infrastructure capacity required, and the risks associated with putting in place digital solutions to implement social protection systems. Proximity to service providers and social security administration (for example, through decentralized offices and single-window services) remains important for those who do not have access to digital technologies. Digital solutions for registration or payment processes can replicate or even

Town of Balakot (40 000 inhabitants) 80 per cent devastated after earthquake, Pakistan, 2005. © Marcel Crozet/ILO

exacerbate existing exclusions, for example through the gender digital divide. Marginalized populations, too, are less likely to be digitally literate or have access to digital technologies such as their own mobile phones, for example. While also working to remove the barriers to digital inclusion, alternatives to digital delivery need to be offered in the meantime to ensure no one is left behind.

Additional key considerations for work on data systems concern issues of data privacy and confidentiality, as well as the use of algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) for certain steps in the delivery chain that may reproduce patterns of discrimination (Sepúlveda Carmona 2018). UN work follows clear safeguards and applies them in its support to countries to ensure data protection and non-discrimination, minimizing exclusion errors. UN inter-agency collaboration on social protection data systems should aim to strengthen national capacities to address questions around data security and protection as well as the risks of exclusionary effects of new technology.

Delivery mechanisms for expanding access to social protection can also include non-state actors. FAO, for instance, is supporting agricultural producer organizations in multiple ways to improve access to social protection systems for their membership, from providing a platform for information-sharing, to supporting "last-mile" implementation by facilitating easier enrolment and payment of social insurance contributions (such as making available mobile administrative centres, mobile registration campaigns and so on) and data collection from members for enhanced evidence generation on social protection.

Adaptive/shock-responsive social protection systems

The risks posed by climate change, political instability, natural disasters, epidemics and compounding health and economic shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic can undermine household resilience and reverse years of achievements that social protection systems have made in poverty reduction. Social protection systems address the consequences of these shocks, and yet are increasingly under stress as a result of the competitive pressures arising from globalization, at the same time as people's needs for social protection are increasing. LNOB and comprehensive, universal coverage (SDG targets 1.3 and 3.8) can only be achieved if both the co-variate and the intensified life-cycle risks are covered, and if systems continue to protect people by anticipating the needs engendered by new and emerging risks. Adaptive social protection (ASP)/ shock responsive social protection (SRSP) systems systems offer one way to protect vulnerable households from these shocks throughout their lifetimes.

> Adaptive social protection (ASP) systems offer one way to protect vulnerable households from these shocks throughout their lifetimes

Developing ASP/SRSP systems means supporting countries in increasing the robustness of their social protection systems and their capacity to anticipate, respond to or recover from different types of co-variate shocks, including economic crises, epidemics or natural disasters, and longer-term trends such as demographic and epidemiologic changes, changes in the world of work or climate change. The development of ASP/SRSP systems involves changes in: (1) policies and programmes, (2) data and information systems, (3) financing and (4) institutional arrangements and partnerships. It entails improving the design of social protection programmes to ensure wider coverage, comprehensiveness of social protection support, introduction of triggers for the rapid extension of coverage or levels/types of benefits, and integration of the range of programmes offered so that populations prone to shocks and crises are supported adequately in both the short and the longer term. In addition, it is critically important to strengthen the administrative governance and delivery capacity of social protection systems in the absence of a co-variate shock, to reinforce their legal basis (through the adoption and implementation of social security laws as well as the ratification of international social security conventions), to improve their vertical (central and local governments/authorities) and horizontal (across ministries and departments) coordination within the government system and secure their financial sustainability, through sound financial management and the establishment of contingency funds that can be used in cases of co-variate shocks and replenished by the State as a guarantee of last resort.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that many governments do not yet have these capacities, and UN agencies will continue to help governments build robust social protection systems that can effectively manage shocks. Both development and humanitarian efforts play a crucial role in building shock-responsive capacity, on the basis of the idea that the increasing robustness and sustainability of social protection systems is a sound strategy to reduce the need for humanitarian support. The existence of sound social protection delivery systems – including established institutions, adequate personnel, sound infrastructure and well-functioning mechanisms for the registration or identification of beneficiaries, collection of social security contributions (if any) and the disbursement of benefits – is a key enabler of effective and timely shock responses. Where these exist, financing for ASP/SRSP allows social protection systems to anticipate predictable crises or support government response needs. Humanitarian funding, on the other hand, can support the scaling up of social protection programmes (for example, social assistance) to address short-term needs in times of crisis, with a view to building nascent, shock-responsive social protection system in the future. In the absence of social protection systems, humanitarian assistance will necessarily remain reliant on predominantly temporary structures established by external actors and delivered directly by UN agencies to affected populations (Longhurst et al. 2021). At the same time, these efforts to address short-term humanitarian needs should also contribute to long-term systems-building, with the aim of strengthening the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. Agencies with dual mandates in both the development and the humanitarian spheres, such as FAO, UNICEF or the WFP, have been supporting this critical work in fragile contexts, including those where no social protection systems are in place or where the social protection system cannot be accessed by migrants, refugees and other forcibly displaced people. Others have tried to ensure during the COVID-19 response that the emergency support provided to countries also contributes to future and longer-term social protection improvements. In this regard, and if emergency solutions are used as the foundation for the development of longer term social protection systems, it is crucial

that a human rights-based approach is followed, including through the systematic application of guiding principles that are commonly followed in the design and operations of social protection systems.[11]

Both in development and in crisis/humanitarian contexts, a shared understanding of what ASP/SRSP is, aligned approaches to planning and systems-building, and coordination in disaster risk management are essential. Among other areas, joint assessments across UN agencies are of key importance. They provide a common entry-point, consolidate existing data/information and sources, support convergence of concepts and recommendations, and thus form the basis for coordinated action. Outside crisis contexts, social protection assessments need to include disaster (risk management) as well as climate change considerations. After a "shock" or in fragile settings, joint assessments (such as rapid post-disaster assessments of needs and vulnerabilities) further ensure rapid information flows, avoid asymmetric information, and enable better coordination and joint responses.

If joint assessments are to form the basis of high-quality programmes in times of crisis, it is critically important that they are conducted in a timely manner. UN agencies have demonstrated that they can come together in crisis-prone countries to implement a twin-track approach that both supports governments in scaling up social assistance and also provides direct humanitarian assistance to those people who are not covered by the social protection system. The joint work of UNICEF and the WFP in three countries of the Sahel region offer useful lessons in this respect (WFP 2021).

Another key area for joint work is assessing the financial risks of the emergence of new co-variate risks for social protection systems and developing innovative financing mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels (see the section above on ensuring adequate and sustainable financing). Similarly, collaborative approaches to risk management need to be developed and applied consistently; and joint work on future policies, national plans and strategies, and the systematic inclusion of an adaptive lens (including preparedness) in UNSDCFs, may constitute important elements of UN collaboration in the area of ASP/SRSP systems.

Successful examples of coherent inter-agency planning include different agencies coming in at different stages of the disaster risk management cycle, supporting the functionality of different social protection instruments and thus jointly working towards universal coverage. Joint UN programmes on ASP/SRSP, while also introducing new challenges (such as the involvement of too many agencies), have already given rise to many good practices, such as regular meetings of inter-agency working groups; formats for joint engagement with governments/partners; clear conceptual frameworks and convergence of approaches; and defined planning horizons and agreed work plans – as well as drilling down to concrete activities, highlighting the added value of collaboration among participating agencies rather than diverging concepts.

However, significant challenges remain, particularly owing to the allocation of separate funds to each participating UN agency, rather than the pooling of resources. This separation is even more pronounced during crises, with separate humanitarian and development funding streams and associated competitive dynamics. At the global level, clear inter-agency agreements between two or more agencies, along with the use of guidance and tools that have already been established, can help encourage and inform joint country-level work and future joint proposals. Finally, while the bringing together of disaster risk management and social protection actors has been promoted and quite successfully achieved in many contexts, bridging the gap between those and other sectoral actors (such as those involved in climate change adaptation/mitigation) has lagged behind and requires additional joint efforts (see box 14).

[11] The ILO's Recommendation No. 202 recognizes 19 guiding principles for the design, financing, implementation and monitoring of nationally defined social protection floors

▶ Box 14. UN JPs aimed at strengthening risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection systems

In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) of the Philippines, two UN JPs are being implemented in partnership with FAO and UNICEF.

Running from 1 February 2020 to 31 March 2022, the programme Ensuring Inclusive and Risk-Informed Shock-Responsive Social Protection Resulting in More Resilient Communities in BARMM, funded by the Joint SDG Fund, aims at ensuring that the poorest and most vulnerable groups in BARMM are able to manage shocks with timely access to an inclusive, risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection system. This is being achieved by:

- mainstreaming risk-informed shock-responsive social protection in BARMM;
- building the capacity of Bangsamoro institutions to analyse and monitor both natural and human-induced risks; and
- improving synergy and coordination between social protection programmes, climate change adaptation, and disaster preparedness and management.

The scaling up of the JP on risk-informed shock-responsive social protection in BARMM aims to enhance the provision of adequate social protection and humanitarian cash transfers for vulnerable households by leveraging the social protection system. Running from June 2021 to November 2022, the programme will reach this objective by:

- protecting the livelihoods and food security of vulnerable rural communities in BARMM by linking the social protection system to anticipatory action;
- improving food security, health and nutrition outcomes for children, and for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers; and
- strengthening cash delivery through improved payment systems.

Source: UNDP

Strengthening the integration of universal social protection and universal health coverage policies

Only two thirds of the global population are effectively protected by any kind of health protection scheme – 2.7 billion people remain uncovered. These figures also hide pronounced regional effective coverage gaps and the persistence of many barriers to accessing healthcare, in particular in terms of limited availability of, access to and utilization of services (SDG 3.8.1) and impoverishment due to out-of-pocket payments borne by households (SDG 3.8.2) (ILO 2021b). There is much still to be done to ensure everyone enjoys the right to health without hardship.

Further, possibly 50 per cent of health, and health equity in particular, is subject to the social determinants of health, especially life expectancy. Social determinants of health can be summarized under five essential conditions that need to be at adequate levels in order for people to live healthy lives: health services; income security and social protection; living conditions; social and human capital; and employment and working conditions. Life expectancy gaps between the most and least affluent 20 per cent of adults within European countries can be reduced in relatively short timeframes by paying greater attention to these factors. Reducing inequities in life expectancy between social groups would have a positive impact on gross domestic product (GDP) of the order of between 0.3 per cent and 4.3 per cent, as well as benefiting human and economic well-being (WHO 2019).

Consultation in the pediatric ward, Haute-Savoie, France, 2009. © Marcel Crozet/ILO

There is a need for a common vision across the UN on the importance of social protection as the second most important social determinant of health, and on its health equity impacts. Furthermore, social protection policies across the life course are a strong contribution to a more equal society and are investments in the necessary conditions to enable all people to prosper and flourish in life and health. Social protection does not happen automatically; it needs to be built deliberately through investments contributing to and being generated from broader social cohesion, underpinned by supportive laws, administration, financing and services, which are essential for peace, health and human development. The investment case is stronger if the multiple benefits can be articulated, in particular making the significance of the benefit in terms of social cohesion more tangible. Investments in social protection should thus not be undone during crises; rather, crises should be used as opportunities to increase their comprehensiveness and scale.

Health systems distribute and redistribute resources, and poorly functioning and poorly financed health systems can increase social inequalities and drive people into poverty. In many countries health systems are partially financed by social protection systems (such as social insurance), and social health protection is an important part of national social protection systems. The aim of universal health coverage is often the first step towards broader efforts on social protection. Furthermore, while the pandemic has drawn attention to the role of social protection in the resilience of health systems resilience and its importance for addressing social determinants of health, the purpose of health systems and universal health coverage aligns with social protection even if the latter is often sought through separate or different avenues and policy emphases.

As noted above, social protection is an important social determinant of health, as acknowledged by the World Conference on Social Determinants of Health (WHO 2011). Health and social protection can thus have joint narratives and coherent messaging. It is equally important that the role of health is recognized for social protection and that the role of social protection is recognized for health. Access to healthcare is among the objectives of social protection systems and constitutes one of the branches of social security. Health is a goal that can be achieved through the realization of other branches of social protection such as unemployment, maternity, old age or family benefits through their contribution to income security, which has an important positive impact on health and well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic has called attention to the important role played by income insecurity and highlighted the fact that a lack of social protection can contribute to the rapid spread of disease and inequities in infection, morbidity and mortality. Low-income and marginalized people, in particular those with insecure incomes, such as workers in the informal economy and those in precarious employment conditions, have been particularly severely affected. A WHO evidence brief that documented profound inequities in COVID-19 health outcomes between population groups in respect of infection, hospitalization and mortality noted that those worse-off in society were two to four times more severely affected than better-off groups (WHO 2021).

Social protection floors include health protection, and USP aligns with the aim of UHC. Health is often the area where support for social protection can be gained most easily, including in the informal economy where workers, their families and economic units often see health protection as a priority. Finally, the strengthening of the interrelationships between care systems – and between the social and health care economies and workforces – is essential for promoting health and health equity and sharing a common view on the main positive impacts of social protection for quality of life, peace and human development. This is particularly true of social protection guarantees that heavily rely on interactions between the health and social care sectors, such as disability and long-term care.

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In the light of the above, initiatives for coordinated action within the UN system to strengthen the coordination and integration of USP and UHC policies is urgently needed. This work can be strengthened at country, regional and global levels by bridging gaps between working groups on social protection and health systems, for example via dedicated focal points such as the P4H network on social health protection and health financing, jointly producing evidence that will speak to audiences in the different sectors concerned (health, social affairs, labour, finance) and supporting research that caters to all concerned sectors for instance through the Health and Social Protection Action Research Knowledge-sharing network (SPARKS) that is supported by both the ILO and the WHO. Further work should be done on measuring the impacts on health and well-being of social protection programmes more generally, so as to inform the adequate design of social protection schemes with a view to maximizing their impact on the social determinants of health.

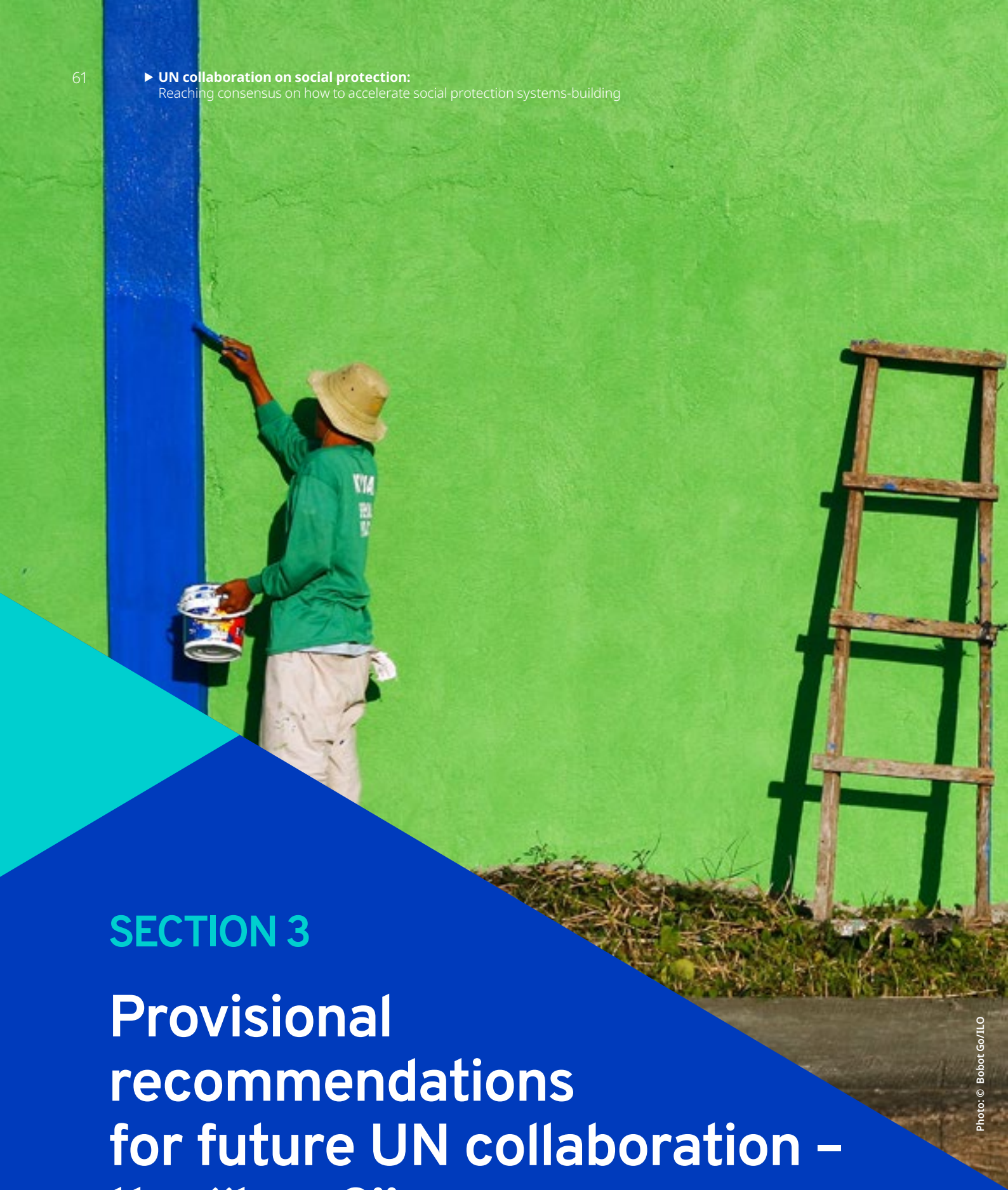


Photo: © Bobot Go/ILO

SECTION 3

Provisional recommendations for future UN collaboration – the "how?"

Following on from the discussion of lessons learnt from previous joint work in section 1 and the identification of key areas of action (the "what") in section 2, this section will present a set of recommendations for taking joint UN work on social protection forward (the "how"). The Global Accelerator launched by the UNSG in September 2021 represents a window of opportunity for renewed efforts to do joint UN work on social protection (UN 2021a). COVID-19 also makes it necessary for the UN to work together more closely. There may, however, be negative impacts on financing from the prevailing economic uncertainty and restricted fiscal space, as well as the economic recession which is likely to ensue, and these may be compounded in some countries by a reduced flow of remittances and foreign investments.

This section discusses six priority lines of action for UN collaboration on social protection to facilitate work in the areas identified above. The six priorities identified below emerge from the consultative workshop, survey and interviews. The discussion under each heading presents some provisional ideas and practical suggestions on what enhanced joint work could look like and how it could happen, as well as some of the obstacles that still need to be overcome if these collaborative ambitions are to be realized.

Stronger collaboration at all levels, from global to regional and national

While inter-agency collaboration in the context of the SPF-I, SPIAC-B, USP2030, UHC2030 and P4H has led to a greater convergence of views and a better understanding of commonalities and differences in approaches across agencies, this has not always translated into a similar level of improved collaboration at the different levels of operation. There is more scope to leverage global agreements and tools in their application in relation to individual projects, which often take place at country level.

In 2009, the SPF-I provided a strong narrative that allowed each agency to identify its place in the overall fabric of a common framework (ILO and WHO with collaborating agencies and development partners 2009) which was used for inter-agency assessments of national social protection systems. The ISPA tools mentioned above have also been developed to promote collaborative approaches across different agencies. As a respondent to the ISPA review survey put it: "As a result of participation in the ISPA process, the development partners were talking the same language; and we had aligned messages to government" (McCord 2020, p.43). However, beyond the establishment of joint diagnostics, the need to identify priorities for the progressive realization of the human right to social security, including through the establishment of nationally defined SPFs, can lead to conflicting policy recommendations from different agencies at the country level. There is still a need to build a common understanding and vision through shared definitions drawing on existing frameworks, while fully recognizing the diversity of specific country contexts and the importance of tailoring interventions to those particular circumstances.

> "Social protection can act as an 'open docking station' around which agencies and objectives can converge."
>
> ▶ **Robert Piper,** UNDCO

Improved collaboration at the country level is important for various reasons. First, better collaboration will improve outcomes: together we are stronger, and collaboration will maximize the complementarities of the roles and capacities of various agencies to increase their joint impact (see box 15). The SDGs are meant to be implemented by governments and national stakeholders, but it is the UN that is expected to provide robust, coherent, efficient and sustainable support on that path. This requires action to unify messages towards common partners, including governments, social partners, CSOs, community-based organizations and the private sector, among others. Speaking with one voice will increase the credibility and impact of the UN system. Efforts to help countries to improve the coordination of their social protection

interventions can succeed only if UN agencies coordinate their work on social protection. We have to offer a consolidated UN perspective/orientation on social protection to the various government departments with which agencies deal (ministries of labour, social development, health, education, family affairs and agriculture), all of which have different UN partners and do not necessarily work together on a continuous basis and towards coherent outcomes. It is often difficult to gain access to the ministry of finance, a key department that mainly interacts with the IFIs; this is one of the reasons why collaboration with the IFIs is critically important for the UN system in order to achieve better coordination within the social protection sector.

Second, collaboration is also important in the context of reform to the United Nations Development System (UNDS) that emphasizes the need for stronger coordination, reflected in new policies such as the "second generation of UNCTs" and a stronger convening role for the UNRC, and the transition from UNDAFs to UNSDCFs. In addition to defining accountability and management roles, collaboration should also lead to agreement on a certain division of labour. When a joint approach is developed, it forms the basis for coordination among different agencies focusing on specific populations or topics (such as children, rural populations or workers, or on cross-cutting issues such as gender), thereby facilitating concerted efforts to achieve stronger results. Collaboration can also increase efficiency by avoiding duplication and improving administrative flows, for example in the allocation of contracts.

Supporting the development of a national social protection strategy (for example, using the ABND/SPPOT methodology) can be a promising way to overcome fragmentation and provide coherent policy advice on social protection. Once adopted, nationally owned social protection strategies should be the key source of guidance shaping UN collaboration approaches to support national efforts in strengthening social protection systems.

The involvement of the UNRC is important to ensure that the joint work reaches beyond the purview of any technical ministry (such as the ministry of labour, social affairs or health) – and therefore any individual UN agency – and is placed at a higher level (such as that of the ministry of planning or prime minister's office). This also ensures that more political support is mobilized for social protection. *Involving UNRCs*, as well as regional directors of the agencies, to agree on common directions is of critical importance.

Gamale Akira Babosy, 17, auto mechanic after receiving training at the CFTPS Center in Diego, Madagascar, 2017. © Marcel Crozet/ILO

▶ Box 15. Harnessing individual agencies' comparative advantages to build synergies and complementarity between social protection, care and macroeconomic policies to strengthen gender equality impacts

As part of their joint global programme entitled "Promoting Decent Employment for Women through Inclusive Growth Policies and Investments in the Care Economy", the ILO and UN Women led the development of applied policy tools to strengthen the capacity of policymakers by linking women's employment, the care economy, social protection and macroeconomic policies in the context of COVID-19 (Fontana 2021).

Using two policy tools on employment and the economic response, UN Women and the ILO, in partnership with the governments of Ethiopia and Nepal, undertook an assessment of each Government's COVID-19 response, which identified women's employment and access to social protection as two major areas of intervention. In both countries women are disproportionately represented in informal employment; therefore, de-linking access to social protection from formal employment was highlighted as a key policy objective to extend women's access to social protection. Mechanisms to create fiscal space to finance social protection were identified, and advocacy efforts continue to make the case for expanding not only the pool of beneficiaries but also the forms of options available.

This partnership, currently being implemented in Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal and Palestine, is an important initiative within the UNSG's framework for immediate socio-economic responses to COVID-19 (UN 2020b) and demonstrates how the UN is working towards a gender-equitable future in critical times.

Source: UN Women.

In some countries, a mapping of actions by and existing collaborations of UN agencies was a useful starting-point for developing an approach to UN collaboration on social protection (identifying who works on what with whom, the level/quality of collaboration and so on) and highlighting best practices. This helps to define the respective agencies' roles in the country, to coordinate them better and to enable them to speak with one voice (in the form of one representative) to the Government and other partners at the country level. This presupposes their being transparent and open to other non-UN agencies.

UN results and thematic working groups, at both regional and country levels, facilitate coordination and create synergies, and thereby help to avoid duplication of effort. At the regional level, frameworks that are pertinent for the countries of a particular region and are aligned with the various social protection legacies and cultures, as well as systemic issues characteristic of the region (such as low labour market participation of women, youth unemployment, high informality, ageing societies, migrations and forced displacements, natural disasters). At the country level, joint approaches will avoid each agency or development partner developing its own social protection framework, thereby again avoiding both duplication and a lack of coordination. In developing both regional and national frameworks, generic frameworks such as the ISPA tools can serve as a useful starting-point.

Common country assessments (CCAs) and UNSDCFs are the key frameworks in which agreed approaches should be anchored. It is important that the social protection approaches integrated into these frameworks adhere to the core principles of the UN system: those of human rights, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and international social security standards, especially the ILO's Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), and Recommendation No. 202. Advocacy for

social protection at the global level has been very successful over the past two decades (as reflected in initiatives such as the SPF-I, SPIAC-B, USP2030, UHC2030 and P4H), not least because of the recurring crises of this period and the importance of social protection as a policy tool for managing them and accelerating recovery. However, this has not yet translated into sufficient action. While the number of technical support activities and the scale of financial resources allocated to social protection have increased, in their current form both are still far from sufficient to meet the needs. Investment in broader social protection lags behind efforts on universal health coverage in many countries, as reflected in the low coverage rate for these guarantees. Furthermore, other policy areas still receive far larger volumes of financing and attention. To achieve greater policy salience for social protection at the national level, there is a need both to strengthen technical capacities in the field and to give the issue greater political visibility.

Strengthening national social protection systems at the country level through joint UN efforts requires both technical expertise and technical authority within the UN system as well as stronger expertise in national public administrations. Technical expertise on various aspects of social protection policy planning, design and implementation exists across the UN system and needs to be pooled to present a coherent and consistent offer to national counterparts.

The example of the JP in Malawi also shows how a joint effort by various agencies enables a large range of issues to be addressed, from financing to food security, strengthening delivery capacities and shock-responsiveness, in a coherent manner (see box 16).

▶ Box 16. Social protection in Malawi: Accelerating inclusive progress towards the SDGs

The JP funded by the Joint SDG Fund has leveraged the expertise of the three implementing UN agencies to enable its targets to be reached by February 2022. UNICEF, the WFP and the ILO have in-country and regional expertise in providing direct social protection system implementation and technical assistance, including on SRSP, financing, systems strengthening and policy development. The JP actively coordinates with several ministries – those of finance, economic planning and development and public sector reform, gender, community development, social welfare and the Department of Disaster Management Affairs – which are the primary stakeholders for this joint programme.

The JP provided a basis for systemic adaptations to the Malawi social protection system, enhanced knowledge management, provided targeted capacity strengthening, and leveraged the social protection system to meet heightened food needs during the annual lean season while providing technical assistance to the Government. Moreover, the JP completed several crucial analyses of social protection financing that will serve as foundational tools and evidence, providing a basis on which the Government can increase spending efficiency and sustainability of spending for social protection programmes. The JP had many important impacts. The following are a selection of these:

- It enabled the Government to leverage the social protection system to reach heightened food needs over the 2020–21 lean season, resulting in the extension of both the transfer value and the coverage of assistance to reach 6,386 food-insecure households by the end of 2021, creating linkages and coordination between the humanitarian and social protection sectors, and ensuring that future emergency food assistance is provided by leveraging the social protection system, where applicable and appropriate.

▶ Continues...

- It also enabled the Government and implementing partners to develop standard operating procedures providing practical mechanisms for implementing horizontal expansion of existing social protection cash transfer (SPCT) programmes under an SRSP approach, enabling future investments in this to be promoted within a single integrated and coherent operational vision within which appropriate mechanisms are embedded to ensure transparency, accountability and meaningful participation of the beneficiaries.
- The JP is also contributing to conceptualizing, operationalizing and improving the performance of existing social protection delivery systems, including for use in response to shocks. For instance, it has helped the Government to identify potential options for keeping Malawi's national registry (the Unified Beneficiary Registry) regularly updated, and expanding the opportunities for the use of existing systems such as the management information systems for the SCTP and for emergencies.
- It contributed to assisting the Government to increase the share of the budget allocated to social protection and undertake measures to improve efficiency and sustainability of spending through progress towards a financing strategy.
- It contributed to ensuring that the social protection system is more comprehensive and integrated through the review, updating and strengthening of the existing policy framework (the 2012 National Social Support Policy), which will define and streamline the measures and systems that are essential to enhance protection throughout all stages of life, with due attention to women and marginalized groups. This also includes support in designing new schemes, specifically an old-age pension scheme that is expected to support more than 600,000 people aged 65 and above.
- It ensured the coherence and quality of the COVID-19 cash response. In collaboration with the Unified Beneficiary Registry, the JP supported the collection of data to be used for crisis intervention and future programming, and ensured its integration with the relevant management information systems, such as the COVID-19 Urban Cash Intervention. It also contributed to enhancing the quality of the COVID-19 cash response by providing technical and operational support on grievance and redress mechanisms, and to a call centre for the management of complaints. In line with the humanitarian–development nexus, these emergency structures developed for the COVID-19 response are being supported to develop into permanent features of the national social protection system that can be leveraged in response to emergencies.

The JP attempted to holistically address operational, financial and policy framework gaps through its three interlinked components. However, challenges cannot be addressed in silos. The way the JP was designed contributed to providing a platform whereby the Government, UN agencies and relevant stakeholders worked together in a coordinated, collaborative manner, leveraging existing structures and investments and avoiding duplications of effort, thereby highlighting the value-added aspect to the PUNOs' coordinated approach. Moreover, while the JP has provided technical assistance in supporting the Government's commitments to reform, structural changes require a longer period to produce effective results. Consequently, the JP would have benefited from a longer lifespan to yield more tangible results, especially when taking into account the changes to the JP required by the pandemic.

Source: UN Women.

A construction worker finishes painting a wall in Filinvest, Muntinlupa City, Philippines, 2011. © Bobot Go/ILO

Collaboration may also require the development of strategies for engagement between residential and non-residential UN agencies with relevant expertise. UN agencies differ in their presence on the ground; some have an extensive presence on social protection across contexts, while some do not have a strong network of country offices – and, even where those are present, may not have social protection experts in all of them. Expertise is often clustered in regional or subregional offices. Inter-agency technical advisory services for a country may therefore require coordination with non-residential UN agencies. While this further complicates workflows and collaborative arrangements, it pays off in terms of improved quality of outputs. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that remote collaboration is possible but requires new routines and working methods.

To facilitate UN collaboration on social protection, it will be important:

- *To have a common definition and language*. There is little consistency in how agencies use different terms and attributes: inclusive, adaptive, shock-responsive, resilient, and indeed universal social protection itself are not used coherently across the UN. Shared understandings of concepts and definitions are not reliably transmitted to those working in the field and are not well reflected in UN common frameworks. This can be especially true in respect of terms used most or solely by humanitarian actors, an observation that emphasizes the importance of bridging the emergency–development divide. Universal health and social protection may also be sought as separate entities, undermining the linkages between them. As different governments/partners also may have context-specific use of terminologies, definitions and approaches, it may also be useful to have common operational definitions at country level to foster greater coherence in approaches.
- *To be more aware of the opportunities and limitations of each agency's mandate and approach to social protection*. This awareness could be improved by, among other things, identifying the social protection focus of and gaps in the different agencies' approaches. For instance, not all agencies necessarily address all groups or all risks, and each agency will have specific expertise for certain groups or risks, depending on its mandate and its capacity in a specific country.

- *To be aware that coordination requires time and resources, an appropriate budget allocation and a good understanding of the different governance structures (centralized, regional or decentralized) of different agencies*. While shared effort is rewarded with better results over the long term, it demands increased resources and staffing or comes at the cost of other activities, including implementation.
- *To continue to carry out joint country analytical work and build on this to support implementation*. For example, the CCA and UNSDCF of the UN at national level should be used for better collaboration on social protection.

The relative strengths and weaknesses of each agency in each country vary according to factors including staff size, specialist experience, consultant networks and so forth. This means that a specific coordination model that works in country A will not necessarily work in country B. Discussions and concepts resulting from successful inter-agency collaboration at the global level (SPIAC-B, USP2030, SPF-I) do not have correlates in the field. Strong, clearly defined leadership by selected lead agencies, with agreed roles for each agency, has worked well where consensus among the participating agencies could be reached. It will therefore require idiosyncratic processes for each UNCT to agree on their social protection framework for engagement that fits their particular constellation and country context.

Advocacy and strategic partnerships at the national level are equally important. Not all countries have a designated lead for coordinating social protection matters; or it may be that this responsibility is assigned to a ministry that does not have the capacity to fulfil this function, such as the ministry of labour and social protection, or ministry of family affairs and social welfare. Having one line ministry fulfil the role of coordinating other line ministries is often difficult unless the coordination function sits at a higher level, for example with the ministry of finance or an entity directly attached to the president's or prime minister's office. Irrespective of the national structures in place, UN agencies need to identify strategic entry points to position social protection at the highest possible level. Joint UN action will be in a much better position to build strong coalitions at the national level to press for political change in favour of extending adequate and comprehensive social protection to all.

A further, and related, point is that strong advocacy for social protection also requires strong leadership. Joint UN work should therefore also include concerted efforts to strengthen both national capacities and existing global mechanisms that facilitate joint UN engagement – such as the UN Joint SDG Fund hosted by the UN Development Coordination Office (UNDCO) and operating at the country level through JPs – not just regarding technical social protection expertise but also regarding leadership and change management, in the context of broader reforms to the UNDS where UNRCs are expected to lead coherent engagement of UN agencies at the country level.

Engaging jointly with IFIs and other external actors to build stronger partnerships

Multilateral and bilateral development banks, as well as the IMF, the EU through its budget support and the OECD, are major players in supporting the development of countries' national social protection systems; they also influence national visions and stances on social protection through their counterparts in national ministries of economy, finance and planning, and sometimes others too (for example, in ministries of social affairs). While consensus and joint visions have emerged through partnerships such as SPIAC-B, USP2030 (co-chaired by the ILO and the World Bank) and UHC2030, the IFIs, EU, OECD and UN agencies do not always agree on the importance of social protection, its role in sustainable development and the form it should take. IFIs' approach may be programme-based; they have a stronger focus on the short term and are less engaged in long-term planning and support to countries, with potentially less focus on institutional change and systems-building. In some contexts, for example, the IMF's focus on macroeconomic stability and crisis mitigation stands in contrast to the equally important need for social spending to redistribute income, alleviate poverty and reduce inequality, thereby strengthening the fabric of society. A social protection system designed to ensure economic

stability will look very different and produce different results from a social protection system designed to realize the human right to social security and LNOB. Similarly, in striving towards universal health coverage, a system based on pooling of funds and risks looks different from one relying on private insurance and finance. Such differences in policy stances indicate a lack of policy coherence at the global level, send conflicting signals to national counterparts, can reorientate national priorities through budget support and conditionalities, and can undermine UN efforts to build a rights-based approach. It is therefore of crucial importance that the UN system engages more systematically with IFIs to forge common ground between these different perspectives.

In the past, reforms promoted by IFIs in some countries have led to social discontent among civil society actors and social partners, who are also core partners for the UN. The vision of the IFIs may be changing through approaches such as the IMF social spending floor (IMF 2019) and the forthcoming new social protection and labour strategy of the World Bank, the "Compass", though such change may not readily filter down to policy directives and conditionalities at the national level.

At the country level, any engagement with the IFIs should be aligned with the national development plans to which governments are committed, and with the UN development cooperation frameworks which set out the priority areas of work for the UN and other development partners. Global frameworks – such as the 2030 Agenda, the human rights framework and international social security standards – should serve as guidance for this engagement with the IFIs at country level, complemented by evidence-based discussions showing the concrete impacts of the different approaches (for example, pension privatization versus parametric reforms, narrowly targeted safety nets versus categorical coverage, private health insurance and user fees versus pooling of risks and resource).

When engaging with IFIs, it is important to be aware of and take into consideration institutional and structural differences. IFIs shape their financial and policy support, and the conditionalities applying to it, through missions despatched from headquarters (HQ), whereas most UN work takes place at the country level, in some cases with support from regional offices or headquarters. HQ-driven country operations risk creating an HQ-centric vision that is not informed by country-level reality. Collaboration structures should ensure that all relevant colleagues can be included, whether or not they are present in the country, and that missions' terms of reference are shared with all partners well in advance. One avenue for exploration might be the creation of incentives for such collaboration (see box 17), for example through terms of reference and performance evaluations for mission chiefs and UNRCs/UNCTs, as well as social protection experts of UN agencies. Another such avenue could be engagement with the IFIs through shared databases, joint analytical frameworks such as ISPA tools, and joint missions from HQ.

Home-based worker, Philippines. 2011. © E. Tuyay/ILO

▶ Box 17. Stronger UN collaboration through incentives: The example of the UN Joint SDG Fund

The UN Joint SDG Fund is a global pooled funding mechanism set up as part of the reform of the UNDS with the objective of accelerating progress towards the SDGs through the leadership of UNRCs and a "new generation" of UNCTs. The fund currently provides financing for 151 UN JPs approved in three global calls for proposals: Social Protection and LNOB, with 35 JPs launched in 2020; SDG Financing, with 90 JPs launched in 2020; and Small Island Developing States, with 26 JPs launched in early 2022.

JPs of the first portfolio, on Social Protection and LNOB, will end in late 2022, and important lessons from this work are already apparent:

- Providing funding for JPs creates incentives and institutionalizes structures facilitating collaboration among UN agencies. For example, JPs have entailed periodic meetings, routine structures for improved sharing of information, and improved communication and coordination structures.
- Efficiency gains were derived from the JPs through the organization of joint meetings, field missions and assessments, as well as by developing and/or using common implementation tools.
- The intensified exchanges enhanced mutual understanding of different agencies' perspectives and approaches, and facilitated the identification of common ground for future joint work.
- The JPs improved intersectoral collaboration across agencies, thereby greatly enriching social protection interventions (for example, giving greater weight to the expertise held by FAO, UNFPA or UN Women in work on social protection).
- For the 79 country proposals that could not be financed, several UNCTs were fully dedicated to carrying out the work that had been jointly planned and decided to go ahead and implement the activities anyway, mobilizing other sources of finance.
- National counterparts greatly appreciate the coordinated and coherent support provided through the JPs.
- Participants in JPs also observed that joining forces improved their cooperation with other development partners, notably IFIs.
- Government coordination mechanisms were also strengthened with a more harmonized approach on the part of the UN system, improving accountability and transparency.

Source: Joint SDG Fund 2021.

The concrete modalities for engagement with the IFIs as joint UN will differ according to country context, bearing in mind that the IMF takes a macro view of social spending as a whole (covering education and health as well as social protection) and its connection with employment and other sectors, rather than discussing specific social protection schemes or programmes. The UN position would therefore also have to pursue a broad systems approach to social protection and related policy areas. In the Arab region, efforts are under way to jointly strengthen this cooperation as a means to prevent conflicts, address fragility and promote stability. As a first step, following up on the UN Regional Monthly Review on Social Protection, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), UNDCO and UNDP, in collaboration with the regional IBC on social protection, have prepared a survey to solicit feedback from UNRCs in the region on existing programmes and partnerships with IFIs on social

protection, covering the type of partnerships they would like to see strengthened, the challenges and gaps they see in building such partnerships, and the support they would need to address them. The results of the survey are expected to inform further action.

Concrete collaboration with IFIs through joint assessments, policy advice on social protection reforms or INFFs are important for unblocking bottlenecks and finding common ground. In Belize, for instance, the Social Protection ABND involved the ILO, UNICEF and World Bank, each agency taking responsibility for a share of the assessment and collaborating on the development of joint recommendations. WHO and World Bank engagement in joint focus and monitoring of UHC and reduction of out of pocket expenditure shows potential for change through sustained efforts. With the UN Joint SDG Fund's support, the UNDP together with 17 other UN agencies and the EU have supported the development and implementation of INFFs in 71 countries, and supported ministries in 43 countries to conduct development finance assessments.[12] The INFFs have expanded the horizon of most UN agencies, involving as they do ministries of finance and planning as well as technical ministries and social security agencies. In Zambia, however, IFIs have to date not been much involved in the INFF process. In Jamaica, the Government put the ILO and the World Bank in competition for the provision of proposals on an important policy reform on unemployment insurance; the two agencies provided complementary advice, which served to demonstrate their respective added value. For governments, it is important to secure a constructive and collaborative environment, and it is, therefore, important – when possible – to try to find complementarity with the IFIs. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the management information system developed by the WHO was used by both the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank for the monitoring of their respective performance-based loans.

Concrete avenues through which to pursue joint work with the IFIs could include the following:

- The development (currently under way) and application of a new ISPA tool on financing social protection may be a good opportunity to increase understanding among UN agencies of their respective added value on financing social protection and encourage them to engage as one in collaborating with IFIs.
- The IMF's interest in the multiplier effects of social protection and active labour market policies on the economy could be a good entry-point for collaboration between the UN and IMF.
- Across the UN system, work on the INFF framework has intensified, and this can be used to structure a national dialogue on policy priorities, financing needs and ways to create more fiscal space for social protection. It is important for all UN agencies to participate in the INFFs and to ensure more participation from IFIs, given the role of the latter in supporting national budgets and shaping governments' policy priorities.
- More capacity-building of national counterparts is needed to frame a long-term vision for the development of social protection, to enable appropriate policy decisions to be taken to achieve this vision, and to ensure that such commitments are respected by seeking the necessary related financing for them, including when engaging with ministries of finance and/or IFIs. The ratification of social security Conventions (such as Convention No. 102) could be useful in that respect and should be promoted as part of UN collaboration on social protection.
- In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the IMF allocated US$650 billion special drawing rights, of which a share has been made available to LMICs either directly or through a reallocation from developed countries. UN agencies could provide technical assistance/advice to support the contribution of these reallocations to higher investments in national social protection systems.

[12] See Integrated National Financing Framework Knowledge Platform.

Streets of Antsirabe, Madagascar. 2017. © Marcel Crozet/ILO

- Social insurance schemes, which can be self-sustaining and are based on tripartite social dialogue, are in principle less threatened by austerity measures; the expansion of such institutions could be further explored and promoted by the UN. In contrast, IFI approaches tend to be critical of social insurance as a central pillar of the social protection system owing to its alleged, though empirically unsubstantiated, adverse impacts on employment creation and informality.
- It is important to include workers' and employers' representatives in collaborations with IFIs to ensure that their views are taken into consideration and their concerns addressed. However, this requires strengthening their capacities and engagement so that they can meaningfully participate in the process (as happened, for example, in Uzbekistan: see box 9).
- Parts of the UN may lack experience and expertise in providing concrete policy guidance on curbing illicit financial flows or reforming tax structures (for example, income tax, or earmarked taxation for social protection), and could perhaps learn from the IFIs' expertise on this. However, moves in this direction have begun to occur. To address this gap, Tax Inspectors Without Borders, launched in July 2015 by the OECD and UNDP, is an innovative means of addressing widespread tax avoidance by multinational enterprises in developing countries.[13]
- As IFIs begin to finance social transfers directly, particularly in humanitarian and fragile contexts, UN agencies can formulate joint approaches to partnership with these institutions to ensure that IFI funds are able to be delivered in line with existing coordination mechanisms and are aligned with ongoing UN humanitarian operations.

[13] See Tax Inspectors without Borders.

Improving resource mobilization and reducing competition

There are huge financing gaps to be filled to ensure adequate social protection systems for all. This applies not just to national social protection systems themselves, but also to development cooperation for longer-term, systematic and consistent support to countries to enable them to plan, design and implement social protection systems that are adequate, comprehensive, sustainable and gender-transformative, and that protect all members of society. This scarcity of resources explains why UN agencies often compete for funding, while in fact these funding constraints make collaboration even more important. How can the UN system move from competition to joint resource mobilization?

One important element in the creation of an effective UN collaboration in this area would be the establishment of stronger incentive structures that reward collaboration and discourage competition, and the recruitment of staff who have both leadership abilities and strong skills in collaboration. Ensuring that internal human resources policies and promotion policies reward cross-agency collaboration can support this. Prominent here is the role of UNRCs at country level, within the broader role of UNDCO in UN collaboration and capacity development for the "second generation" of UNCTs. Joint work needs to be made more visible and brought to the highest levels. Financing mechanisms conditioned on joint approaches provide incentives for such work. Examples include the UN Joint SDG Fund's funding for JPs on integrated social protection and social protection financing, amounting to over US$100 million, and other financing including through the European Commission programme on Improving synergies between social protection and public finance management.

Reducing competition and engaging in joint resource mobilization is important to achieve progress towards the SDGs and maximize the impact of UN system work. This is directly relevant for SDG 17 on strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development, but also for the achievement of all the other goals, as well as for implementing UN reform more effectively and efficiently. While the UNRC has the formal role in leading resource mobilization and coordination of the UNCT – according to the consolidated version of the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) (UNSDG 2021) adopted on 15 September 2021 – it is also a reality that all UN agencies of course also interact individually with donors and have their own personal relationships and networks of contacts.

A lack of cooperation or even competition between agencies also carries a reputational risk and constitutes an image problem for the UN, as competition is typically perceived as counterproductive. Moreover, poor cooperation is also potentially burdensome for the partner country. In times of decreasing bilateral funding and an increasing number of calls for inter-agency proposals, the UN needs to put in place modalities that foster and create incentives for collaboration, for example by highlighting combined comparative advantages as early as the resource mobilization stage, before detailed programming. This is particularly important in fragile countries and compounded crises, and in country contexts where several agencies have strong social protection capacities on the ground.

Joint UN work on social protection in general, and on joint resource mobilization in particular, requires UN agencies to have a common understanding of social protection in general as well as in specific country contexts. It also requires that a mapping of current and planned social protection interventions at the country level be carried out. This mapping can then facilitate the identification of areas of collaboration for which a joint funding request can be elaborated to ensure that actions are driven by social protection needs in the country. This can have the advantage of demonstrating to donors the extent to which UN action is well coordinated, building on the respective strengths and areas of expertise of different agencies under the leadership of the RC. Such a joint approach would automatically reduce competition (see box 18).

▶ Box 18. Eleven years of delivering the SPF together in Mozambique

In Mozambique, the ILO, UNICEF and WFP have been working together since 2011 providing harmonized technical advice to the Government to support programme implementation and improvement of the legal framework to strengthen the social protection system in the country. Through the "UN Joint Programme on Social Protection in Mozambique", established in 2011 with funding from Sweden, later also supported by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Government of the Netherlands, the three sister UN agencies had provided effectively coordinated and complementary support in the context of the Delivering as One Initiative to consolidate the SPF. UN joint support is provided at three levels, and the three agencies have complementary and mutually reinforcing roles. At policy level:

- the ILO has played a key role in supporting the policy design process and costing policy options, resulting in the development of a comprehensive legal and policy framework for social protection;
- at the systems level, UNICEF's support has been instrumental in enhancing the managerial capacity of the Government through the development of a new business model, which includes new standard operating procedures related to targeting, payment, case management and monitoring of programme implementation;
- at implementation level, the WFP has played an important role in piloting alternative implementation mechanisms – such as payments on the basis of vouchers or bank cards – for the new public works programme (ILO, WFP and UNICEF 2015).

Source: ILO.

In countries where social protection sector reviews or systems analyses are already carried out, these can be good starting-points for planning joint UN work on social protection. Where these do not exist, such analyses could be carried out jointly. It is crucial that these should inform the common country assessment and become an integral part of the UNSDCF, because JPs will have to be fully aligned with both the framework and the joint workplans at output and outcome levels. As noted above, developing such a joint approach requires a strong convener, strong leadership and/or external incentives, such as the opportunity that the RC has with finance from the Joint SDG Fund to support the planning of joint work among agencies on social protection. The challenge lies in ensuring joint implementation once the resources have been mobilized and the work planning has been completed. In some JPs, agencies get together to secure the funding but then do not actually implement their plans jointly.

The UNRC and the dynamic in the UNCT play key roles in facilitating joint efforts, through close liaison with technical teams (in this case social protection technical working groups) to avoid competition and address unresolved disagreements at UNCT level so that they do not obtrude, or even become exacerbated, at the technical level. Strong leadership and guidance are important, as is the inclusion of social protection in the priorities of RCs and senior programme officers in the RC's office, which can help promote understanding of its functions at the country level. National development strategies and other agreed planning instruments, such as those reflected in jointly developed UNSDCFs, should be the decisive sources for such guidance and convergence. The reformed and strengthened RC system now also has a mandate to engage with social partners. In rare cases, competition can be fruitful where it triggers a search for the best solutions in response to a request from the Government.

The UNRCs, supported by the UNRC's Office, also increasingly contribute to facilitating resource mobilization, in line with the MAF. Here, it is important to ensure awareness and technical understanding of social protection issues, which is often difficult to achieve among the multiplicity of topics competing for attention. Currently, joint resource mobilization is very much supply-driven (by donors, the UN and the international agenda). However, the pooled funding mechanism of the Joint SDG Fund has successfully given rise to JPs that are demand-driven, based on the UNSDCF, led by RCs and implemented jointly by UN agencies. Learning from these cases, we need to shift to more demand-driven resource mobilization, to respond better to countries' and populations' needs and to the priorities that UN agencies (jointly) identify – rather than relying on top-down agenda-setting, with topics selected according to geographic focus and scale/scope for instance.

> All UNCTs and UNRCs need to be literate in social protection.
>
> ▶ **Robert Piper,** UNDCO

Existing social protection sector working groups have proven important in many countries, offering an institutionalized structure for coordination and collaboration. Joint work has been successful where a particular undertaking did not start with drafting a proposal on a blank sheet but where the proposal was based on joint analytical work, inter-agency social protection assessments and/or a jointly organized national dialogue on social protection policy options. Such analysis helps UNCTs to decide to which call for proposals to respond, and informs prioritization regarding the interventions to be included in the proposal. Where donors make it clear that inter-agency proposals are preferred, agencies intending to apply will join forces to create a stronger proposal.

Strong leadership by UNRCs has often proved important to bring agencies together in collaboration on JPs. RCs play a crucial role through their convening power and ability to facilitate UNCT collaboration in such a way that each agency maximizes its comparative advantage and expertise. However, some technical decisions at UNCT level do not always lead to good outcomes – for example, where an attempt is made to merge two proposals that technically do not fit well together. JPs were also less successful if too many agencies (usually, over five) were involved.

From joint analytical work and capacity-building to joint recommendations, delivery or implementation, and to improved UN-wide policy messaging on social protection

In section 1 of this report, joint analysis and research were described as together constituting a core pillar of UN work, where collaboration seems to work well and produce fruitful results in the form of richer publications of better quality and higher credibility than single-agency reports. However, agencies sometimes derive very different policy recommendations from the same analysis, and joint diagnostics are not always followed by joint implementation. Contradictory policy advice to governments undermines the UN's credibility and diminishes the effectiveness and efficiency of individual interventions. This can also lead to a lack of the clarity in joint policy messaging on social protection that is critical for articulating a coherent set of social protection interventions. Below the discussion considers the options for ensuring joint recommendations, delivery or implementation, and consistency in UN-wide policy messaging on social protection.

Evidence should then be built on to inform action. For example, a range of JPs have commissioned gender impact assessments or sector reviews (see box 19) over past years, but it is unclear how far the findings and recommendations have informed programme implementation. A learning review should consider what factors lead to action following, for example, gender analyses of social protection systems.

▶ Box 19. JPs that have commissioned gender impact assessments or sector reviews with support from the Joint SDG Fund

Context-specific assessments of gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities alongside sector reviews that identify how well current social protection systems respond to those risks and vulnerabilities are an important starting-point for integrating gender into social protection. They can provide a baseline for monitoring progress on gender-responsive social protection going forward. Several JPs have undertaken such assessments.

Kenya: The JP has supported the Government to undertake a comprehensive gender assessment study of the social protection system in Kenya conducted in 2022. The study will assess the extent to which the social protection delivery systems generate gender-responsive data and indicators by sex, age and disability, and develops an investment case for gender-sensitive social protection in Kenya.

Lebanon: as part of the JP, UN Women has commenced a comprehensive baseline assessment of the social protection sector in Lebanon, which identifies gender gaps in all areas of national social protection and serves as an entry-point to a range of areas, while also providing gender-responsive recommendations. This analysis targets those left further behind, including vulnerable women, women working in the informal sector and rural areas, women with disabilities, and LGBTIQ groups.

Malawi: As part of the National Social Protection System review process, gender analysis will be included in the project appraisal document via an equality assessment including an examination on how the previous policy helped to empower women.

Nigeria: Several gender-related research questions were included in the 2020 diagnostic study on the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). The results showed that the NHIS could do a lot to improve its understanding of, and to address, gender-related challenges with regard to health and social health insurance. Under the SDG programme, the need for gender-aggregated and specific data was underlined throughout the project, which was able to support one of the social health insurance State-level agencies to work towards the adoption of openIMIS.

Thailand: Understanding that gender is an important element of the Social Protection Diagnostic Review, the JP commissioned Oxford Policy Management to develop a dedicated "Gender Impact Assessment of the Social Protection System in Thailand". The publication will identify barriers to promoting gender equality and women's/girls' empowerment through social protection, and will provide recommendations to improve the gender-sensitivity and gender-responsiveness of social protection policies in Thailand.

Source: UN Women.

Analysing the situation comprehensively from the different UN agencies' and national stakeholders' perspectives, and bringing in the different expertise of various agencies, can help all participants to grasp the full picture and to consider the full range of possible policy options. Such comprehensive analysis will be more convincing and can more easily generate consensus.

Being able to present joint recommendations and joint work planning for a coherent set of social protection interventions increases credibility *vis-à-vis* national stakeholders and donors. It also increases the effectiveness and efficiency of each project, if it is well integrated into an agreed, consistent and country-specific joint UN approach to social protection.

UNDAFs, sustainable development cooperation frameworks (SDCFs) and social protection sector working groups at the country level, or other joint dialogue mechanisms with governments – rather than bilateral channels – provide good starting-points for planning the joint implementation of social protection interventions. At the technical level, a broad range of tools exist that can be used jointly: these include, among others, ISPA tools, vulnerability assessment frameworks and the UN LNOB framework. Global frameworks that provide guidance and reflect a consensus among the international community – for example, the human rights framework and related social security standards, or the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – can also provide helpful guidance.

Joint analytical work confers credibility on UN work and policy advice. UNCTs should continue and strengthen joint analysis, including through joint evaluations of social protection programmes and the joint analytical frameworks available in, for example, the ISPA tools. Regional groups and IBCs are often important in fostering collaboration and also in disseminating analytical work, catalysing successful approaches and sharing lessons learnt.

Similarly, engaging in joint training and capacity-strengthening activities, both for national counterparts and for UN staff, can contribute to joint understanding and improved collaboration. UNCTs should therefore continue their joint capacity-building work, such as that carried out under the TRANSFORM initiative in Africa or by participation in the ITC ILO Social Security Academy and UN Staff College courses on social protection discussed above. Joint monitoring of progress on the SDGs can also help to strengthen convergence.

In order to arrive at joint recommendations on the basis of joint analytical work, it is important to be clear about how particular recommendations are derived from the available evidence. Where differences in perspectives exist, these are best elaborated explicitly, with the entire set of arguments for and against these competing approaches set out to enable decision-makers to arrive at a conscious choice for one or the other.

Fostering and supporting South–South learning through South–South cooperation and triangular

Joint analytical work confers credibility on UN work and policy advice

cooperation on social protection, including communities of practice, is an important part of the dialogue processes informing policymaking and implementation.

UNCTs have also had some good collaborative experiences by first agreeing on key concepts and objectives and then jointly issuing work to consultants. Collaboration can also work better where an agency-neutral leader animates the process; for example, if the Government exercises strong leadership.

In many countries, different agencies do not know what projects others are working on. Where information about social protection interventions is not exchanged systematically but only sporadically, for example through invitations to the launch of a report, it is often realized too late that there is much duplication in the work and a lot of scope for collaboration. This happens particularly if leadership is lacking and social protection sector working groups do not exist or do not function properly, and where differences in approaches, terminology and understandings of social protection prevail. Establishing routine processes for the exchange of information is also important, because even in the context of JPs with a common delivery framework, each agency typically reports on a different result and activities are not necessarily implemented jointly. Reliance on consultants for the work can sometimes further increase these difficulties. Collaboration is further hampered by the fact that agendas are often driven strongly by agencies' internal processes, often making it impossible to build consensus through compromise. A particular challenge arises for non-residential agencies, where specialists often cover more than a dozen countries in one region.

Ensuring clarity in joint communication on social protection at national, regional and global levels is of critical importance. Improved policy messaging is an important objective of UN collaboration for several reasons. First, clear messages will reduce

confusion. Many UN agencies feel empowered to work on social protection and link social protection to their respective mandates; this certainly enriches the work, but can also create dysfunctionality if key technical terms are adapted by each agency to its own objectives and are thus used differently across the UN system. For instance, there is still much confusion about the respective definitions of social protection and social security, with different agencies attaching different meanings to the terms. It is therefore important to agree on the definitions, given the differences outlined in box 11.

> Ensuring clarity in joint communication on social protection at national, regional and global levels is of critical importance

Second, improved policy messaging can reduce misunderstandings. While we may agree on overall policy messages, such as the rights-based approach to social protection, the life-cycle approach, or the need to provide access to health and other social services, issues and misunderstandings may arise when we go into the details of policy formulation. For instance, some UN agencies do not include health protection in their social protection work, whereas international standards define sickness as one risk to be addressed through social protection measures.

Third, improved policy messaging can avoid fragmentation. Disagreement among UN agencies is counterproductive, as it may lead to a situation in which a national Government will pick and choose among policy options, leading to a fragmented policy response, instead of building a coherent system. In a context of scarcity, in respect of both domestic resources and international development financing, collaboration around a common and strategic move towards USP should take precedence over promoting the particular messages of different agencies.

Taxi boat docked at the harbor, Cairo, Egypt. 2008. © Marcel Crozet/ILO

A good example of effective joint policy messaging occurred with the successful articulation of the SPF-I. This success is explained by the fact that the initiative was based on a common concept (as defined in the *Manual and Strategic Framework for Joint UN Country Operations* (ILO and WHO with collaborating agencies and development partners 2009) that was understood and accepted by all participating UN agencies, and in respect of which each agency had a role to play. The design and implementation process of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions provides a renewed opportunity to develop a common road map on social protection as well as on informality, care and health, and financing.

While agreeing on joint policy messages is important, it is even more important to agree on a common objective (what do we as the UN want to achieve together) in line with or derived from national visions and strategies. Most of the effort around precise wording is effort wasted; that effort would be better focused on identifying the broad objective and actionable measures to achieve it that can be agreed across the UN system. In truth, it would be futile to try to change the policy messages of other UN agencies and development partners, because these messages are often developed through long internal negotiations and consensus-building processes and then approved by the agency's governance system – and, once adopted, are no longer negotiable. Once they are written into agencies' strategies, policies and standards, it is better to agree on the direction to take and actions needed to get there by using the full menu of available tools across the UN system. Fully resolving the tension over streamlining definitions may not be possible; and even if definitions could be streamlined, this would not mean all differences would automatically be overcome. Nevertheless, common ground can still be found, and improving collaboration further is both possible and desirable.

Furthermore, some degree of *flexibility* is needed to facilitate compromise. Policy messages cannot be straitjacketed; UN agencies need to have some scope to adjust them according to the particular country context, demand from national counterparts, and the ambition of providing a joint response to country requests. We need to be open and willing to negotiate positions (while being faithful to our red lines) and to seek and find innovative ways to address and overcome differences.

Maximizing impact by leveraging the UNCT/UNRC structure and SDCFs

As noted above, UNRCs play a crucial role through their convening power and ability to leverage UNCTs in such a way that each agency maximizes its comparative advantage and expertise. Collaboration requires close coordination, which can be time-consuming, cumbersome and resource-intensive yet worthwhile. By institutionalizing structures for coordination and joint approaches, while making maximum possible use of existing forums, mechanisms, platforms and tools,[14] the UNRC can contribute to reducing the opportunity costs of collaboration (See box 20 for an example of successful UN collaboration with a clear distribution of roles across UN agencies and the RCOs).

The RC plays a role in both policy formulation and resource mobilization for the UNCT in the context of the UNSDCF, through engaging with the Government, and in funding dialogue with donors and (particularly important for the ILO) social partners. It is therefore important to think strategically about how social protection can be positioned prominently in RC engagement with national counterparts. Given that social protection is just one among many issues on the development agenda competing for attention, the RC is in a position to raise its profile and to identify the strategic entry-points for social protection interventions at the country level. RCs also have an important role to play in connecting agencies to important developments at the global level. For example, they can ensure that global approaches (for example on SPFs) are integrated into CCAs and UNSDCFs.

[14] These include, among others, CCAs, the UNSDCF, UNCT configurations, joint work plans, UN Info, results groups, thematic groups, annual results reports and joint annual performance reviews.

The central instrument for planning and implementation of UN development activities at country level is the UNSDCF, with a CCA at its core. Through this, the UNCT develops a common vision, identifies synergies to be leveraged and policy trade-offs to be addressed, and avoids competition. This framework should create a common understanding of the country context, and collectively address the identified challenges and opportunities based on the comparative advantage of each agency and the UNCT as a whole.

Personal relationships are important and can sometimes help to overcome administrative difficulties in UN collaboration. Joint tools such as ABND/SPPOT are effective and contribute to elevating social protection to higher-level political decision-making. Inviting the RC to represent the UN agencies in these political processes at key points as well as to address events hosted by agencies on social protection is central to creating momentum for change.

> Let's not be porcupines with sharp quills quick to go up and separate us, but focus on our shared goals and work better together.

▶ **David Stewart,** UNICEF

▶ Box 20. Accelerating Viet Nam's transition towards inclusive and integrated social protection through the JP

The JP in Vietnam (2019–22), funded by the Joint SDG Fund, is focusing on supporting reform of the social protection system towards more integrated, inclusive, shock-responsive and universal social insurance coverage, including families with children, women informal workers and the elderly.

The JP is led and convened by the ILO and involves UNICEF, UNFPA and the UNDP with implementing partners from the Government. The RC provides overall leadership with an RCO focal point to support the coordination of the JP at the strategic level, including joint advocacy, monitoring and external outreach, while PUNOs are responsible for implementation and providing inputs to the JP reporting according to targeted outcomes.

By December 2021, the JP had achieved almost all the targets it set itself, including (1) an integrated multi-tiered social protection system using the rights-based and life-cycle approach; (2) extension of the social care services system; and (3) an effective e-system for social protection service delivery. Overall, the JP efforts reached just over 32 million people, including 15.5 million women, 600,000 pregnant women, 3.2 million children, 1.1 million persons with disabilities, 1.9 million older persons, and 1.08 million unemployed persons.

The JP has helped accomplish concrete policy change in the following ways:

- The adoption of a new law on 1 July 2021 extending social assistance. This has increased the coverage of the non-contributory social pension by reducing the eligibility age from 80 to 75, meaning an additional 204,000 vulnerable people will receive social assistance; also, more than 3.4 million people will benefit from a 33 per cent increase in benefit.

▶ Continues...

- The JP supported the Government to finalize revision of the Policy Orientation for Social Insurance Law, incorporating several policy changes. This also included a multi-tier child benefit (comprising contributory and non-contributory components).
- In response to COVID-19, the JP was reprogrammed in mid-2020 to focus on supporting the Government in explicitly incorporating responses to shocks in its design and implementation. For example, the JP helped formulate the Government's COVID-19 package, which provided 14 million vulnerable people with cash support to help address lost incomes, sustain their livelihoods and businesses, and reduce the risk of poverty. It also helped to make sure that the second COVID-19 stimulus package (amounting to VND 26 trillion) focused on ensuring social protection and promoting economic recovery, production and business stabilization, and that the third package of VND 33 trillion provided income support for more than 12.4 million workers through the unemployment insurance fund.

Key lessons learnt from the JP regarding UN collaboration included that better synergies and complementarities can be gained from shared expertise and integrated approaches, and this interaction can promote shared understanding and learning for participating agencies. A joint approach is also more likely to contribute to sustainable results, providing opportunities for multi-sectoral responses and addressing multi-dimensional vulnerabilities. Moreover, UN collaboration is beneficial for programming as a means to ensure the efficient use of limited resources to achieve the SDGs.

The challenge for UN collaboration is that it can be more time-consuming to engage government counterparts to accommodate a JP approach, given the fragmentation of authorities and national institutional arrangements. Nevertheless, it is precisely the intention of JPs to help reduce such fragmentation and support governments in producing more coherent policies.

Source: Joint SDG Fund

Photo: © Mirza A. / ILO

Conclusion: Possible way(s) forward

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has elevated and revalorized the importance of social protection, has prised open a policy window for enhanced One UN collaboration, and renewed impetus for the UN to pursue joint engagement on social protection – as illustrated by the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 and the UNSG's instigation of the Global Accelerator. Nonetheless, this remains an uncertain moment, and while there is greater awareness of the critical importance of social protection, potential fiscal consolidation on the horizon may hamper the goal of supporting our primary constituents – the countries themselves. Countries that request help from the UN to design and implement national policies deserve high-quality and unified UN support in doing so. The Global Accelerator offers a unique opportunity to build a new, strong and coherent UN narrative to organize our efforts to move towards universal social protection as a shared mandate, and as part of an integrated policy response. The various exchanges, workshops, interviews, surveys and other inputs on which this publication draws give a strong indication of the central elements of such a renewed joint narrative: namely, a UN system that supports countries in building strong and coherent social protection systems, based on a national consensus achieved through social dialogue and participation, composed of programmes anchored in law, with strong delivery structures, that provide adequate benefit levels and comprehensive coverage of life-cycle risks, are able to adapt to co-variate risks, are sustainably financed, and build on both non-contributory and social insurance mechanisms to cover the whole population.

> The COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the profile and attention paid to social protection.
>
> ▶ **Mansour Ndiaye,** UNDP.

However, the preceding sections illustrate that there are substantial challenges still to be overcome if the UN is genuinely to act as in a unified manner on social protection. The key challenge lies in the involvement of many agencies with different mandates competing for governments' attention and limited national and international resources. Agencies pursue different policies and have different understandings of what social protection is, and what it can and should do. Nonetheless, there is still considerable room for collaboration and scope for overcoming, if not eliminating, these imperfections. Possible ideas of how these collaboration gaps can be closed are outlined below.

1. A first key concern that is also being addressed by current work on UN reform is to better mainstream human rights instruments and other international standards adopted by the standard-setting UN agencies into the work of operational agencies. Doing this, for example through better training of the staff of those agencies in international standards, will generate greater coherence across the UN system, based on our common values and principles. UN reform has also addressed the role of UNRCs, including their important convening and leadership role, which is key for forging coherence and a common vision for social protection in UNCTs that reflects the realities of each particular country. This in turn depends on sound data and research to build a strong shared evidence base.

2. Second, it is important to build on existing structures to develop joint UN approaches. At country level, UNSDCFs, MAPs missions, sectoral working groups and national development policy planning documents are important elements in building joint UN social protection work based on country ownership and national priorities. Measures and actions for universal health coverage could be used better in support of social protection, especially where support for broader social protection is limited.

3. The UN needs to improve its collaboration not only internally but also with external actors in the development arena, in particular the IFIs, which play an important role in influencing domestic resource mobilization for social protection. Similarly, close relationships with the EU and OECD are important in the light of their roles as donors and think tanks influencing the global development discourse. The UN should also keep up its engagement with CSOs representing people concerned and in particular ensure that social partners are fully involved in social protection interventions.

4. Close engagement of UNDCO and UNSDG member entities at the global and regional levels, and UNRCs and UNCTs at the country level, is essential to enhance collaboration on social protection and leverage the Joint SDG Fund as the existing global structure that facilitates country-level joint programmes in social protection that are spearheaded by the UNRCs, based on UNSDCFs and led by national governments.

5. A series of joint gender-responsive and disability-inclusive guidance and operational documents should be developed for UN collaboration on social protection; this would increase efficiency, avoid duplication of effort and maximize impact. It could include, for example, the following elements:

a. a joint directory of "who is who" in social protection, including social protection specialists with expertise on gender and disability;

b. a guidance document for RCs that clearly spells out the normative framework and basic tenets for UN collaboration on social protection work across the UN system;

c. a joint evidence/data/research repertoire from all agencies, building on the socialprotection.org platform;

d. identification of gaps in data and knowledge to push the social protection agenda forward at all levels and focus continued investment in joint research to close these gaps;

e. a set of joint key messages around social protection at global, regional and country levels, building on the USP2030 Call to Action (USP2030 2019);

f. a joint position on the international financing mechanism for social protection currently being developed as part of the work on the Accelerator, with subsequent joint engagement with donors and IFIs;

g. joint training and capacity-strengthening strategies on gender-responsive and disability-inclusive social protection for national constituents and UN staff at global, regional and country levels;

h. a gender-responsive and disability-inclusive model of intervention on social protection, building on ISPA tools and including a theory of change, key objectives, activities and indicators of success, as well as key partners.

The current work on the design and implementation of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, as well as continuous work as part of the SPIAC-B and USP2030 on the development of joint assessment tools and position publications, will help implement several of these recommendations and concrete next steps.

Annexes

▶ Annex 1: Timeline of key steps in the evolution of inter-agency work on social protection systems, including floors

A core concept underpinning the work of UN agencies is the SPF and the associated systems approach, which has existed for nearly two decades now. Outlined below are a number of milestones in the SPF's evolution, set out chronologically from its genesis to its elaboration as an international instrument, and currently as a core component of the UN's COVID-19 response plan.

▶ 2003–04

The SPF concept has its origins in the ILO Social Protection Department's efforts around this time to calculate and cost a basic set of social security guarantees to demonstrate the affordability of SPFs for most countries (ILO 2010; Pal et al. 2005).

▶ 2008–09

When the global financial and economic crisis erupted, the UN system began to use the concept of the SPF at the institutional level to emphasize the urgency of a social protection response. Amid this crisis, the value of social protection as an economic stabilizer became widely and increasingly acknowledged, paving the way for the launch of the UN SPF-I in 2009 as one of nine UNCEB initiatives to respond to the crisis and accelerate recovery. A dedicated working group, co-chaired by the ILO and WHO, and working in collaboration with many other agencies – among them FAO, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP – agreed on a common definition of the SPF and a way of working to support SPFs at the national level. The group came up with the first inter-agency tool, called the Manual and Strategic Framework for Joint UN Country Operations (ILO and WHO with collaborating agencies and development partners 2009). On the basis of this manual, a One UN approach to social protection was progressively developed, which resulted in several concrete successes outlined below and above in box 1:

- making social protection a core pillar of UNDAFs;
- undertaking joint assessments of social protection systems to support the development of national social protection strategies;
- advocating that more domestic resources be allocated for social protection;
- promoting a systems approach where all existing programmes, ministries and other stakeholders coordinate policy design and implementation; and
- advancing a rights-based approach.

▶ 2009

The level of the UN's engagement with social protection started to increase considerably, as evidenced by the number of UNDAFs that prioritized its advancement. The UN SPF-I provided a framework for joint responses to a growing number of requests from countries including, among others, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and

Zambia. UN agencies developed capacity-building materials, toolkits, research products and position papers for UNCTs, providing entry-points for joint work on social protection.

A joint statement on advancing child-sensitive social protection (DfID et al. 2009) was issued to build greater consensus on the importance of this aspect of social protection among UN agencies (ILO, UNDP and UNICEF) and other development/civil society partners. It laid out the particular vulnerabilities that children and families face, and the impacts social protection can have on children even when not explicitly focused on them, and outlined a set of principles and approaches for undertaking child-sensitive social protection.

▶ 2010

The 2010 *State of Food Insecurity report* (FAO and WHO 2010) was one of the first inter-agency reports to highlight the linkages between social protection, humanitarian assistance and food security, particularly in protracted crises. The 2010 report marked a culmination of a shift in thinking over the preceding decade on the role of social protection systems in humanitarian response, and advocated investment in long-term social protection solutions to address the underlying causes of protracted crises.

In August 2010 an SPF advisory group was convened under the SPF-I to enhance global advocacy and provide guidance on the conceptual and policy aspects of the SPF. The work of the SPF Advisory Group, chaired by Michelle Bachelet, culminated in the flagship report Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization (Social Protection Floor Advisory Group 2011), which was presented to UNSG Ban Ki-Moon. This increased the visibility and diffusion of the SPF concept among world leaders and national policymakers (ILO 2011). Marshalling the growing evidence base behind the case for social protection, the report called for the implementation of SPFs and made concrete recommendations to advance the extension of social protection and accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs. The Rio Declaration on Social Determinants of Health underscored the importance of social protection for health (WHO 2011).

▶ 2012

Momentum continued to gather behind the SPF-I in the years following the financial crisis, and it was recognized that an instrument was needed to provide guidance to countries endeavouring to build their national SPFs. Consequently, at the ILO's 101st ILC in 2012, Recommendation No. 202 concerning national social protection floors was adopted with near unanimity (ILO 2012b). This is the principal – indeed, at present the only – international standard on building SPFs as a core element of national social protection systems. It provides a definition of the SPF, and elaborates several guiding principles for the design of national social protection systems, including floors. The UN's 2012 resolution on global health and foreign policy urged countries to accelerate progress towards universal health coverage (UN 2013).

UN agencies, IFIs and CSOs working on labour and human rights issues were involved in the discussions in the lead-up to and during the 2012 ILC. This resulted in the issuing of a statement calling for a strong SPF, which was signed by 60 CSOs. To further strengthen the momentum behind the SPF Recommendation and the vision captured in the statement, a Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) was formed (Theeman 2014). Today this coalition comprises over 100 CSOs and trade unions, and it continues to mobilize nationally and internationally for the realization of SPFs. The GCSPF developed the SPF Index as an easily and widely accessible and understandable monitoring tool, based on publicly available data, to provide an indication of the current state of progress in building SPFs in 160 countries (GCSPF 2020).

The work of the SPF-I also laid a foundation for intensifying UN and development partner collaboration at the global and regional levels. The results of this collaboration were manifest in the launch of SPIAC-B in 2012. SPIAC-B was formed as a response to a request from the G20 for international organizations to provide social protection financing and technical advisory services to developing countries to improve

the coordination of their efforts (G20 Development Working Group 2011). Co-chaired by the ILO and the World Bank, and comprising UN agencies, IFIs, government agencies and CSOs, SPIAC-B continues to be the key forum for inter-agency exchange on social protection today (SPIAC-B 2013).

▶ 2014

In March 2014, a joint letter was sent by Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator and Chair of the UNDG, and Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General, to encourage all UNRCs and UNCTs to maintain the momentum behind the establishment of SPFs; it also proposed concrete steps to help make social protection a reality for all, based on strengthened One UN teams working on SPFs.

▶ 2015

The UN SPF-I and the GCSPF contributed to raising the significance of social protection within the development agenda, at both global, regional and country levels. This was one of the reasons why in 2015 SPFs were adopted as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which prioritized social protection as a means to achieve several SDGs. Most prominently, SDG target 1.3 calls upon countries to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems for all, including floors, to reduce and prevent poverty, which is measured by indicator 1.3.1 (UN 2015).[16] Moreover, social protection is recognized as an essential lever in working towards other SDGs, contributing to multiple goals, in particular the elimination of poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), and the promotion of good health and well-being (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). In support of the universal SPF the target of the "health" goal, 3.8, focuses on universal health coverage. The ILO is the custodian of SDG indicator 1.3.1 and supports countries – including through UN joint work on strengthening national statistical capacities – to monitor social protection indicators through the Social Protection Monitor.

2015 was also the year that socialprotection.org was launched on the recommendation of the G20 that a global knowledge-sharing platform be established, building on existing mechanisms. This platform now acts as a centralized repository for development partners' knowledge products, as well as a collaborative network that promotes capacity-building, multi-stakeholder initiatives and regular events (see recommendation no. 54 in G20 Development Working Group 2011). Moreover, the *State of Food and Agriculture* 2015 report (FAO 2015), which explored the role of role of social protection and agriculture in breaking the cycle of rural poverty, was published during the same year.

▶ 2016

The Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030) was launched at a side event during the UN General Assembly meeting in New York in September 2016. This is a multi-stakeholder partnership that brings together governments, international and regional organizations, CSOs, social partners and other bodies, with the express mission of ensuring that anyone who needs social protection can access it without financial hardship (USP2030 2021). It strives to encourage development partners to assist with the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, in line with the SDGs. It also endeavors to encourage countries from the global South to work together, including through South–South and triangular cooperation, to achieve universal social protection.

Also in 2016, SPIAC-B presented a joint statement from its members entitled "Leaving No One Behind: How Linking Social Protection and Humanitarian Action Can Bridge the Development–Humanitarian Divide" at the World Humanitarian Summit (SPIAC-B 2015). As part of strengthening development–humanitarian

[16] This indicator refers to the proportion of the population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims, and the poor and vulnerable.

linkages, the joint statement called for the further expansion and strengthening of social protection systems to continue to address chronic vulnerabilities and to scale up the use of social protection as a means of responding to shocks and protracted crises. The statement also recommended that (1) humanitarian caseloads of chronically affected populations be moved into social protection programmes and systems; (2) greater, more predictable, innovative and risk-informed financial resources be invested across the full range of contexts, before, during and after crises; and (3) a coordinated operational and research agenda be created to strengthen the linkages between social protection and humanitarian actions. The summit led to agreement on a set of commitments made by humanitarian stakeholders called the "Grand Bargain". Working groups and subgroups were set up for each commitment to take the work forward. As a result of the earlier influence of SPIAC-B and the recognized need within the humanitarian sector, the Grand Bargain subgroup on linking humanitarian cash with social protection was created in 2018 as a common platform to bring humanitarian and social protection stakeholders together to promote dialogue and knowledge exchange, and influence policies and practices. Co-led by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), UNICEF and the UK FCDO, this subgroup includes other UN agencies, among them FAO, the UNHCR, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), UN Women and the WFP. With the dissolution of the Grand Bargain workstreams after the completion of their five-year term, the subgroup has become a working group of SPIAC-B, while the international health partnership was transformed into the UHC2030 multistakeholder partnership.

▶ 2017

In September 2017, the International Conference on Social Protection in Contexts of Fragility and Forced Displacement was organized by FAO, ILO, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, World Bank and donor agencies, bringing together governments, international and bilateral organizations, CSOs and researchers from 40 countries.[17] The topics of discussion ranged from the potential of social protection systems in crises to options for developing new social protection systems, and preserving and expanding the coverage of existing systems, in fragile contexts. The conference also explored the role of social protection in mitigating the impacts of mass displacement on host communities, while predictably meeting the needs of people displaced over the long term. The conference contributed to ongoing discussions on the role of social protection in humanitarian and development programming, and generated recommendations for implementing existing international commitments around LNOB and working towards common outcomes in humanitarian and development programming. Overall, the conference was successful in highlighting the need for strengthening the links between humanitarian and development stakeholders in supporting people who live in fragile and conflict-affected areas. Above all, it illustrated the important role that social protection can play in bridging the humanitarian–development divide.

▶ 2018–19

The UN Joint SDG Fund was created in 2018 to accelerate progress towards achievement of the SDGs through JPs that bring UN agencies together, under the leadership of UNRCs, with the aim of producing catalytic and transformative results based on integrated and multi-sectoral policy solutions and financing. It contributes to the UN reform programme by facilitating collaboration within UNCTs, drawing on the varied expertise of different UN agencies to break down silos and effect systemic change across sectors and policy areas, while ensuring national ownership and capacity development. In March 2019, the Joint SDG Fund launched its first call for proposals focusing on integrated social protection and LNOB, in recognition of the strong potential of social protection to accelerate progress across a wide range of SDGs and in the work of many different UN agencies. It also established cross-cutting priorities on gender by approving only those proposals that scored high on the Gender Marker. The focus on LNOB ensured direct contributions to the improvement of social protection for the most vulnerable, including

[17] For further details, see https://socialprotection.org/connect/communities/international-conference-social-protection-contexts-fragility-and-forced.

PwDs. From the total of 114 proposals, the top 35 proposals were selected and developed into fully fledged JPs with a total budget of US$101 million (including co-funding). The resulting portfolio included 16 UN entities and two regional economic commissions, along with over 600 local partners ranging from central and subnational governments, NGOs, trade unions and employers' associations to private-sector enterprises. The JPs were launched in 2020, and they are expected to deliver over 100 integrated policy solution to drive transformative results in 2022 (see boxes 4, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20 and 21).[18] The call for integrated social protection also presented an opportunity for participating UN agencies to identify their respective comparative advantages and the synergies in the area of social protection available from joint work, and to raise awareness among UNRCs of the role of social protection in catalysing development outcomes in the context of reforms to the UNDS. Within the second call for proposals, focusing on the enabling environment for SDG financing, the Joint SDG Fund invested US$87 million to support 62 joint programmes in 69 countries for co-creating SDG financing strategies in the context of (A coalition of agencies launched the Joint Statement: Towards Inclusive Social Protection Systems Supporting Full and Effective Participation of Persons with Disabilities. Moreover, concerns with the higher level of poverty among children than adults, and its impact on those children over the course of their subsequent lives, prompted the convening of an international conference on universal child benefits jointly by the ILO, the ODI and UNICEF; a related report was published by the ODI and UNICEF (2020) to explore the arguments and the evidence for universal child benefits, which informed debates on related reforms in a number of countries. Moreover, USP2030 organized a high-level conference, and the ILO celebrated its 100th anniversary with a Global Social Protection Week: Achieving SDG 1.3 and Universal Social Protection in the Context of the Future of Work. UN commitment to UHC was also enhanced through a high-level meeting and political declaration on the topic (UN 2019).

▶ 2020

In a similar fashion to the 2008–09 crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic catapulted social protection into the limelight as the primary front-line policy response used by governments to contend with the adverse impacts. The absence of income-stabilizing social protection was found to increase health inequities arising through COVID-19 (WHO 2021). In addition to national responses, social protection features as one of five central pillars of the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 (UN 2020b), in which universal social protection is assigned a pivotal role for accelerating recovery and addressing future challenges. Through the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Trust Fund, and the repurposing of at least 20 per cent of allocations to the UN Joint SDG Fund JPs, as well as other sources of funding, UNCTs worked together to provide an adequate response to the crisis, supporting national counterparts in strengthening aspects of their health systems, or creating or scaling up cash transfer programmes targeting (among others) workers in the informal economy, one of the groups that suffered most from the crisis. This was for instance the case in Timor-Leste (see box 21), as in many other countries where there was UN collaboration in implementing social protection responses to the pandemic (see box 22).

▶ 2021

UNCTs, headed by UNRCs with technical leadership from UNDP, have led the preparation of COVID-19 SEIAs in 97 countries, as well as UN socio-economic response plans (SERPs) that encompass social protection in 139 countries (see box 22).

The Food Systems Summit recognized the role of social protection for food systems transformation. More than 62 national pathways refer to social protection as a way to transform food systems, while three coalitions of actors have the promotion of social protection as a main objective: (1) the Social Protection Consortium for Food Systems Transformation under USP2030, involving FAO, ILO, UNICEF, WFP and World Bank, among other actors; (2) the Decent Work Living Income and Wages Coalition led by

[18] For more detailed information, see Annex 2 and the Joint SDG Fund website.

CARE, e International Fund for Agricultural Development and the ILO and supported by FAO, in which one pillar focuses on the extension of social protection and income security to agri-food systems workers; (3) the School Meals Coalition, led by the WFP and supported by a number of UN actors such as FAO. In addition, other coalitions, such as the Urban Food Systems Coalition and the humanitarian-development-peace Nexus Coalition, refer to social protection as one of their main tools to achieve their goals.

The 2021 ILC conducted the Second Recurrent Discussion on Social Protection and its 187 Member States, represented by governments and workers and employers' organizations, adopted a resolution to guide future work on social protection (ILO 2021a), strongly emphasizing the importance of multilateral collaboration to build universal social protection systems.

To further accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and build a better world for future generations, the UNSG's report Our Common Agenda calls for the establishment of universal SPFs, including universal health coverage (UN 2021b). To achieve universal social protection, and close the coverage and financing gaps, the UNSG launched the Global Accelerator in September (UN 2021a). This is a mechanism put in place by the UN system to achieve the SDGs relating to jobs and social protection. It focuses on three areas of work – integrated polices, sustainable financing and enhanced multilateral collaboration. A technical support facility will provide assistance and strengthen capacities across these three areas.

▶ Box 21: Country examples of joint UN support for social protection responses to the COVID-19 pandemic

Cambodia: UN collaboration was important in supporting the launch of a new cash transfer, covering around 600,000 households with impacts on over 2 million people. The swift response was powered by 1,700 tablets supplied to the Ministry of Planning that enabled the Government to move from a paper-based to an electronic system (UNDP and UNICEF).

Iran: A joint SERP supported the Government in reducing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and helped deliver social protection, reaching around 5,000 households including 4,390 rural women, female heads of households and 965 students through the Rapid Socio-Economic Response (RASER) programme of integrated social protection, in addition to 6,747 households with children from the lowest three deciles with a "cash plus" programme in selected provinces (UNDP and UNICEF).

Jordan: A new social protection response committee was formed to manage the response to the pandemic. An assessment followed by an emergency "cash plus" programme for informal workers and refugees was implemented. Efforts were made to support the system with effective delivery mechanisms to expand the national social protection programme (UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP).

Malawi: With funding from the Joint SDG Fund, concerted technical support was provided to the Government's "Crisis Interventions to Address the Effects of COVID-19 Master Plan", including the design and implementation of a new emergency urban cash transfer programme, needs assessments, targeting strategies, coordination, and grievance mechanisms to increase the transparency and accountability of the programme (ILO, UNICEF, WFP).

▶ Continues...

Mauritania: UN joint efforts funded by the Joint SDG Fund leveraged the El Maouna assistance programme, designed to respond to difficulties arising from the lean season in agriculture, quadrupling the number of beneficiaries that could be reached by the Government, enabling vulnerable groups to participate in decision-making and promoting gender equality (ILO, UNICEF, WFP).

Sahel: UN agencies worked together to embrace a twin-track approach – providing short-term relief and simultaneously engaging in longer-term systems-building – to help governments in Mali, Mauritania and Niger to scale up their social cash transfer programmes to support the populations most severely affected by the economic impact of COVID-19. Coverage gaps were filled through direct support, but with a view to incrementally strengthening social protection systems (UNICEF, WFP).

St Lucia: The need to integrate care more strongly into social protection systems has acquired even greater relevance and urgency with the COVID-19 crisis. In directing some of its activities towards addressing the pandemic, the joint programme funded by the Joint SDG Fund in the Eastern Caribbean conducted a study on the impact on front-line and essential workers in St Lucia, which confirmed that the care needs of these workers were not adequately addressed in the national response. The JP has also started a pilot scheme that links women beneficiaries of the St Lucia Public Assistance Programme to a range of public services, including childcare (ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, WFP). As a government pandemic response, an economic relief programme was introduced to provide emergency and temporary unemployment benefits for approximately 20,000 people. The lack of an unemployment scheme became conspicuously evident during the crisis, and consequently the JP is supporting the assessment of the financial sustainability of the social security scheme to see how these gaps in the social protection system can be addressed.

▶ Box 22. How SEIAs contribute to longer-term social protection systems-building

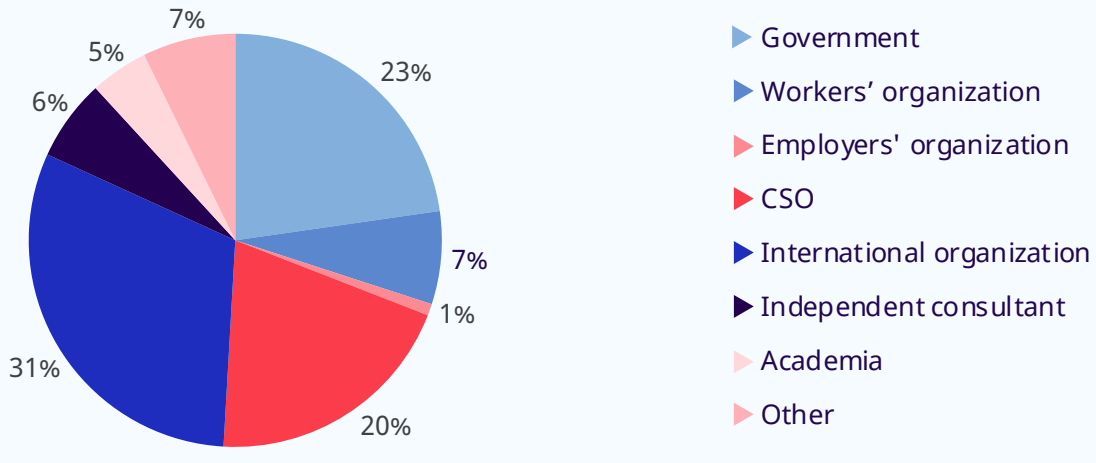
At the onset of COVID-19, 23 UNDP country offices in the Asia–Pacific region undertook SEIAs informed by the UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19, some of which were undertaken jointly with UN agencies. The SEIAs enabled the UN to highlight the multi-dimensional development challenges posed by COVID-19 and provide coherent policy advice to the governments. The UN's jointly commissioned evidence brought unique perspectives to the policy table, highlighting the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on the most vulnerable people and communities – including access to services, economic effects, including in the informal sector and medium, small and micro-enterprises, the additional and disproportionate care burden on women, and so on. This evidence informed rights-based and people-centred agendas at the heart of response and recovery. For example, in Bangladesh, the joint SEIA informed the National Preparedness and Action Plan on COVID-19 and led to a timely roll-out of assistance for poor households and small businesses in rural and urban areas, helping them to weather the crisis. Subsequently, the UNDP, along with other UN agencies and partners, supported national and subnational governments in rolling out several packages, including delivery of essential services, preserving stability and addressing social concerns as the pandemic unfolded. Ultimately, this helped to elevate the need to strengthen national social protection systems, and its integrated nature contributed to longer-term systems-building.

▶ Annex 2: Summary of Social Protection Floor Actors' Survey: Reflecting on 12 years of joint work on social protection

This survey was conducted from December 2020 to January 2021 and disseminated widely through UN networks. The survey received 150 respondents from 48 countries across governments, UN agencies and development partners, the largest groups of respondents coming from governments, CSOs and International organizations (see figures 1 and 2).

The overall results show strong support for the principle of an SPF and a consensus that the SPF has made a positive contribution UN work on social protection. Half of respondents agreed strongly, and 84 per cent agreed overall, that the principle was helping the extension of social protection; and 87 per cent agreed that the SPF principle makes a positive contribution to human rights and the achievement of the SDGs. Over three quarters of respondents – 76 per cent – agreed that the SPF has helped clarify the concept of social protection.

▶ Figure 2: The heterogeneous range of respondents to the survey



▶ Figure 3: Number of survey respondents by country

Angola	1	India	2	Rwanda	3
Azerbaijan	1	Indonesia	5	St. Kitts and Nevis	1
Belgium	3	Ireland	1	Slovenia	1
Belize	1	Kenya	4	Sri Lanka	2
Brazil	4	Lao People's Democratic Republic	2	Switzerland	10
Cambodia	2			Thailand	4
China	1	Lebanon	2	Timor-Leste	1
Costa Rica	1	Lesotho	1	Trinidad and Tobago	2
Egypt	1	Malawi	3	Turkey	1
Ethiopia	1	Montserrat	1	Uganda	1
France	6	Netherlands	1	United Kingdom	8
Gambia	2	Nigeria	3	United Republic of Tanzania	2
Georgia	1	Occupied Palestinian Territory	1		
Germany	4			United States of America	5
Ghana	3	Pakistan	1	Viet Nam	2
Guyana	1	Philippines	6	Zambia	1

▶ Figure 4: Countries where the SPF concept has contributed to advancing social protection strategy, coverage, financing or coordination

Afghanistan	3*	Côte d'Ivoire	2	Ireland	1
Argentina	1	Egypt	1	Jamaica	1
Bangladesh	1	Eswatini	1	Jordan	2
Belize	1	Ethiopia	2	Kenya	7
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	1	Finland	2	Lesotho	1
		France	2	Liberia	1
Brazil	5	Gambia	1	Lithuania	1
Cabo Verde	1	Georgia	1	Malawi	3
Cambodia	7	Ghana	2	Malaysia	1
Canada	1	Guyana	1	Mauritius	1
Costa Rica	2	Indonesia	5	Mongolia	1

▶ Continues...

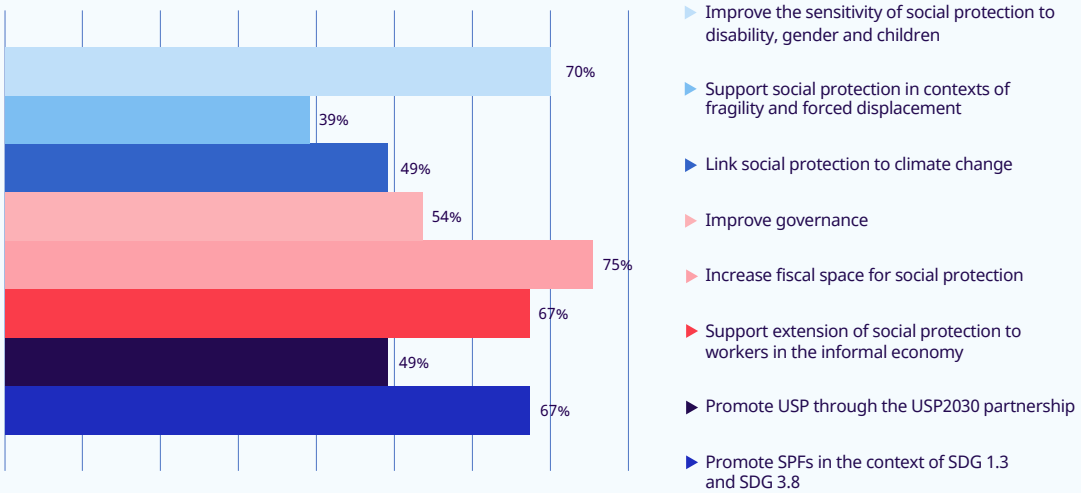
Mozambique	5	St. Kitts and Nevis	1	Trinidad and Tobago	1
Myanmar	1	Sierra Leone	1	Turkey	1
Nepal	3	Singapore	1	United Kingdom	2
Netherlands	1	South Africa	1	Tanzania	2
Niger	1	Sri Lanka	1	United States of America	1
Pakistan	2	Tajikistan	1	Venezuela	1
Philippines	1	Thailand	8	Viet Nam	5
Rwanda	3	Timor-Leste	2	Zambia	1

* Number of respondents by country.

In respect of the priority areas for future work on social protection, respondents ranked the following topics as their top three priorities:

- increasing fiscal space for social protection;
- improving the sensitivity of social protection to particular groups;
- tied in third place: extension to informal workers; promoting SPFs to achieve the SDGs.

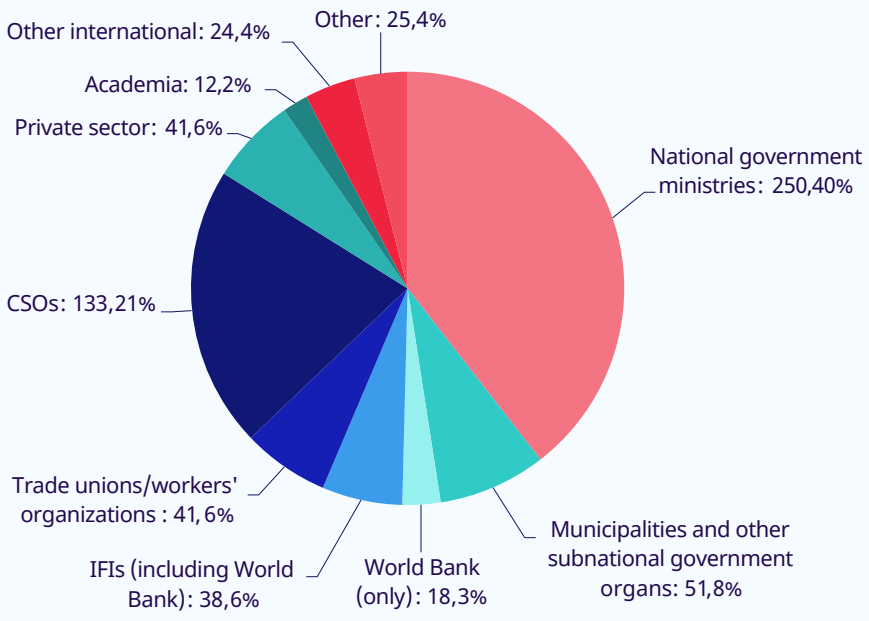
▶ Figure 5: In which thematic area(s) of social protection should the UN and development partners collaboratively work over the next ten years, and to what end?



▶ Annex 3: Overview of the UN Joint SDG Fund's 1st portfolio – 35 JPs on social protection and LNOB

The investment strategy is based on driving transformation, understood as delivering solutions that accelerate progress towards achievement of the SDGs by unlocking systemic policy shifts. The focus is on identification and activation of "leverage points" – those policy and/or institutional changes that produce a catalytic "chain reaction" across sectors and stakeholder groups. The JPs aim to spearhead systemic change that yields social impact across the whole spectrum of the SDGs, with the spotlight on social groups hitherto left behind. The impact of JPs contributes to progress on multiple SDGs, producing catalytic results at scale within reduced timeframes. Given the interdependence of the SDGs, JPs facilitate change by working across sectors and connecting silos through an integrated, multi-dimensional approach that addresses vulnerabilities across the whole life cycle and among priority target groups.

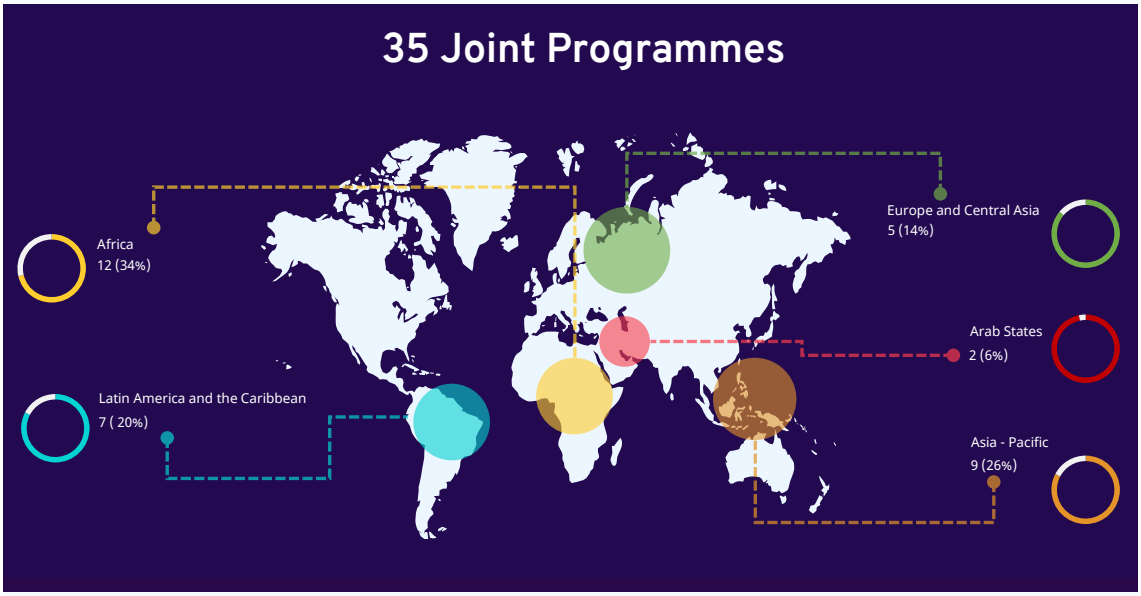
▶ **Figure 6: Joint SDG Fund partners working on social protection**



Source: UN Joint SDG Fund

As the strategic instrument for galvanizing acceleration of progress towards the SDGs, the Joint SDG Fund invested US$69 million, and mobilized US$32 million in co-funding, into 35 JPs in 39 countries on integrated policy solutions for social protection to leave no one behind. The call for concept notes was launched in March 2019 and led to 114 country applications. From these, 35 proposals of the highest quality were developed into fully fledged JPs that were launched in 2020.

▶ **Figure 7: Social protection – LNOB JPs (2020–22)**



Source: UN Joint SDG Fund

By the end of 2021, a minimum of 147 million additional people had benefited from the Fund's investment into integrated policy for LNOB, including from new or extended social protection benefits and access to social protection. This includes a minimum of 62 million women, 14 million children, 16 million older persons, 4 million PwDs and 1 million pregnant women, among other groups. In addition to 80 per cent of JPs (28) reporting extended social protection coverage, 86 per cent (30) improved comprehensiveness of social protection and two thirds (66 per cent or 23 JPs) improved governance and/or implementation of social protection systems. As for the contribution to social protection financing efforts, over two thirds of JPs (83 per cent or 29 JPs) produced financing, costing and feasibility analyses to inform increases in social protection spending.

Multi-sectoral dialogues and partnerships, joint advocacy work, and collaborative knowledge development and capacity-building have been improved among the UN agencies involved in JP implementation, as well as in UNCTs overall. This has led to development and implementation of coherent government policies, systemic change, and more catalytic support by the UN. By harnessing the comparative advantages and networks of the UN agencies, JPs have contributed to integrated policies across sectors and institutions to establish cross-sectoral coordination solutions to drive systemic change. These multi-sectoral dialogues and partnerships, joint advocacy work, knowledge development and capacity-building have supported development and implementation of coherent government policies and institutional change. All JPs reported contributing to at least two or more sectors/thematic areas, with the work of the JPs spanning on average more than five sectors each. These included, among other areas, childcare, food security and nutrition, healthcare, education, employment, domestic work and income security.

COVID-19 increased the salience of social protection for the most vulnerable. For this reason, the Fund provided an opportunity for repurposing 20 per cent of programme budgets to adapt and respond to

the pandemic. The priority was to support the most vulnerable, build back better, and contribute to acceleration of progress towards the SDGs by:

- designing and institutionalizing comprehensive social protection systems that mainstream human rights to address inequalities, vulnerabilities and systemic poverty;
- making social protection systems more adaptive and resilient in preparation for future shocks arising from pandemics, natural disasters or climate change;
- Facilitating innovation that breaks down silos and produces coherent, just and sustainable policy outcomes.

In addition to the first investment into integrated social protection, the Joint SDG Fund provided funding for INNF joint programmes, including 25 that have a special focus on social protection financing. JPs in an additional seven SIDS supporting policy innovation on social protection are being launched in 2022, as a result of the broader call for proposals launched in 2021.

For further information on the support provided to social protection by the Joint SDG Fund, visit jointsdgfund.org/integrated-social-protection.

▶ Annex 4. Overview of the most significant results achieved in conducting ABNDs (2016–20)

1. **Cambodia:** GIZ, the ILO, UNICEF and other partners supported the development of the National Social Protection Framework 2016–25, using ABND. It was approved by the Council of Ministers on 24 March 2017 and launched by the prime minister in July 2017.
2. **Cameroon:** The ILO and other UN agencies provided support to the Government to finalize the National Strategy for Social Protection, which was adopted in 2018 and identifies key areas on which improvements to the social protection system will focus, including the strengthening of non-contributory systems (transfers for vulnerable groups) and implementing a universal health coverage system..
3. **Egypt:** The ABND was conducted in 2017–18 and included poverty impact assessments of several SPF packages as well as a fiscal space analysis. The report has not yet been endorsed by the Ministry of Social Solidarity.
4. **Georgia:** The ABND was conducted in 2019 and suggested closing gaps in social protection provision for children and people of working age, at a cost of less than 2 per cent of GDP.
5. Kyrgyzstan: IIn 2018, the ABND multi-stakeholder working group, comprising government and social partner representatives and the UN country team in Kyrgyzstan, endorsed the ABND report, whose priority recommendation was to increase the level of state pension benefits. In October 2018, the Government issued the necessary decrees to implement an increase in both the basic, non-contributory and social insurance components of the state pension scheme, bringing the basic benefit closer to the established minimum subsistence level.
6. **The Lao People's Democratic Republic:** The ABND was conducted under the oversight of the Government's Drafting Committee for the National Social Protection Strategy, led and facilitated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare with the support of the ILO and other UN agencies. The ABND report was officially published and launched in 2017, including several recommendations for improving social protection in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Among them are the

introduction of a child support grant and a universal social pension. Drawing upon these conclusions, the ILO subsequently provided direct technical assistance to the Government in the formulation of a national social protection strategy that was adopted in September 2020.

7. **Malawi:** The ILO and other UN agencies have been supporting the Government in the participatory review and evaluation exercise of the Malawi National Social Support Programme (MNSSP-I), using ABND methodology. This led to the development of the MNSSP-II, which was formally adopted and launched during Malawi's Social Protection Week in July 2018 and will run from 2018 to 2023.

8. **Mozambique:** The ABND was used to support the development of the National Strategy for Basic Social Security 2016–24, which was approved by the Council of Ministers on 23 February 2016.

9. **The Niger:** The ILO and other UN agencies have supported the Government in the conduct of a national dialogue for the establishment of an SPF. Supported by ILO technical studies, a series of consultations were carried out to analyse existing programmes and available fiscal space, identify priority branches for future expansion, and improve coordination across public institutions and services.

10. **Occupied Palestinian Territory:** A national diagnostic study was conducted in 2017, as the first step in a national dialogue process aiming at the development of an SPF.

11. **Pakistan:** In 2018, the ILO and other UN agencies supported federal authorities in conducting a national mapping and situational analysis of existing social protection schemes, using the ABND. Today, the ILO chairs the UN Working Group on Social Protection, which provides joint support to the Government on the adoption of a national SPF concept.

12. **The Philippines:** The ABND was finalized in 2018 and is today being used to support the institutionalization of a national SPF as one of the reforms under the updated Philippine Development Plan 2017–22, launched in February 2021.

13. **Tajikistan:** The ABND was developed with the participation of the Government, employers' and workers' organizations, civil society, UN agencies, international financial organizations and development partners. Endorsed by the Government in February 2018, it provides concrete recommendations to achieve a nationally defined SPF.

14. **Timor-Leste:** The ILO and the UN have supported the Government of Timor-Leste in conducting an ABND exercise, which was informed by ILO cost assessments and micro-simulations to estimate the potential impacts of proposed reforms. Endorsed by the Government in May 2018, the report analyses 26 programmes across six ministries. It was used as a basis for the development of the National Social Protection Strategy (which has not yet been adopted).

15. **Togo:** The ILO has led the application of the inter-agency tool ABND-SPPOT, in partnership with the EU and the OECD and in collaboration with the African Development Bank, the EU, FAO, GIZ, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNICEF, the WFP, the WHO and the World Bank. This led to recommendations for the implementation of an SPF in Togo and was used as a basis for the formulation of the National Development Plan (2018–22), which was launched in March 2019.

16. **Viet Nam:** The ILO's support for the development of the Master Plan on Social Assistance Reform (MPSAR), adopted in April 2017, and the further MPSAR adopted in May 2018, used the ABND approach and RAP tool to calculate and project the cost of social protection benefits. These master plans represent a national commitment to achieve universal social protection coverage through multi-tiered systems.

17. **Zambia:** The ILO and other UN agencies supported through an ABND process the development of the Integrated Framework for Basic Social Protection Programmes, which was launched in November 2017 during social protection week in Lusaka. This framework is intended to promote an efficient, coordinated and more coherent provision of social protection transfers by reducing fragmentation and facilitating synergies and complementarities in programming.

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This publication reflects a joint effort by UN agencies from across the UN system and development partners to enhance collaboration on social protection. It contributes to the overarching objective of UN collaboration and reform of the United Nations Development System and is intended to help the UN deliver on the essential goal of universal social protection, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To this end, the report (1) analyses success stories and challenges in joint UN work on social protection since the launch of the UN Social Protection Floor Initiative in 2009; (2) priority areas for social protection engagement; (3) recommendations for improving UN collaboration; and (4) next steps for the way forward.

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International Labour Organization
Route des Morillons 4
1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland