

Child, maternity and paternity protection



Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals on Universal Social Protection through South-South and Triangular Cooperation

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Reaching out through child-sensitive social protection

Today, around 1 billion children across the world live in poverty. This situation is unacceptable and has long-lasting consequences. A child who falls into poverty is likely to remain poor for a lifetime. Without adequate nutrition, health care, education and care, children cannot develop physically and intellectually. This also affects their ability to engage in productive employment later in life. Poor children are also at greater risk of child labour. Breaking the vicious cycle of child poverty is key to achieving sustainable development and is particularly addressed in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1.3, 4, 8 and 10.

Child-sensitive social protection responds to the specific problems faced by children and their families. It combines financial support for families, essential nutrition, health care, childcare services and education. It also ensures that care workers have good working conditions. Child-sensitive social protection can help to alleviate poverty, realize children's basic rights and reduce future gender gaps at work.

Particular attention should be paid to children who are especially vulnerable, such as orphans,

children growing up in families affected by HIV/AIDS, street children and children with disabilities. Girls are often more vulnerable to health and economic risks and affected by traditional norms and gender stereotypes.

Several countries have implemented child-sensitive social protection programmes, including Argentina, Mongolia and South Africa. South Africa provides a Child Support Grant, a Foster Care Grant and a Care Dependency Grant. Such grants enhance families' economic security through cash transfers and promote access to education and health-care services. Other types of programmes may also have positive effects on children. The Expanded Public Works Programme in South Africa develops childcare centres and services, reduces unpaid work and improves parents' access to economic opportunities.

“ Thanks to the child support grant...you have children that are doing well in our society.



Frank Earl, Executive Manager Grants Administration, South African Social Security

Maternity protection in Mozambique

Like many female domestic workers in Mozambique, Inocência Chongo had to leave her job after becoming pregnant. The problem of job loss is very real and such women have little money or support to take care of themselves and their babies. To compound the problem, many have to start searching for new jobs soon after birth.

Since 2008, Mozambique has provided maternity leave and cash benefits to women working in the formal sector. This means 94 per cent of the female labour force – primarily working in agriculture and unpaid family work – remains uncovered.

The situation is changing as Mozambique is currently working to extend the maternity leave and cash benefit system to informal sector workers and self-employed women.



Adequate protection for mothers

Safe maternity is at the core of life itself. However, the birth of a child may not always be the happy event that it should be, as many women and their babies face threats to their health and economic security. Maternity protection provides an income guarantee that allows women to rest at home before and after giving birth. In addition, it gives access to medical services before, during and after delivery.

Today, 72 per cent of working women do not have maternity protection. These women continue to work far into pregnancy, putting their health and that of their unborn children at risk. Without income protection, mothers may start working too soon after childbirth, which often reduces the duration of breastfeeding.

Employer-financed maternity benefits can lead to discriminatory hiring practices, whereby employers are reluctant to hire young female workers. Domestic workers, agricultural workers and women in the informal economy face the most adverse work conditions and are most likely to lack maternity coverage.

Importance of paternity leave

Over the last few years, the involvement of fathers in caring for their babies has gained importance. Today, paternity leave is mandated in 94 countries, compared to only 40 countries in 1994. Although paternity leave is becoming

common, the mandated leave period is often less than one week or unpaid.

Early involvement of fathers in caring for their children and taking up responsibilities at home has been proven to benefit the health and development of children and makes it easier for mothers to engage in paid work. This can encourage gender equality at home, which is the foundation of gender equality at work.

Global frameworks to promote maternity protection and paternity support

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) advocate for maternity protection and paternity support for all through target 1.3 on social protection systems and target 5.4 on gender equality and non-discrimination.

The ILO's Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), calls for 14 weeks of maternity leave with cash benefits to sustain mothers and children in good health and living conditions. Funding maternity and paternity leave through social insurance and public funds is essential to prevent discrimination and ensure income security for women and their families during a critical period of their lives. Guaranteeing universal maternity health care and extending the coverage of maternity cash benefits are key to ensuring that no one is left behind.

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